


FORUM ARTICLE

# Overcoming a stigmatic past: National Central University students in Nanjing, China, and the politics of wartime history

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## Abstract

The Japanese empire's occupation of China during the Second World War left a complex and bitter legacy in postwar Chinese society. This article examines the occupation and its legacies at the grassroots, taking university students in Nanjing as a case study in occupation history and 'bottom-up' wartime commemoration. These young people, who studied at National Central University (NCU) under the Japanese-backed Reorganized National Government of Wang Jingwei, organized three protest movements between 1940 and 1945, defying puppet authorities, Japanese forces, and, after the war, the returning Chongqing Nationalist government, as they campaigned against corruption, opium sales, and discriminatory treatment over their status as 'bogus students' who supposedly received Japanese 'enslavement education' from a collaborationist regime. In the 1980s, after decades of marginalization under the People's Republic of China, these former protestors began holding reunions, documenting their experiences, and campaigning for recognition from Nanjing University, which eventually recognized them as alumni. Drawing primarily on privately printed alumni memoirs and commemorative volumes, this article positions the protests in the history of youth activism in Nanjing. That NCU students were able to rehabilitate themselves was due to their own organizational prowess and a sympathetic reception from the leadership of a cash-strapped Nanjing University, though the interests of fellow alumnus Jiang Zemin and the Communist Party-state still set the parameters of historical memory. In this, the example of the Nanjing students complicates the top-down role of the state, as described in much previous scholarship on Chinese wartime commemoration, in producing politically motivated nationalist narratives of wartime history.

**Keywords:** Commemoration; enslavement; education; Japanese empire; occupation; Second World War

## Introduction

How do once-marginalized groups overcome the burdens of a stigmatic past? In societies that experienced occupation during the Second World War, acknowledging the compromises of occupation ran the risk of disrupting the patriotic narratives

necessary for restoring national pride in the postwar period. Memory of collaboration was especially nettlesome, offering an unwelcome counter-narrative to an idealized account of the nation united in heroic resistance against the occupier. This resistance narrative, however, which was baked into the Chinese designation of the period as the 'War of Resistance', provides only a highly selective account of the long, unglamorous experience of occupation and remains vulnerable to interrogation.

Such struggles over national memory will be familiar to historians of wartime Europe. As Pieter Lagrou has observed, it was over the course of the 1960s that patriotic memory of the Second World War reached its fullest flower before then shedding its consensus in the face of emerging memories incompatible with national glorification. For France, this marked the beginning of what Henry Rousso called the 'Vichy syndrome', when the official narrative of the state gave way to endless contention among competing groups, each advancing their own wartime narrative through competing 'vectors of memory'.<sup>1</sup>

What, then, is the role of the state in how such groups put forth their own accounts of a contentious past? As per Rousso, in France it was the failure of the state's official memory that led to the Vichy syndrome. In this, China offers an important counterexample, where the state (and the social imperative of state allegiance) ensures that an official, patriotic memory of the war remains very much intact. Whether in its failure in France or its overwhelming presence in China, the role of the state in recounting wartime history has been paramount.

As with France, Chinese memory of the war has undergone a series of shifts in the decades since 1945, but with the crucial distinction that the grassroots have had to fit their narratives within the party-state's matrix of official memory rather than compete with or challenge its premises directly. Yanan He has described this dynamic as 'top-down elite myth-making and bottom-up mass reactions', but at the local level, there is a more complex interplay, even if the party-state remains pre-eminent.<sup>2</sup> Nowhere is this more apparent than in the historical refashioning surrounding alumni of National Central University (NCU) that occurred alongside the rise to power of Jiang Zemin. Jiang, who gained prominence as the mayor of Shanghai during the free-wheeling 1980s, was appointed general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) after the military suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. But from 1943 to 1945, Jiang studied at NCU, an elite institution in Japanese-occupied Nanjing on the campus of what later became the still-prestigious Nanjing University. Jiang's rise redeemed his classmates and could have generated a more open discussion of wartime collaboration and the problem of 'enslavement education' (*nuhua jiaoyu*) in China.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the role of underground Nationalist agents, non-communist students, and the

<sup>1</sup>See Pieter Lagrou, *Legacy of Nazi occupation: Patriotic memory and national recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 15; Henry Rousso, *The Vichy syndrome: History and memory in France since 1944*, (trans.) Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 225–226.

<sup>2</sup>Yinan He, 'Remembering and forgetting the war: Elite mythmaking, mass reaction, and Sino-Japanese relations, 1950–2006', *History and Memory*, vol. 19, no. 2, Fall/Winter 2007, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>See Cao Bihong, Xia Jun and Shen Lan (eds), *Wang wei tongzhi qu nuhua jiaoyu yanjiu* [Research on enslavement education under the jurisdiction of the bogus Wang regime] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2015) for a recent study organized around the framework of 'enslavement education'.

intentions of occupation state officials within the occupied territory were swept aside. Eschewing all complexity, the story that eventually emerged recast Jiang and his fellow students as patriotic youth led by the CCP, rising up against an opium monopoly operated by the Japanese invaders and their Chinese lackeys.<sup>4</sup>

Such a shift in judgement is not unique. More recently, Jacqueline Lin has shown how Nationalist veterans have been granted a measure of recognition as heroes in the contemporary People's Republic of China (PRC) after decades of invisibility or denunciation as 'counter-revolutionaries' thanks to the activism of People's Liberation Army (PLA) ex-serviceman who, as Lin puts it, 'strategically use counter-memories and official war narratives, while reinserting the erased past'.<sup>5</sup> Anticipating this redress movement, the NCU alumni adopted a similar strategic repertoire. As their case demonstrates, however, the erased past they sought to recover was one that had to be rearticulated (or 'reinserted') into a matrix largely defined and defended by the state.

Margherita Zanasi has emphasized the connections between French and Chinese understandings of collaboration that emerged during postwar collaborationist trials, when Chinese authors linked Philippe Pétain and his Vichy regime to the Chinese collaborators. By this reckoning, Wang Jingwei, the poetic Nationalist Party stalwart who returned to Nanjing in 1940 to lead the last in a line of occupation states established under Japanese auspices, became tied in the Chinese press to Pétain and the French wartime experience.<sup>6</sup> Contra France, however, more recent changes in Chinese memory of the war have developed under state guidance, with various 'carriers of memory'—in this case, official, scholarly, and organizational—advancing their own representations of occupation, even as they remain trapped within confines determined by the state.

Rather than thinking in psychoanalytic terms of collective trauma or repressed memory, I turn to the broader context of societal, political, and scholarly change in China during the 1980s and 1990s. Against this backdrop, I analyse privately printed collections of alumni memorial literature that have circulated unofficially in Nanjing since 1983 as well as the evolving commemoration of the NCU alumni in the formal histories of Nanjing University, published in 1982, 1992, and 2002 to mark the anniversaries of the University's 'establishment' in 1902. These updated editions, roughly tracking the ebb and flow of reforms following the death of Mao Zedong, serve as 'official' pronouncements on the NCU alumni, who recorded their experiences in seven privately printed commemorative volumes published from 1987 to 2002.

As the 1980s unfolded, economic and political changes opened up new avenues of influence in the writing of history, in this case via the organizational prowess

<sup>4</sup>Jiang Zemin, 'Yi Li Enyu tongzhi' [Remembering Comrade Li Enyu], in *Li Enyu jinianji* [Collected essays in memory of Li Enyu], (eds) He Chongyin and the Nanjing Municipal Party Committee Propaganda Department (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 1–5.

<sup>5</sup>Jacqueline Zhenru Lin, 'Remembering forgotten heroes and the idealisation of true love: Veteran memorial activism in contemporary China', *Memory Studies*, vol. 14, no. 5, 2021, p. 1083.

<sup>6</sup>Margherita Zanasi, 'Globalizing *hanjian*: The Suzhou trials and the post World War II discourse on collaboration', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 113, no. 3, June 2008, pp. 722–733. For a full study of Wang, see Zhiyi Yang, *Poetry, history, memory: Wang Jingwei and China in dark times* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023).

of the NCU alumni. But as Jelena Đureinović has noted in her study of wartime commemoration in the former Yugoslavia, powerful institutions in post-socialist states tend to ‘forge a unitary interpretation of the past from above’.<sup>7</sup> Such was the case in China. The thaw of the late 1980s gave way to the Party’s post-Tiananmen crackdown, when the Patriotic Education Campaign of the early 1990s reasserted the top-down primacy of the CCP in historical narratives,<sup>8</sup> including those related to the NCU alumni. In more recent years, developments in the field have slowed as the state has responded to the willingness of younger scholars to reconsider the politics of occupation. In a similar spirit to Russian legislation governing historical narratives,<sup>9</sup> the Chinese party-state has further tightened its grip on the archives, and has now enacted legislation to make defamation of the nation’s ‘heroes and martyrs’ a civil offence.

The case of the NCU alumni therefore offers a window into the shifting dynamic between scholars, grassroots activists equipped with their own localized experiences of occupation, and a party-state bent on propagating its own national narrative. Over three decades, the NCU alumni’s carefully crafted efforts to commemorate their experiences gained them entry into successive editions of Nanjing University’s ‘official history’, yet they have done so in a prescribed way that only reinforces the binary of collaboration and resistance. The party-state, for its part, has effectively co-opted these narratives in its wider effort to position Jiang Zemin and the CCP at the forefront of resistance against Japan and in so doing resolved the incongruity of a national leader of Jiang’s stature being a ‘bogus student’, a recipient of what is still derided in China as Japanese ‘enslavement education’.

### National Central University

Situated in the fallen capital of Nanjing, NCU operated from 1940–1945 and was the premier institution of higher education in occupied China. In 1938, Wang Jingwei, who had hitherto ranked second in the Chinese government, broke with Chiang Kai-shek to pursue peace with Japan. After a dramatic escape from the provisional capital, Chongqing, Wang established the Nanjing-based occupation state known as the Reorganized National Government (RNG), and it was under this government that NCU operated.

Critics—from Mao Zedong to the Nationalist wartime government—have positioned education in occupied China and, by extension, NCU itself, as Japanese ‘enslavement education’. Postwar scholars have taken this up rather uncritically,<sup>10</sup> but to all

<sup>7</sup>Jelena Đureinović, *The politics of memory of the Second World War in contemporary Serbia: Collaboration, resistance and retribution* (New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>On patriotic education, see Zheng Wang, *Never forget national humiliation: Historical memory in Chinese politics and foreign relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), pp. 96–100; William A. Callahan, *China: The pessoptimist nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 32–38; Takashi Yoshida, *Making of the ‘Rape of Nanking’: History and memory in Japan, China and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 154–156; Daniel Sneider, ‘Textbooks and patriotic education: Wartime memory formation in China and Japan’, *Asia-Pacific Review*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2013, p. 45.

<sup>9</sup>See Mark Edele, ‘Fighting Russia’s history wars: Vladimir Putin and the codification of World War II’, *History and Memory*, vol. 29, no. 2, Fall/Winter 2017, p. 91.

<sup>10</sup>Mao Zedong, *Lun chijiu zhan* [On protracted warfare] (Zhangjiakou: Xinhua JinChaji fendian, 1945), p. 29, wrote of the Japanese ‘Spiritually...working to destroy the national consciousness of the

appearances NCU was designed more to cultivate a citizenry loyal to the Axis-aligned RNG than to inculcate Japanese enslavement. In contrast to Vichy, which strove to turn back the clock on the policies of the prewar French Third Republic, the RNG looked to the prewar Chinese state as a touchstone of legitimacy. As David P. Barrett has noted, Wang grounded his claims to legitimacy as head of government on the basis of his defence of Nationalist Party orthodoxy.<sup>11</sup> Establishing the RNG was thus billed as the ‘return to the capital’ (*huandu*) and the first order of business was ‘reopening’ the institutions of the immediate prewar National government, including its universities.

Accordingly, the ‘reopening’ of NCU was cast in the language of consistency as part of an attempt to co-opt the legacy of the prewar university of the same name that had evacuated to Chongqing three years earlier.<sup>12</sup> In this, the head of Nanjing’s NCU, Fan Zhongyun, even offered a critique of Chinese education in line with that of Chiang Kai-shek, who had sought to extend Nationalist control—or ‘partification’ (*danghua*)—across higher education in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> Prewar education, Fan sniffed, had students reading Shakespeare and Milton when they couldn’t read a reference text without a dictionary. Fan’s critique, with his worry that ‘after the chaos of war, many students would have yet to complete even a middle-school level of education’, was part of a conservative, Nationalist Party vision for education that emphasized broad-based training in Chinese, English, Japanese, mathematics, and other subjects, as well as a sense of campus discipline that discouraged student involvement with politics.<sup>14</sup> Where Vichy grappled with turning the still-operational Collège de France to its own purposes, the RNG ‘reopened’ institutions in major occupied centres, each one a doppelgänger of a Chongqing-based rival under the government of Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>15</sup>

The student body that assembled in Nanjing was drawn from throughout occupied China or, in the case of Alfred Hoffmann, a German Sinologist who attended as an advanced student, from the RNG’s Axis allies.<sup>16</sup> Recruitment was brisk and corruption rife; during that summer in 1940, some 3,000 students sat the inaugural entrance examinations in major centres throughout the occupied territory, with many reportedly

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Chinese people. Under the flag of the “Rising Sun” all Chinese are forced to be docile subjects, beasts of burden forbidden to show the slightest trace of Chinese national spirit.’ See also Fang Ying (ed.), *Di Wei de nuhua jiaoyu* [Enslavement education of the enemy and their puppets] (n.p.: Guomin zhengfu junshi weiyuanhui zhengzhibu, 1941), p. 5; Jenny Huangfu Day, ‘The war of textbooks: Educating children during the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945’, *Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 46, no. 2, May 2021, pp. 111–114.

<sup>11</sup>David P. Barrett, ‘The Wang Jingwei regime, 1940–1945: Continuities and disjunctures with Nationalist China’, in *Chinese collaboration with Japan: The limits of accommodation*, (eds) David P. Barrett and Larry N. Shyu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>12</sup>‘Zhongda huandu’ [Central U returns to the capital], *Zhongbao*, 16 April 1940, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>For Chiang’s ‘partification’ and his critique of Chinese education, see Wen-hsin Yeh, *The alienated academy: Culture and politics in Republican China, 1919–1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 173–176 and 180–181.

<sup>14</sup>Fan Zhongyun, ‘Yi nian laide zhongyang daxue’ [The first year of Central University], in *Guoli zhongyang daxue yaolan* [National Central University: An overview], (ed.) Guoli Zhongyang Daxue (Nanjing: Nanjing yinshuguan, 1941), pp. 3–4.

<sup>15</sup>On the Collège de France during the occupation, see Philippe Burrin, *France under the Germans: Collaboration and compromise*, (trans.) Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 1996), pp. 306–323.

<sup>16</sup>Hoffmann enjoyed a prominent postwar career in Germany at the Ruhr University Bochum where he supervised the doctoral studies of Wolfgang Kubin, who in turn became one of Germany’s most eminent Sinologists.

attempting to gain admission through bribery. In late August, the incoming class of 674 students, many from impoverished families who were dependent on NCU's financial subsidies, gathered on the site of the former Central Political Academy to commence their studies.<sup>17</sup>

Though pro-Axis in orientation, the extent of Japanese colonial influence at NCU was far less apparent than at Manchukuo's Kenkoku University, for example, where Japanese planners held sway from its inception.<sup>18</sup> NCU's motto—'True knowledge and vigorous action'—given by Wang Jingwei himself, permeated the campus more than any imported ideologies of the Japanese empire. As Wang explained to faculty and staff in a summer speech prior to NCU's opening, Sun Yat-sen's maxim that 'to know is difficult, to act is easy' was a widely misunderstood reference to the fact that many acted blindly, and that they should always first seek knowledge before taking action. It was therefore of the greatest urgency, according to Wang, that education trained students to first pursue knowledge and only then take action, to cultivate in them a real capacity for patriotism and national salvation, rather than blindly taking part in political action or organizing of whatever stripe, particularly that of the communists, whose student mobilization Wang condemned as exploitation.<sup>19</sup>

This motto was emphasized again when the campus formally reopened, with RNG foreign minister (and father of an NCU student) Chu Minyi appearing in the campus's flag-bedecked assembly hall to expound on the meaning of true knowledge and vigorous action, which was written in Wang's calligraphy on two massive banners behind him.<sup>20</sup> As Chu described, the motto had a long lineage, taking inspiration from both Sun Yat-sen as well as from the Ming dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming, who called for the unity of knowledge and action.<sup>21</sup> Equipped with such a pedigree in both Chinese thought and Wang's own political prestige, the motto spread throughout campus, inspiring a 'True Knowledge' and a 'Vigorous Action' hall, a 'True Knowledge' campus journal and sports trophy, as well as becoming grist for the writings of various university officials and for Chu's speeches on other occasions.<sup>22</sup> While this might seem like thin gruel ideologically, these were the kinds of notions, along with the promotion of Wang himself, that filled the official symbolic space of NCU's campus, and were part of

<sup>17</sup>For commentary on subsidies, which were available according to both need and scholastic performance, see Wang Dezi (ed.), *Nanjing daxue bainian shi* [100 years of Nanjing University] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2005), p. 242; Chan Cheong-choo, *Memoirs of a citizen of early XX century China* (Willowdale, ON: Chan, 1978), p. 157. For the reference to corruption, see Wang Jingwei, 'Dui Zhongyang daxue zhiyuan zhici' [Instructions to the faculty of National Central University], in *Wang Jingwei xiansheng zhengzhi lunshu*, (ed.) Ho Mang Hang (n.p.: n.p., 1990), vol. 12, p. 2291.

<sup>18</sup>Yuka Hiruma Kishida, *Kenkoku University and the experience of Pan-Asianism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), p. 23.

<sup>19</sup>Wang, 'Dui Zhongyang daxue zhiyuan xunci', pp. 2289–2291.

<sup>20</sup>Zhongda xing kai xueli', *Zhongbao*, 12 November 1940, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup>Chu Minyi, 'Zhenzhi lixing' [True knowledge and vigorous action], *Qiaowu jikan*, no. 3, 15 December 1940, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup>See an article by the university vice-president, Qian Weizong, 'Daxue jiaoyu yinggai yi 'zhenzhi lixing' wei zhongxin xunlian zhi wu jian' [My views on how education should be centered on training in true knowledge and vigorous action], *Jiaoyu jianshe*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1940, pp. 1–4, and later reportage of a talk by subsequent university president Chen Changzu in 'Wang Zhuxi jingshen bu si' [Chairman Wang's spirit lives on], *Zhongda zhouban*, 4 December 1944, p. 1, as well as Chu Minyi, 'Zhenzhi lixing' [True knowledge and vigorous action], *Zhongbao*, 22 November 1940, p. 6.

an effort to urge students to focus on their studies for national salvation, rather than taking direct political action themselves.

Such regard for official pronouncements and attention were part of the close ties between the government and the university, and underlined the campus's status as a place of political significance and factional competition. Although the university president Fan Zhongyun claimed that the campus should remain free of political entanglements, he himself held an appointment as a government affairs attaché and was a long-time associate of Zhou Fohai, the RNG finance minister (and leader of a major faction in the government), having worked alongside him at the New Life Bookstore in Shanghai as early as 1928.<sup>23</sup> Of NCU's three subsequent presidents, only one was, strictly speaking, a scholar, while the others had close government ties, including one whose most obvious qualification was his status as Wang's brother-in-law. Even the chair of the Chinese department, a renowned poet, was known for his personal friendship with Wang and tutored his children.<sup>24</sup> It was this privileged space within occupied China that both afforded the students a platform for airing their grievances via protest and ensured that such actions had political consequence.

The initial outburst of campus activism was very much in line with prewar Nanjing's rowdy tradition of student protest, about which Wang Jingwei had forewarned the faculty in 1940.<sup>25</sup> On 31 May 1943, NCU President Fan faced student accusations of corruption and maladministration of the campus canteen—a sensitive issue given wartime food shortages.<sup>26</sup> With the assistance of a Japanese student with contacts in the occupation forces and under the direction of a Chongqing Nationalist spy, NCU students took over the campus and marched unobstructed on Wang Jingwei's official residence to demand Fan's removal.<sup>27</sup> Wang's chief propagandist, Lin Baisheng, whose role as Minister of Publicity and leader of the RNG's Youth Corps gave him a platform for influencing youth affairs, acceded to student demands to launch an investigation. The report, issued on 8 June 1943, dismissed the corruption allegations but criticized Fan for poor management and losing control of the students. Fan's dismissal and replacement by the Minister of Education Li Shengwu was announced the same

<sup>23</sup>Fan, 'Yi nian laide zhongyang daxue', p. 4.

<sup>24</sup>Zhang Shouping, 'Ciren Long Muxun xiansheng' [The poet, Mr Long Muxun], in *Ren han lu xue ji: Long Yusheng de shengping yu xueshu* [Scholarly records from the studio of enduring cold: The life and learning of Long Yusheng], (ed.) Zhang Hui (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2014), p. 79; John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War 1937–1945: The politics of collaboration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), p. 396.

<sup>25</sup>On protests, see Charles D. Musgrove, *China's contested capital: Architecture, ritual and response in Nanjing* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), p. 218–230; Wang, 'Dui Zhongyang daxue zhiyuan zhici', p. 2290.

<sup>26</sup>Jonathan Henshaw, 'Kiang Kang-hu, "Starvation is a serious matter"', in *Translating the occupation: The Japanese invasion of China, 1931–1945*, (eds) Jonathan Henshaw, Craig A. Smith and Norman Smith (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020), pp. 270–277.

<sup>27</sup>Nanjing zhongda (40–45) lianluo chu (eds), 'Zhongyang daxue xiaoyou hui zhuanke' [Central University Alumni Association special issue] (Nanjing: n.p., 1990), p. 22. Chongqing Nationalist agent, Li Wenzhai, mentions his role in orchestrating the protests in an internal report dated 8 November 1943, and again in a newspaper article four years later. See Li Wenzhai, 'Yige dixia gongzuozhe de zibai' [Confession of an underground operative], *Dadao bao* (Nanjing), 15 January 1947, unpaginated clipping from the 'New clippings before the year of 1949' database; Li Wenzhai, *Li Wenzhai xiansheng yanlun huibian* [Collected works of Mr Li Wenzhai] (Taipei: Wenhua yinshua, 1986), pp. 49–53.

day.<sup>28</sup> In a possible acknowledgment of student grievances, however, the university put out a tender seeking a contractor experienced in providing meals for the campus community beginning in July of that year.<sup>29</sup>

The next series of protests, which broke out on 17 December 1943, saw students from NCU and other institutions in Nanjing (as well as other occupied cities) marching against the sale of opium.<sup>30</sup> Youth Corps leader Lin Baisheng instigated this second wave just as the RNG leadership was attempting to gain control over opium revenues from the Japanese. Students affiliated with underground communist organizations (future president Jiang Zemin among them) and from other schools in the city also worked to expand the movement and destroy local opium dens. The marching students, including Lin's own son and those of other RNG officials, claimed to have Lin's backing and (reportedly) chanted regime slogans as they marched.<sup>31</sup>

A final wave of student discontent occurred shortly after the war's end, when the returning Nationalist government disbanded Nanjing's NCU and branded those who had received their education in occupied China as 'bogus students' before subjecting them to a political screening programme run by various 'interim universities'.<sup>32</sup> Student indignation was widespread. On 6 October 1945, protests broke out in Nanjing against the government, and on the Double Tenth holiday, a group of NCU students delivered a petition to He Yingqin demanding that discriminatory policies be corrected, with students allowed to resume studying at their since dissolved institutions. Although protests continued into January of 1946, the Nationalist government was unmoved, leading to student alienation.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup>See Zhao Mingzhong and Shao Ling (eds), *Wang wei zhengfu xingzheng yuan huiyilu* [Meeting records of the bogus Wang regime's Executive Yuan] (Beijing: Dang'an chubanshe, 1992), vol. 19, pp. 452–454; 'Xiandai xuesheng xiuxue jiuguo zhi tu' [Modern students study the path to national salvation], *Shenbao*, 6 June 1943. Li Shengwu and Fan Zhongyun would cross paths again after the war in Hong Kong, where Li served as editor-in-chief at the Chung Hwa Book Company, with Fan working under him as an editor.

<sup>29</sup>Guoli Zhongyang daxue chufang zhaoshang chengbao' [National Central University canteen seeks contractors], *Zhongbao*, 2 June 1943, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>For a detailed account of the protests, see Mark S. Eykholt, 'Resistance to opium as a social evil in wartime China', in *Opium regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839–1952*, (eds) Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 360–379.

<sup>31</sup>See He Chongyin (ed.), *Li Enyu jinian ji* [Collected essays in memory of Li Enyu] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 229–230 and 235. On opium revenues, see Motohiro Kobayashi, 'An opium tug-of-war: Japan versus the Wang Jingwei regime', in *Opium regimes*, (eds) Brook and Wakabayashi, pp. 344–359; Brian G. Martin, "'In my heart I opposed opium": Opium and the politics of the Wang Jingwei government, 1940–45', *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 2 no. 2, 2003, pp. 365–410. Information about the involvement of Lin Baisheng and Chen Gongbo's sons in an email between the author and Chen Kan, 14 March 2015.

<sup>32</sup>For details on the screening programmes, see Song Enrong and Zhang Xian (eds), *Zhonghua minguo jiaoyu faui xuanbian* [Selected education legislation in the Republic of China] (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), pp. 684–695.

<sup>33</sup>Nanjing Zhongyang daxue (1940–1945 nian) xiaoyou hui (eds), 'Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Nanjing Zhongyang daxue shi ji' [Historical collection from Nanjing Central University during the War of Resistance] (Nanjing: n.p., 2002), pp. 63–67. Lo Jiu-jung also suggests that student alienation after the screening measures was a response to a failed policy on the part of the government that cannot simply be attributed to communist activists; see Lo Jiu-jung, 'Kangzhan shengli hou jiaoyu zhenshen de lilun yu shiji' [Theory and practice of educational screening after the victory in the War of Resistance], *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History*, no. 22 xia, 1993, p. 209.



In the early decades of the PRC, the CCP rewrote history to place itself at the centre of resistance against Japan. The anti-opium protests of 1943, with their close affiliation to Wang Jingwei, did not fit well into such narratives and, as Lynn Spillman and Xiaohong Xu have argued, ‘Chinese public discourse in this period provided little space for claims-making carrier groups not associated with the center, if indeed they could have formed at all.’<sup>34</sup> For NCU alumni in those years of revolutionary fervour and obsession with internal enemies, their educational background became a source of stigma.

For the past three decades, however, Chinese scholars have struggled more openly with the history of occupied China, and the field has developed accordingly in discernible stages. Rana Mitter outlined a process that is common to contentious topics in authoritarian states, whereby a topic is ‘first, considered off-limits, then a set of documents relating to that topic is published with minimal commentary, and finally monographs begin to appear, still staying within official guidelines but opening up a field for consideration’.<sup>35</sup> This schematic, which suggests a top-down, elite-driven process in which formerly off-limits topics become possible to write about, can serve as a general guide to developments in the post-socialist era. The rehabilitation of the NCU students, however, provides an example of how the history of the period has evolved, with grassroots activists skilfully navigating the confines of the state and its determination to control wartime narratives.

### Lingering at the margins

On 15 August 1945, the Japanese emperor announced his country’s surrender, thereby casting occupied China into a state of flux. The RNG responded a day later, formally dissolving itself and leaving the Provisional Nanjing Political Affairs Committee in its place. As Nanjing tilted towards confusion, the Nationalists under Chiang Kai-shek began preparing for their return from Chongqing, hastened by the fear of a power vacuum in which the CCP might seize control. In the ensuing ten days, Nanjing’s mayor was arrested by a Chongqing Nationalist agent; the head of the Examination Yuan committed suicide; and Chen Gongbo, Wang’s successor and acting president after his death in 1944, fled to Japan under an assumed name. Japanese defeat instantly discredited the RNG cause, leaving the leadership facing the prospect of arrest or worse; many were put on trial as *hanjian* (traitor to the Han Chinese) and sentenced to death or life imprisonment.

Unlike the politicians, NCU faculty and staff initially refused to fade away. The faculty proposed merging their school with that in Chongqing, only to be met with derision—NCU, as a creature of the RNG, was destined for closure.<sup>36</sup> The students showed more grit, taking to the streets to defend their legitimacy when the returning

<sup>34</sup>Xiaohong Xu and Lynne Spillman, ‘Political centres, progressive narrative and cultural trauma: Coming to terms with the Nanjing Massacre in China, 1937–1979’, in *Northeast Asia’s difficult past: Essays in collective memory*, (eds) Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. 103.

<sup>35</sup>Rana Mitter, ‘Old ghosts, new memories: China’s changing war history in the era of post-Mao politics’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 38, no. 1, January 2003, p. 121.

<sup>36</sup>‘Zhongyang daxue jiaoshou xiu yu hanjian weiwu’ [National Central University faculty ashamed to be associated with *hanjian*], *Xinhua ribao*, 17 September 1945, unpaginated clipping from the ‘New Clippings Before the Year of 1949’ database. Many NCU faculty members were branded as cultural *hanjian* and put

government derided them as 'bogus students'. Although in a 1945 report a special investigator for the Nationalist government, Shao Tizhang, noted the discontent among the youth and students in Nanjing over the harms wrought by the sale of opium and named Lin Baisheng as leading the protests, this seemingly counted for little in terms of the students' postwar plight.<sup>37</sup> A 1947 account by the journalist Tao Juyin, who had remained in occupied Shanghai, appeared to offer the last word, dismissing the 1943–1944 anti-opium protests that spread to Shanghai as nothing more than a result of factional politics in Nanjing.<sup>38</sup> From then on, the NCU alumni and the other students in the occupied territory effectively disappeared from the public record.

Their disappearance was partly a matter of public stigma and partly the result of self-protection as repeated political campaigns felled even those with the most common of credentials. The CCP's wartime spy chief, Pan Hannian, died during a lengthy prison term after the Party accused him in 1955 of colluding with Wang Jingwei during the war. Guan Lu, a leftist author who used her position in wartime Shanghai's cultural sphere to gather intelligence, endured years of political persecution for her misunderstood role before committing suicide in 1982.<sup>39</sup> For those alumni who had taken part in intelligence organizations under the RNG and the Nationalists in the postwar period with the authorization of their CCP handlers, these were treacherous years. 'We never imagined this would become a crime,' one alumna noted, recalling the resulting expulsion from CCP membership.<sup>40</sup> Even for those who had merely served in or were educated under the RNG, China's postwar environment offered no motivation to remember apart from the forced confessions of Maoist political campaigns.

Such was the message delivered to Li Shengwu, the erudite and ambitious international jurist who served as acting-president of NCU (alongside his role as Minister of Education from 1941–1945) for some three months after the protests that toppled Fan Zhongyun, and who nursed dreams of a return to political life in China from his postwar Hong Kong exile. Following his son's exploratory return to China in 1957, a representative of the Committee on Overseas Chinese Affairs informed Li in no uncertain terms that returning to mainland soil would bring imprisonment.<sup>41</sup> And in contrast to the conservative politics of France under Charles de Gaulle, the CCP's

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on trial after the war. For a discussion of one such cultural *hanjian*, see Naoko Kato, 'Saving China and admiring Japan: Cultural traitor Qian Daosun', in this Forum.

<sup>37</sup>See Ma Mozhen (ed.), *Zhongguo jindu shi ziliao* [Materials on the history of narcotics suppression in China] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 1998), p. 1592.

<sup>38</sup>Tao Juyin, 'Tian liang qian de gudao' [Solitary island before the dawn], *Xin Zhonghua* [New China], vol. 4 no. 20, Summer 1947, p. 41.

<sup>39</sup>For details on Pan, see Joseph K. S. Yick, 'Communist-puppet collaboration in Japanese-occupied China: Pan Hannian and Li Shiqun, 1939–43', *Intelligence and National Security*, vol. 16, no. 4, Winter 2001, pp. 61–88. A brief introduction to Guan is found in Nicole Huang, *Women, war, domesticity: Shanghai literature and popular culture of the 1940s* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 97–103.

<sup>40</sup>Fu Jijia, 'Wo jing wo fu, wo ai wo fu' [I respect my husband, I love my husband], in *Wang Jiamo jini-anji* [Wang Jiamo memorial essays], (eds) Wang Jiamo jinianji bianjuzi (Beijing: Nanjing zhongyang daxue [1940–1945] xiaoyou hui, 1997), p. 149.

<sup>41</sup>In 1989, some three decades later, Li succeeded in returning to the mainland where he spent the final year of his life living with his eldest daughter in Heilongjiang. Charles N. Li, *The bitter sea: Coming of age in a China before Mao* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), pp. 241–242 and 282.

victory in 1949 meant that former RNG officials were condemned not only for their collaboration but for their anti-communism as well.

It was only in the 1980s that occupied China became the object of hesitant scholarly attention. The death of Mao and subsequent emergence of the reformist Deng Xiaoping offered an opportunity to reconsider the revolutionary past, as evidenced by a wave of rehabilitations (often posthumous), including the aforementioned Pan Hannian and Guan Lu. This in turn opened the door to cautious reconsiderations of the wartime experience, typically couched in some combination of denunciation, confession, or claim to secret affiliation with the CCP.

Historians worked with caution, compiling collections of documents that provided a selective glimpse into the RNG's operations. One early compilation, published in 1981, carried the defensive proviso that the editors' motivation in compiling the book was to provide material for criticizing collaborators more effectively.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, when the diaries of Zhou Fohai were published in 1986, they carried a blistering critique from Zhou's son. 'The coffin is sealed and the verdict delivered,' he declared. 'Zhou Fohai was the scum of the Chinese nation, a traitorous thief who sold out the country. Publishing his diaries will provide more material for researchers of the traitorous Wang clique and bogus Wang regime's evil activities.'<sup>43</sup> However sincere, these denunciations are a clear indicator of the awareness that merely expressing academic interest in collaboration could arouse accusations of attempting to 'reverse the verdict'.

In official commemoration, the NCU alumni remained obscure. The first postwar history of Nanjing University, published in 1982 for the school's eightieth anniversary, made no mention of Nanjing's NCU. Instead, the editors played it safe by preparing a collection of documents with minimal editorial comment. In charting the history of Nanjing University, the editors cobbled together an institutional lineage over four time periods and included over half a dozen schools, conveniently circumventing occupied Nanjing. Some of these linkages appear contrived, with the authors navigating through a maze of institutions, leaving the selection of 1902 as the 'founding year' of Nanjing University arbitrarily based on the establishment of an obscure teacher's college.<sup>44</sup>

NCU alumni who thumbed through this version of the university history would find nothing to reflect their own experiences or alma mater. At an institutional level, nearly four full decades after the war, narratives of the occupation remained locked in a framework that downplayed local agency and dismissed the role of the Nationalist Party in favour of CCP-led resistance. As Parks Coble has observed, accounts from occupied China were sharply prescribed, often adopting the form of a confession—for indeed that is what they often were, written in prison or amid the turbulence of the

<sup>42</sup>Nanjing daxue 'Wang Jingwei wenti yanjiuzu' (eds), *Wang Jingwei jituan maiguo toudi pipan ziliao xuanbian* (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue xuebao bianbu, 1981), overleaf.

<sup>43</sup>Zhou Youhai, 'Xu' [Introduction], in *Zhou Fohai riji quanbian* [Complete diaries of Zhou Fohai] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenlian chubanshe, 2003), p. 6; Zhu Yuqi, *Panni rensheng: Zhou Fohai zhi zi Zhou Youhai chuanqi* [Life of a rebel: A biography of Zhou Youhai, son of Zhou Fohai] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005) focuses on the life of Zhou Youhai (1922–1985) to provide a rare account of life in the PRC as the descendant of a convicted *hanjian*.

<sup>44</sup>Nanjing daxue qing xiao bangongshi xiaoshi ziliao bianjizu (ed.), *Nanjing daxue xiaoshi ziliao xuanji* [Selected materials on the history of Nanjing University] (Nanjing: n.d., 1982), pp. 3–4.

Maoist campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s by those the state deemed ‘enemies of the people’.<sup>45</sup>

One such writer, E Jizhao, offered a rare account of his time as a student in the Nanjing Municipal Youth Association. E’s account, written in 1963 but published in 1981 as ‘an aid in researching the evil history of the bogus Wang regime’, casts the Association as a mere plaything of competing factions within the occupation state, replete with opportunists who did not buy the RNG’s rhetoric but nonetheless looked to it as a means of getting ahead. In his effort to avoid controversy, E touched briefly on the Association’s involvement in the protests against NCU president Fan Zhongyun in 1943, only to minimize it and suggest that the organization had folded prior to the larger protests against opium later that year. ‘I was a delinquent youth who went astray,’ he wrote, ‘and am endlessly ashamed to think of it today.’<sup>46</sup>

A second student account, published in 1983, brought to life the student protests against the returning Nationalist government’s decision in the autumn of 1945 to screen students educated under the RNG at various ‘interim universities’ before recognizing their credentials. This account, written by three former protestors, describes how the government’s screening programme, along with coverage in the *National Salvation Daily* deriding the youths as ‘bogus’ students and ‘little traitors’, had drawn their ire and triggered protests led by underground CCP activists.<sup>47</sup>

In contrast, former RNG officials framed their accounts as criticisms of Nanjing’s factionalism, leaving no room for agency on the part of the students. One of Youth Corps leader Lin Baisheng’s deputies in the Ministry of Publicity placed the anti-opium protests in the context of Lin’s long-standing ambition to organize the students to gain political muscle. These efforts reached a high point during the New Citizens Movement (*Xin guomin yundong*), launched by Wang in 1942 as the RNG’s signature political campaign, reminiscent in style of the New Life Movement from the 1930s but with a heady dose of anti-imperialist Chinese nationalism and traces of influence from Japanese wartime political campaigns.<sup>48</sup> It was in this context that Lin mobilized the students as part of an internal power struggle. ‘On the surface,’ Lin’s deputy recalled, ‘the movement was self-started by the students, but in actuality, everything was orchestrated by Lin Baisheng from behind the scenes.’ His assessment was blunt: ‘The students were fooled; [Lin Baisheng] simply exploited them.’<sup>49</sup> Another official, who served first on the committee that reopened NCU and later as deputy secretary of the New Citizens

<sup>45</sup>Parks M. Coble, ‘China’s “new remembering” of the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance, 1937–1945’, *The China Quarterly*, no. 190, June 2007, pp. 394–410.

<sup>46</sup>E Jizhao, ‘Wang wei zhengquan de “Nanjing shi qingnian xiehui”’ [The bogus Wang regime’s Nanjing Municipal Youth Association], *Jiangsu wenshi ziliao*, no. 3, 1981, pp. 114–123.

<sup>47</sup>Yu Boqing, Yan Jiqing and Yang Shihou, ‘Fan zhenshen douzheng’ [The struggle against political screening], in *Jinling fengyu* [Trials and hardship in Nanjing], (eds) Gongqingtuan Jiangsu shengwei (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 1983), p. 4.

<sup>48</sup>See Jeremy E. Taylor, *Iconographies of occupation: Visual cultures in Wang Jingwei’s China, 1939–1945* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2020), pp. 32–35; Craig A. Smith, ‘The New Citizens’ Movement and Wang Jingwei-ism’, in *Translating the occupation*, (eds) Henshaw, Smith and Smith, pp. 238–245, for a fuller introduction to the movement.

<sup>49</sup>Guo Xiufeng, ‘Wang wei shiqi de xin guomin yundong’ [The New Citizens Movement in the bogus Wang era], *Jiangsu wenshi ziliao xuanji*, no. 12, 1983, pp. 184–185.

Movement Promotional Committee, took a similar stance, describing the anti-opium protests as orchestrated by Lin and a product of his ambitions to influence education.<sup>50</sup>

These accounts, alternating between denunciation and confession, upheld old certainties even as they broke new ground. None of the authors questioned the CCP's role in leading the resistance, the corruption of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist Party, or the moral failure and betrayal of Wang Jingwei and the occupation state he led. The more difficult questions posed by enemy occupation did not emerge, and the binary of resistance versus collaboration remained intact. Despite this, the very act of recalling Chinese experiences of the Second World War, particularly as they unfolded within occupied territory and under Wang Jingwei's RNG, helped open the door for the NCU alumni to reclaim their place within official commemorations of the war.

### A return to official history

During the 1980s and early 1990s, NCU alumni gradually returned to history. In contrast to Nationalist war veterans who were stymied, as Neil Diamant notes, in gaining credit for their wartime service by their lack of organization and sense of shared identity, many NCU alumni were conveniently located in Nanjing and were well-equipped to advance their interests when the opportunity arose.<sup>51</sup> Invoking the political slogans of the day, they claimed to 'advance the Four Modernizations', among other more social reasons, and on New Year's Day 1983, some 40 NCU alumni organized their first reunion at Nanjing's Xuanwu Lake.<sup>52</sup> An event held the following year was attended by 147 alumni, and by 1987, the group had upgraded themselves into a 'centre' and were reaching out to fellow classmates in Taiwan (via Hong Kong) to share poems, recordings, and photos.<sup>53</sup> A directory published in 1993 marked a highpoint, with 559 alumni listed.<sup>54</sup>

The simple act of attending the alumni meetings, as then-mayor of Shanghai Jiang Zemin first did at an alumni breakfast in 1988, offered a form of tacit acceptance that was unparalleled among students educated at other universities under the RNG, and the alumni began to display a greater sense of pride in commemorating their wartime past. In describing NCU's vibrant theatre groups, the alumni took care to note how their decision to use tickets sales revenue to buy food supplies for impoverished families had earned them local acclaim. Even E Jizhao, who had written with such shame in 1963, was cast in a different light. By 1990, E's detention of the NCU dormitory master while the students took over the campus to demand the removal of the university

<sup>50</sup>Dai Yingfu, 'Wang Jingwei xin guomin yundong neimu' [The inside story of Wang Jingwei's New Citizens Movement], *Jiangsu wenshi ziliao*, no. 29, 1989, pp. 270 and 274.

<sup>51</sup>Neil J. Diamant, 'Conspicuous silence: Veterans and the depoliticization of war memory in China', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 460–461.

<sup>52</sup>He Ming, Wu Yayuan, Yang Yu, Wu Zhaoqi and Su Changliao (eds), (1940–1945) *Nanjing Zhongyang daxue xiaoyou tongxunlu* [Nanjing Central University alumni directory, 1940–1945] (Nanjing: n.p., 1983), back overleaf.

<sup>53</sup>Nanjing zhongda (40–45) *lianluo chu* (eds), 'Zhongyang daxue xiaoyou hui zhuanke', p. 5; Nanjing Zhongyang daxue (1940–1945) *tongxue lianxi zhongxin* (eds), *Nanjing-Taiwan tongxue chang he shichao* [Collected songs and poems by Nanjing and Taiwan classmates] (Nanjing: n.p., 1987), Foreword.

<sup>54</sup>Nanjing Zhongyang daxue (1940–1945) *xiaoyou lianluochu* (ed.), *Nanjing Zhongyang daxue (1940–1945) xiaoyou tongxunlu* [Nanjing Central University (1940–1945) alumni directory] (Nanjing: n.p., 1993).

president in 1943 earned him an honourable mention in a privately printed commemorative volume.<sup>55</sup> Support from Jiang Zemin and the determination of the alumni to commemorate their experiences with pride laid the groundwork for the appearance of the NCU alumni in Nanjing University's 'official history'. China's market-oriented reforms also played a part in this process. From 1986 to 1989, Chinese universities faced a funding shortfall of up to 25 per cent, and by 1992, university administrators were formally mandated by the State Education Commission to look to broader sectors of society to make up the difference.<sup>56</sup> With university administrators casting about for funds, the NCU alumni were able to commemorate their wartime experiences with a monetary donation of US\$300,000 to finance the construction of an alumni building at Nanjing University. An account of a meeting in 1987 between Cheng Zhixin, an NCU alumnus who became a wealthy shipping magnate in Taiwan after 1949, and Lu Yurong, then-party secretary of Nanjing University, outlines how the wealth of some key alumni and Nanjing University's dire financial straits brought about the deal.

The account describes an encounter between Cheng and Party Secretary Lu in which Cheng had lamented the 'orphaned' status of the NCU alumni. While admitting the political difficulties of granting recognition to students educated under the RNG, Cheng also underlined the fact that by geography and school history, Nanjing University was one of the institutions that was closest in 'bloodline' to the alumni group.<sup>57</sup> More importantly, Cheng took care to note that in the 1980s, Nanjing University was struggling financially, with the school's food supplies running so low as to compel school authorities to approach the provincial party secretary for emergency supplies. The university officials, Cheng wrote, were eager to harness the support of their alumni.<sup>58</sup>

In considering the question of recognition, the eventual conclusion Lu reached, which was endorsed by then-president of Nanjing University Qu Qinyue, is worth quoting in full:

The bogus Wang regime was a bogus *hanjian* regime that sold out the country, especially with regard to the main people responsible for the government, but Nanjing Central University was definitely not a Japanese school, *nor was it a product of enslavement education* [emphasis added]. Life for ordinary people in occupied territory was extremely difficult, and students suffered along with them. At the same time, the students of Nanjing Central University never gave up any available opportunity to struggle. Knowledge should not be divided by political criteria, and so many innocent students should not be 'beaten with the same club' due to one individual. This kind of complete rejection, one size-fits-all method would be harmful to both *economic* [emphasis added] construction and social development.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>55</sup>Nanjing zhongda (40–45) lianluo chu (eds), 'Zhongyang daxue xiaoyou hui zhuanke', pp. 30 and 22.

<sup>56</sup>Yin Qiping and Gordon White, 'The "marketisation" of Chinese higher education: A critical assessment', *Comparative Education*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1994, pp. 219 and 222–223.

<sup>57</sup>Cheng Zhixiang and Wang Wu (eds), *Jiexiang zai Jiangnan: Cheng Zhixin xiansheng dansheng 90 zhounian jinian wenji* [Hometown in Jiangnan: Memorial essays in honour of Mr Cheng Zhixin's 90th birthday] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2012), pp. 51–52.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

Cheng notes this consensus was passed on to the State Education Commission for approval and, although there is no indication of an official response, the more formal reception offered to the alumni at their 1988 annual reunion suggests that the decision received at least tacit approval from the national body. Qu and Lu used the occasion to address a crowd of some 240 NCU alumni, announcing their formal recognition as alumni of Nanjing University, and two years later, Jiang Zemin, newly minted as general secretary of the CCP, offered his additional sanction by hosting the alumni at Zhongnanhai in Beijing.<sup>60</sup>

This changed status was then marked with a five-page subsection in the 1992 school history publication, timed to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of Nanjing University. The new section, headed 'The Operations of Nanjing Central University in Occupied Territory from Beginning to End', presented a brief outline of NCU that covered the student protests and the screening programme instituted by the returning Chongqing Nationalists in 1945, but made no mention of Jiang Zemin.<sup>61</sup> This new narrative emphasized a division between treatment of the school, which was established by order of Wang Jingwei's 'bogus National Government', and that of the students. The editors write:

Under an iron boot, most students at Nanjing NCU witnessed all manner of violence by the Japanese army, came to hate Japanese militarism, and were utterly unwilling to be slaves without a nation; on the one hand, they were industrious in their studies, deeply believing the day would come when they could serve their country, and on the other, used every type of method to engage in progressive resistance against the Japanese.<sup>62</sup>

Nanjing, the editors state, was the centre of Japan's military operations in China as well as the capital of the Wang regime and, as such, became a place of heated struggle between contending political factions. As a site of higher education, the NCU campus also became an important test of strength for competing factions. The Wang regime openly exerted its influence to win over students and increase its strength, while the Chongqing Nationalists and its Three Principles of the People Youth Corps energetically took to underground activities on campus. At this stage, the editors admit, the CCP's underground organization was 're-establishing' itself and, rather than working under a unified leadership, instead relied on activists sent in from the surrounding region and extra-Party organizations.<sup>63</sup>

While the attention paid to NCU broke new ground in acknowledging a long-neglected aspect of the war and the competing factions and loyalties at play in occupied territory, the editors of the 1992 history still took care to note how the CCP and its proxies played a prominent part in leading the anti-Japanese struggle. However circumspect, this inclusion in the official history of Nanjing University is striking in comparison to the wider state of the field in the early 1990s.

<sup>60</sup>Nanjing zhongyang daxue (40–45) xiaoyou (eds), 'Qiannian juhui jiniankan' [Millennium gathering commemorative volume] (n.p., 2000), p. 36.

<sup>61</sup>Nanjing daxue xiaoshi bianxiezu (ed.), *Nanjing daxue shi* [The history of Nanjing University 1902–1992] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 1992), pp. 201–202.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., pp. 198 and 200.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

Recognition of the alumni took concrete form the following year with the construction of the Building of Knowledge and Practice, built on the Nanjing University campus with the aforementioned US\$300,000 donation from Cheng Zhixin and 589 other donors.<sup>64</sup> For the NCU alumni, the building was a public testament to their role in the history of Nanjing University; in return for providing funds for construction, material, and design, the university administration undertook to maintain and preserve the building, including its name and memorial plaque, for alumni and academic activities.<sup>65</sup>

As a commemorative space, the building's establishment was not only an act of commemoration that marked the existence of NCU and those years of hardship and honoured the contributions of its students; it was also an act of selective remembering and forgetting. One alumnus, the poet Yao Dajun, borrowed a turn of phrase from Su Shi who likened traces of past events to goose tracks left in the snow [*xueni hongzhao*]. Having left their tracks during the 'frigid winter' of their student days, Yao wrote, the NCU alumni had now returned, searching for some trace of days gone by and hoping to leave some slightly deeper tracks this second time around.<sup>66</sup> The name of the building, agreed to by both the NCU alumni and the Nanjing University administration, echoed the university motto of 'true knowledge and vigorous practice' given by Wang Jingwei in 1940. But in the era of Jiang Zemin, five decades later, the alumni cited the educator Tao Xingzhi who, like Wang, echoed Wang Yangming and Sun Yat-sen in making his claim that 'practice is the beginning of knowledge, and knowledge is the result of practice'.<sup>67</sup> Left unspoken among the various explanations of the relationship between knowledge and practice was the most obvious historical tie that the phrase had to the institution that was opened under Wang Jingwei.

While the openness of the 1980s provided the context in which this change of status for NCU alumni occurred, it is important to consider the nature of the shift. The NCU case represented a unique, but limited, refashioning. Students from Nanjing's Southern University, to take one example, also helped lead the anti-opium protests, yet their efforts at postwar commemoration came to nothing more than a stray article in a local periodical. Alumni of other institutions were even less successful; National Zhejiang University closed well before the war ended, Guangdong Provincial University saw precious few students graduate, and the president of Shanghai University reacted with incomprehension when an occupation-era alumnus approached him in the late 1990s about possible recognition.<sup>68</sup> And in Suzhou, where protests had also occurred, there has likewise been no recognition whatsoever;

<sup>64</sup>Five hundred and ninety donors are listed in *Xue ni hong zhao: Zhixing lou luocheng dianli jinian ce* [Goose tracks through the snow: Building of knowledge and practice building opening ceremony commemorative booklet] (n.p., undated), pp. 31–35.

<sup>65</sup>See Qu Qinyue et al., 'Juanzeng "Zhixing lou" caoyishu' [Draft endowment agreement for the building of knowledge and practice], *Xiaoyou*, no. 1, 1992, pp. 145–146.

<sup>66</sup>This poem was then put to music by alumni Qian Renkan and carved on a memorial plaque for the alumni building. See *Xue ni hong zhao*, p. 36.

<sup>67</sup>Cheng and Wu (eds), *Jiexiang zai Jiangnan*, p. 59.

<sup>68</sup>See Yang Yuting, Wang Shoubin and Deng Ruixiang, 'Nangfang daxue de bianqian' [Vicissitudes of Southern University], *Jianye wenshi*, no. 3, 1988, pp. 48–51; Li Xun, 'Wang wei shiqi chouban wei "guoli shanghai daxue" shimou' [The beginning and the end of the bogus National Shanghai University during the bogus Wang regime], *Shanghai daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)*, vol. 9, no. 6, November 2002, p. 95.



as Wu Jen-shu has found in his recent study, there is simply no evidence of involvement in the protests there by the CCP or its peripheral organizations.<sup>69</sup> Lacking the successor institution, the financial resources, and, most importantly, the backing of the CCP party-state in the form of a political patron-alumnus like Jiang Zemin, the alumni of these institutions found that their experiences could not be recouped into a CCP-directed national narrative of resistance.

Moreover, in the same year that the NCU alumni celebrated the construction of their alumni hall, Chinese historian Cai Dejin published his *History's Freak: Wang Jingwei's National Government from Beginning to End*, a landmark study that was the most comprehensive account of the RNG to date. Though the book detailed much of Nanjing politics at an elite level, it did so with such unrelenting hostility towards Wang and his associates that it left little room for acknowledging individual agency and the complexities of life and politics under enemy occupation.<sup>70</sup> For Cai, the RNG was merely a detested puppet regime.<sup>71</sup>

Political strictures aside, Cai's emotional contempt seemed heartfelt. As a child, he had experienced the war as a refugee, roaming the countryside with his mother and sisters, where they hid in temples and farms, once coming across a village strewn with corpses, with not a living soul in sight. These villages haunted Cai's thoughts for five decades, driving him to lead a group of students on a research trip in 1993 across that same countryside in a fruitless effort to locate them once more.<sup>72</sup> Cai himself made explicit the links between these experiences and his academic work, recalling a talk at Taiwan's Academia Historia by an unnamed American scholar who 'accepted Wang Jingwei's viewpoint that resistance only caused greater harm for the nation, and if they hadn't resisted the hardship would have been lessened'. Seated in the audience, Cai lamented, were 'young people who had never experienced the battlefield, never known the bitterness of being a slave without a country, of being a refugee during the War of Resistance'. For Cai, the debate revolved around an emotional binary. 'If Wang Jingwei is patriotic,' he asked, 'were those martyrs who lost their lives resisting Japan traitors?'<sup>73</sup> As with many of his generation, Cai's experiences left him with a visceral hostility that shaped his scholarship.

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See also Li Xun, 'Wancheng Qian Xiaozhang jiaoban de renwu' [Completing the assignment from President Qian], *Xinmin wanbao*, 24 August 2010.

<sup>69</sup>Wu Jen-shu, *Jiehou 'tiantang': Kangzhan lunxian hou de Suzhou chengshi shenghuo* [Paradise plundered: Urban life in occupied Suzhou during the War of Resistance] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2020), p. 246.

<sup>70</sup>For a critique of how an over-emphasis on total Japanese repression versus Chinese resistance distorts the dynamics of occupation, see Joshua H. Howard, 'Beyond repressions and resistance: Worker agency and corporatism in occupied Nanjing', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1, 2022, pp. 346–348.

<sup>71</sup>Regarding Japanese demands over the establishment of Nanjing's Central Reserve Bank, for example, Cai states: 'Since the Wang regime itself was a puppet regime; it therefore...took its orders [from Japan] and carried them out.' See Cai Dejin, *Lishi de guaitai: Wang Jingwei guomin zhengfu shimou* [History's freak: Wang Jingwei's National Government from beginning to end] (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 1993), p. 147.

<sup>72</sup>Wang Jingyuan, 'Houji' [Afterword], in *Tao ni ji* [Collected works denouncing the traitors], (ed.) Cai Dejin (Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 2005), pp. 440–441.

<sup>73</sup>Cai Dejin, 'Guanyu kangzhan shiqi Wang Jingwei yu Wang wei zhengquan de jige wenti zhi wo jian' [My views on a few questions regarding Wang Jingwei during the War of Resistance and the bogus Wang regime], in *ibid.*, pp. 366–367.

In such a context, the rehabilitation of NCU and the alumni left the analytical categories for understanding the politics of occupation ('resistance' and 'collaboration') fully intact. Instead, the NCU student protestors were recategorized in accordance with the national narrative of CCP-led resistance. From the patriotic youth who took to the streets of Nanjing to the 'bogus students' of the immediate postwar period and the exploited dupes of Lin Baisheng and the RNG in the early 1980s, by 1992 they were refashioned once more into defiant patriots. The backdrop to this most recent switch, which took place in the relatively free-wheeling late 1980s and 1990s, came about not because of scholarly developments in the Chinese academy, where historians like Cai Dejin who experienced the war remained hostile. Rather, it was due to a convergence of interests between the cash-strapped authorities of Nanjing University, the ambitions of the NCU alumni, and the political needs of the party-state under Jiang Zemin.

### Patriotic youth and patriotic education

In the wake of the Tiananmen protests of 1989, Beijing increasingly emphasized patriotism within the education system. According to Suisheng Zhao, the Patriotic Education Campaign, which began as a series of policy recommendations in 1991, targeted students from kindergarten to university in an effort to make patriotism the focus of educational reform. Zhao noted the shift in emphasis from previous campaigns by describing the effort as 'a state-led effort to rebuild the legitimacy of the post-Tiananmen leadership in a way that would permit the CCP's rule to continue on the basis of non-Communist ideology rather than Marxism or anti-traditional iconoclasm'.<sup>74</sup> The ideological substitute, of course, was patriotism, and narratives of the CCP's wartime resistance came to take pride of place.

Against the backdrop of the campaign, discussion of NCU and the history of the occupation showed signs of fragmentation. Plans to publish the newly discovered diary of Wang Jingwei, which were announced in November of 1987, inexplicably failed, and in any event, over the next two decades, a younger cohort of scholars emerged who would look beyond the high-level politics of leading officials within the occupation state.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, the NCU alumni continued their efforts to commemorate their experiences alongside the development of state-led commemoration that interwove the leadership of the CCP, nationalism, and resistance.

In a collection of essays by contemporary intellectuals in honour of their mentors, Wang Hui, an influential thinker often associated with China's New Left, described the veneration his graduate supervisor Zhang Shicheng had had for his own mentor, the

<sup>74</sup>Suisheng Zhao, 'State-led nationalism: The Patriotic Education Campaign in post-Tiananmen China', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1998, pp. 292 and 296.

<sup>75</sup>This is not to say that senior scholars did not continue with the direction of their previous research. Shi Yuanhua, for example, who began his studies on Wang Jingwei's Nanjing government in the late 1970s, maintained a steady output of studies and biographies of Chen Gongbo, released in 1986, 1992, 1997, 1999, and 2008. For details, see Shi Yuanhua, 'Luanshi nengchen' *Chen Gongbo* [Chen Gongbo: A capable minister in a chaotic world] (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2008), pp. 376–377. Similarly, in 1992, Cai Dejin likewise followed up on his 1986 publication of Zhou Fohai's diaries with the biographical *Zhou Fohai: Zhao qin mu chu* [The turncoat Zhou Fohai] (Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1992). For details on the recovery of Wang's diary and plans to publish it, see Cai Dejin, 'Tan tan Wang Jingwei riji' [Discussing Wang Jingwei's diary], in *Tao ni ji*, (ed.) Cai, pp. 123–127.

wartime head of Chinese literature at NCU, Long Yusheng. Wang's essay, first published in 1996, provides an account of the 73-year-old Zhang privately entrusting him with the task of locating Long's grave and bowing three times before it as a sign of respect. Looking back at Long's decision to remain in occupied territory, teaching at NCU, Wang calls for a shift away from foregrounding moral judgement.<sup>76</sup> 'The passage of time cannot change the existence of right and wrong,' he acknowledges, 'but apart from this, might there not be compassion for the vicissitudes of life?'<sup>77</sup> Wang's sentiments, cautiously phrased and aimed at a relatively obscure intellectual who was imprisoned as a cultural *hanjian* by the Nationalists, nonetheless indicate the possibilities of moving beyond wartime binaries and condemnation based on external political criteria to the consideration of individual circumstances.

From the available material, the NCU alumni evidently paid attention to the broader political direction in the country and valued the possibilities of official commemoration. In October 1997, alumni in Beijing printed a memorial book for one of their number, Wang Jiamo, who passed away in 1995. In recounting the protests, the alumni recast the relationship between Youth Corps leader Lin Baisheng and the students in somewhat ambiguous terms. While former Nanjing officials saw the students as exploited, former protestor Pan Tian countered that the officials 'wanted to exploit us, and although we didn't want to be used for their purposes, we still wanted to achieve our goal of mobilizing the masses and developing patriotic, anti-Japanese, progressive forces'.<sup>78</sup> Although printed unofficially, the commemorative book gave prominent place to the calligraphy of state leader Wang Daohan on the cover and included in the opening pages a colour photo of Jiang Zemin, now firmly ensconced as CCP general secretary, visiting the alumnus.<sup>79</sup> Such features were not simply stylistic; they suggested official sanction. Just as the NCU alumni had invoked the name of Lin Baisheng when marching through the streets of Nanjing in 1943, so too did they call upon the names of state leaders in commemorating their comrades in the 1990s.

It was in this context that General Secretary Jiang wrote a 1998 memorial eulogizing his fallen classmates. Personal nostalgia aside, the memorial was part of the Patriotic Education Campaign's pursuit of Chinese history as a tool to buttress the Party's legitimacy. More specifically, it recast the role of the NCU students, and especially the anti-opium protests, as part of an anti-Japanese resistance led by the CCP. Indeed, by 2000, Jiang appeared in an alumni commemorative volume, not merely as a supportive alumnus as in previous volumes, but as having taken active part in the 1943 anti-opium protests and having been fast friends with one of its long-dead leaders.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup>For a more recent debate on the question of moral judgement, see Timothy Brook, 'Hesitating before the judgment of history', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 71, no. 1, February 2012, pp. 103–114; John Whittier Treat, 'Choosing to collaborate: Yi Kwang-su and the moral subject in colonial Korea', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 71, no. 1, February 2012, pp. 81–102.

<sup>77</sup>Wang Hui, 'Ming'an zhijian: ji Zhang Shicheng xiansheng' [Between darkness and light: Remembering Mr Zhang Shicheng], in *Ling yi zhong xueshu shi: ershi shi ji xueshu xinzhuan* [A scholastic history of another kind: Passing the academic torch through the 20th century], (eds) Zhang Chuntian and Zhang Yaorong (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2012), p. 143.

<sup>78</sup>Pan Tian, 'Jiamo yongyuan huo zao women de xin zhong' [Jiamo lives forever in our hearts], in *Wang Jiamo jinianji* [Wang Jiamo memorial essays], (eds) Wang Jiamo jinianji bianjizu (Beijing: Nanjing zhongyang daxue (1940–1945) xiaoyou hui, 1997) p. 7.

<sup>79</sup>Wang Jiamo jinianji bianjizu (eds), *Wang Jiamo jinianji*.

<sup>80</sup>Nanjing zhongyang daxue (40–45) xiaoyou (eds), 'Qiannian juhui jiniankan', p. 20.

A few years later, in April 2002, the NCU alumni printed an unofficial two-volume collection of the school's history and personal reminiscences, this time giving prominent place to Jiang's memorial. Free of space considerations and direct official oversight, these accounts of the school's history and individual student experiences reveal the complex politics of occupation as well as the alumni's desire in their old age to present themselves as being on 'the right side' of history. Some essays, such as Chen Xiuliang's 'History Proves He was a Good Party Member', emphasize the spotless revolutionary credentials of the student leaders. Others, like that of Wang Jiamo's widow, Fu Jijia, reveal a more gradual shift in attitude over the course of the war, with Wang initially idealizing Nationalist Chongqing as the seat of anti-Japanese resistance before turning to the CCP.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, the overview of anti-Japanese activities on campus suggests underground Chongqing-affiliated organizations were active from 1940 through to early 1942, and then again from 1944, though with much less success in the latter period.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast to these more nuanced accounts, a new official history of Nanjing University appeared in the same month, this time to commemorate the school's centennial. Coverage of NCU had expanded by a few pages and included more detailed information on the size and composition of the student body, as well as specific events from the various protests. Significantly, the coverage of anti-Japanese activities on campus also shifted. While the previous history described the campus as an arena of competition between the Nanjing government, the Chongqing-affiliated Three Principles of the People Youth Corps, and various CCP organizations sent in from outside Nanjing, the new history contained no such language and highlighted instead the primacy of the CCP in the campus environment. 'Students' and teachers' patriotic, anti-Japanese activities began spontaneously,' the editors claimed, 'but were sporadic and unable to rally supporters. Later, when the CCP's underground organizations entered the campus and contacted each of the patriotic social organizations to commence anti-Japanese activities...the results became impressive.'<sup>83</sup> As a narrative, the official history's emphasis on the role of CCP-led resistance set it apart from both the previous official history as well as the work of younger scholars.

Rather than directly challenge the standpoints laid down in previous scholarship, younger researchers shifted their focus. This resulted in studies of collaboration at the grassroots level as carried out by local elites or as seen in the operations of somewhat more peripheral branches of the occupation state. These more low-profile topics allowed more leeway to navigate the state-backed narrative and present a more nuanced account of how collaboration may have made sense at the local level, and how collaboration was carried out in practice.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup>See Chen Xiuliang, 'Lishi zhengming ta shi yige hao dangyuan' [History proves he was a good Party member] and Fu Jijia, 'Wo jing wo fu, wo ai wo fu' [I respect my husband, I love my husband], in *Kangri zhanzheng shiqi Nanjing zhongyang daxue shiji* [Chronicle of Nanjing National Central University during the War of Resistance against Japan], (eds) Nanjing zhongyang daxue (1940–1945) xiaoyou hui (Nanjing: unknown, 2002), pp. 19 and 149 respectively.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>83</sup>Wang (ed.), *Nanjing daxue bainian shi*, p. 248.

<sup>84</sup>For collaboration at the local level, see Pan Min, *Jiangsu Riwei jiceng zhengquan yanjiu (1937–1945)* [A study of bogus Japanese local regimes in Jiangsu (1937–1945)] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2006). For a study of the RNG's Central Reserve Bank, see Zhu Peixi, *Jisheng yu gongsheng: Wang wei*

In the post-Tiananmen period, the NCU alumni continued to play an important role, especially by commemorating their experiences in the form of memoir literature. But while their efforts prior to the publication of the 1992 history expanded narratives of the occupation to include their own experiences, in the following years their experiences were taken up as part of a state-backed form of official commemoration that revolved around CCP-led resistance. This new narrative not only downplayed the complexities and rivalries of life in occupied territory, but also reduced the agency of the students. By foregrounding the Party's predominant role in leading resistance against the Japanese, the NCU alumni also set themselves apart from members of the younger generation of scholars, some of whom were willing to ground their approach to life in occupied territory in individual circumstances and context.

### Commemoration's context

Although the postwar trials of collaborators in France and China marked a highpoint in the shared French and Chinese experiences of occupation, as Margherita Zanasi has suggested,<sup>85</sup> the historiography of the NCU students and the RNG demonstrates how greatly the historiography of the period has diverged in France and China. Timothy Brook has framed this divergence as a matter of the Chinese being at 'a much earlier stage of coming to terms with their occupation' than the French. This lag, he suggests, has emerged as a result of both China's continued sense of grievance over Japan's failure to adequately acknowledge its wartime aggression or make appropriate compensation, and a popular unwillingness to re-examine the past that has played into the CCP's continued exploitation of resistance narratives to sustain its own legitimacy.<sup>86</sup> But in looking below the surface of this situation, it is important to recall that French progress in 'coming to terms' with the occupation remains, despite its prominence in academic literature on collaboration, an exceptional case. For the countries that endured German and Japanese occupation, the construction of occupation narratives has been deeply contingent upon the role of the state and post-occupation events. There is no pre-determined outcome.

As the case of the NCU alumni suggests, and in line with recent research on France and Italy, the public commemoration of occupation has been shaped by specific changes in the social, political, and scholarly environment of the postwar period.<sup>87</sup> The history of commemoration, in other words, can tell us much about both the commemorators and the commemorated. As a grassroots effort, the NCU alumni's struggle for rehabilitation provides a point of comparison between French and Chinese experiences of occupation as well as a window into the practice of history and commemoration. The NCU alumni's changing status has reinforced the wartime categories of collaboration and resistance, rather than critically analysing them to account for

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*zhongyang chubei yinhang yanjiu* [Parasitic and symbiotic: Research on the bogus Wang regime's Central Reserve Bank] (Shanghai: Tongji daxue chubanshe, 2012), p. 168.

<sup>85</sup>Zanasi, 'Globalizing *hanjian*'.

<sup>86</sup>Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese agents and local elites in wartime China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 6.

<sup>87</sup>See Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The dilemmas of remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 6–7.

the complexities of life under enemy occupation. This is in large part due to the interference of a state that, unlike France, continues to stake part of its legitimacy on the claim of having spearheaded uncompromising resistance to the occupier.

For scholars of memory and collaboration, the NCU alumni's experience is instructive, highlighting how the PRC as a postwar successor state has remained deeply invested in the wartime binary of collaboration versus resistance, seeking to manipulate and control commemoration of the period even decades after the end of the war. In the French and Chinese cases, this has led to some intriguing parallels, with both countries' presidents addressing their wartime experiences during the 1990s, but the crucial fact remains that memory of the occupation in both countries has been deeply shaped by the role of the state, either in its retreat or its overbearing presence.<sup>88</sup>

In Mao-era China, the wartime period remained overshadowed by the revolutionary narrative, on the one hand, and the silence of self-preservation on the other.<sup>89</sup> It was only in the more freewheeling 1980s, after the death of Mao and the turn to a politics of reform and opening, that Chinese researchers began to turn their attention to life and politics in occupied territory, with the often-explicit goal of maintaining the condemnatory framework of collaboration and resistance that originated during the wartime period. Within this framework, the NCU alumni were able to carve out an eventual place for themselves in the official histories of Nanjing University. Far from being a scholarly development, however, it was instead a matter of commemoration by transaction, whereby those who had once been shunned by the university were, after a substantial financial donation, suddenly lauded for their patriotic resistance against Japan.

Since then, competing narratives have emerged as the NCU alumni continued to document their own experiences. Non-academic influences like the Patriotic Education Campaign and Jiang Zemin's revelations in 1997 of his own wartime experiences have co-opted the efforts of the NCU alumni in order to maintain an official narrative of the occupation, which gives pride of place to underground CCP activists. Unfortunately, much of what has been published recently on the NCU students simply inverts the category in which the students are cast from 'collaboration' to 'resistance', effectively leaving both halves of the binary uninterrogated. The resulting literature only reinforces a genre of historical writing in which those who 'resisted' are heroes, and those who 'collaborated' are, by definition, villains. Such a literature admits no room for a nuanced examination of Youth Corps leader Lin Baisheng's role in instigating the anti-opium protests, or of the relationship between the Nanjing Education Minister and the Chongqing operative who directed the protests that toppled the NCU's president. It can therefore make no real sense of the complexity and contradictions of enemy occupation.<sup>90</sup> As a result,

<sup>88</sup>Éric Conan and Henry Rousso, *Vichy: An ever present past*, (trans.) Nathan Bracher (Hanover, NK: University Press of New England, 1998), pp. 124–155.

<sup>89</sup>Wang Jingwei's wife, Chen Bijun (1891–1959), presents an intriguing example of a *hanjian* refusing to confess her guilt. Imprisoned after the war, she reportedly rejected an offer of early release in exchange for denouncing her husband. See Charles D. Musgrove, 'Cheering the traitor: The post-war trial of Chen Bijun, April 1946', *Twentieth Century China*, vol. 30, no. 2, April 2005, p. 24.

<sup>90</sup>At his trial in 1947, Li Shengwu was fully aware that it was a Chongqing operative who had orchestrated the march on Wang's residence. See Nanjing shi dang'anguan (ed.), *Shenxun Wang wei hanjian bilu*

scholarship on student movements and education in occupied territory remains underdeveloped.

Similarly, prospects for further scholarly developments in China along the lines of France appear limited, despite the presence of scholars with an interest in the field. Current president Xi Jinping remains willing to wield wartime history as a source of legitimacy, as per the recent increase in wartime anniversaries and the decree that China's war against Japan began in 1931, rather than 1937, when full-scale war broke out. Importantly, Xi has the clout to reframe wartime narratives, in marked contrast to Nicolas Sarkozy's efforts a decade ago, which were dismissed and derided as *l'histoire bling-bling*.<sup>91</sup> This insistence on defending history for its legitimating functions ensures that the party-state will exert influence over China's various 'vectors of memory' to either reject alternative narratives that acknowledge the complexity of experiences endured by those in occupied territory or co-opt them, as in the case of NCU. In contrast to Europe, where Pieter Lagrou finds that local groups had to 'speak a language that post-war society was ready to understand', it remains necessary in China to speak a language that the party-state is ready to understand.<sup>92</sup> Unless official commemoration abandons the binaries of collaboration versus resistance and sets aside epithets like 'enslavement education', alternate narratives of the war that acknowledge realities on the ground will remain subject to the same types of contortions as those experienced by the NCU alumni.

Until such time, the history of the occupation will remain a sore point in China, too conspicuous to overlook yet too sensitive to look into. In Nanjing, the Building of Knowledge and Practice, built with funds from the NCU alumni, remains on campus as a testament to their relationship with Nanjing University, but for the past several years a carefully pruned hedge has precisely covered the plaque explaining the building's origins. Despite the passage of time, for the state, the period remains fraught.

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[Records of the bogus Wang traitors on trial] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 552–555, 607–608 and 629.

<sup>91</sup>Richard J. Golsan, *The Vichy past in France today: Corruptions of memory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017) p. xi.

<sup>92</sup>Lagrou, *The legacy of Nazi occupation*, p. 304.

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