CHAPTER 1

Contextualizing the Wang Jingwei Regime

Some of the existing scholarship on Wang Jingwei's wartime government that was touched upon in the introduction is useful for considering the very nature of the RNG at various points in this regime's short life. Rather than revisiting the internal intrigues of this regime or assess its political economy—topics that have been thoroughly addressed before[1]—this chapter demonstrates how individuals and institutions within the RNG sought to define and justify their administration in the context of occupation. How sections of the RNG presented their regime in the broader sweep of the modern Chinese Republic, and what they hoped China might become, are also considered. The broader picture that results will allow us to contextualize, in later chapters, the eclectic iconographies that developed in Wang Jingwei's China. Indeed, without a sense of what the RNG was, we cannot properly appreciate the messages that various arms of this administration (and its non-state allies) sought to visualize.

The RNG's "Return"

The RNG has always been inextricably linked to the figure of Wang Jingwei—the former premier of Nationalist China who led this wartime regime from March 1940 until his death in November 1944. Wang's regime was presaged, however, by a more nebulous campaign that both overlapped and diverged from it—the Peace Movement (*heping yundong*). This movement included members of the Chinese Nationalist Party, or Kuomintang (KMT), who had chosen to split with Chiang Kai-shek (following the fall of Wuhan in October 1938 and Chiang's subsequent flight westward to Chongqing) and lobby for a cessation of hostilities with the Japanese.[2] The Peace Movement included within its ranks some of the same individuals who had displayed political loyalty to Wang in earlier years. Most would come to take up important posts in Wang's wartime administration. These included former communists and staunch critics of Chiang Kai-shek such

as Chen Gongbo (who would serve as mayor of Shanghai under the RNG), Zhou Fohai (who would emerge as one of the main negotiators with the Japanese and would later serve as finance minister), and Li Shiqun (who would become head of intelligence); the Soviet-trained newspaper editor and long-term ally of Wang, Lin Baisheng (who would serve as the RNG's minister of publicity);[3] Wang's brother-in-law, the French-educated KMT cadre Chu Minyi (who would later serve as the RNG foreign minister); and Wang Jingwei's wife and long-term revolutionary comrade, the Malaya-born Chen Bijun (who would exert considerable influence in Guangdong Province during the occupation). Almost all of these same individuals would go on to develop factional cliques under the RNG, and all would hold quite different ideas about the regime itself.[4] Indeed, factionalism was inherent even in this regime's self-definition, for the "reorganized" element of its name was not a sign of wartime innovation but a reference to the reorganization faction (*gaizupai*), an anti–Chiang Kai-shek clique within the KMT that dated to the 1920s.[5]

Given the Kuomintang heritage of virtually all of its main protagonists, it is unsurprising that the RNG looked, sounded, and acted remarkably like the prewar Republican state. Indeed, Wang's regime claimed to be the only legitimate Republican Chinese government when it came into existence on March 30, 1940—an event that, significantly, was referred to not as the founding of a new political entity but as the "return [of the Republican state] to the capital" (*huandu*) of Nanjing. Despite all the emphasis on "new China" in occupation-era propaganda then, this regime never officially described itself as "new." It was, rather, the natural and legitimate heir to the Republic that had been founded following the 1911 Revolution.

Accordingly, the RNG resurrected the institutions of the moribund Republican state. It celebrated October 10 (the anniversary of the Xinhai Revolution) as its national day. And it swore allegiance to "one party, one ideology, and one leader" (*yige dang, yige zhuyi, yige lingxiu*), while justifying all of its policy decisions on the ideological basis of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People (*Sanmin zhuyi*)—that is, nationalism (*minzu*), the people's rights (*minquan*), and the people's livelihood (*minsheng*).[6] Indeed, veneration of Sun was central to the RNG and to the legitimacy of Wang's power. As Mara Yue Du has recently explained, for example, the very notion of Sun as the "father of the nation" (*guofu*) emerged out of the struggle between the RNG and the Chongqing Nationalists over Sun Yat-sen's legacy at the time of Wang Jingwei's "return" in 1940.[7] The siting of Sun statuary in Nanjing today is, likewise, a result of RNG attempts to reorganize the streetscape to emphasize the

regime's supposed fealty to Sun: a bronze statue of Sun, commissioned by Sun's late Japanese benefactor Umeya Shōkichi in 1928 and sculpted by the artist Makita Shōya, was relocated to central Nanjing's Xin Jiekou intersection on the seventy-sixth anniversary of Sun's birth in November 1942.[8]

As such contestation suggests, the RNG's main point of difference with the prewar Republican state was that it maintained a Chinese "Other." The initial raison d'être of the RNG was to restore a version of Republican Chinese orthodoxy that had been forfeited by Chiang Kai-shek. Chiang's apparent capitulation to communism, his corruption, and his lust for personal power—to say nothing of his willingness to abandon China in the face of Japanese expansion—were all betrayals of the ideals of the 1911 Revolution. If, in the RNG worldview, Chiang Kai-shek and his government of resistance in Chongqing now represented dictatorship, corruption, and subservience to Soviet (or, later in the war, British and American) masters, then Wang would become the true defender of Republican institutions, and his government—as Andrew Cheung puts it—a bastion of "constitutionalism."[9] This distinction would remain a central part of RNG thinking for the remainder of its existence and would ensure that this regime oscillated between emulation of the Chongqing Nationalists and a contradictory impulse to distinguish itself from them.

The RNG also underlined anticommunism as a main tenet of its ideology, outdoing even Chiang Kai-shek in the vitriol of its attacks on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Zhongguo gongchandang) and its supposed Soviet backers. For Wang Jingwei, international communism represented a fundamental betrayal of Sun Yat-sen ideals, and Chiang Kai-shek's willingness to work with the CCP in opposing the Japanese was tantamount to a betrayal of Sun's legacy.

There was another key difference between the RNG and its Chongqing rivals, however. This was that Wang's regime existed at the whim of a foreign occupier, not simply sharing power with an overwhelming and belligerent force but also coexisting alongside other client regimes that had been put in place by the Japanese prior to 1940. In this regard, we might see the RNG as inhabiting what David Serfass (referring to Timothy Brook) has recently defined as an "occupation state." For Serfass, this occupation state was never a single coherent body. Rather, it can be conceptualized as an ever-evolving project in which competing centers of power vied for greater levels of control.[10] These centers included, of course, the Japanese. It was ultimately the Japanese who held, for instance, the purse strings of occupation. It was Japanese advisers who were seconded to key RNG government

ministries. And it was Japan's China Expeditionary Army (Shina hakengun) that acted as Wang's ultimate protector. Yet the occupation state also included other groups who aided in its maintenance and operations. Among these were conservative elites in east and south China who had filled the vacuum left by the fleeing Nationalists in 1937 and had been enthusiasts for earlier client regimes, such as the RGROC in Nanjing. In 1940, such groups still held considerable power at the local level while others were subsumed into RNG institutions at the behest of the Japanese.

Within this fluid occupation state, the RNG—including Chinese government institutions, the Kuomintang, and the armed forces—represented a third center of power, and one that served initially (as Serfass puts it) as a facade for the occupation itself.[11] However, as with the other prongs of the occupation state, it could never claim complete power. It was always reliant on its Japanese and local elite partners to administer an occupied China and hence had to adhere to imperial Japanese policies, regardless of how humiliating they might be. That the RNG recognized and subsequently shared talent and staff with the Japanese-backed state of Manchukuo was perhaps the clearest example of this. In other ways also, however, the RNG was forced to accept humiliating conditions for its own existence. Wang's administration was not even officially acknowledged as a legitimate government by Tokyo until the signing in November 1940 of the Treaty concerning Basic Relations (between the RNG and Japan) (Hua-Ri jiben guanxi tiaoyue)—some eight months after the *huandu*.[12]

Nonetheless, and as Serfass and others have shown, the balance of power within the occupation state was constantly shifting. Indeed, if in 1940 it had been the Japanese holding the reins of economic, military, and diplomatic power, the war ended with Wang's administration exerting a far greater influence over fiscal policy and enjoying a far greater reach into the counties and towns of occupied China beyond Nanjing. The RNG also deployed trusted, prewar modes of mobilization that would enable it to exert significant levels of control over the lives of its Chinese citizens. One example of this was the Scouts (*tongzijun*). Dating back to the 1910s, the Scouts had represented a vehicle of youth mobilization for the Republican Chinese state prior to the war. The Scouts had become a "key component of civic training in secondary schools by the early 1920s,"[13] and during the Nanjing decade the Nationalist state had centralized their management under the KMT. In the spring of 1941, however, the RNG minister of education Zhao Zhengping revived this reliably Republican institution to help "develop [children's] personalities" (*gexing zhi fazhan*) and encourage "positive habits"

(*lianghao xiguan*) among China's youth—and to populate mass demonstrations of support for Wang's administration when necessary.[14]

The RNG also established its own armed forces, thereby enabling it to exert far greater influence on specific areas of policy, such as counterinsurgency, and to shape the lives of conscripted men. Some of these armed forces were composed of units that had defected from Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists or served earlier client states. Many others, however, were conscripted through the *baojia* (local-level civil defense and law enforcement) system that was resurrected under the RNG as a means of extending state control at the local level.[15] The RNG armed forces included a navy, a small (and largely symbolic) air force, and a Peace National Salvation Army (Heping jiuguo jun).[16] By 1945, the RNG could claim up to 900,000 soldiers.[17] These forces were nominally administered under a Military Affairs Commission (Junshi weiyuanhui).

Military forces could not, however, disguise that this regime exerted only limited control over entire areas of China to which it laid claim. This state of affairs reflected the ultimate failure of Wang and his Peace Movement in the prolonged negotiations that they had engaged in with Tokyo over the course of 1939. Indeed, while Wang had originally envisaged his RNG "peace area" (*heping diqu*) as representing a single region of China beyond Japanese control (such as the southwest), he emerged in 1940 as the nominal head of a patchwork of occupied areas centered on the Yangtze and Pearl River deltas, the boundaries of which ebbed and flowed with Japanese military fortunes.[18] Entire areas of south China, such as the island of Hainan, remained directly occupied by the Japanese throughout the war.[19] The cities of Shanghai and Xiamen were initially granted "special status" as a result of their proximity to Japan and colonial Taiwan, respectively. Most importantly, vast areas of north China previously claimed by the PGROC were granted effective autonomy under a North China Political Affairs Commission (Huabei zhengwu weiyuanhui) in 1940. This was headed by the very same PGROC officials who had been in power there since the end of 1938, a group that operated almost entirely independently of Wang's Nanjing-based administration.[20] All the same, the areas over which Wang did claim dominion were not insignificant. In 1940, Wang's regime administered parts of Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Fujian. In 1941, as a result of Japanese successes, its reach extended into areas of modern-day Hunan and Hubei.[21] And later in the war, the administration even experimented with the creation of new provinces that would better reflect its control of areas in what is today northern Jiangsu.[22]

In light of such territorial fluidity, it is hardly surprising that RNG obloquies directed at Chongqing were often articulated in expressions of provincialism. References to Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists as being simply the Chongqing side (*Yu fang*) suggested, more than anything else, a sense of territorial inadequacy on the part of Wang Jingwei's followers. And if the records left to posterity by leading RNG statesmen such as Zhou Fohai are to be believed, then Wang's regime spent much of its energy arguing with Japanese advisers—sometimes unsuccessfully—about the need to return lands conquered by the Japanese military to RNG control.[23] These frustrations about a lack of territorial control would plague this regime for the rest of the war, despite what Brian Martin has referred to as the RNG's "pretensions to nationwide rule."[24] They also help explain why even the most modest of geographic enlargements mattered so much in wartime Nanjing.

The "return" (*tuihuan;* sometimes given as "*jiaohuan*") of the International Settlement (Gonggong zujie) in Shanghai (as well as foreign concessions in other cities) to nominal RNG control in the summer of 1943 was the most significant symbolic triumph for the regime in its short existence. While the foreign concessions represented little more than dots on the larger map of wartime China, the ability to claim ownership of spaces denied to Wang's administration in earlier years—and so closely associated with imperialism—cannot be overstated.

If the RNG excelled at reclaiming cities, the same cannot be said of its record in the countryside. Indeed, the introduction from the summer of 1941 of the Rural Pacification campaigns—described by Brian Martin as "the most important politico-military policy of the Nanjing government"[25]—represented a tacit admission of a lack of power beyond urban China. It was also indicative of Nanjing's frustration about the continuing power of local elites in the countryside. Rural Pacification was a set of Japanese-initiated campaigns aimed at wiping out resistance in areas of Jiangsu and Zhejiang. Indeed, it was introduced with the purpose of ridding those areas of the New Fourth Army (Xin si jun), which had been leading resistance efforts there since prior to the *huandu*.[26] These were not purely Japanese campaigns, however. Much like the occupation state itself, Rural Pacification was characterized by a Sino-Japanese division of labor, with Japanese forces managing military matters (though RNG troops would also come to play a key role) and RNG cadres managing political and cultural matters in the "pacified" areas.[27]

The political side of Rural Pacification was directed by the RNG chief of intelligence, Li Shiqun, from the city of Suzhou. Lasting until late in the

war, these campaigns were designed along many of the same lines as the anticommunist campaigns that Chiang Kai-shek had directed in the prewar years.[28] They were as much a cultural project as a military purge, however. Rural Pacification involved RNG cadres traveling alongside Japanese and Chinese troops as they cleared villages of suspected communists, while selling the RNG brand to a restive peasantry and reluctant local elites. Indeed, visual and performative expressions of loyalty to the regime remained a central part of these campaigns, with RNG organizations establishing Rural Pacification drama troupes (*qingxiang jutuan*) and "movable propaganda units" (*liudong xuanchuandui*).[29] Such work was overseen by a Rural Pacification Publicity Team (Qingxiang xuanchuan zongdui), a group managed by a dramatist and propagandist called Lei Yimin.[30]

Republican Iconography and the Theater State

The RNG may have looked very much like the prewar Republican state. However, the context of foreign occupation endowed certain aspects of existing Chinese political culture with new significance in Wang Jingwei's China. This can be seen most clearly in the selective RNG deployment of Republican Chinese iconography. As recent scholarship has revealed, for example, the RNG agreed to "return to the capital" only on the condition that key prewar symbols of Chinese statehood could be restored—a condition extracted from the Japanese by Wang's primary negotiator, Zhou Fohai.[31] This included one icon that would become central to the RNG's claims to legitimacy and a constant feature of its state-sponsored visual culture—the Republic of China (ROC) flag (figure 1.1).

Much has been made of the fact that the flag that initially flew over Wang's China was a compromised version of the original version. Under Wang Jingwei, a yellow pennant that included the phrase "*heping, fangong, jianguo*" (peace, anticommunism, nation-building) would be attached to the flag so as to distinguish it from the ensign used in Chongqing.[32] Even at the *huandu,* however, Wang's Ministry of Publicity confidently predicted that the pennant would be removed "with the disappearance of the Chungking [Chongqing] regime."[33]

The RNG use of (a version of) the ROC flag was more than simply a return to prewar iconography, however. It spoke also to the fetishization of Republican icons that had occurred since the Japanese invasion of 1937 almost always, prior to 1940, in the name of resistance. The story of the "lone battalion" (*gujun*)—in which "China's national colours were flown from a mast above

Figure 1.1. The ROC flag (without its pennant) is hung at the entrance to RNG headquarters in late 1940. Courtesy of the National Archives (London), CN 11/11.

a sea of Japanese flags" by soldiers resisting Japanese attacks on Shanghai in 1937[34]—would have been well known to Wang Jingwei and his followers. It had been recounted in Chinese visual art and media in the early war years, with the hoisting of the ROC flag in the midst of shelling during the Battle of Shanghai depicted as one of the great symbolic acts of Chinese heroism.[35] That RNG cadres were able to raise this same flag of the "blue sky, white sun, and a wholly red earth" (*qing tian, bai ri, man di hong*) above Nanjing in spring 1940—even as rank-and-file Japanese soldiers publicly defiled it[36]—suggested, then, not a return to prewar normalcy but an attempt to harness the symbolic significance that resistance lore had given to this icon in

the months prior to the *huandu*. Importantly, RNG administrators continued to lobby the Japanese for the removal of the yellow pennant and often used the flag without it. In February 1943, their endeavors would prove successful, when the full, unadulterated ROC flag was hoisted again in Nanjing and Shanghai, just as it was in Chongqing.[37]

The RNG embellished other Republican Chinese icons as well. Take, for example, the figure of Sun Yat-sen. While existing scholarship is correct in stressing the continuities between RNG worship of Sun and the prewar apotheosis of Sun that had been attempted under Chiang Kai-shek,[38] I would argue that the RNG went to even greater lengths than the prewar Nationalists in placing Sun at the center of its political culture. Indeed, veneration of Sun was tied inextricably to deference for Wang Jingwei himself—a man (RNG propagandists never tired of reminding the world) who had been personally and politically closer to Sun than any other living statesman.[39] Wang also seems to have taken great interest in the physical legacies of Sun. He showed a particular concern, for example, in recovering ephemera associated with Sun from Japan during wartime.[40] And in March 1942, the RNG deposited, amid great solemnity, Sun Yat-sen's "remaining entrails" (*yi zang*)—a slice of Sun's intestines that had been preserved in a Beijing hospital after Sun's death in 1925—in the Sun Yat-sen Mausoleum in Nanjing.[41]

In founding its capital in Nanjing, the RNG also took stewardship of Sun Yat-sen's physical remains. The possession of Sun's body represented an important component of RNG claims to legitimacy.[42] Accordingly, the Sun Mausoleum—itself a product of the Nanjing decade and described by Delin Lai as "one of the most sacred sites in modern Chinese history"[43]—became the RNG's most hallowed landmark. Annual commemoration of Sun's birth and death at the mausoleum sat alongside the October 10 anniversary as some of the most important dates on occupied China's calendar. Official visits to pay respects at the mausoleum (*ye ling*) became a staple part of RNG political ritual.[44]

If worship of Sun's body in the mausoleum that housed it emerged as an important practice in the RNG, then so too did worship of prewar Chinese martyrs, for this regime inherited the most important cemeteries of the Republican movement, including the Huanghuagang (Yellow Flower Mound) site in Guangzhou, where the "seventy-two martyrs" (*qishi'er lieshi*) of a failed 1911 uprising against the Qing dynasty had been commemorated since the 1910s.[45] Huanghuagang became a major ritual center for this regime, with the memory of Republican martyrs there conflated with the celebration of Pan-Asian unity.[46] To this prewar pantheon of Republican

revolutionaries, however, the RNG added its own Peace Movement martyrs (*heyun xianlie*)—that is, individuals who had died in defense of the RNG or of Sino-Japanese collaboration more generally.[47] These martyrs were granted their own annual memorial day (September 1), placing them symbolically alongside heroes who had died pursuing earlier revolutionary activities.[48]

Martyrdom also became part of the mythology built around Wang Jingwei himself. As Zhiyi Yang has convincingly argued, "Wang consistently portray[ed] himself as a martyr and a romantic figure who was ready to sacrifice not just his life, but even his posthumous reputation, for the salvation of the nation."[49] In wartime hagiography, great emphasis would also be placed on Wang's early career and his own brush with martyrdom during a failed bid to assassinate the Manchu prince regent Zaifeng in 1910. Attempts on Wang's life in Beijing in 1935 and in Hanoi in 1939 were also worked into this narrative.

In other respects, however, the RNG was markedly different from the Nationalist government it replaced. This was especially so in one important element of its self-image—its imagined riparian geography. By this, I am referring at one level to the fact that many of the regime's main centers of power (e.g., Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Wuhan) were river ports. At another level, however, a reliance on rivers and on control of ports along them shaped how the RNG defined itself, as well as the political culture it adopted, and even the ways in which it envisaged China itself. One example of this was in the watered landscapes of Jiangnan that became so common a feature of visual cultures in occupied China, especially beyond Nanjing, in the first two years following the *huandu*. In the eyes of occupation artists and photographers, for example, real and imagined canals, lakes, and rivers dominated artistic representations of rural China, while the bunds of port cities were favored as vistas for landscape photography.[50]

Another example of this riparian imaginary, however, was the symbolic importance given to the RNG navy. Founded at the same time as the *huandu* (but including what had formerly been the RGROC's coast guard), the navy emerged as the most eulogized of this regime's armed forces. Headquartered on Nanjing's Yangtze docks, the navy took pride of place in RNG political culture, though much of its work was, tellingly, restricted to anti-smuggling patrols and ceremonial duties. The very establishment of a navy under Wang Jingwei had been opposed by sections of the Japanese military.[51] This did not stop RNG propagandists from borrowing extensively from Japanese precedents when it came to promoting this force, however. In fact, it may very well explain Wang Jingwei's own obsession with

it. As we shall see in later chapters, the flattering images of RNG sailors (and RNG leaders in naval uniform) in photojournalism looked a little too reminiscent of those found in Japanese wartime pictorials.

It is in the ceremonial nature of the navy, however, that we find an indication of the more general nature of the RNG itself. Just as the navy represented more of a symbolic than a military force, so too was the RNG a regime of pomp, in the absence (until late in the war) of any significant power in many areas of public policy. Indeed, in its attention to ritual, its extensive media and propaganda apparatus, and its almost fanatical obsession with historical anniversaries, the RNG might be said to have fulfilled many of the criteria of the Geertzian model of the "theater state."[52]

While recognizing the significant differences between the RNG and the precolonial Balinese polities that inspired Clifford Geertz' coining of this phrase, I follow the lead of other comparative historians in finding the deployment of the "theater state" useful well beyond its original context. Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, for example, have shown how the notion of the theater state was initially formulated by Geertz in the context of the "politics of spectacle" and "charismatic rule" in Sukarno's Indonesia (even though it was applied to the study of precolonial Bali).[53] The issue for these two scholars, then, is not whether this paradigm has a place in modern political systems but, rather, "how to come to terms with the state's forceful politics of display (and politics as display) as a fundamentally modern political practice." For Kwon and Chung, the notion of a (rather than "the") theater state can help explain the prominence given to display and ritual in the society that is their topic of study—that is, North Korea. They use this paradigm to explain how narratives from the past—which, in the North Korean case, include the foundational myths that are so central to the Korean Workers' Party's claims to legitimacy—can be transformed into key elements of the political present. By continually reenacting past glories through state-led spectacles, the North Korean regime ensures that the "old heroism" of the revolutionary struggle against Japanese rule can be transformed into "an ever-new glory of the polity's contemporary life."[54]

We can find parallels with such dynamics in the RNG, while acknowledging the fundamental structural differences between pre- or postcolonial Indonesia, North Korea, and Wang's China. The RNG was a regime that based its entire legitimacy on its supposed provenance in the Republican Chinese past and went to extreme lengths to underline such provenance through ritual commemoration, especially of the republic's nominal founder, Sun Yat-sen. In Geertz' original definition, the "expressive nature" of the

state was pointed "toward spectacle, toward ceremony, toward the public dramatization of the ruling obsessions of . . . culture."[55] In Geertz' thesis, such ritual was itself a source of power. This was not the case for the RNG. But if one of the major criticisms of Geertz' *Negara* paradigm is that it places culture before politics, it is perhaps logical that the idea of the theater state can also make sense when applied to a regime that held little autonomy *except* in fields such as culture and propaganda. In other words, while the RNG was unable to achieve much in terms of political autonomy, it did manage to carve out a ritual space for itself when it came to commemorating events and individuals from the Chinese past. Indeed, it invented an entire state apparatus—from drama troupes to propaganda colleges—to train the occupied Chinese intelligentsia in the art of state theater.

In this regard, I would argue that the RNG was fundamentally different from most twentieth-century Chinese governments. The source of that difference lay in the reality of an administration that was so reliant on a belligerent occupant for its very existence but was granted extensive autonomy in the realm of culture. If the RNG struggled to force its Japanese guarantors to live up to the economic and political assurances it had been promised in 1939 (ranging from control of finances to the right to establish diplomatic relations with foreign powers), and if its lack of territorial integrity was too significant a fact to properly conceal, then at least the RNG could find solace in the realm of iconography.

This RNG focus on theater extended not just to secular, political events but even to the embellishment of traditional festivals and celebrations, as Nanjing was transformed into a community of flag-waving students, Scouts, and servicemen. As Mark Eykholt has argued, public attendance at such events did not necessarily equate to support for occupation or for Wang's regime. Rather, it may well have reflected the sheer boredom experienced by many residents of Nanjing at the time, or perhaps was even a form of escapism.[56] Nonetheless, public celebrations were an important part of life in occupied Nanjing. In 1942, the Taiwanese writer Wu Zhuoliu, who worked in Nanjing at the time as a journalist for the newspaper *Tairiku shinpō,* described this tendency toward theatrics candidly, hinting as he did so at the reasons behind what he interpreted as the widespread public participation in such events:

> Every time there is some commemoration in Nanjing, a big procession [*youxing*] is held. Needless to say, all the commercial guilds and associations become involved. But as well as that, each county,

> *baojia* unit, and district competes with each other to come up with something new, making all sorts of things that they can use in such processions. When I was in Nanjing, the biggest procession was one held on the fifteenth day of the first month [i.e., the Lantern Festival]. All kinds of organizations, student groups, and the municipal police formed long, winding lines of marchers, so long that they would take a number of hours to pass. The crowds on the streets would watch as these lines of marchers went by, and in the area around Fuzimiao, events would go on well into the night. It was enough to make you imagine that there was no war going on somewhere else on the mainland.[57]

Pacifism, Pan-Asianism, and Fascism

At its "return," the RNG sided with Japan, yet maintained a position of neutrality. It justified such a decision by referring to Japan's commitment to wiping out communism in China. However, at the same time, and as Wai Chor So has explained, the RNG maintained an attitude toward the Western powers, especially the United States, that vacillated between ambivalence and amity.[58] In 1940, the RNG's professed enemy was not "the West" but the "subversive and peace-disturbing activities" of international communism.[59] The RNG sought to taint the Chinese communists, and more importantly Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists, by association with this malevolent force.

However, while Nanjing's official line was that resistance as espoused by Chongqing was harmful to the Chinese people, it also declared that it would not fight Chiang Kai-shek's armies. It continued to honor this commitment up until the end of the war.[60] This is not to suggest that it maintained official relations with Chongqing or that it sympathized with Chiang's resistance. On the contrary, the RNG promoted itself as an administration associated with "peace and collaboration" and thus as the direct opposite of a Chongqing government "associated with war and resistance."[61] This tendency toward defining itself by what it was not—by presenting itself as the antithesis of Chongqing—dominated a good deal of RNG rhetoric in the pre–Pearl Harbor era. It would also define how the RNG presented itself to China and to the world.

This initial emphasis on peace had a number of implications beyond differentiation from Chongqing, however. For example, the regime's professed commitment to pacifism resulted in an admiration for Buddhism, even as the RNG inherited the claims to secularism that had been a hallmark of the

prewar Republican state.[62] Buddhism in its various forms not only represented a fittingly "Pan-Asian" religion that could be called upon to underline cultural affinity between China and Japan—something already emphasized in other client regimes in Japanese-occupied Asia[63]—but could also be used to emphasize RNG claims to self-sacrifice. Wang Jingwei invoked Buddhist allusions in his speeches.[64] Hagiographers likened Wang Jingwei himself to a Bodhisattva who was "giving up not only his life but also his reputation" for the nation.[65] And the RNG sought to preserve or rebuild sites within occupied China that held significance in Buddhist history.[66]

If the RNG had started the 1940s true to its Peace Movement credentials, however, it ended the war as a militantly nationalist regime that looked remarkably like a Chinese pretender to Axis power status.[67] In some regards, this was the result of internal struggles over the fate of this regime; in others, however, it reflected the RNG's need to react to continually shifting geopolitical trends over which it had little control. The signing of the Soviet-Japanese Non-aggression Pact in April 1941, for example, put the RNG in a difficult rhetorical position. Under a flag that still announced anticommunism as a core tenet of this regime, RNG cadres were forced to turn their attention away from the Soviet menace in China and instead curse more nebulous notions of resistance. It was this subtle shift that energized the Rural Pacification campaigns—with their emphasis on Chinese resistance rather than international Bolshevism—from the summer of 1941 onward. Diplomatically, however, this period was also characterized by a series of successes for Nanjing, culminating in the formal recognition of Wang's China by Italy and the Third Reich. Given that Wang's administration had not been recognized even by Tokyo until late 1940, this represented a considerable achievement.[68]

Following the transformation of the "China Incident" into the Greater East Asia War (Dai Tōa Sensō) in December 1941, however, the wider geopolitical context changed once more for the RNG. Now, despite remaining officially neutral, the RNG was forced to adopt an increasingly anti-British and anti-American line in keeping with Japan's war against the Allies. It was also in this period that the RNG began to take on more authoritarian tendencies, with the adoption of the New Citizens Movement (NCM) (Xin guomin yundong). Officially launched by Wang Jingwei himself on New Year's Day 1942, this movement has been characterized as little more than a copy of prewar mobilization efforts by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists.[69] The NCM went far beyond earlier efforts, however, and its aims were not entirely the same. The NCM certainly did combine elements of prewar Republican nationalism

and mobilizational strategies with a strong dose of anti-imperialist sentiment. Indeed, its promoters openly cited the May Fourth Movement as a source of inspiration,[70] while handbooks on its implementation demanded the propagation of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles; the implementation (*guanche*) of the Peace Movement; the eradication of corrupt thinking; the mobilization of the people; an emphasis on material production; and respect for the supreme leader (*zuigao lingxiu*) Wang Jingwei.[71] Without doubt, however, the NCM also borrowed rhetoric and performative practices directly from wartime Japanese models, the movement's motto being "to fulfill the Chinese Revolution and realize the liberation of East Asia."[72]

Under the NCM, a quasi-military Youth Corps (Qingnian tuan), members of which were expected to publicly profess complete allegiance to Wang, was established for people aged between sixteen and twenty-five. Founded by Lin Baisheng in 1942, the Youth Corps maintained chapters at municipal, county, and school levels and was originally designed to challenge the monopoly on youth mobilization that Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists were claiming through Chongqing-based groups such as the San Min Chu I Youth Corps (Sanmin zhuyi qingnian tuan).[73] Members of NCM Youth Corps adopted the same emphasis on May Fourth nationalism that their peers in Chongqing did. Indeed, as oral histories of Chinese students who had taken part in such groups have shown, the Youth Corps' activities were seen as a means of expressing a distinctly Chinese patriotism when few other outlets for such sentiments existed.[74]

In early 1943, however, the Youth Corps was combined with the Scouts to form a new Youth League (Qingshaonian tuan). This league operated under its own logo—a KMT white sun superimposed over a bundle of three intersecting arrows. Members were trained in behaviors that looked remarkably similar to those undertaken by the young members of fascist movements in Europe and Asia yet also emulated practices common during the Nanjing decade. At specially designed summer camps, Youth League members were trained in public speaking, the production of propaganda, and the writing of critical "self-assessments" (*zishu*).[75] They also regularly engaged in quasi-military parades and rallies to celebrate RNG rule.

Through the NCM, the RNG thus came to adopt the language, aesthetics, and many of the accoutrements of the Axis states. Crucially, however, it combined these with the language of May Fourth anti-imperialism. As the Greater East Asia War raged on, the RNG dedicated itself—despite still adhering to the rhetoric of peace—to encouraging anti-Western sentiment, while concurrently establishing links with youth groups in other

parts of the Axis world. Foreign incursions against China over the former century now became the focus of RNG vitriol, as the war against the Allies was conflated with China's own struggle for "liberation" (*jiefang*).

The adoption of the New China Policy by the Japanese government in late 1942, in response to changing fortunes in the wider war, marked an important moment of change when it came to the balance of power within the occupation state. As Margherita Zanasi has argued, the new relationship between Tokyo and Nanjing that developed as a result of this policy—and that would eventually culminate in the signing of the Sino-Japanese Pact of Alliance (Zhong-Ri tongmeng tiaoyue) in October 1943—led to a greater stake for RNG rule in various fields that had previously been dominated by the Japanese.[76] This policy turn also contained an important visual element, however, for it entailed making the markers of Japanese military power less visible in occupied China, and replacing these with "the police, the soldiers, the office-holders, of the Nanking regime."[77]

This goes some way to explain the seemingly counterintuitive militarization of the RNG that occurred after this administration was granted extensive new levels of autonomy by the Japanese. Autonomy, in other words, would culminate, not in a move back toward the neutrality of 1940, but toward increasingly frequent expressions of belligerent Chinese nativism. The RNG eventually became a combatant in World War II on January 9, 1943—the day Wang Jingwei declared war on the Allies. In the very same month, the RNG initiated a "general mobilization of the national spirit" (*guomin jingshen zong dongyuan*), through which youth activists called for the overthrow of Anglo-American imperialism.[78] A regime based on "peace, anticommunism, and nation-building" now presented itself as an integral part of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Dai Tōa Kyōeiken), or GEACPS.

The self-congratulatory reverie surrounding the return of the foreign concessions in the summer of 1943—and especially the International Settlement in Shanghai—marked the high point of the RNG's war and was a supposed victory for Chinese nationalism under occupation. If Wang's administration had always aspired to regaining Chinese sovereignty, then direct rule over cities that had once been marked out by their extraterritoriality was a concrete achievement that could be celebrated. Yet such celebrations also paved the way for more public expressions of Chinese nationalism under occupation. These included physical attacks on "decadent" opium dens and dance halls[79] and criticism of residual treaty port culture. In such a context, the RNG even went so far as to redefine Chongqing as a regime inhabited by compatriots (*tongbao*) rather than rivals, instructing its cadres

that "the main objectives of our propaganda attacks should now be Britain and America."[80] In other words, while the RNG had started in 1940 by defining itself against Chongqing, by 1943 it was emphasizing all that it shared with Chiang Kai-shek's administration (and, contrarily, everything that set it apart from the Allies). In the context of the radical expressions of nationalism that were also being articulated in Chongqing via Chiang's magnum opus, *China's Destiny,* at precisely the same time, the late-war RNG began to look far more like the regime from which it had split.[81]

By the time Wang Jingwei attended the Greater East Asia Conference (Dai Tōa kaigi) in Tokyo in November 1943, the RNG looked almost unrecognizable from the pacifist, civilian administration that had returned triumphantly to Nanjing in the spring of 1940. Despite the "emptiness" of the Greater East Asia Conference,[82] this event marked the fulfillment of the RNG's transformation into a pretender to Axis status and the transformation of Wang Jingwei into an icon of Pan-Asian "liberation."[83] Observers of the RNG are correct in pointing out that RNG armed forces never fired a shot in anger at the Allies.[84] The point, however, is that being a combatant was, for this theater state, more about adopting the aesthetics and performative strategies of the Axis powers than engaging in combat. The RNG had bought into the "look" of what Madeleine Herren has referred to as "fascist internationalism."[85]

Herein lies one of the great ironies of the RNG, for throughout the period during which this regime lacked any genuine political autonomy, it cleaved to pacifism. Over the course of 1942 and early 1943, however, this regime underwent a complete transformation. While the RNG may never have succumbed to the racism that inspired fascism elsewhere,[86] it took on many of the "hyper-militaristic" affectations that Louise Young has noted were central to what she has called "Asian-style fascism."[87] Indeed, superficially, the late-war RNG fitted perfectly within Young's typology of "fascist imperialism," under which "fascist ideas interacted with anti-colonial nationalisms and gave rise to new forms of sovereignty" throughout Japanese-occupied Asia.[88] This was even reflected in visual culture. The RNG introduced far more stringent rules on cultural expression and on the control of Chinese cultural workers in the aftermath of its declaration of war on the Allies. A new Basic Outline on Policy for Wartime Culture and Propaganda (Zhanshi wenhua xuanchuan zhengce jiben gangyao) was introduced by Wang's regime in June 1943. This set out a cultural policy that would thereafter be highly controlled, rationalized, and centralized from Nanjing. It also included nativist calls for the purging of foreign influence and ideas from all Chinese visual expression.[89]

It would be a mistake, however, to see the RNG's "fascist turn" as purely the result of Japanese influence, for fascism was nothing new to Republican China. The language and aesthetics of fascism had been adopted by a variety of groups in prewar China, often as a means of countering imperialist (including Japanese) influence, as well as the rise of communism. As Maggie Clinton has argued, none of this necessarily contradicted a professed loyalty to Sun Yat-sen's 1911 Revolution. It did, however, represent an often violent rejection of communism, as well as a distinctly "nativist turn" away from the anti-Confucian sentiments of May Fourth activism on the Left. In the iconoclasm of flag-waving RNG youths we find not so much an ideological capitulation to Japanese imperialism, therefore, but rather a return to prewar forms of Chinese fascist mobilization—a revival of the "cultural revolution from the Right" that Clinton has observed as having been adopted by many sections of the KMT in the 1930s.[90] In the context of occupation (during which international communism was blamed for many of China's ills, but in which a more assertive RNG sought ways in which to stake a claim to autonomy from the Japanese), fascism could be used as means of nationalist (i.e., Chinese) agitation against both communist resistance and belligerent occupation.

In examining this unsubtle shift from pacifism to the aesthetics and ritual of fascism, however, we might also consider RNG commitments to a number of ideologies with which it has often been associated. Pan-Asianism, for example, was a common feature of RNG rhetoric, with Wang's government "emphasizing the pan-Asian elements," as Timothy Brook puts it, "when it relaunched Sun Yatsen's thought."[91] Indeed, the extrapolation of Pan-Asian ideas as articulated by Sun in two speeches delivered in Kobe in 1924 was frequently highlighted as one of the fundamental justifications for Wang's decision to work with the Japanese in the first place.[92]

Torsten Weber, however, argues that the RNG adoption of this ideology was "neither a mere invention for propaganda reasons nor a wholesale and uncritical adoption of Japanese wartime rhetoric."[93] Instead, Wang and his courtiers celebrated notions of Pan-Asianism that invariably linked the idea of "Asian liberation" to Chinese nationalism—a fact that saw writings on the topic by Wang significantly edited when they were published in Japan.[94] When the RNG head of overseas propaganda, T'ang Leang-li, published a new collection of Sun Yat-sen's work's on Pan-Asianism in 1941, the emphasis was on Sino-Japanese friendship and cooperation couched in the language of the Chinese Revolution.[95] The RNG might agree with Japanese advisers on the need to put a distinctly Pan-Asianist spin on events like the

centenary of the end the First Opium War in 1842 (which, serendipitously, fell in August 1942). The significance of such commemorations, however, could be viewed quite differently in Nanjing and Tokyo. In other words, RNG interpretations of "Pan-Asianism," while sounding remarkably similar to militaristic Japanese claims that had emerged out of the Shōwa Research Association (Shōwa Kenkyōkai) and calls for a Japanese-led "new order" (*shinchitsujo*),[96] were often deployed in pursuit of distinctly Chinese aims. This ranged from the defense of Chinese forms of cultural expression to calls for the fulfillment of Sun Yat-sen's revolution. In the hands of RNG propagandists, including even those associated with organizations founded by the Japanese—such as the East Asia League (Dong Ya Lianmeng)[97]—a woolly phrase like "Greater East Asia" (Da Dong Ya) might well be spoken in attacks on the "Anglo-American" presence in China. However, it might just as easily be deployed to imagine a postwar and post-occupation China free of *all* foreign interference.

The RNG claimed dominion over the wealthiest and most cosmopolitan of China's regions—the urban east and southeast. This regime was led by an elite that could make significant claims (though it seldom did so) to an internationalist outlook. Its leadership included individuals who had been educated in Europe, the Soviet Union, colonial Southeast Asia, Japan, and China's treaty ports. The occupation state, of which the RNG was but a part, also inherited a vibrant commercial media and culture industry that was home to a vast array of opinions and voices, many of which tested the boundaries of occupation cultural expression.

The fate of the RNG, however, was inextricably linked to Japan's fortunes in the wider war. Denied any significant political or economic sovereignty until late in the war, lacking stable borders, and struggling to keep abreast of changes to Japanese imperial policy, RNG leaders retreated into a world of spectacle and ritual, clinging to the symbolism of Republican Chinese nationalism while selectively adopting Japanese and Axis aesthetics. This highly factionalized regime also bred very different ideas about what China should look like. All these factors contributed to the emergence of an eclectic set of iconographies that sometimes sat at odds with the RNG's verbal rhetoric.

None of this suggests, however, that the RNG is not worthy of study. Nor is the RNG's lack of genuine military or economic autonomy a reason to dismiss this regime as inconsequential. The RNG's relevance lies precisely in the extent to which it can illustrate the resilience—and limits—of

the ideologies that first developed in the prewar Chinese Republic and, indeed, in the Japanese empire. Its significance lies not in its apparent treason—though almost all of the scholarship on this regime thus far has focused on the extent to which the label "collaborationist" can be aptly applied to it—but in the fact that it represented a set of short-lived and continually shifting visions of Chinese nationalism adapted to the exigencies of foreign occupation. Chinese icons, ideas, and modes of visuality that had been developed prior to the Japanese invasion (and sometimes in response to the threat of Japanese invasion) could be given new significance under occupation by inventive RNG propagandists, and by Wang Jingwei himself. Equally, however, the RNG could use the technologies, talent, and icons of the Japanese empire (and the wider Axis world) to serve distinctly Chinese goals. In the chapters that follow, we will see just how this was done.