

# News under Fire

## China's Propaganda against Japan in the English-Language Press, 1928–1941

Shuge Wei

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# Contents

List of Illustrations	vi
Names of the Guomindang Government Organizations	viii
Abbreviation of Archives	ix
Notes on the Text	x
Acknowledgments	xi
Introduction	1
<b>Part I: A Nation without a Voice</b>	
1. Bridge or Barrier: The Treaty-Port English-Language Press in China, 1920s	21
2. Beyond the Front Line: The Jinan Incident	46
<b>Part II: Growing Pains</b>	
3. To Control the Uncontrollable: The Nanjing Government's International Propaganda Policy, 1928–1931	65
4. Shadowed by the Sun: The Mukden Incident and the Shanghai Incident	96
5. Facing Dilemmas: China's International Propaganda Activities, 1932–1937	125
6. Friend or Foe: The Amō Doctrine	162
<b>Part III: Propaganda during the War</b>	
7. From Nanjing to Chongqing: International Propaganda in Wartime, 1937–1938	185
8. Confronting Encirclement: Chongqing, 1939–1941	219
Conclusion	252
Glossary	259
Bibliography	263
Index	278

# Illustrations

## Figures

Figure 1	The North China Daily News Building, 1925	25
Figure 2	The China Press Building, 1911–1929	28
Figure 3	Covers and front pages of <i>Millard's Review of the Far East</i> and the <i>New Republic</i>	31
Figure 4	“Time Will Tell Who Rules the Waves”	45
Figure 5	“The Road Hog”	62
Figure 6	“The Burdens of Office”	95
Figure 7	“Sayonara”	124
Figure 8	Tang Liangli	136
Figure 9	Hollington K. Tong	146
Figure 10	The <i>China Press</i> staff party	149
Figure 11	Yang Guangsheng	152
Figure 12	“A Damsel in Distress”	161
Figure 13	“A Little Boat May Leave a Big Wash Behind”	181
Figure 14	A weeping baby amid the ruins of the bombed Shanghai train station	195
Figure 15	China Campaign Committee	197
Figure 16	“Double Suicide?”	218
Figure 17	W. H. Donald and H. J. Timperley	235
Figure 18	H. H. Kung's financial support to rebuild the Press Hotel	238
Figure 19	Working in the dugouts	239
Figure 20	“The Lone Battalion”	251

## Diagrams

Diagram 1	The structure of the Guomindang Ministry of Information, 1929	70
Diagram 2	The International Department members' military ranks	193

Diagram 3	The structure of the Guomindang international propaganda machinery, 1938	201
Diagram 4	Censorship data, International Department, December 1937–September 1938	205
Diagram 5	Selected payroll of the International Department	223
Diagram 6	XGOY's broadcasting timetable to North America, 1940	232

# Introduction

It was one o'clock in the morning of December 8, 1941. Peng Leshan, the head of the radio office of the Ministry of Information's International Department in Chongqing, was waiting in front of the wireless receiver in his office to pick up news updates from contacts in Los Angeles. Suddenly a message came through his headphone—the Japanese army had attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States would wage war against the Japanese Empire. Alone in the office, he wondered whether the news was true or whether he had simply misheard it on account of his fatigue. Hesitating to report it to his superior Hollington Tong, vice minister of information, he decided to reflect on what he had heard before dialing Tong's number. Around four o'clock, the phone at Chiang Kai-shek's mansion rang—Tong reported the attack on Pearl Harbor to Chiang.<sup>1</sup> It was a fateful day for China, perhaps as much as it was for the United States. The attack drew America into a common war against Japan. It put an end to years of solitary and desperate resistance by the Chiang Kai-shek government and signaled a real possibility of victory in the prolonged Sino-Japanese War.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was not a bolt from the blue but an escalation of preexisting tensions between the United States and Japan. The public was keenly aware of mutual animosity well before the attack, a key dispute revolving around Japan's military action in China. A Gallup poll in 1939 suggested that 74 percent of the US public sympathized with China's cause. By September 7, 1941, 70 percent of the US public supported the idea of checking Japan's military expansion even at the risk of war.<sup>2</sup> On November 26, 1941, US Secretary of State Cordell Hull rejected Japan's demand for relaxing embargos and issued an ultimatum, requesting Japan to withdraw completely from China. The attack on Pearl Harbor constituted both a military measure against the economic sanctions and an effort to keep the US Pacific Fleet from interfering with Japan's further actions in Asia.

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1. Hollington Tong, *Chiang Kai-shek's Teacher and Ambassador: An Inside View of the Republican China—General Stilwell and American Policy Change towards Free China* (Bloomington: Authorhouse, 2005), 119.
  2. September 7, 1941, Japan, in George Horace Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 69.

The US public's sympathy for China represented the general attitude in the Western world. Yet this sympathy was not won overnight; it was the result of long-term persuasion and conditioning. Only a decade earlier, in 1928, when the Nanjing government was first established, China was still commonly portrayed in the West as a country of antiforeign nationalists, which lacked the discipline of a modern nation such as Japan. What caused this sea change in opinion? Western opinion leaders' "obsession" with solving the Chinese riddle and their desire to share their knowledge about this exotic country were often cited as the cause. They combined China's pursuit of independence with their personal ambitions, prejudices, and fears.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, as T. Christopher Jespersen argued, the images of China often reflected Western public's assumption about itself.<sup>4</sup> Despite thorough investigation of the activities of Western journalists, businesspeople and diplomats, little has been said about China's endeavors to promote the change. Yet China has its own story to tell—a story about how a weak nation, given the context and constraints of its own times, utilized international propaganda to achieve national survival. This story also adds another dimension to the existing military and social history of the Sino-Japanese War, shedding light on how the conflict played out in the media.<sup>5</sup>

This book is a study of China's efforts to make its voice heard in the world press from the time of the establishment of the Nanjing government to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Challenging a perceived Chinese passivity in international propaganda, it demonstrates that advocating China's case was an important means for the Nationalist government to restore China's sovereignty in the absence of a strong military and economy. It argues that, in this propaganda war against imperialist encroachment, it was ironically the very product of imperialism—the treaty-port press—that

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3. Warren I. Cohen, *The Chinese Connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); Paul French, *Through the Looking Glass: China's Foreign Journalists from Opium Wars to Mao* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009); Mordechai Rozanski, "The Role of American Journalists in Chinese-American Relations, 1900–1925" (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1974); Stephen R. MacKinnon and Oris Friesen, *China Reporting: An Oral History of American Journalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Jon Thares Davidann traced American statesman Henry Stimson's support for China's case from the Manchurian Crisis and discussed the role William Henry Chamberlin, the *Christian Science Monitor's* expert on Japanese issues, and the role popular writers Pearl Buck and Nathaniel Peffer played in tarnishing Japan's image among the US public. See Jon Thares Davidann, *Cultural Diplomacy in US-Japanese Relations, 1919–1941* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 180–86; Karen J. Leong, *The China Mystique: Pearl S. Buck, Anna May Wong, Mayling Soong, and the Transformation of American Orientalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
  4. T. Christopher Jespersen, *American Images of China, 1931–1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), xv.
  5. Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013); Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra F. Vogel, ed. *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Hans J. Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945* (London: Routledge, 2003).

constituted the best resource to connect China with the world press. It provided the basis for the establishment of an international propaganda institution. The absence of clear boundaries of nationalities, state and public actors greatly expanded China's opportunity to reach the world public. The ability of the government and the treaty-port press to adapt to each other's information system during national crisis fostered the development of China's international propaganda.

### Propaganda by a Weak Country?

After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, China went through decades of chaos in a painful search for a new sociopolitical order. The lack of a legitimate central government gave rise to a period of "warlordism" during which regional militarists maneuvered for power and wealth. The Nationalist Party (Guomindang) nominally unified the country in 1928 under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Despite Chiang's supremacy in military power, the government was in reality a coalition of regional warlords who had nominally pledged allegiance to the Nationalist Party but maintained substantial fiscal and administrative autonomy.<sup>6</sup> Chiang's authority was frequently challenged by political rivals within the party and by the Communists externally.<sup>7</sup> The economic situation of the young Nationalist government was equally bleak. Constant warfare with warlords and the Communists had depleted the government's coffers and caused considerable damage to the country's economy. While regional leaders blocked the collection of internal taxes in defiance of Chiang's authority, the country's low credit ratings and its volatile political conditions made it hard to attract foreign loans.

Japan's military aggression in China posed a grave threat to the fledgling government and the Chinese nation. From 1931, the Japanese army moved to seize Chinese territory, first in Manchuria, then in North China. Encouraged by private initiatives as well as Japanese government policies, Japanese trade expansion in China was more rapid than that of the other foreign powers.<sup>8</sup> Its constant demands on the Chinese government to suppress popular anti-Japanese activities provided a pretext for Japan's intervention in China's politics. Japan's determination to exercise direct colonial control in certain parts of China posed a sharp contrast to the indirect colonial penetration by Western powers, and this created a new type of foreign danger for China.

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6. Parks Coble, *Facing Japan: Chinese Politics and Japanese Imperialism, 1931-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 27.

7. Hung-mao Tien, *Government and Politics in Kuomintang China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 45-72.

8. Mizoguchi Toshiyuki, "The Changing Pattern of Sino-Japanese Trade, 1884-1937," in *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895-1937*, ed. Peter Duus, Ramon H. Myers, and Mark R. Peattie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 4-5.



It not only undermined the Nationalist government's nation-building efforts but also gave rise to fear for the extinction of the Chinese nation among the Chinese public.<sup>9</sup>

Leaders of the Nationalist government were keenly aware of the reality that China was unable to stave off Japan's pressure single handedly. Having been trained at a Japanese military school, Chiang Kai-shek understood clearly that Chinese troops were incapable of standing up to the modern Japanese army. Moreover, a war with Japan would be political suicide for Chiang, destroying the delicate balance of forces that he had carefully constructed within the government and providing his rivals with an opportunity to overthrow his rule. For a weak nation with inadequate military and economic power to defend its territorial sovereignty, raising international pressure to curb Japan's ambition was essential. But how could China gain influence in the Western powers' foreign policy making?

Propaganda, "a concerted scheme for the promotion of a doctrine or practice,"<sup>10</sup> became an important means to gain and maintain power in international affairs from the time of World War I.<sup>11</sup> The rise in the use of propaganda was a result of greater mass participation in politics and the proliferation of communications technology, as well as increasing interaction among nations.<sup>12</sup> During the war, belligerents widely adopted propaganda as a way of strengthening the morale of their own forces and to sap that of their enemies.<sup>13</sup> The Soviet Union even set up long-term propaganda institutions, exploiting them to promote its political ideology worldwide.<sup>14</sup> In democratic countries, where the manipulation of political information was considered unethical, officials generally refrained from supporting propaganda activities after the war.<sup>15</sup> Acknowledging the power of public opinion, however, they wasted no time reverting to official propaganda when international crises intensified. By the end of the 1930s, propaganda had become an important instrument in international politics worldwide. As E. H. Carr observed in 1939, "New official or semi-official agencies for

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9. Coble, *Facing Japan*, 6.

10. Edward Hallett Carr, *Propaganda in International Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939), 3.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Tomoko Akami, "The Emergence of International Public Opinion and the Origins of Public Diplomacy in Japan in the Inter-war Period," *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 3, no. 2 (2008): 101–2.

13. Harold Dwight Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in World War I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); George Creel, *How We Advertised America* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1920); Philip M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda, 1919–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

14. Edward Hallett Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (London: Macmillan, 1939), 137; Philip M. Taylor, *Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Era* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), 206.

15. See British officials' discussion of the function of propaganda in peacetime, in Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, 44–50.

the influencing of opinion at home and abroad were springing up in every country.”<sup>16</sup> And propaganda “has never been so important a factor in politics as it is today.”<sup>17</sup>

However, international propaganda was essentially a privilege of powerful nations that had the infrastructure and networks to transmit their views to an international audience. This echoed Carr’s observation that “power over opinion cannot be dissociated from military and economic power.”<sup>18</sup> During World War I, Britain’s control over the transatlantic cables enabled it to monitor the output of telegraphic news sent from Germany to the United States and to continuously feed overseas representatives with news from the British perspective.<sup>19</sup> The United States spread its international propaganda networks in Europe, Latin America, and Asia by the Committee on Public Information. Benefiting from wireless technology, the committee widely explained America’s aim in the war and advocated Wilson’s gospel of democracy.<sup>20</sup> Since the late nineteenth century, Japan also developed a sophisticated submarine cable network to coastal cities in China, Korea, and Taiwan. Its state-sponsored news agencies had gained an essential foothold in the Chinese news market and become a presenter of Chinese issues in the international world.<sup>21</sup> Yet China by the late 1920s did not possess a single international news agency, nor did it have full sovereignty over cable transmissions within its own territory.<sup>22</sup> When a conflict between China and Japan occurred, China often found its voice drowned out by Japan’s advanced propaganda machinery.

Existing literature on propaganda experiences of the strong powers, like Western countries and Japan, fails to shed light on China’s case. While the Powers had military and economic strength to back up their propaganda efforts, China’s propaganda did not have such support.<sup>23</sup> Like many other foreign-introduced strategies, ideas, and institutions, international propaganda had to go through a process of localization before it could function in the Chinese context.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, China’s international

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16. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939*, 137.

17. Carr, *Propaganda in International Politics*, 3.

18. Carr, *Twenty Years’ Crisis, 1919–1939*, 141.

19. Taylor, *Projection of Britain*, 58.

20. Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 48–70; Creel, *How We Advertised America*.

21. Daqing Yang, *Technology of Empire: Telecommunications and Japanese Expansion in Asia, 1883–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Tomoko Akami, *Japan’s News Propaganda and Reuters’ News Empire in Northeast Asia, 1870–1934* (Dordrecht: Republic of Letters, 2012).

22. Westel W. Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1920; Taipei: Cheng-Wen Publishing, 1966), 2:943–77. Citations refer to the Cheng-Wen edition.

23. The Powers in this book refers to Western and Asian empires that have substantial imperial interests in China.

24. Mittler argued that modern newspapers in China, instead of following the Western model, have gone through an indigenization process to cater for the Chinese market. See Barbara Mittler, “Domesticating an Alien Medium: Incorporating the Western-Style Newspaper into the Chinese Public Sphere,” in *Joining the Global Public: Word, Image, and City in Early Chinese Newspapers, 1870–1910*, ed. Rudolf Wagner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13–46.

propaganda experience had its own features. First, propaganda was not pursued by the state alone. Nonstate actors, particularly the treaty-port bilingual elites were crucial in making China's case known to the world. Second, transnational networks characterized China's propaganda experience. The resource it relied on to resist imperialist encroachment ironically was a product of imperialism—the English-language treaty-port press.

## The English-Language Treaty-Port Press in China

The English-language treaty-port press in China has almost entirely escaped scholarly attention. Based on the static notion that the identity of a press derives from the language it uses, Chinese media historians have all but neglected the English-language treaty-port press as an integral part of the Chinese media.<sup>25</sup> Yearning to carve out an identity to fit into a neat nation-state framework, they have ignored the reality that identity itself is a fluid notion that takes shape through cultural encounters and exchange.<sup>26</sup> Others who believe that the English-language papers catered only to the expatriate community tend to regard this medium as unworthy of serious consideration. A scarcity of resources has also led to the neglect of the English-language press. Thomas Ming-heng Chao's *The Foreign Press in China* and Frank H. H. King and Prescott Clarke's *Research Guide to China-Coast Newspapers, 1822–1911* have mapped a diversified landscape of the treaty-port press in China from the late Qing to the early Republican era. Apart from a few papers available on microfilm or in digital form, most of the English-language papers were either lost or hidden, uncatalogued in Chinese provincial libraries. They appear only vaguely in scattered references in

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25. Despite Lin Yutang's active engagement in English-language treaty-port journals in the 1930s, he failed to include them under the rubric "Chinese press" when discussing the history of the press in China; see Lin Yutang, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1937). Zeng Xubai only made passing reference to the English-language newspapers without any extended discussion of their political stances; see Zeng Xubai, *Zhongguo xinwen shi* [A history of China's journalism] (Taipei: Guoli zhengzhi daxue xinwen yanjiusuo, 1966). Discussion of the influence of the treaty-port press is also absent in a recent study of the Guomindang's news policy by Wang Lingxiao; see Wang Lingxiao, *Zhongguo Guomindang xinwen zhengce zhi yanjiu, 1928–1945* [News policy of the Guomindang government, 1928–1945] (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996). Literature on China's media history published in the People's Republic of China has operated largely within the ideological bounds of the "imperialism" model, in which the impact of the foreign empires have long been regarded as marred by exploitation. It often neglects the contribution of the treaty-port foreign press and narrowly considers it as merely an instrument of imperialist rule. Although Fang Hanqi briefly distinguishes the different attitudes toward China presented by British and American papers in the 1920s, he does not explore the significance of the press in China's domestic politics and foreign relations; see Fang Hanqi, *Zhongguo xinwen shiye tongshi* [General history of the press in China] (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1992).
26. Rudolf Wagner, "Don't Mind the Gap! The Foreign Language-Press in Late-Qing and Republican China," *China Heritage Quarterly*, nos. 30/31 (June/September 2012), [http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=030\\_wagner.inc&issue=030](http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/features.php?searchterm=030_wagner.inc&issue=030).

studies on the activities of foreign journalists in China.<sup>27</sup> They have rarely been considered of historiographical interest, let alone worth investigating in terms of their editorial stances, financial backgrounds, connections with the state, or rivalries in the press market. An even larger problem, however, is that traditional historiography has tended to reduce Sino-foreign interactions to a simplified East-West dichotomy. The tensions between the foreign powers as the oppressors and China as the victim have been a popular theme that has strongly shaped public memory in China to date.

Scholars have recently begun to take notice of the significance of the English-language press in Chinese diplomatic history, but they have yet to investigate the treaty-port papers' interaction with indigenous elites.<sup>28</sup> Peter O'Connor's detailed study of English-language papers based in Japan demonstrated a transnational news networks in East Asia.<sup>29</sup> By examining the *China Critic* and *T'ien Hsia*, two English-language journals operating in Shanghai in the 1930s, Shuang Shen reveals a "cosmopolitan public" composed of Western-educated Chinese intellectuals who actively published in the English-language treaty-port press.<sup>30</sup> These seminal studies deepen our understanding of the dynamic media environment in the treaty ports, but they tend to emphasize the importance of the press for foreign readers, while neglecting its influence on Chinese politics. This book will look into this missing aspect and explore how the English-language press was used to restore China's sovereignty during the Sino-Japanese crisis and how the press influenced the formation of a centralized institution for international propaganda.

While the Chinese government lacked a channel to make its voice heard internationally, newspapers published in the foreign concessions and settlements integrated China into the world media system. Treaty-port journalists, editors, and foreign expatriates in general were highly regarded as credible sources by audiences in their home countries. Their writings about the exotic land and their observations of its people and political affairs continued to dominate the imagination of readers at home.<sup>31</sup> Sharing correspondents and news reports between the treaty-port press and metropolitan papers was also common practice. This further expanded the influence of the treaty-port journalists to the metropolitan audience. Savvy journalists who had connections with Chinese officials were favorite contacts for diplomats. They

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27. Paul French, *Carl Crow: A Tough Old China Hand* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006); French, *Through the Looking Glass*.

28. Feng Yue, *Riben zai Hua guanfang bao: Huabei zhengbao, 1919–1930* [Japan's official English-language paper in China: *North China Standard*] (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2008); Wu Yixiong, *Zai Hua Yingwen baokan yu jindai zaoqi de Zhongxi guanxi* [The English press in China and the Sino-Western relationship in the early modern times] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012).

29. Peter O'Connor, *The English-Language Press Networks of East Asia, 1918–1945* (Kent: Global Oriental, 2010).

30. Shuang Shen, *Cosmopolitan Publics: Anglophone Print Culture in Semi-colonial Shanghai* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

31. Robert A. Bickers, *Britain in China: Community Culture and Colonialism, 1900–1949* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 22–59.

were frequently approached for opinion and inside information in case of diplomatic controversies.<sup>32</sup>

However, it would be wrong to consider the treaty-port press as homogeneous. The press was rife with tensions. Unlike regular colonies such as India where local economies and social life were dominated by a single empire, the Chinese treaty ports were operated by an assortment of foreign powers with different interests and ideologies. The presence of various imperial interests gave rise to fierce competition among papers for the power of discourse, information resources, and advertising markets. The emerging American press challenged the British news monopoly in China in the early twentieth century.<sup>33</sup> Yet temporary alliances were forged and dissolved between the two when Japanese and Chinese interests became involved in the press. Tensions did not end in the treaty ports but also existed between treaty-port expatriates and the metropolitan public. Instead of following the metropolitan view about Chinese issues, treaty-port communities tended to develop a relatively independent opinion that was sometimes at odds with the foreign policy maintained by their home countries.

The treaty-port press was characterized by transnational identities, partly due to the Chinese government's weak presence there. The treaty-port system was underpinned by extraterritoriality, which exempted foreign residents from the jurisdiction of Chinese laws. This protected foreign-registered newspapers from state intervention and gave rise to a complex and densely packed media environment, where conventional national boundaries did not apply and transnational registration, editorship, ownership, and subsidies became common practice.<sup>34</sup> As Bickers rightly points out, in practice the treaty-port system had effectively replaced the state as the defining organizational framework. It cultivated new identities among expatriates and attracted Chinese, regardless of whether they were professionals, gangsters, refugees, or traders.<sup>35</sup> Here, lines of identity of newspapers were complex, multilayered, and pragmatic.<sup>36</sup> It was common to find an English-language paper registered with one country, operated by nationals of another, with the funding provided by an interest group in a third country. Information was distributed by state-related actors,

32. See the consul general in Shanghai Edwin Cunningham's close connection with George E. Sokolsky, in Cohen, *Chinese Connection*, 86–87.

33. Yong Z. Volz and Chin-Chuan Lee, "Semi-colonialism and Journalistic Sphere of Influence: British-American Press Competition in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Journalism Studies* 12, no. 5 (2011): 563–65.

34. See the discussion of the transnational features of the Chinese press during the late Qing and Republican era by Bryna Goodman, "Networks of News: Power, Language and Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850–1949," *China Review* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 1–10.

35. Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot, introduction to *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842–1953*, ed. Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 4–5.

36. Bryna Goodman and David Goodman, ed., *Twentieth-Century Colonialism and China: Localities, the Everyday and the World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 10; Rudolf G. Wagner, "The Role of the Foreign Community in the Chinese Public Sphere," *China Quarterly* 142 (1995): 423–43.

independent groups, and individuals with an agenda that could not be simply categorized as imperialism, nationalism, or capitalism. Nor was the nationality of the editor a reliable indicator of a paper's editorial stance. Frequent changes of ownership between proprietors from different nations and hidden foreign subsidies further complicated the identity of the paper. There was deep interpenetration of news resources, funding, and personal networks among newspapers representing interest groups of different nations. The complex treaty-port media environment made it onerous for the Chinese government to exercise effective control of it. Ironically, it was exactly this lack of order that provided the Chinese intellectuals and officials, who had little prior engagement with this medium, the opportunity to penetrate it.

It is a common assumption that the English-language papers served the foreign community, whereas the Chinese press circulated among the Chinese. Yet the historical reality indicates that the two types of newspapers were more interdependent than is commonly recognized.<sup>37</sup> Editors of the treaty-port English-language papers, particularly those operated by Americans, had discovered a considerable numbers of bilingual Chinese readers. Most of them had educational experience abroad or in foreign-operated schools and universities in China.<sup>38</sup> Instead of being a passive audience, these bilingual elites actively engaged in the operation of the English-language papers, working as contributors, editors, or managers. Indeed, reading, writing, or even working in English had become fashionable among the bilingual elites. It partly reflected a dimension of their cosmopolitan identities and extensive life experience. When Sino-Japanese relations soured, those bilingual elites, who had been immersed in the treaty-port press, knew what sort of rhetoric appealed to Western audiences.<sup>39</sup> Their involvement in the press formed the initial basis for China's international propaganda, especially when an official framework was yet to be constructed.

The influence of the English treaty-port papers also extended to Chinese readers who did not have the language proficiency to read originals. The language barrier could easily be overcome by translation. Bryna Goodman's research has shown that a significant portion of the important news that appeared in Chinese papers was translated from foreign papers. Citation of a Western source, such as the *North China Daily News* or the *China Weekly Review*, enhanced the authority of the news. Those translations of the Western press frequently appeared in headlines, a privilege the Chinese sources did not enjoy.<sup>40</sup> Yet this was not a one-way flow of information. The Chinese bilingual elites constituted an important source of information

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37. Bryna Goodman, "Semi-colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai," *China Review* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 64.

38. John B. Powell, *My Twenty-Five Years in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1945), 10.

39. The large number of bilingual intellectuals in the early Republic China was the result of the cultural policy of the United States and Japan. See Heng Teow, *Japan's Cultural Policy toward China, 1918-1931: A Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

40. Goodman, "Semi-colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai."

for foreign journalists through formal news exchange or informal conversations. As Stephen MacKinnon observed, few Western journalists spoke or read Chinese, but many had close ties with their Chinese counterparts through the English-language press.<sup>41</sup> Some journalists found it convenient to leak information to the foreign papers and then cite this material in Chinese translation to avoid censorship and social awkwardness in the Chinese community.<sup>42</sup> These invisible and personal information networks expanded the power of English treaty-port press and enabled its tentacles to reach the deepest corners of Chinese politics and society. This also explains why so many interest groups were eager to gain influence in this seemingly unimportant medium and why the competition over the control of the key papers was fierce.

The translingual flow of information nevertheless could not erase national and racial boundaries. Although many Chinese popular newspapers sought to benefit from the conditions of extraterritoriality by registering abroad as foreign assets, the level of protection they received from foreign administrations was much more limited than that extended to the English-language papers run by foreigners. When controversies arose with the Chinese government, foreign legations usually refused to protect journalists with Chinese backgrounds yet could not ignore similar situations with their own nationals.<sup>43</sup> It was still the foreign-operated English-language papers that enjoyed the highest level of independence from state intervention in China.

Such independence was unattainable for commercial Chinese newspapers either. It is true that the rise of commercial newspapers, as well as the rapid professionalization of journalistic training in the 1920s, led to a more independent and less politically partisan press. Yet commercialization did not foster political freedom to the level intellectuals wished to achieve. The quest for profit pushed the Chinese press owners to provide more social and entertainment news while avoiding sensitive political debates so as to avoid trouble with the government.<sup>44</sup> Although the English-language papers were also commercial, they targeted a small number of foreign and Chinese elite readers who paid more attention to politics and culture than social entertainment. This required the papers to engage in deep political debates and in information digging.

The treaty-port press provided a broader platform than Chinese-operated papers to discuss Chinese domestic and international politics. The high level of political independence constituted the source of credibility and power of the English-language press in both international and Chinese domestic news markets. Such an information

41. Stephen R. MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China* 23, no. 1 (January 1997): 11–15.

42. Goodman, "Semi-colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai," 77.

43. See Eugene Chen's case in Goodman, "Semi-colonialism, Transnational Networks and News Flows in Early Republican Shanghai," 78.

44. Timothy Weston, "Mining the Newspaper Business: The Theory and Practice of Journalism in 1920s China," *Twentieth-Century China* 31, no. 2 (April 2006): 4–31.

enclave attracted people from all over the country who were open to diversified ideas and looking for a space to pursue an alternative form of information order. Indeed, preserving a locale where messages were considered more credible in the news market was never the Nationalist government's intention. Its existence simply reflected the government's inability to extend control over treaty ports. It also challenged the state's traditional propaganda strategies and the top-down information order that the party tried to establish. Yet it was undeniable that the press constituted a valuable channel that China desperately needed to reach an international audience. Such an ambiguous situation required the Guomindang government to deal with the treaty-port press with great caution.

### Treaty-Port Press and International Propaganda Institution

The information order in the treaty-port press was distinctive from that pursued by the Nationalist government elsewhere in China. In 1924, Sun Yat-sen reorganized the Nationalist Party along Leninist lines. A Ministry of Propaganda was established following the organizational structure of its counterpart in the Soviet Communist Party. The propaganda system placed great emphasis on thought control and ideological indoctrination. Various schemes, including censorship, political training, distribution of propaganda outlines and publications, were exercised through party organizations on a central and local level.<sup>45</sup> The party propaganda system implemented a top-down form of information control. Based on the belief that the party represented public interests and that it was equipped with the knowledge to solve China's problems, propaganda officials considered it imperative to educate the public with Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles. Although national leaders acknowledged that European and American ideals of liberty and equality had initially inspired the revolution in China, they regarded the pursuit of personal freedom not useful to further guide China's revolution. It was the party that had the freedom of expression, not the individual.<sup>46</sup> This logic ran contrary to the values held in the treaty-port press, where independence and credibility, as mentioned above, were the key factors determining how far a message could travel. The clash of values developed into tensions between the treaty-port journalists and the conservative Guomindang members when the former joined the government's propaganda system after the war.

The development of international propaganda policy needs to be understood in light of the dimensions of China's international environment as well as its domestic political culture. Just like William Kirby observed, during the Republican period

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45. John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), chapters 6 and 7.

46. Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, 215.



(1912–1949) “everything important had an international dimension.”<sup>47</sup> From 1931 to 1941, Chiang Kai-shek’s foreign policy experienced a paradigm change, from taking a position against foreign coercion, particularly that of Britain, to an anti-Japanese policy. Yet the transition did not follow a linear path, and the line between friend and foe was unclear, particularly during the mid-1930s.<sup>48</sup> While the Guomindang government was alert to Japan’s desires for Chinese territory, it was also concerned about the Western powers’ encroachment on China’s sovereignty. Officials of different political groups often debated about who China should ally with to fight against whom. The lack of consensus and a definite diplomatic line led to the government’s ambiguous attitude toward the treaty-port press: while it pursued an alliance with the Western-operated papers to denounce Japan, it was relentless in its efforts to challenge the Powers’ extraterritorial privileges in the press.

Factional politics among Chiang Kai-shek, Wang Jingwei, and Hu Hanmin, which involved rivalries for control of the government, impaired the formation of a unified and coherent system of international propaganda. Conservative party members who were reluctant to abandon the party’s anti-imperialist tradition continued to raise hurdles for the implementation of propaganda policies aimed at forming an alliance with Western powers. Attempts at building a strong international propaganda system by civilian leaders were contradicted by the continuing militarization of politics and administration in the 1930s. The concentration of propaganda resources became possible only after Chiang Kai-shek’s ascendance to the leadership following the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War.

The relations between the English-language treaty-port press cohorts and the Nationalist government should be analyzed in two phases, divided by the outbreak of the full-scale Sino-Japanese War in 1937. During the prewar period before a centralized propaganda institution had been established, the most vibrant force to advocate China’s case was the English-language treaty-port papers operated by bilingual Chinese and foreign nationals. Despite several institutions’ involvement in international propaganda, their efforts were conducted in an ad hoc manner without consistent policy guidelines. The government made considerable adjustments to the transnational treaty-port press at this stage. Facing a complex media environment in the treaty ports, where the boundaries of national identity were not always clear cut, the government sought to infiltrate the press by camouflaging its connections with some of the distinguished papers and journalists. Scholars have tended to perceive the Guomindang government and the press as dichotomous opposites whose

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47. William C. Kirby, “The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era,” in *Reappraising Republican China*, ed. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 179.

48. Youli Sun, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

relationship was characterized by the former's suppression and the latter's resistance.<sup>49</sup> This study demonstrates that the relation between the two was far more complex. Apart from challenging the independence of the press, the government also sought to adapt to the transnational media environment. Communication between the Western press and Chinese communities was not only increased by the pressure to maximize profit in the news market and journalists' innate desire to dig out news, but also by the government's efforts to incorporate the treaty-port press into its propaganda system.

After the war, the treaty-port press cohorts were under great pressure to adapt to the government's propaganda system. Having to abandon the news infrastructure and resources in the treaty ports, they sought institutional accommodation in the party-state. Despite their desire to uphold the liberal journalism learned in US-influenced institutions, they had to make compromises to the party's surveillance of information transmission during wartime. A special structure was thus established to accommodate this group of outsiders who had no roots in the party to help them fit in with the existing propaganda bureaucracy. Chiang's effort to insulate them from external pressure was essential to guarantee their office's efficiency. Julia Strauss's seminal study on the Nationalist government's institution building argued that the institutions' ability to insulate themselves from external intervention was essential to maintaining their daily operations and therefore to achieving mid- and long-term goals.<sup>50</sup> Her analysis is germane to understanding the development of the international propaganda institution. Yet the international propaganda office benefited from insulation only temporarily. The strategy soon proved to be the poison to quench the thirst, since it further isolated the institution from other political factions with which collaboration was imperative. It also made the propaganda office vulnerable, since its independence, and the credibility derived from it, became increasingly hinged upon Chiang's support. Yet Chiang, who was by no means committed to liberal values, was ready to exploit the intelligence role of the office at the cost of its efficacy of publicity.

Compared to the Guomindang's domestic propaganda system, the international propaganda office established in 1937 placed greater emphasis on professionalism and qualifications than on seniority and commitment to the party's ideologies. Indeed, the officials who used to serve the treaty-port press had tried to eke out a space in the government where they could maintain a certain level of independence. Yet compromise was inevitable. The institution was not strictly a modern, Weberian bureaucracy operating on the basis of impersonal recruitment procedures and a clearly defined distribution of power based on administrative protocols. Instead, it was strongly patriarchal. Philip Kuhn argued that the Qing Chinese state was a

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49. Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

50. Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

“bureaucratic monarchy,” characterized by the simultaneous coexistence of an autocratic monarchy with a routinized bureaucracy.<sup>51</sup> This model could also be used to understand the international propaganda department. Apart from the codes and ethics used to regulate staff members of the department, Chiang could always find a channel to monitor its daily operations, influence its censorship policy, and ensure its output to fit his larger political plans. A sense of community was nurtured through informal networks based on people’s native place, alumni connections, experiences as colleagues, and chains of friendship.

The person Chiang Kai-shek put in charge of establishing the propaganda system was Hollington Tong (Dong Xianguang), a US-trained bilingual journalist. While his name rarely appears in books on the involvement of foreign journalists in China’s war and revolution, Tong played a key role in linking the Nationalist government with the treaty-port press and in founding an international propaganda department in the party. Yet the process was not always pleasant. He constantly found himself sandwiched between his commitment to liberal ideals and the necessity to adapt to the conservatism of the party. And his experience mirrored many intellectuals of the time who struggled to gain more independence when nationalism became the dominant ideology that pushed people to make decisions based on national interests during wartime.

## Structure and Outline

Scholarship dedicated to the history of the Chinese media has tended to examine propaganda policies and media texts separately and has often obscured their interaction. In each media battle, trial and error was an integral part of the formative process of building an effective international propaganda system. This book combines discourse analysis with studies on policy making and institution building. It traces how China’s fractured government carried out a propaganda scheme in spite of Japan’s advanced international news network.

This book adopts a two-tiered structure: each chapter on the historical development of Guomindang propaganda policy is followed by a section that analyzes how the Sino-Japanese conflict was discussed in the treaty-port press during the given period. The purpose is to integrate the analysis of media policies with that of actual reporting in newspapers. Given the transnational feature of the treaty-port media environment, the national identity of a newspaper in this book is based on its source of funding, which significantly affected its editorial line. “Propaganda” in this study mainly refers to news propaganda—the use of news in the English-language press as

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51. Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1786* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

a tool of diplomacy.<sup>52</sup> “News,” on the contrary, carries a broader meaning, applying to both the reporting of facts and political commentary on recent events.

In my case studies, I pay particular attention to the interactions between the texts that appeared in the press and their social and political context. Media texts are not generated in a social vacuum. They are often a response to a context, which may be an opponent’s propaganda or a particular opinion popular among the public. Although it is impossible to discern precisely to whom an article was initially directed, juxtaposing texts from several rival sources usually provides a good indication in this regard. The juxtaposition is also important to track the flow of information between treaty-port papers and from treaty-port press to the metropolitan papers in Britain and the United States. For each case, I will examine how Japan and China presented their sides of the story in the treaty-port press. The opinions of the British- and American-controlled treaty-port papers will be discussed to reveal their engagement in this media battle. This will be followed by a review of press opinion in London and New York in order to trace whether and to what extent Chinese and Japanese views were accepted by the metropolitan press.

The case studies are meant to demonstrate two points. First, they seek to reflect the nuanced and multilayered treaty-port press environment and the various political tensions behind it, especially through examination of a particular paper’s choice of words and cross-referencing with other papers representing different interest groups. Second, the competition for news reporting between China and Japan was more about establishing the context of the news than reporting the news itself. As Edward L. Bernays put it, “there has to be fertile ground for an idea to fall on and grow.”<sup>53</sup> Unable to retrieve historical reality most of the time, newspapers of both sides had paid great attention to cultivating favorable contexts for their reports, so as to make their versions of the story appear more authentic and thus acceptable among the readers.

There are obvious limits to what this study can accomplish, one of them being the assessment of the efficacy of propaganda. For decades, the question of whether propaganda can effectively change people’s minds has been the topic of much debate. Scholars approaching the question with different analytical models come to different conclusions, and I do not intend to join the debate. Rather, I follow Warren Cohen’s injunction to “chart lines of access to decision-makers and to the public”<sup>54</sup> and present the neglected factors that might lead to certain changes. The ability to transmit one’s views, as he suggests, does not guarantee influence, but no influence is possible without the ability to convey opinions to audiences. This study traces China’s

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52. See the explanation of the term “news propaganda” in Akami, “The Emergence of International Public Opinion and the Origins of Public Diplomacy in Japan in the Inter-war Period,” 102.

53. Edward L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 1928), 109.

54. Cohen, *Chinese Connection*, 2.

endeavors to gain access to the world press. Second, various forms of media and publications contribute to national image building, such as movies, radio, travelogues, and popular novels.<sup>55</sup> While there is considerable scholarship on this, the treaty-port English-language press remains underresearched. This book examines how news was employed as an intangible power to shape the minds of the foreign public. Third, discourse analysis does not examine what actually happened in the past but what was reflected in the press. The press may not necessarily be able to discern truth during or immediately after an event, but it reflects certain parts of it and records what people perceive the truth to be, based on the prevailing attitudes.

This book comprises three sections. Part I describes the Chiang Kai-shek government's weak position in international propaganda during the early years of the regime, when connections with the treaty-port press had not yet been established. Chapter 1 sketches out the backgrounds of the key British- and American-owned English-language papers in the treaty ports in the late 1920s and China's efforts to compete with Japan in international news reporting before 1928. Chapter 2 examines China and Japan's confrontation in the English-language press during the Jinan Incident in May 1928—the first military conflict between the Nationalist government and Japan after Chiang Kai-shek established the Nanjing government.

Chapters 3–6 form the second part of the book. They address the formative period of China's propaganda system before the full-scale Sino-Japanese War. Chapter 3 deals with the Nationalist government's attempts to build an international propaganda system from 1928 to 1932. It explores the government's efforts to regulate treaty-port papers protected by extraterritoriality and to window dress its own papers with foreign capital and editors. The Mukden Incident (1931) and the Shanghai Incident (1932), which instigated another battle of words between China and Japan in the English-language press, tested the Nationalist government's international propaganda system. Chapter 4 analyzes the position and strategy that the major newspapers adopted during the two incidents. In Chapter 5, I trace the development of China's international propaganda from 1933 to June 1937, a period characterized by the government's appeasement of Japan and Chiang taking two positions simultaneously. While suppressing anti-Japanese voices in the domestic press, he secretly subsidized the prominent anti-Japanese English-language papers. Chapter 6 uses the press's reaction to the statement of the Amō Doctrine (1934) to reveal how China and Japan both failed to form a unified line in the press, due to complex political circumstances.

Part III explores the Nationalist government's propaganda policy after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War. Chapter 7 traces the establishment of a centralized international propaganda system led by Hollington Tong. Analyzing the Nanjing Incident of

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55. Chang-tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Michael A. Krysko, *American Radio in China: International Encounters with Technology and Communications, 1919–1941* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

1938, this chapter reveals how the system organized international propaganda against Japan through its extensive network. The final chapter examines how Tong operated the propaganda institution after Chiang Kai-shek moved the capital to Chongqing. Troubled by the lack of resources and constant bombing by the Japanese, Tong's office also had to compete with the Communist Party for the attention of foreign correspondents and to undermine the propaganda efforts of the Wang Jingwei regime through a clandestine branch office in Shanghai.

During my years of reading the *North China Daily News*, the foremost treaty-port newspaper of the time, I have collected many cartoons drawn by the paper's talented White Russian artist Georgii Avksent'ievich Sapojnikoff, known by his pen name Sapajou.<sup>56</sup> To recapture the historical events and political circumstances, I end each chapter with one of his cartoons published between 1928 and 1940—when the paper ceased publication under Japanese pressure.

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56. Richard Rigby, "Sapajou," *East Asian History*, nos. 17/18 (June/December 1999): 131–68.

# Conclusion

The period between 1928 and 1941 witnessed two marked trends: the growing sympathy for China's anti-Japanese cause in the English-language press and the development of China's foreign propaganda system. The two processes were closely connected. Even before China became a military ally of the United States and Britain after Pearl Harbor, it had already become an emotional ally. A change in national image is always a complex process. Other elements, such as the conflict of interests between the Western powers and Japan as well as Japanese atrocities in China, may well have contributed to the shift in public opinion. Yet it is undeniable that China's continuous propaganda efforts intensified the existing tensions between Japan and the Western powers and strongly promoted the change. History does not allow "what if" questions. Yet some hypothetical scenarios are useful in urging us toward a reevaluation of the significance of certain stories and events that are absent from current history telling. Would the United States have entered the war in 1941 without any propaganda effort from the Nationalist government? Had the United States delayed confrontation with Japan and stayed out of East Asia, could Chiang Kai-shek's government have survived Japan's encirclement? If the Chiang Kai-shek regime had collapsed in the early 1940s, would World War II have ended with the same result?

The development of China's international propaganda benefited immensely from the treaty-port press, a set of sources long neglected by historians. The press not only provided China with an effective channel to present its case during the deepening Sino-Japanese crisis but also honed the journalistic skills of some members of the Chinese bilingual elite. It nurtured a news network that survived the extreme hardship of warfare, including China's loss of territory and of news facilities, the death of personnel, and the terror of extreme violence. The treaty-port news operations were characterized by a commitment to the norm of the untrammelled flow of information, a respect for credibility, and a skillful use of transnational identities. All of these exerted a strong influence on the government's propaganda policies at the beginning of the full-scale Sino-Japanese War.

However, the path of development of China's international propaganda institution should not be taken for granted. The strong influence of the treaty-port press was a

result of the incompetence of the Guomindang government to control it. Operating in these special zones, the press served an audience whose cosmopolitan vision was not restrained by ideological affiliations to nationalism, Marxism, or capitalism. Protected by extraterritoriality, the treaty-port press enjoyed a high level of editorial independence not available elsewhere in the country. This challenged the top-down information order that the Guomindang government sought to establish after the Soviet model and provided a haven where an alternative information order influenced by liberalism could be exercised.

Indeed, the contention between the government and the treaty-port press in part revealed the friction of two propaganda models—the Soviet and the Anglo-American—tested in China during the 1930s. While the former emphasized swamping the public with an all-encompassing ideology through indoctrination and information insulation, the latter focused on persuasion and debate among diverse viewpoints. The former valued the authority of sources, whereas the latter believed that the power of sources lay in their credibility.<sup>1</sup> Yet the two information orders were not always in conflict. Unable to subject the treaty-port press to the control of its party-led propaganda machinery, the government had to play on the field characterized by the intricate power relations of the treaty-port press and adapt to the transnational environment to maximize the chance of broadcasting its voice to the international public. This adaptation also demonstrated the government's compromise with the treaty-port elites whose support they desperately needed to secure political authority.

The Guomindang government was an authoritarian regime led by one party. Yet compared with other contemporary one-party states, such as Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, it was a weak government troubled by internal disunity and external threats. The formation of the international propaganda institution, however, was the outcome of power struggles among different political interest groups. It took place in a period when the survival of the Guomindang government depended on a search for foreign patrons and allies in a fast-changing international environment.<sup>2</sup> Yet the leftists were reluctant to depart from its anti-imperial tradition. Meanwhile, the distinction between foreign allies and threats was often unclear, due to the highly volatile political situation. Struggle for political supremacy within the regime further complicated the development of the international propaganda institution, with all major factions trying to garner propaganda resources and wield influence in the treaty-port press. Various departments that sought to influence foreign public opinion often disagreed with each other over what political stance to pursue or how to regulate the

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1. See Mareike Svea Ohlberg's discussion on the two propaganda models in "Creating a Favorable International Public Opinion Environment: External Propaganda as a Global Concept with Chinese Characteristics" (PhD dissertation, Heidelberg University, 2013), chapter 2.
  2. William C. Kirby, "The Internationalization of China: Foreign Relations at Home and Abroad in the Republican Era," in *Reappraising Republican China*, ed. Frederic Wakeman Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 188.



foreign papers. A unified international propaganda institution became possible only after Chiang Kai-shek gained absolute leadership and was able to pull together all available resources for his propaganda team led by Hollington Tong.

The international propaganda institution was not a strict modern bureaucracy where office duties and opportunities were separate from private lives. Propaganda resources were bound together by *renqing* (human feelings) cultivated in the treaty ports. The institution was built on interlocking personal networks based on native place, alumni connections, collegial experience, and chains of friendship. The Missouri mafia, the Missouri and Yenching university networks, St. John's University connections, and the *China Press* group together played a key role in forming the basic human resources for the propaganda institution. During Tong's leadership of the propaganda office, he constantly sought to make his relations with his colleagues even closer by attending to their personal needs. The living conditions in the Holly's Hotel and the International Department compound in Chongqing helped to combine office work with private domicile. The extremities of the war situation justified this design for security reasons, but it was also intended to strengthen the cohesiveness of the department and so to improve efficacy and enhance personal control. It was a network tied by common commitment, personal loyalty, and friendship that ensured the continuous flow of information despite the perilous situation for news transmission during wartime.

Although this study has dealt with the rise of the international propaganda institution, it has also narrated the tragedy of some members of the treaty-port elite who had to give up their liberal ideals during a time of national crisis. For Hollington Tong, the transition from treaty-port journalist to Guomindang official placed him in a painful dilemma of pursuing liberal journalism or submitting to conservative Guomindang culture. His experience reflected the quandary faced by many other Western-trained intellectuals at this time. Strongly influenced by liberalism during their university studies overseas, these intellectuals supported basic civil liberties and believed that a diversity of ideas constituted a necessary ingredient of a healthy society. Yet the Sino-Japanese crisis severely limited their independence. The war machine absorbed them into the militarized system, crushed their dream of creating an information oasis based on the treaty-port order within the propaganda system, and dashed their hopes of influencing the Guomindang bureaucracy from within. While the Sino-Japanese War might have provided an antidote to China's malaise and chaos, and cultivated a sense of nationalism among its mass public,<sup>3</sup> it also strengthened the party-state and nipped the development of liberal journalism in the bud.

Chiang's patronage of the propaganda institution derived partly from his personal friendship with Tong. Again, *renqing* was essential in the operation of the institution.

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3. Chang-Tai Hung, *War and Popular Culture: Resistance in Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

However, this very element that tied the journalists and the state together was vulnerable. Despite having been born in the same region and having been taught by Tong, Chiang's trust in Tong was limited. Chiang respected Tong's professional skills but remained cautious about his strong commitment to liberalism. Tong's views often ran contrary to the traditional Guomindang culture that emphasized ideological tutelage and personal control. Chiang would allow Tong to relax censorship as long as it did not threaten his personal prestige and ordered him to tighten it immediately when circumstances turned hostile. After moving to Chongqing, he installed Dai Li to use his intelligence apparatus to monitor the department's daily work and thus balance Tong's power in the propaganda ministry. Keenly aware of Tong's political limitations in the party, he chose Zhou Fohai, an unpredictable doyen of the party, to be minister of information, rather than promote his faithful follower. As Chen Bulei noted, Tong was much less adroit in dealing with party affairs than in organizing his propaganda office.

Throughout his professional life Tong remained fully aware of the filial nature of Chinese organizations and relationships. Because Tong taught him English in high school, Chiang always addressed Tong as "teacher." However, Tong fully understood that the title did not imply any real subservience on Chiang's part and treated Chiang as his superior both personally and professionally. While Tong's power derived from Chiang, he was mainly supported by Soong May-ling, who shared his views on liberal strategy in propaganda. Soong provided Tong with a certain degree of protection when Tong's policy contradicted Chiang's vision. Yet the close connection with Soong also led him to be regarded in the party as part of the "empress clique," which was not held in high esteem by many senior political leaders in Chiang's faction.

The suffocating political environment exhausted Tong. He resigned from the Ministry of Information immediately after the Sino-Japanese War and joined the YMCA school in New York to learn automobile mechanics. When his disciple Ye Gongchao visited him, he confided that "there is more fun repairing cars than trying to serve the government."<sup>4</sup> This half-joking off-the-cuff comment betrayed the deep frustrations he had felt over the past decade. However, his plan to become a mechanic was interrupted by the Civil War. He was called back to Nanjing in 1947 by Chiang to once again lead the government's international propaganda office.

Some seven decades have passed since the Sino-Japanese War. Yet a nuanced understanding of the period has seldom emerged in the public or academic debate. As Rana Mitter pointed out, without the "China Quagmire," Japan's imperial ambitions would have been much easier to fulfill. Yet China's struggle during the Sino-Japanese

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4. Ye Gongchao, "Huainian Dong Xianguang xiansheng" [In memoriam: Mr. Hollington Tong], in Dong Xianguang xiansheng zhuisilu bianji weiyuanhui, *Dong Xianguang jiniance* [In memory of Hollington Tong] (Taipei: Dong Xianguang xiansheng zhuisilu bianji weiyuanhui, 1972), 21.

War has been largely forgotten.<sup>5</sup> Official histories in mainland China exclusively attributed the victory over Japan to the leading role of the Communist Party. Scholars in Taiwan are reluctant to discuss the Nationalist government's achievements, when the Guomintang veterans had to swallow the pain and shame of the loss of the Civil War, and the increasing awareness of native identity continued to push for a Taiwan-centered perspective on history writing. In the United States and Europe, people were more attracted to the questions of "Who lost China?" or "Why did the Communists win in 1949?" instead of evaluating what the Nationalist government attempted to achieve, or could have achieved, given the context and constraints of those times.

While recovering lost stories is part of my intention, I am also interested in seeking a parallel between the past and the present. Despite the challenges, struggles, and disasters China experienced during this period—the Civil War, the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, the reopening of its doors to the world, and the return to the international society—what we see today is a rising independent China with a strong influence on international affairs; a nation linked more and more closely with the rest of the world in economic development, political decision making and regional security; and a nation, after the Mao era, seeking to redress its isolated status in international relations, rebuild its national image, and make its political model and values more widely understood.

Since the end of the 1990s, China has put great emphasis on the development of "soft power" rather than power through coercion or warfare. At the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting in January 2006, Party Chief and President Hu Jintao noted that the rise of China's international influence depended both on hard power and soft power. He further highlighted the significance of the latter in his political report to the Seventeenth Party Congress in October 2007, stressing the urgent need to strengthen China's soft power in response to international challenges.<sup>6</sup> China's use of soft power in South Asia, Africa, and Latin America has also caught the global attention of academics and diplomats. In 2007, the then-Australian Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd (a few months before he became prime minister) handed to US president George W. Bush a copy of Joshua Kurlantzich's book *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* at their meeting in Sydney.<sup>7</sup> The US Congressional Research Service also conducted a lengthy report on China's soft power in South America, Asia, and Africa to assess its implications for the security and economic interests of the United States.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), 379.

6. Mingjiang Li, *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 1.

7. Peter Hartcher, "Rudd Offers a Cheeky Lesson in Soft Power," *Sydney Morning Herald*, September 7, 2007.

8. US Congressional Research Service, "China's Foreign Policy and 'Soft Power' in South America, Asia, and Africa" (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2008). [https://fas.org/irp/congress/2008\\_rpt/crs-china.pdf](https://fas.org/irp/congress/2008_rpt/crs-china.pdf).

The development of soft power in today's China is, of course, different from that in the 1930s. Today, China is an independent nation. Its efforts to exercise soft power are built on its growing economic, military, and political strength. The deep apprehension of the threat posed by Japan and other imperialist powers as well as the difficulties created by circumscribed sovereignty in organizing foreign propaganda in the 1930s have become history—a history that is too remote and inaccessible for those born after the war to be aware of unless they deliberately make an effort to hunt for its traces and, sometimes, be brave enough to revisit the turmoil, suffering, and pain that was exposed.

However, careful readers of history will see that many key features of those days remain present. Among the hustle and bustle of the Shanghai Bund, where Westerners today walk in and out of the historic buildings, we see a reflection of the lively and cosmopolitan Shanghai of the 1930s. When Chinese Central Television and the Xinhua News Agency began to expand their English-language services to present China's perspective to a global audience, their actions strongly echoed the attempts made by China in the 1930s to make its voice heard and its cause understood abroad. Similarly, the global development of Internet technology has transformed both the flow of information and the nature of social networks, with Microblogs (*Weibo*) and WeChat providing challenges to the Chinese government's control of information that past leaders of the Communist Party never faced. The way in which online information and social networks are transforming the public sphere today mirrors the actions of China's treaty-port papers, which embraced a wide range of divergent opinions and sought to exert strong influence over the world media. Today, China's use of nationalism with strong Confucian overtones to fill the ideological void left by the collapse of communism,<sup>9</sup> again reminds us of the role nationalism played in nurturing allegiance among diverse political groups during the 1930s.

Since China reentered global society at the end of the Mao era, both China and the rest of the world have worked hard to manage its comeback. The Chinese government is eager to establish its reputation and legitimacy, while the rest of the world tentatively watches how the rise of China transforms global society. The portrayal of this economic giant but ideological heretic is a constant matter of dispute. What should China do to improve its image in the world? There are many possible answers to this question and doubtless as many critiques of whatever China does. But whatever does occur, the experience of the past, the road China has traveled, and the experiences that continue to shape its thoughts and actions will better inform us in the present.

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9. Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 8.

# Index

- 72 *Hang shang bao*, 41
- Abend, Hallett, 43, 60, 113, 117, 211, 243;  
deportation of, 81–83
- Ackerman, Carl W., 92
- Akira, Ariyoshi, 39, 164
- Allcott, Carroll, 245
- Allman, Norwood, 245
- All-Union Society for Cultural Relations  
with Foreign Countries, 67
- Amō Doctrine, 16, 160, 162–80
- Amō Eiji, 162. *See also* Amō Doctrine
- Anglo-Chinese Medhurst College, 191
- Anglo-Japanese alliance, 55, 234
- anti-Communist campaign, 125, 172
- Anti-enemy Committee, Shanghai, 191, 196,  
197, 207, 214, 234
- antiforeignism, 2, 51, 52, 54, 57, 60, 75,  
96, 101, 106; change of, 93, 115,  
123, 126; dilemma of, 162. *See also*  
anti-imperialism
- anti-imperialism, 12, 54, 61, 65, 68, 90, 101,  
114, 115, 126, 253
- appeasement policy, 16, 126, 130, 137, 138,  
160, 162, 169, 177, 219
- Armstrong, Herbert W., 105
- Asahi shimbun*, 98
- Asia* magazine, 131
- Associate Press, 25, 41, 60, 228, 233
- Associated Press, 25, 41, 60, 228, 233
- Bai Chongxi, 211
- Bates, Lilliath, 211
- Bates, Miner S., 211, 214–15
- Beijing government, 37, 42, 46, 50, 53, 76, 92
- Belden, Jack, 247–48, 249
- Bernays, Edward L., 15
- Bess, C. D., 76
- Bickers, Robert, 8, 22
- bilingual elites, 6, 9, 12, 14, 32, 33, 42, 87,  
90, 252
- Birdwood, William Riddell, 100
- Black Dragon Society, 170
- Blue Shirts. *See* Fuxing She
- Bolshevik influence, 35, 43, 54, 100. *See also*  
Comintern
- Borodin, Mikhail, 43, 44, 60
- Brady, Mary B., 216
- British Foreign Office, 26, 39, 80, 235
- “bureaucratic monarchy,” 14
- Burma Road, 219, 229, 234, 235
- Burton, Basil, 215–16
- Butts, J., 22
- Byrna, Goodman, 9
- C. C. Clique, 84, 125, 137, 225, 229, 240
- cable, 5, 65, 81, 83, 84–86, 97, 102, 110, 113,  
141, 142, 153, 155, 209, 210, 212, 229,  
231, 248, 249
- Cai Gongshi, 49
- Cai Tingkai, 150
- Canton Gazette*, 43, 82
- Canton Register*, 21–22
- Carr, E. H., 4–5
- Cecil, Lord, 122
- censorship, 10, 11, 14, 72–74, 76, 84, 109,  
113, 133, 140, 141, 188, 190, 207,  
208, 212, 215, 227, 242, 248, 255;  
on outgoing dispatches, 153–60; policy,  
158–60, 204–5, 223–26, 246

- Censorship Office on Books and Magazines, 224
- Center for Foreign Service, 67
- Central Daily News*, 23–24, 154
- Central Executive Committee, 67, 70diagram1, 72, 77, 136, 139, 143, 240
- Central Military Academy, 240
- Central News Agency, 41, 70diagram1, 140–46, 159, 190, 193, 195, 202, 228, 246
- Central Plains War, 88
- Changchun, 96, 104
- Chao, Thomas Ming-heng. *See* Zhao Minheng
- Chen, Eugene. *See* Chen Youren
- Chen, W. C., 42
- Chen bao*, 154
- Chen Bingzhang, 228
- Chen Bulei, 151, 255
- Chen Cheng, 241
- Chen Gongbo, 189, 192, 203, 241
- Chen Guofu, 84, 141, 202, 225
- Chen Lifu, 73, 84
- Chen Mingshu, 150
- Chen Youren, 43, 82, 92, 136
- Cheng, Hawthorne, 149fig.10, 190
- Cheng Tiangu, 138
- Chiang Kai-shek, 1, 4, 12, 88, 139, 151, 208, 211, 216–17, 231, 233, 235, 243, 246, 250, 254; and *China Press*, 146, 149, 150, 152, 172; and factional struggles, 12, 69, 117, 136–37, 150, 157, 172, 189, 255; and Northern Expedition, 46, 48–49, 52, 58; and purge of Communists, 52, 137; and struggles with warlords, 72, 141, 220; challenge of, 126, 137–38, 139, 150–51, 229; foreign policy of, 12, 16, 54, 68, 125, 130–31, 140, 164, 165, 172, 185–86, 234, 236; government, 3, 16, 17, 41, 70–71, 151, 219, 233, 252; Madam Chiang Kai-shek (*see* Soong May-ling); militarizes the government, 156, 187–88, 192–93; propaganda policy of, 13, 48–49, 51, 66, 82, 116–17, 158, 186, 188, 199, 200, 227–29, 233–34, 239–42, 249; supports Central News Agency, 141–43. *See also* Tong, Hollington; and Chiang Kai-shek
- Chicago Daily News*, 22, 210, 211, 228
- Chicago Examiner*, 27
- Chicago Tribune*, 22
- China at War*, 193, 196, 224
- China Campaign Committee, 197
- China Critic*, 7, 79, 137, 146, 172; and Amō statement, 173–74; and Shanghai Incident, 114–15; and Tanaka Memorial, 103–5; establishment of, 90–91
- China Defence League, 248
- China Forum*, 139
- China Press*, 22, 91–94, 138, 140, 146, 191, 192, 193, 204, 208, 245, 254; and Amō statement, 169–73, 177, 180; and Jinan Incident, 48, 55–57, 58; and Nationalist government, 146–52; and Shanghai Incident, 114–15; establishment of, 27–30
- China Republican (China Gazette)*, 43
- China Weekly Review*, 9, 22, 38, 78, 79, 82, 83, 89, 93, 102, 127, 130, 135, 136, 248; and Amō statement, 176–77; and Jinan Incident, 58–59; and Mukden Incident, 109–10; and Nanjing Incident, 212–13; and Shanghai Incident, 120–21; establishment of, 30–35
- China's Industrial Commission, 37
- Chinese Courier and Canton Gazette*, 21
- Chinese Nation*, 89, 147
- Chongqing Garrison Command's Guards, 227
- Christian Science Monitor*, 248
- Christianity, 21, 144, 145, 188, 200, 204, 208, 214, 216
- Chun qiu*, 125
- Clark, Grover, 43, 87–88
- Clark, J. D., 39, 88
- Clegg, Arthur, 198
- Columbia University, 27, 92, 200
- Comintern, 43, 79, 139
- Commercial Pacific Cable Telegraph Company, 84, 85, 153, 212
- Commercial Press, 113
- Committee on Public Information, 5, 33, 67
- Communications Clique, 92
- Communist International*, 105

- Communist Party, 17, 99, 138–39, 185,  
205–6, 219, 240–41, 245–48, 256–57;  
Soviet, 11. *See also* Communists;  
propaganda: Communist
- Communists, 3, 51–52, 54, 72, 87, 125, 137,  
139, 150, 158–59, 172, 206, 219, 247–49,  
256
- Constitutional Defence League, 79
- constitutionalism, 66
- consul general: of France, 43; of Japan, 33,  
39; of UK, 27, 81, 133; of US, 33, 94, 127
- Coolidge, Calvin, 50
- Cosmopolitan Club, 191
- Craddock, A. K., 39
- Crane, Charles R., 27
- Cripps, Stafford, 234
- Croly, Herbert, 30
- Crow, Carl, 28, 29, 33, 39
- Cui Wanqiu, 194, 223diagram5
- Cunningham, Edwin S., 33, 94, 113, 128
- Da wanbao*, 149, 150, 194
- Dagong bao*, 41, 206
- Dai Jitao, 73, 240
- Dai Li, 186, 195, 208, 227, 243, 255
- Daily Shipping and Commercial News*, 23
- Daily Telegraph* (London), 88, 225
- Daily Telegraph*, 88, 225
- Daily Worker*, 198
- datong*, 67
- Daugherty, William E., 227
- Deane, Hugh, 248
- Diao Minqian (M. Tukzung Tyau), 42, 87
- die-hardism, 26, 37, 58, 78, 79, 80, 88, 107,  
108, 109
- Diet, 163
- Domei News Agency, 243
- Donald, William H., 38, 83, 91, 93, 156–57,  
203, 213–14, 235. *See also* Tong,  
Hollington: and William H. Donald
- Dong Shoupeng (Z. B. Tong), 157, 208
- Du Xigui, 147
- Du Yuesheng, 116, 149, 151
- Duncan, Chesney, 43
- Durbin, Peggy, 205
- Durbin, Tillman, 148, 149fig.10, 192, 206,  
210–11, 217
- East India Company, 21
- Eastern Extension Telegraph Company, 84,  
153
- Egypt, 101, 106, 108
- Eliot, Charles, 101
- empres clique, 242, 255
- Epstein, Israel, 225, 228
- Evans, Henry, 200
- Executive Yuan, 67, 77, 114, 130, 135, 156,  
224
- extraterritoriality, 8, 10, 12, 16, 22, 26, 32,  
34, 54, 88, 93, 99, 103, 114, 204, 253;  
abolition of, 73–84, 99, 121, 131–36;  
origins of, 74–75. *See also* treaty  
revision
- Ezra, Edward I., 30, 91
- Fang Zhi, 111
- Far Eastern Mirror*, 196
- Far Eastern Review*, 37–38, 51, 83, 84, 105,  
109, 127, 131, 168; and Amō statement,  
168–69; and Mukden Incident, 98–101;  
and Shanghai Incident, 118–19
- Feng Yuxiang, 43, 72, 81, 88
- Fengtian Clique, 37, 42
- Ferguson, J. C., 29, 93
- Fessenden, Stirling, 94
- Fifth Board, 186–92
- Findley, William T., 91
- Fitch, George A., 199, 214–15
- Fitch, Geraldine, 199
- Fleischer, Benjamin, 27
- Foreign Agents Registration Act, 200
- Four Agencies, 150–52, 157
- Fox, Albert W., 77
- Fox, Charles J., 76–77
- French Concession, 38, 43, 112, 135, 208
- Freyn, Hubert, 208
- Fry, Margery, 198
- Fujian rebellion, 148, 150, 164
- Fukuda Hikosuke, 46
- Fuxing She, 240
- Gage, B. E. F., 235
- Gallop poll, 1, 249
- Gan Naiguang, 136
- Gao Zongwu, 240

- Geming pinglun*, 54  
 Georgii Avksent'ievich Sapojnikoff. *See*  
 Sapajou  
 Gilbert, Rodney, 26, 80, 101  
 Gollancz, Victor, 198  
 Gould, Randall, 105–6, 120, 154, 158, 211,  
 233, 245  
 Great Northern Telegraph Company, 84, 153,  
 207, 212  
 Green, Owen Mortimer, 26–27, 78, 80–81,  
 101  
 Green Gang, 116, 149  
 Greene, Roger, 199  
 Grew, Joseph, 163, 164, 167  
 Gu Mengyu, 140, 239  
 Guangzhou (Canton), 35, 41, 43, 66, 82, 121,  
 138, 140, 141, 154, 229  
 Guangzhou Clique, 117, 177  
 Guangzhou government, 43, 66, 82  
 Gui Zhongshu, 90  
 Guo Moruo, 241  
 Guo Taiqi, 197  
 Guomin (Kuomin) news agency, 41, 48, 49,  
 136, 147  
 Guomindang. *See* Nationalist Party  
 Guomindang leftists, 33, 54, 69, 72, 125,  
 136, 138, 141, 149, 150, 248; Wuhan  
 government led by, 43, 72  
 Guowen news agency, 41
- Hahn, Emily, 227–28  
 Han Deqin, 247  
 Hankou (Hankow), 29, 54, 56, 57, 68, 121,  
 142, 156, 196, 198, 205, 206, 208, 215,  
 238  
*Hankow Herald*, 198  
 Harmon Foundation, 216  
 Havas news agency, 25, 40  
 Hirota Kōki, 163, 166, 167–68, 169–70  
 Holcomb, Chauncey P., 91  
 Hong Kong, 84–85, 138, 142, 144, 152, 196,  
 206, 208, 220, 227, 233, 239, 240, 243,  
 245, 248  
*Hong Kong Telegraph*, 43  
 Horiguchi Yoshinori, 243  
 Hornbeck, Stanley K., 168, 171, 178, 199, 216  
*hou dang*. *See* empress clique  
*hou zhi hou jue*, 66  
 Howard, Edwin, 27, 81, 105  
 Howard, Roy, 229, 234, 245  
 Hu Hanmin, 12, 50, 137–38, 141, 172, 177  
 Hu Jintao, 256  
 Hu Shi (Hu Shih), 33, 90, 200, 240  
 Hu Zhengzhi, 41  
*Hua min wanbao*, 245  
 Huang Fu, 48, 50, 51, 164  
 Huang Xianzhao, 145  
 Hull, Cordell, 1, 216, 250  
 Hunter, E. H., 88
- imperial interests, 8, 34, 55, 174; of Britain,  
 24, 34, 80, 106, 108; of Japan, 104, 176;  
 of United States, 34  
 Imperial Maritime Customs, 88  
 imperialism, 9, 34, 201, 257; legacies of, 2, 6,  
 94; resistance of, 6, 54, 67, 88, 90, 101,  
 139. *See also* anti-imperialism  
 India, 8, 81, 100, 104, 106, 122  
 information order, 11, 253  
 intelligence, 13, 35, 38, 113, 137, 146, 151,  
 152, 186, 194, 195, 196, 208, 233, 234,  
 255  
 International Committee for the Nanjing  
 Safety Zone, 211, 214  
 International Communications Committee,  
 85  
 International Department: against  
 Communists, 245–49; against  
 Wang Jingwei, 239–45; British networks  
 of, 197–98, 235–36; changes guidelines  
 in Chongqing; 223–26; establishment  
 of, 192–93; settles in Chongqing,  
 220–23; structure of, 192–202; under  
 air raids, 236–39; US networks of,  
 199–201, 233–35. *See also* Press Hotel;  
 Radio: XGOY  
 International Division (Guoji ke), 69–70  
 International Settlement, 24, 111, 112,  
 115, 120, 121, 207. *See also* Shanghai  
 Municipal Council  
 Investigation and Statistics Bureau, 195, 227  
 Iriye, Akira, 110  
 Isaacs, Harold, 139, 148, 149  
 Itagaki Seishirō, 112



- Jacoby, Melville, 228, 230  
*Japan Advertiser*, 27, 83, 167  
 Japanese Telegraph Administration, 84  
 Jehol (Rehe), 125, 126  
 Ji Zejin, 223diagram5, 225  
 Jiang Guangnai, 150  
 Jinan Incident, 16, 44, 46–61, 65, 88, 90, 107  
 Johnson, Nelson T., 83, 132–34  
*Journal de shanghai*, 153, 212  
 journalistic professionalism, 10, 13, 93, 143,  
 145, 146, 148, 154, 156, 157, 188, 255  
 Judd, Walter, 199  
 Juntong. *See* Investigation and Statistics  
 Bureau
- Kawashima Yoshiko, 112  
 Keating, A. S., 21, 22  
 Keen, Victor, 212  
 Kellogg Pact, 110, 114, 116  
 Kerr, Clark A., 235  
 Kinney, Henry W., 127  
 Kirby, William, 11  
 Kirton, Walter, 42  
 Kong Xiangxi, 151–52, 200, 226, 228, 238  
 Konoé Fumimaro, 236  
 Koo, Wellington (Gu Weijun), 91, 92,  
 128–30, 138, 139  
 Kouichi Shiozawa, 117  
 Kuhn, Philip, 13–14  
 Kung, H. H. *See* Kong Xiangxi  
 Kwantung Army, 96, 97, 98, 112, 164, 185
- Lampson, Miles, 27, 80, 81  
 Laski, Harold, 198  
 Lawrence, Lowell, 199  
*Leader*, 87, 101–103, 117, 129, 136. *See also*  
*Peking Leader; Peiping Chronicle*  
 Leaf, Earl, 198–99, 215–16, 244  
 League of Nations, 50, 54, 99, 100, 107,  
 108, 109, 110, 114, 116, 125, 126–30,  
 138, 162, 164–66, 172–73, 175, 178,  
 180  
 Lee Yu-pu, 207  
 Left Book Club, 198  
 legal pluralism, 74  
 legation: American, 29, 38, 82, 87, 88, 94,  
 132, 133, 135, 136, 139; British, 132, 133,  
 135, 136; French, 132, 134, 135, 136;  
 Japanese, 117, 132  
 Legislative Yuan, 90, 140, 151, 164, 191  
 Li Bingrui (Edward Bing-shuey Lee), 87, 89,  
 117  
 Li Cai (Lee Choy), 41, 43  
 Li Jishen, 150  
 Li Shizeng, 50, 54  
 Li Zongren, 72, 88  
 Liang Shichun, 145  
 liberal journalism, 13, 226, 227, 245, 254  
 liberalism, 69, 79, 157, 204, 225, 226, 242,  
 253, 254, 255  
*Life* magazine, 234, 247  
 Lin Wenqing (Lim Boom Keng), 89  
 Lin Yutang, 6n25, 90, 137  
 Lindley, Francis, 166  
 Lippman, Walter, 30  
 Liu, Frank, 191  
 Liu Dajun, 90  
 Liu Zhan'en, 191, 207  
 Lohrbas, Larry, 22  
 Low Key Club, 240  
 Luce, Henry, 234  
 Luo Jialun, 140  
 Luo Wengan, 114, 130, 134, 140  
 Lushan Conference (1937), 186  
 Lytton Commission, 126–31  
 Lytton Report, 130, 139
- Ma Su, 43  
 Ma Yinchu, 90  
 Ma Zhanshan, 130  
 MacCausland, J. A., 204, 223diagram5, 228,  
 230  
 MacDonald, C. M., 234  
 MacMurray, John Van Antwerp, 81, 82  
 Magee, John, 214  
 Malone, Colonel L'Estrange, 80  
*Manchester Guardian*, 26, 52, 58, 80, 191,  
 212, 213, 235  
 Manchukuo, 96, 112, 125, 127, 128, 129, 131,  
 163, 164, 169, 173, 175, 244  
 Manchuria, 3, 34, 36, 40, 58–59, 97–116, 120,  
 122, 125, 127–30, 163–64, 171. *See also*  
 Manchurian crisis; Mukden; Mukden  
 Incident

- Manchuria Daily News*, 36, 100  
 Manchurian crisis, 2n3, 91, 96, 100, 105, 125, 127, 128, 165, 180. *See also* Mukden Incident; Shanghai Incident  
 Manila, 37, 85, 118, 152, 231  
 Mao Qingxiang, 233  
 Marco Polo Bridge, 185  
 Marsh, E. L., 91  
 Martin, Kingsley, 197–98  
 Matthews, Herbert L., 83  
 May Fourth Movement, 83, 106  
 May Thirtieth Movement, 53, 90, 106  
 McHugh, J. M., 203, 213  
 McKee, Frederick, 199  
 Meeus, Charles L., 201  
 Metropolitan Hotel (Nanjing), 138  
 metropolitan papers, 7, 8, 15, 26, 27, 36, 59–61, 107–8, 110–11, 121–23, 177–80, 211. *See also* *Manchester Guardian*; *New York Times*; *Times* (London)  
 militarism, 119, 147, 187–88, 192–93, 254  
 Military Affairs Commission, 156, 157, 186, 187, 192, 202, 205. *See also* Investigation and Statistics Bureau  
 Millard, Thomas F., 27–28, 30, 32, 82, 83, 91, 93, 144. *See also* *Millard's Review of the Far East*  
*Millard's Review of the Far East*, 27n26, 30, 33, 82, 92, 93. *See also* *China Weekly Review*  
 Mills, Hal P., 245  
 Ministry of Communications, 67, 76, 85, 92, 131, 134, 153, 207, 227  
 Ministry of Finance, 42, 85, 143, 202, 242  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (China), 41, 42, 67, 77, 81, 83, 85, 87, 90, 92, 133, 134, 135, 136, 152, 172, 185, 186, 197, 242  
 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), 35, 36, 97, 98, 117, 127, 162, 166, 169  
 Ministry of Information, 41, 70, 72, 73, 77, 87, 89, 92, 141, 142, 156, 188, 255; and registration orders, 131–32; establishment of, 66–69; in Chongqing, 220–49; in Wuhan, 192–216. *See also* International Department; International Division  
 Ministry of Information, British, 244  
 Ministry of Interior, 132, 133  
 Misselwitz, Henry F., 60  
 Missouri mafia, 30, 92, 204, 254  
 Mitter, Rana, 103, 255  
 Mongolia, 40, 104, 128, 176  
 Moore, Frederick, 82  
 Morris, John, 244  
 Mossman, Samuel, 24  
 Mukai Toshiakai, 212  
 Mukden, 35, 96, 113, 129  
 Mukden Incident, 16, 33, 86, 97–111, 165, 175, 212; and Shanghai Incident, 112–30  
 Nagasaki, 84, 85, 86, 155  
 Nakamura Shintaro, 98–99  
 Nanjing government: and the legal control of the press, 72–73, 131–32, 153; diplomatic dilemmas of, 12, 54, 126, 130–31, 169–70, 172, 185; establishment of, 2, 16, 66, 70–71; led by Wang Jingwei, 242–43; recognition of, 50  
 Nanjing Incident (1927), 51, 52, 56, 60  
 Nanjing Incident (1937), 16, 209–16, 224  
 Nash, Vernon, 145  
*Nation*, 30  
 National Central University, 140  
 National Film Censorship Board, 188  
 National Press Cooperating Committee (Quanguo baoye lianhe hui), 41  
 National Press Development Committee (Quanguo baoye jujin hui), 40  
*National Review*, 42  
 National Revolutionary Army, 52, 54, 58, 59, 60  
 nationalism, 9, 14, 54, 55, 79, 82, 103, 106, 108, 253, 254, 257. *See also* antiforeignism; anti-imperialism  
 Nationalist Party: 3, 12–14, 33, 47, 49, 50, 52, 54, 139, 140, 141, 153, 192, 199, 201, 202, 206, 219, 224, 247–49, 253; and extraterritoriality, 75–78, 82, 84, 99, 131–33, 135; and treaty-port press, 43–44, 87–90, 149, 151; division of, 44, 54, 69, 136–38, 141, 150, 174, 177, 188–89, 224, 240–43, 255; ideology

- of, 11, 66–68, 69, 71–73, 126, 142, 154, 156, 185, 186, 187–88, 190, 240; political culture of, 143, 156–59, 186, 189–90, 202, 226, 242, 245–46, 254–55; reorganization of, 66. *See also* Guomindang leftists; Ministry of Information; Three People's Principles
- Nationalist-Communist United Front, 158, 205, 206, 219, 228, 240, 247
- navy: British, 122; Chinese, 147; Japanese, 96, 111, 112, 116, 117, 118, 164, 171, 243; US, 38, 122–23, 180, 200, 203, 212
- Nazi Germany, 178, 234, 253
- Nazi-Soviet nonaggression pact, 234
- New Culture Movement, 147
- New Fourth Army Incident, 247–49
- New Republic*, 30, 32
- New Statesman and Nation*, 198
- New York Herald Tribune*, 212, 228
- New York Times*, 36, 43, 50, 82–83, 113, 117, 148, 154, 192, 200, 205, 206, 210, 211, 212, 213, 228; and Amō statement, 165, 179–80; and Jinan Incident, 52, 60–61; and Mukden Incident, 110; and Shanghai Incident, 122–23
- Newsweek*, 148
- Nichi nichu shimbun*, 53, 212
- Nine Power Treaty, 114, 167, 169, 176, 180
- Nineteenth Route Army, 116, 117, 148, 149, 150
- Noda Iwao, 212
- North China, 3, 37, 43, 88, 92, 117, 125, 126, 176, 185, 214, 246
- North China Daily News*, 9, 17, 29, 30, 32, 34, 39, 48, 58, 59, 83, 88, 93, 97, 98, 101, 110, 146, 178, 208, 211; and Amō statement, 174–76; and Jinan Incident, 55–57; and Mukden Incident, 105–7; and Nanjing Incident, 211; and Shanghai Incident, 119–21; establishment of, 23–27; postal ban on, 77–81. *See also* *North China Herald*
- North China Herald*, 23, 24, 120
- North China Standard*, 36, 37
- North China Star*, 76, 83, 144
- Northern Expedition, 46, 49, 51, 52, 54, 76, 87, 88, 118
- Nottingham, E. A., 38, 39
- Ochs, Adolph S., 82
- Office of Naval Intelligence of the United States, 38
- Open Door policy, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38, 55, 109, 123, 144, 166, 180n92
- Oriental Affairs*, 131
- Pan Gongbi, 151
- Paris Herald*, 148
- Paris Peace Conference, 38, 41
- patriotism, 156, 157, 207, 222
- Pearl Harbor, 1, 2, 208, 249, 250, 252
- Peiping Chronicle*, 129, 130, 136, 143. *See also* *Leader*; *Peking Leader*
- Peking and Tientsin Times*, 34, 78, 88, 144
- Peking Daily News*, 24, 42, 92
- Peking Gazette*, 92
- Peking Leader*, 36, 42, 43, 58, 82, 87. *See also* *Leader*; *Peiping Chronicle*
- Peng, Rosalind, 83
- Peng Leshan, 1
- Penniston, John B., 152, 208–9
- People's Republic of China, 69
- People's Tribune*, 43, 44, 116, 119, 136–37, 174
- Picard-Destelan, Henri, 76
- Pittman, Key, 199
- Plain Truth*, 105
- political tutelage, 66, 255
- postal ban, 76–81, 86, 132, 133, 135, 150–51
- Powell, John B., 22, 30, 32, 33, 38, 39, 83, 91, 92, 93, 144, 208, 245, 248
- Pratt, F. L., 152, 157, 208
- President Hoover* (American Dollar Liner), 203
- Press Hotel (Holly's Hotel), 226–29, 238, 254
- press registration, 73
- Price brothers, 198–99. *See* Price, Frank; Price, Harry
- Price, Frank, 198. *See* Price brothers
- Price, Harry, 198–99. *See* Price brothers
- Prohme, William and Rayna, 43

- propaganda, 4–6, 65, 147; by Wang Jingwei regime, 243–45; channels of, 9, 41–44, 88–90, 109, 113, 136; Communist, 79, 139–40, 205–6, 245–49; dilemmas of, 54, 125–26, 130–1, 134, 160, 161, 254; division of, 12, 54–55, 136–40, 187, 189, 192, 225–26, 241–43, 254–55; efficacy of, 13, 15–16, 252, 254; guidelines, 12, 187–88, 223–24, 226, 234; in Hong Kong, 196, 206, 208, 233, 248; in Japan, 216; in Japanese-occupied Shanghai, 206–9, 243; in the United States, 198–201, 216, 234; in UK, 197–98, 215, 235; indirect, 147, 187, 190–92, 194, 196, 203–4, 209, 226–27; institution of, 11, 13, 66–67, 110–11, 140, 185–88, 192–202, 225, 252–54; Japanese, 35–9, 47–53, 58, 61, 97–101, 115, 117–19, 120, 128, 163, 165–69, 200–201, 207; on ideologies, 11, 66–71, 89, 187; Soviet influence of, 66–67, 187, 253; urgency of, 42, 47, 65, 90, 110–11, 126–27, 185. *See also* “whispering propaganda”
- Publication Law, 73, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135
- Pulitzer School, 92
- qi lian*, 54
- Qing dynasty, 6, 13–14, 40, 42
- Qingdao, 47, 53, 121
- radio, 1, 16, 70diagram1, 208, 210, 234, 237; Section, 196; station XHQC, 207; station XGOY, 229–33
- Rajchman, Ludwig W. 165, 173, 175
- Ramsay, Alexander, 42
- Rangwai bixian annei*, 125
- Ransome, Arthur, 26, 80
- Rea, George Bronson, 37–38, 84, 99, 127, 168
- Rees, Rev. Ronald, 208
- Reformed Government of the Republic of China, 207
- Ren Lingxun, 143–44
- Rengō news agency, 36, 102, 127, 167
- renqing*, 254
- Republican China*, 92
- Research Clique (Yanjiuxi), 42
- Reuters news agency, 25, 30, 35, 36, 39, 40, 41, 48, 60, 88, 93, 97, 121, 129, 142–43, 144, 211, 224, 228, 234, 244, 245
- Ridge, William Sheldon, 130
- Rockefeller Foundation, 199
- rōnin*, 120
- Rosholt, Malcolm, 152, 200
- Russia, 40, 84, 88, 100, 105, 163, 168, 176, 200, 212, 231. *See also* Soviet Union
- Saitō Hiroshi, 166
- Sapajou, 17, 45fig.4, 62fig.5, 95fig.6, 124fig.7, 161fig.12, 218fig.16, 251fig.20
- Scott, Robert, 244
- Shanghai Bar Association, 109
- Shanghai Committee, 79
- Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury*, 30, 89, 106, 108–20, 127, 154, 208, 211, 233, 245
- Shanghai Evening Star*, 30
- Shanghai Incident, 16, 96, 111–23, 125, 126, 127, 128, 148, 150, 212
- Shanghai Mercury*, 39, 88–89
- Shanghai mind, 26, 79–80, 94
- Shanghai Municipal Council, 24, 26, 77, 79, 91, 94, 112, 118, 121
- Shanghai Municipal Police, 39
- Shanghai nippo*, 207
- Shanghai Publicity Bureau, 79
- Shanghai Times*, 29, 38–39, 58, 109
- Shanghai Truce, 125, 126, 150
- Shao Lizi, 192, 239
- Shao Yuancong, 140
- Shao Yulin, 195
- Shaw, Bruno, 198
- Shen bao*, 24, 41, 93, 149, 151, 245
- Shen Jianhong, 145, 146, 149fig.10, 193, 223diagram5
- Shenshi News Agency, 41, 93, 149, 150
- Shi Liangcai, 93, 149, 151
- Shi Zhaoji (Alfred Sze), 130
- Shidai gonglun*, 125
- Shidehara Kijūrō, 101
- Shiozawa Kōichi, 111, 118
- Shiratori Toshio, 167
- Shishi xin bao*, 41, 93, 149, 150–51
- Si she. *See* Four Agencies
- Simon, John, 100, 176, 178

- Simpson, Lenox (Putman Weale), 88
- Sino-Japanese War (first), 118
- Sino-Japanese War (second), 1, 2, 12, 16, 146, 152, 185–250, 252, 254, 255
- Smedley, Agnes, 245, 246, 249
- Smith, Leslie C., 211
- Smythe, Lewis, 215
- Snow, Edgar, 144, 246, 247, 248, 249
- soft power, 256
- Sokolsky, George E., 34, 77, 82; deportation of, 83–84
- Soong May-ling, 81, 83, 158, 188, 190, 194, 201, 202–3, 232, 235, 242, 242, 255
- Soong Qing-ling, 44, 139, 206, 248
- Soong, T. V. (Song Ziwen), 82, 84, 113, 114, 116, 125, 130, 135, 138, 165, 172, 173
- South China Daily News*, 227
- South China Morning Post*, 138
- South Manchuria Railway, 87, 96–99, 101; Company, 36, 127
- Southwest Political Council, 177
- sovereignty: defence of, 4, 74; legal, 131; loss of, 5, 12, 22, 61, 75, 126, 244, 257; over Manchuria, 100, 120, 122; restoration of, 2, 7, 65, 67. *See also* extraterritoriality
- Soviet Union, 4, 67, 100, 185, 219, 234, 253
- St. John's University, 149, 204, 230, 254
- Starr, Cornelius Vander, 89, 108, 109, 245
- Steele, Archibald Trojan, 113, 120, 121, 210, 228, 247
- Stefani news agency, 25
- Stimson, Henry L., 2n3, 116, 121, 199
- Strauss, Julia, 13, 242
- Stuart, Charles, 231, 239
- Sues, Ilona Ralf, 190
- Sun Fo. *See* Sun Ke
- Sun Ke, 37, 50, 90, 137, 164
- Sun Ruiqin, 129
- Sun Yat-sen, 30, 32, 37, 43, 44, 54, 66–67, 83, 90, 92, 119, 137, 198; Madam Sun Yat-sen (*see* Soong Qing-ling); thought of, 67–72, 244. *See also* Three People's Principles
- Sun Yat-sen Cultural and Educational Publishing, 186
- Swire, Warren, 80
- Taiwan, 5, 85, 256
- Takahashi Sankichi, 117
- Tanaka Giichi, 53, 104; government, 52. *See also* Tanaka Memorial
- Tanaka Memorial, 103–5, 116, 170
- Tanaka Ryūkichi, 112
- Tang Dechen, 145, 146
- T'ang Leang-li. *See* Tang Liangli
- Tang Liangli, 136–37, 243, 245
- Tang Youren, 151
- Tang Yuanzhan, 42
- Tanggu Truce, 130, 137, 138, 163, 178
- Tass news agency, 40
- Thackrey, Theodore Olin, 108
- Third National Congress, 65
- Thorburn case, 99, 105
- Three People's Principles, 11, 54, 67, 70, 73, 198
- T'ien Hsia*, 7, 191, 196
- Time* magazine, 131, 230, 247
- Times* (London), 26–27, 36, 71, 81, 156, 234; and Amō statement, 177–79; and Jinan Incident, 59–60; and Mukden Incident, 97, 107–8; and Shanghai Incident, 122
- Timperley, H. J., 58, 154, 191, 197, 198, 203, 208, 211, 212, 213–16, 228, 235–36
- Tōhō news agency, 35–36, 39, 40, 41, 47–48, 52, 60
- Tong, Hollington K. (Dong Xianguang), 1, 14, 17, 32, 33, 43, 170, 205, 221–22, 230, 233, 234, 236, 237–38, 245, 247, 249, 254–55; and Beijing government, 92–93; and censorship, 154, 156–60, 204, 224–26; and Chiang Kai-shek, 147–48, 172, 156–57, 158, 186, 187–88, 190, 192, 200, 202–3, 225, 227, 255; and *China Press*, 91–94, 146, 148–51, 156, 157, 191, 192, 193, 222; and Fifth Board, 186–92; and intelligence, 13, 186, 194, 195, 196, 208, 227, 233, 255; and Missouri network, 91–92, 144–45, 193, 203; and Nanjing Incident, 210, 213–17; and Soong May-ling, 188, 190, 202–3, 240; and William H. Donald, 156–57, 203; factional struggles of, 159, 189,

- 239–43, 248, 255; in occupied Shanghai, 206–9, 243–44; propaganda principles of, 147, 158, 187, 190, 193–94, 202, 203–4, 223–24, 226. *See also* International Department
- Transocean news agency, 93
- Treaty of Bogue, 74
- Treaty of Wanghia, 74
- treaty ports, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 16, 22, 23, 26, 29, 30, 34, 35, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 73, 76, 80, 103, 129, 132, 133, 147, 148, 202, 254. *See also* extraterritoriality; treaty-port press
- treaty-port press, 2, 6, 14, 15, 16, 245; and division with metropolitan papers, 23, 26–27, 60–61, 107–8, 110–11, 121–123, 179–80; as propaganda resources, 7, 10, 190–91, 202, 252–53; information order of, 11; journalists of, 12–14, 26, 76–84, 119–21, 146–52, 156–57, 190–91, 202; of British interests, 23–27, 30, 55–58, 105–7, 119–21, 174–76; of Chinese interests, 30, 42–44, 82–94, 101–5, 114–17, 146–49, 152, 169–74; of Japanese interests, 37–39, 52–53, 97–101, 117–19, 165–69; of US interests, 27–35, 58–59, 108–10, 119–21, 176–77; origins of, 21–22; transnational feature of, 7–10, 22. *See also* extraterritoriality; Shanghai mind
- treaty revision, 51, 73, 79, 80, 85, 101. *See also* extraterritoriality
- Trotskyism, 139
- Turner, W., 35
- Twenty-One Demands, 99, 169, 170, 180
- Uchida Yasuya, 163
- unequal treaties, 34, 68, 74
- United Press, 40, 76, 93, 198, 227, 228, 244, 245
- University of Missouri, 28, 30, 43, 90, 91–93, 144–45, 147, 193, 203, 243. *See also* Missouri mafia; Tong, Hollington K.: Missouri networks
- USS *Panay*, 212–13
- Utley, Freda, 194
- Villard, Oswald Garrison, 30
- Votaw, Maurice, 204, 228, 230
- Wang, C. T. (Wang Zhengting), 76, 77, 81, 83, 84
- Wang, H. S., 195–96
- Wang Boheng, 24, 42, 43n103
- Wang Chonghui, 50
- Wang Jiasong, 145
- Wang Jingwei, 12, 17, 44, 50, 72, 126, 130, 136–37, 177, 189, 219, 241, 242–43, 246; government, 17, 233, 243, 244, 245
- Wang Shijie, 225, 241, 242, 249
- Wangbaoshan Incident, 104
- War Ministry of Japan, 53, 97
- warlords, 3, 37, 40, 41–43, 46–47, 50–51, 54, 56, 59, 60, 61, 66, 68, 70, 71, 82, 88, 119, 141, 169, 220
- Washington Conference, 76, 133
- Washington Star*, 166
- Webb, C. Herbert, 27
- Weberian bureaucracy, 13
- Wei Jingmeng (Jimmy Wei), 157, 208, 216–17, 223, 225, 238
- Wen Yuanning, 191, 196
- Western Hills faction, 72
- Whampoa Military Academy, 240
- White, Theodore H., 220, 228, 236, 247
- Williams, Frederick V., 200–201
- Williams, Walter, 144
- Wilsonianism, 5, 33
- “whispering propaganda” (*eryu xuanchuan*), 216
- Wolff news agency, 25
- Wood, William W., 21, 22
- Woodhead, Henry George Wandesforde, 34, 78, 92, 109, 127, 131
- Woodman, Dorothy, 197–98
- World War I, 4, 5, 30, 33, 66, 71, 85, 119, 147, 168
- Wu Chaoshu (C. C. Wu), 50, 52
- Wu Tiecheng, 111, 113, 118, 141, 243
- Wu Tingfang, 27
- Xia Jinlin, 191, 197–98, 236
- Xi’an Incident, 158, 205

- xian zhi xian jue*, 66  
 Xiao Tongzi, 141–45, 190, 195, 241  
 Xinjiang, 25, 40, 176  
*Xinminguo bao*, 41  
*Xinwen bao*, 24, 93  
 Xu Peigen, 228  
 Xu Xinliu, 91  
 Xu Zhaoyong, 145  
  
 Yan Huiqing (W. W. Yen), 42, 114, 160  
 Yan Xishan, 72, 88  
 Yang Guangsheng (Kuangson Young), 152  
 Yano Makoto, 117  
 Yarnell, Harry E., 199  
 Ye Chucang, 77, 141, 151  
 Ye Gongchao, 222, 225  
 Ye Gongchuo (Yeh Kung-cho), 37, 92  
 Yenching University, 144–45, 193, 199, 254  
 Yokohama Specie Bank, 29, 38  
*Yong bao*, 32, 93, 157, 193  
 Yoshizawa Kenkichi, 118  
 Yuan Shikai, 42, 43, 92  
 Yunnan, 25, 174  
  
 Zeng Xubai, 157, 193, 194, 204, 215, 222,  
     223, 225, 227, 230  
 Zhang, Pengchun, 200  
 Zhang Junqi, 111  
 Zhang Mingwei, 143  
 Zhang Pingqun, 228  
 Zhang Qun, 220, 241  
 Zhang Sixu (Samuel H. Chang), 41  
 Zhang Xinhai, 90, 159  
 Zhang Xueliang, 72, 81, 91, 102, 113, 117,  
     126, 141, 145, 158, 203  
 Zhang Zhuping, 30, 91, 93, 94, 149–52, 157  
 Zhang Zuolin, 46, 53  
 Zhao Minheng, 6, 24, 90, 142, 224, 228  
 Zhili Clique, 42  
*Zhongyang ribao*. See *Central Daily News*  
 Zhou Enlai, 205, 217, 241, 247  
 Zhou Fohai, 239–43, 255  
 Zhou Ziqi, 92  
 Zhu Jiahua, 140, 158, 164  
 Zhu Qi, 42  
 Zhu Shuqing (S. T. Chu), 157, 208  
 Zhuang Zhihuan, 85