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“Communism Destroys Republicanism, and International Supervision Destroys Communism”: Manchukuo’s First Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu and His Dreams of the Open Door and the Kingly Way

Jianda Yuan*

ABSTRACT

This article examines Zheng Xiaoxu’s concept of *Zhongguo* and the ways in which he tried to construct and protect that *Zhongguo* as the Prime Minister of Manchukuo between 1932 and 1935. Replacing “China” with *Zhongguo* and “Confucianism” with *Rujia* for conceptual clarity, it argues that *Zhongguo* was for Zheng a cultural realm that valued the *Rujia* notion of benevolence and righteousness, and that the government of *Zhongguo* should function as an administrative agency to attract foreign economic support and an educational institution to spread the morality of *Rujia* among its people. The Open Door policy and Kingly Way politics were interrelated strategies for Zheng to construct such a *Zhongguo*. Equating Manchukuo with the legitimate governing institution of *Zhongguo*, and determined to secure a rightful position for it in the world, Zheng’s cooperation with the Japanese was more complicated than a seeming disruption of the national interest of “China.”

Keywords: Zheng Xiaoxu; Manzhouguo; Manchukuo; Kingly Way; Open Door; collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Zheng Xiaoxu (1860-1938)—Qing loyalist, scholar, poet and calligrapher—was one of the central figures behind the establishment of Manchukuo in 1932, serving as Prime Minister between March 1932 and May 1935. Born in 1860 into a late Qing family of bureaucrats in Fujian province, Zheng passed the county level of the civil examinations in 1882 with the highest grade of his home province at the age of twenty-two, and was admitted to the Qing imperial court in 1889.¹ Refusing to become an official in the newly established Republic of China (ROC) government after the Nationalist

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1 Ye Shen, Chen Bangzhi and Dang Xiangzhou, eds., *Zheng Xiaoxu zhuan* [Zheng Xiaoxu’s biography] (Xinjing: Man Ri wenhua xiehui, 1938), 17-18.

Revolution of 1911, Zheng lived in Shanghai as a loyalist to the defunct Qing Dynasty until February 1924, when he went to serve Aisin Gioro Puyi (1906-67)—the last Qing emperor—in the Forbidden City.² After the warlord Feng Yuxiang (1882-1948) drove Puyi out of the Forbidden City in November 1924 with armed force, Zheng and Puyi left Beijing and settled in the Japanese concession in Tianjin. Treating the ROC as a false regime that disrupted the stability of Han Chinese society, Zheng embraced the Qing monarchy and considered the restoration of Puyi his lifelong mission.³ Hence, two months after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931, Zheng followed Puyi to Manchuria under the invitation of Japanese military radicals from the Kantô Army.⁴ There, Zheng participated in the establishment of the new Manchurian state, Manchukuo, and became the regime's Prime Minister with Japanese support.

Regardless of Zheng's position in the Manchukuo state and his particular significance in the creation of its national creed, the Kingly Way, in the early 1930s, existing research in both English- and Chinese-speaking academies have paid inadequate attention to this important political and cultural figure. To date, specific studies on Zheng as the Prime Minister of Manchukuo in English hardly exist, except for a brief discussion in historian Yamamuro Shin'ichi's *Manchuria Under Japanese Domination*⁵ and an article on Zheng's diary, "The Fugitive Self," by historian Marjorie Dryburgh.⁶ Scattered Chinese-language studies on Zheng in the Manchukuo era evolve from denunciation of his collaboration with Japanese imperialism in the 1980s and the 1990s to criticism of his Kingly Way ideology after the 2000s. Lao Zude, the editor of Zheng Xiaoxu's diary, for example, deems Zheng a "national thief" who "chose to destroy his personal reputation by assisting [the Japanese] to carry out atrocities."⁷ Historian Yang Zhaoyuan associates Zheng's intention to "use Japanese imperialism to revive the Qing Dynasty" in 1931 with betrayal of China's ethnic and cultural identity after the 1911 Nationalist Revolution, arguing that Zheng's "tragic ending was the inevitable fate of a traitor to Han Chinese and a slave of foreigners."⁸ Zhou Mingzhi deems Zheng's Kingly Way ideology "a naïve fantasy" because Zheng treated it as a means to "destroy the ROC. . . [and] lay the foundation of China's reunification under the banner of the Qing Dynasty" with Japanese assistance.⁹ Lin Chih-hung argues that Zheng used the Kingly Way to "convince himself that Japan's armed invasion [of Manchuria]" was a righteous cause for the re-

2 Li Jun, *1931 nian qian Zheng Xiaoxu* [Zheng Xiaoxu before 1931] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2018), 230.

3 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Zheng Xiaoxu riji* [Zheng Xiaoxu's diary], ed. Lao Zude (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 2344-45.

4 Aisin Gioro Puyi, *Wode qian bansheng* [My earlier life full edition] (Beijing: Qunzhong chubanshe, 2007), 219-20.

5 Shin'ichi Yamamuro, *Manchuria Under Japanese Domination* (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

6 Marjorie Dryburgh, "The Fugitive Self: Writing Zheng Xiaoxu, 1882-1938," in *Writing Lives in China, 1600-2010: Histories of the Elusive Self*, eds. Marjorie Dryburgh and Sarah Dauncey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 110-132.

7 Lao Zude, "Zhengli shuoming" [The editor's notes], in *Zheng Xiaoxu riji*, 4.

8 Yang Zhaoyuan, "Zheng Xiaoxu yu wei Manzhouguo" [Zheng Xiaoxu and bogus Manchukuo], in *Wei Man renwu* [Bogus Manchukuo figures], ed. Sun Bang (Changchun: Jilin renmin chubanshe, 1993), 315-16.

9 Zhou Mingzhi, *Jindai Zhongguo de wenhua weiji: Qing yilao de jingshen shijie* [Cultural crisis in modern China: Qing loyalists and their mental world] (Jinan: Shandong daxue chubanshe, 2009), 5, 242, 248.

gion's residents.¹⁰ Although agreeing that Zheng's Kingly Way in Manchukuo "provided modern China with a different possible direction in terms of national development," Li Jun hints that Zheng was still responsible for causing Japan's hegemonic domination of Manchuria because his Kingly Way rhetoric legitimized Japanese occupation.¹¹

Negating Zheng's political ideals in the Manchukuo era, existing research on Zheng in the early 1930s focuses primarily on identifying the gaps between Zheng's national outlook and the political reality of the early twentieth century. Likewise, his views on the Kingly Way are largely dismissed as an inauthentic and anachronistic misuse of Confucianism against this same national interest. As a result, Zheng has been rendered as a stubborn-minded idealist whose immature view of statecraft and international relationships plagued the innocent residents of Manchuria in the years of Japanese occupation between 1932 and 1945.

Although "China" appears on the surface to be a self-evident term that does not require further terminological explorations, it becomes misleading concept when applied to the study of Manchukuo and Zheng Xiaoxu. Historian Dan Shao notes that "China" and "Chinese" have long been unconsciously used by the majority to "refer to all the historical regimes that once ruled the People's Republic of China's territory and to their multiethnic populations."¹² Scholars of cultural borderlands, however, tend to argue that national and cultural identities are negotiable, as sovereignty contestations, state successions, shifting national borders and ethnic boundaries can change the ways in which people view their communities.¹³ Therefore, state successions and political fragmentations in both China proper and Manchuria after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1912 provided contemporary people in different regions with an opportunity to define "China" and "Chinese" based on their own communal and cultural experiences. In the early 1930s, the Japanese capitalized on the ROC's inability to control Outer Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang to argue for Manchukuo's legitimacy, contending that, "China today is merely a geographical term, without embodying a united nationhood."¹⁴

Likewise, Confucianism has often been used as a broad all-encompassing term for China's philosophical tradition. Thus, historian Kiri Paramore believes that in Japan and the rest of East Asia today "anything that can be related to the text [of Confucian classics] can be justified in Confucian terms" due to the absence of a "substantial autonomous social infrastructure for Confucianism."¹⁵ Indeed, "Confucianism" is an ambivalent term that can

10 Lin Chih-hung, *Minguo nai diguo ye: zhengzhi wenhua zhuanxing xia de Qing yimin* [The Republic of China is a hostile state: Qing loyalists during China's political and cultural transformation] (Taipei: Lianjing chubun shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 2009), 340.

11 Li Jun, *1931 nian qian Zheng Xiaoxu*, 312.

12 Dan Shao, *Remote Homeland, Recovered Borderland: Manchus, Manchukuo, and Manchuria, 1907-1985* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 15.

13 Shao, *Remote Homeland*, 11. "New Qing history" for example, often examines the importance of concepts like identity formation and state successions to the development and demise of the Qing Dynasty. Mark Elliott, for example, rejects the Sino-centric view of Qing history and argues that the Manchus intentionally preserved their own political norms and privileges. Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

14 Roy H. Akagi, "Japan and the Open Door in Manchukuo," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 168: *American Policy in the Pacific* (July 1933): 54.

15 Kiri Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 191.

both refer to the doctrines of Confucius alone (in its narrowly defined meaning) or the thoughts of people like Mencius (372-289 BCE), Xunzi (*circa* 316-237 BCE), and Zhu Xi (1130-1200). Without even discussing the distinctions between post-Han Confucianism and post-Song Neo-Confucianism, historian Henrietta Harrison has suggested that one could still interpret the term as either a “contest for fame and fortune exemplified in the examination system” or the “morality of the classical texts.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, Confucianism was a changing and evolving concept in history that both Han and non-Han rulers manipulated to advance their own interests, thereby manifesting multiple forms of Confucianism “in different places and times.”¹⁷

An exploration of Zheng’s national and cultural perceptions requires re-conceptualizing both “China” and “Confucianism” instead of relying on their common English translations and interpretations. To this end, this study uses the Chinese term *Zhongguo* (the Middle Kingdom) to replace “China” and *Rujia* (the school of learned scholars) to replace “Confucianism.”¹⁸ Overcoming the theoretical obstacles of “China” and “Confucianism” allows one to observe Zheng’s ideals in a way other than the seeming disruption of “China’s” national interest or the misinterpretation of classical texts in the face of foreign occupation.¹⁹

Relying on first-hand materials by or on Zheng Xiaoxu in the Manchukuo era, such as his diary, speech manuscripts, his monograph *Wangdao guankui* (A glimpse of the Kingly Way), and Manchukuo newspapers, this article explores two questions: What was the definition of *Zhongguo* for Zheng and, more importantly, how did he try to construct and protect that *Zhongguo* as the Prime Minister of Manchukuo? The association of *Zhongguo* with a particular politically constructed entity, be it the ROC, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), or any historical dynasty blurs cognition of Zheng’s concept of the state of *Zhongguo*. *Zhongguo* was, for Zheng, a culturally shaped idea that included key principles of *Rujia*, which Zheng associated with the core values originally expressed by Confucius such as benevolence, righteousness, and filial piety.

At the same time, a comprehensive understanding of Zheng’s attempted restoration of *Zhongguo* requires an exploration of his very distinctive attitude towards the Open Door policy and the Kingly Way ideology, and the way in which he treated them as integrated rather than separate topics. In Zheng’s eyes, an ideal state of *Zhongguo* should simultaneously function as an administrative agency capable of attracting foreign assistance and an educational institution capable of cultivating its people’s morality; any state capable of accomplishing those tasks could serve as the legitimate governing institution of *Zhongguo*. As early as 1912, Zheng argued that *Huaren* (the residents of *Hua[xia]*, or *Zhongguo*) feared and marginalized *wairren* (outsiders) because he believed that the *Huaren* of his time “had no morality or personality.” For him, the “opening of the whole country,” especially in the field of communi-

16 Henrietta Harrison, *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man’s Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 47.

17 Paramore, *Japanese Confucianism*, 2.

18 Defining the term “ru” is complicated because it is often simply translated in English as Confucianism, whereas its base meaning is a broader and more universal concept of “learned scholars,” albeit a concept under which Confucian scholars were naturally subsumed.

19 This article, however, does not substitute the “Republic of China,” “China proper,” and contemporary Western observers’ use of “China” with other terms because they are lesser problematic concepts to the study of Zheng in the 1930s. This article also uses “Chinese” to address the country’s written language.

cations, to foreign investment was the only way to reduce such xenophobia and “bring *Zhongguo* prosperity.” Zheng argued the necessity to “develop the whole country’s territorial strength [with international support] first and think about domestic political reforms afterwards.”²⁰ For the sake of the livelihood of *Zhongguo*’s people, a competent state must rely on its administrative power to provide foreign investors with equal opportunities to participate in the development of *Zhongguo*’s riches. To reduce the people of *Zhongguo*’s xenophobia and make them understand the importance of mutual respect, it was the state’s responsibility to enforce education on the values of *Rujia* through domestic reforms and to normalize *Zhongguo*-foreign relations at the personal level. That reform was to be achieved through the “Kingly Way.” Only an opened *Zhongguo* would influence the world with the principles of *Rujia* and gradually motivate foreign powers to give up the use of force to solve international disputes.

In Zheng’s state concept, the Kingly Way—an ideology that embraced “universal love” (*bo’ai*) and the “eradication of soldiers” (*mibing*)—was a by-product of the Open Door rather than a “naïve fantasy” constructed out of thin air. Siding with the Japanese due to his long-term contact with their country and Sino-Japanese cultural proximity, Zheng saw Manchukuo as a laboratory in which to test the feasibility of his project because such an opportunity was not available in the ROC. Failing to realize his utopian ideals and forced to resign from the Prime Ministership in May 1935 due to Japanese interference, Zheng unfortunately became a symbol of national treason and the target for moral criticism up to the present.²¹

“THE BEAUTY OF CLOTHES AND LITERATURE”: ZHENG XIAOXU’S
FASCINATION WITH *ZHONGGUO*

Although it is not possible to provide a detailed analysis of the definition of *Zhongguo* in an article-length study, the term generally evolved from a geographic term to a cultural concept over the past 3,000 years. Both the famed *Shijing* (Classic of poetry) and Mencius used the term to address the surrounding territories of the capital cities (Haojing and Luoyang) of the Zhou Dynasty (circa 1046-256 BCE). A poem titled “Minlao” (The laborious masses) in *Shijing* encouraged the monarch of Zhou to “provide [the people of] this *Zhongguo* with benefits” (*hui ci Zhongguo*), and Mencius contended that King Xuan of Qi (?-301 BCE) wanted to “situate [himself] in *Zhongguo* and pacify the surrounding barbarians” (*li Zhongguo er fu siyi ye*).²² Given the loss of *Zhongguo* and the rest of the Yellow River basin to northern pastoralist civilizations between the fourth and the sixth centuries CE, cultural identity gradually replaced geographic location as the defining feature of *Zhongguo* among the Han population. By the establishment of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), terms like *Zhonghua* and *Huaxia* had already become well-defined synonyms

20 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 1400.

21 This study essentially interprets the Open Door and the Kingly Way through the perspective of Zheng Xiaoxu based on his writings. It does not analyze the ways in which the Manchukuo government used the Open Door to propagandize its status as a legitimate nation-state, nor does it explore the implementing measures of the Kingly Way in the early 1930s, as they are topics that could generate multiple fruitful research projects.

22 Anonymous, “Minlao” [The laborious masses], in *Shijing xinjie* [A new interpretation of the classic of poetry], ed. Shen Zeyi (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2000), 473; Mengzi (Mencius), *Mengzi yizhu* [The Mencius with translation and annotation], ed. Yang Bojun, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 16.

for *Zhongguo*. According to Tang Dynasty scholar Kong Yingda (574-648), *hua* means “the beauty of clothes and literature” (*fuzhang zhi mei*) and *xia* means “greatness.”²³

Although *Zhongguo* never became the official name of any dynasty, it nevertheless transcended any dynastic titles because it signified a sense of orthodoxy to the masses. Known in Chinese as *zhengtong*, orthodoxy was a term used before 1912 by Han and non-Han rulers and historians mostly to justify a dynasty’s legitimacy of governance “during periods of dynastic transition, when ethnic conflicts arose, or when borderland security was in danger.”²⁴ Even the last Qing emperor Puyi in his 1954 written confession used this term to criticize his determination of revival before 1945, confessing that he treated “the Qing Dynasty [as] the *zhengtong* of *Zhongguo*.”²⁵ Regardless of ethnicity, those who managed to convince the majority that their governance complied with the cultural framework of *Zhongguo* could usually claim the throne without triggering major antagonisms among loyalists of former dynasties.²⁶ This is arguably a major reason why dynastic successions contributed little to the disintegration of *Zhongguo* in the past three thousand years, and why the concept of *Zhongguo* grew so prominent over time.

As the fourth generation of the Zheng family after his great grandfather Zheng Pengcheng became an official through the civil examinations in 1796, Zheng Xiaoxu highly valued the term *Zhongguo* in his written works. Zheng viewed *Zhongguo* as an ultimate cultural realm instead of the Qing Dynasty or any other historical regimes. Speaking to the German diplomat Gustav Detring (1842-1913) on September 17, 1885, Zheng linked European nations together under the term *Xiguo* (Western countries) and treated *Zhongguo* as their counterpart. He believed that “*Xiguo* valued intelligence and were willing to appreciate the nations that had triumphant talent.” *Zhongguo*, in contrast, valued righteousness instead of intelligence, and was “willing to follow the lead of righteous individuals.”²⁷ Zheng considered righteousness a defining feature of *Zhongguo*. Six years later, on November 28, 1891, he implied that monarch-subordinate relations could serve as a model of righteousness: “monarch is superior and subordinate is inferior; this is a ritual that has lasted for several thousand years. In *Zhongguo*, millions and billions of people embrace [the leadership of] one person, so why is it not appropriate to acknowledge the honorable status of emperor?”²⁸ In speaking of “emperor,” Zheng not only referred to the Manchu monarchs but also the benevolent rulers of the former dynasties, and all those who acknowledged the hierarchical relationship of monarch and subordinate could be deemed righteous individuals. For ordinary people, benevolence also implies a “reluctance of hurting others” and righteousness implies an “absence of selfishness,” explained Zheng during the Japan-Manchukuo Joint Conference on Education

23 Kong Yingda, *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* [An annotation and interpretation of the *Commentary of Zuo*], ed. Li Xueqin, vol. 3 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999), 1587.

24 Shao, *Remote Homeland*, 111.

25 Aisin Gioro Puyi, “Aixin-Jueluo Puyi bigong” [Aisin Gioro Puyi’s written confession], June 1, 1954, in *Wei Manzhouguo de tongzhi yu neimu: wei Man guanyuan gongshu* [Bogus Manchukuo’s domination and inside stories: confessions of bogus Manchukuo officials], ed. Zhongyang dang’anguan (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 5.

26 Watanabe Yoshihiro, “Ka i ni tsuite” [About *Huaxia* and barbarians], in *Chiran no hisutoria: Ka i, seitō, ze* [A history of order and disorder: *Huaxia* and barbarians, orthodoxy, and trends], ed. Itō Takayuki (Tokyo: Hōsei daigaku shuppan-sha, 2017), 29-72.

27 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 71.

28 Ibid., 252.

in Xinjing on April 26, 1932.²⁹ To serve the cause of *Zhongguo*, one also had to “appreciate benevolent individuals and never seek the help of un-benevolent individuals,” argued Zheng in two 1882 essays.³⁰

For Zheng, the Manchus could be a part of *Zhongguo*, but *Zhongguo* was not the private property of the Manchus or the Qing Dynasty. This is evident in his own words. As he noted on December 25, 1894, “the Manchus’ loss of *Zhongguo* would become a predicable future” if they continued to “provide this hostile neighbor [Japan] with compensation through the extraction of [the people of *Zhongguo*’s] wealth.”³¹ His loyalty to the Qing Dynasty after the establishment of the ROC in 1912 thus is in essence a desperate wish to protect the cultural essences of *Zhongguo*, not a sign of his ideological identification with the Manchu monarchy.

In his study of *zhengtong*, Watanabe Yoshihiro notes that bureaucrats at the beginning of the Han Dynasty (202 BCE–220 CE) already treated culture instead of race as the dividing line between *Zhongguo* and barbarians. While barbarians could become part of *Zhongguo* if they practiced its moral precepts, they insisted that the people of *Zhongguo* could also become barbarians if they intentionally discarded its cultural dogma.³² As a loyal practitioner of *Rujia*, Zheng considered the Manchus the people of *Zhongguo* and Han revolutionaries barbarians. In his eyes, it was still possible to preserve *Zhongguo*’s righteousness and benevolence under the banner of the Qing Dynasty or the newly established Manchukuo, whereas Han revolutionaries in the ROC intended to destroy them:

Since the year of Xinhai [1911], those who propose civil rights discredit monarch-subordinate relationships and value equality, so a son feels ashamed to serve his father; a younger brother feels ashamed to follow the words of his older brother; and a wife feels ashamed to support her husband. [The liberalists] destroy their own hats and the imperial crown and refuse to obey the rituals [of *Zhongguo* in the name of liberty], thereby resulting in the chaotic situation today.³³

Zheng was convinced that the ROC would lead to a disintegration of *Zhongguo* given its contempt towards *Zhongguo*’s essence. In 1939, American social-political author John Gunther (1901–70) noted that “family” in China promoted “a rigid code of manners and complex patterns of social behavior,” and “the loyalty of the average Chinese was primarily to [their] family group” rather than to their “province or nation.”³⁴ If interpreting Gunther’s notion of “family” as *Zhongguo*, then “nation” signifies a dynasty. The above analysis suggests that Zheng cared more about the preservation of *Zhongguo*’s “rigid code of manners and complex patterns of social behavior” than the revival of Manchu domination. Influenced by his contacts with the Japanese and long-term study of the thoughts of *Rujia*, Zheng embraced the Open Door policy and Kingly Way politics as a means of resurrecting *Zhongguo* from political disorder and civil war, a cause for which he would devote his life.

29 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Zheng Zongli dachen wangdao yanjiangji* [A collection of Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu’s speeches on the Kingly Way], ed. Peng Shuxian (Xinjing: Fu wensheng yinshuju, 1934), 68.

30 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 15.

31 Ibid., 457.

32 Watanabe Yoshihiro, “Ka i ni tsuite,” 33–34.

33 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui* [A glimpse of the Kingly Way] (Xinjing: Guowuyuan zongwuting qingbaochu, 1934), 5.

34 John Gunther, *Inside Asia* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1939), 185.

"THE WESTERNERS MADE *ZHONGGUO* AN INTERNATIONAL MARKET": ZHENG
XIAOXU'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE OPEN DOOR IN THE LATE QING
AND THE EARLY REPUBLICAN ERAS

Enunciated by the US Secretary of State John Hay (1838-1905) in 1889, the Open Door was an American policy that aimed at providing "equal opportunity for citizens of all nations to trade in China or similar undeveloped territories." It was reiterated in the Nine Power Treaty at the Washington Conference of 1922 to guarantee the independence of the ROC.³⁵ Observers in Europe and the United States in the early 1910s considered the Open Door and the Monroe Doctrine "great political doctrines of the world" because Hay reportedly said that China was key to "the world's politics of the next five centuries."³⁶ Equal trading opportunities in China also meant respect for China's sovereignty. Hay promised the Qing Minister to the United States Wu Tingfang (1842-1922) on June 22, 1900 that the United States would not send an army into the provinces "where the [Qing] Government showed ability and determination to preserve order and protect the lives and rights of foreigners."³⁷ In a lengthy note to the French charge affairs on July 3, 1900, Hay further argued for the importance of smooth communication with Beijing at the national level for the preservation of China's "territorial and administrative entity." He encouraged the Qing government to "protect foreign life and property against the attacks of subversive anarchy [the Boxers]" in order to "bring about permanent peace and safety to [China]."³⁸ Hay considered Qing communication with the outside world on an equal basis as the prerequisite for its normal foreign relations, associating the safety of foreign residents and properties with China's territorial integrity.

Similar to John Hay's claims, Zheng Xiaoxu highly valued the Open Door and considered it key to the prosperity of *Zhongguo*, with a particular reference to Manchuria, long before Manchukuo's creation. On January 3, 1910—three years after the provincialization of Manchuria in 1907—Zheng recorded a dispute among members of the Fengtian Provincial Consultative Bureau regarding the construction of the Qiqihar-Jinzhou railway with foreign loans. Although opponents described the action as "inviting an armed outsider to enter your room," Zheng insisted that "closing your door is not a good strategy. . . If [the government of Fengtian] could appoint a competent individual to deal with [foreign investors]," Zheng continued, "there is no need [for local residents] to fear the outsiders."³⁹ One day later, in front of his superior, Bayuete Xiliang (1853-1917)—the Governor General of the Three Eastern Provinces who also supported Manchuria's openness—Zheng argued that "if the Three Eastern Provinces want to open their door to the outside world, their officials have to open the provincial doors to the people [of *Zhongguo*] first." Volunteering to become "the chief representative of the people of the Three Eastern Provinces," Zheng wanted to help Bayuete "carry out Manchuria's opening project."⁴⁰ Arguably due to Zheng's efforts, the government of Fengtian eventually decided to construct the Qiqihar-Jinzhou

35 Ibid., 193.

36 Frederick McCormick, "The Open Door," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 39 (1912): 58.

37 Anonymous, "The Integrity of China and the 'Open Door'," *The American Journal of International Law* 1, no. 4 (1907): 959.

38 Ibid., 960.

39 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 1221.

40 Ibid.

railway with financial support of the United States because the country “supported the Open Door and wished to develop Manchuria’s industry and business.”⁴¹

Zheng also persuaded Regent Aisin Gioro Zaifeng (1883-1951)—the father of the last Qing emperor Puyi—on June 21, 1911 to turn “*Zhongguo* and Russia into the hosts of European-Asian communications” through the construction of a railway connecting Zhangjiakou and the Russian Siberian city Kyakhta via the Mongolian capital Kulun (Ulan Bator). Zheng argued,

If *Zhongguo* wants to become a strong nation, opportunities will only be available within the next twenty years, as the Panama Canal, the Kyakhta Railway, and the Russo-India Railway will together revolutionize the world’s communications. The Trans-Siberian Railway is an artery that connects Europe and Asia. Russia was its initial possessor, but Japan managed to operate south Manchuria after the [Russo-Japanese] War. If *Zhongguo* could quickly construct the Kyakhta Railway today, travel from Berlin to Beijing will only take eight days and a half, reducing four days and a half [of the original distance] for the world’s travellers. From then on, *Zhongguo* and Russia will become the hosts of European-Asian communications, and the South Manchuria Railway and the Chinese Eastern Railway will lose their erstwhile values. Furthermore, Japan’s economic possessions in Korea and Manchuria must regress for ten years. This great opportunity might not appear again for the following one thousand years, so please do not let it fade away, Your Majesty.⁴²

To carry out such an ambitious plan, international investment was indispensable, so Zheng “bitterly suggested [in front of Zaifeng] that the construction of railways with foreign loans is an inevitable process of [*Zhongguo*’s] reform.”⁴³ Suffering condemnation by conservative bureaucrats in the imperial court due to his advocating for *Zhongguo*’s openness, Zheng revealed his contempt towards these voices in his conversation with a Hunanese official in Beijing on July 7, 1911: “Striving for the understanding of the few who know the significance of our policy, or expecting the confused majority to accept our persuasion—which one do you think is more important?”⁴⁴ On February 18, 1912, six days after Puyi’s abdication, Zheng reiterated his support for *Zhongguo*’s openness, lamenting: “who could believe my words in this country?”⁴⁵

Between 1911 and 1931, Zheng Xiaoxu’s support for the Open Door gradually evolved into fascination with international supervision as a means to end *Zhongguo*’s endless civil wars and political disorders. Zheng developed a theory in the mid-1920s, known as *san gong lun* (The discourse of the three ‘gongs’), to justify the use of foreign assistance for the restoration of domestic order. The three gongs refer to Republicanism (*gonghe*), Communism (*gongchan*), and joint international supervision (*gongguan*). Based on this theory, Republicanism would quickly be replaced by a Communist government, but provisional international supervision would then expel both because *Zhongguo*’s chaotic situation had proven the people of *Zhongguo* incapable of governing themselves, and the ultimate objective of Communism was “to subvert the world with violence.”⁴⁶

Zheng actually began to develop his theory after the 1911 Nationalist Revolution. This is evident in his diary entry on December 23, 1911:

41 Ibid., 1244.

42 Ibid., 1227.

43 Ibid., 1327.

44 Ibid., 1320.

45 Ibid., 1400.

46 Ibid., 2072; Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 4.

The Westerners made *Zhongguo* an international market. In the past fifty years, commercial affairs were all conducted at different treaty ports; rich merchants all relied on foreign firms to operate their business. However, the present turmoil has destroyed all these efforts, and it will not be possible to make *Zhongguo* an international market again without opening the whole country to the world. . . In the past, the state still strove for [*Zhongguo*'s] sovereignty and international status [in front of foreign powers], but [the revolutionaries] totally burned down these terms today without leaving any ash. Those who seek refuge flood into foreign concessions, unable to carve up [the regions for their own sake]. All these disasters are signs of Anarchism, something hardly able to calm without the opening of the whole country [to international supervision].⁴⁷

In these sentences, Zheng treats foreign investment and the commercialization of *Zhongguo* as causal factors for shaping the country's status in the world.

After witnessing the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and anti-foreign unrest in the early 1920s, Zheng was convinced that violence generated radical thoughts and anti-foreign sentiments, something that helped Communism attract a broader audience in the ROC:

Today's newspaper publishes an announcement of Wu Peifu [1874-1939] that supports the exclusion of foreigners in the name of protecting domestic workers. Zhang Xueliang [1901-2001] and Wang Chonghui [1881-1958] are planning to expel all the British people at Hankou and reclaim the city's foreign concessions. The virus of Communism has infected these people, making the political claims of the south and the north today a homogeneous entity. However, their arrogance and ignorance perhaps even surpass the Boxers; Heaven is now making international supervision a reality.⁴⁸

Zheng made the above assertions in his diary on January 14, 1927. For him, Republicanism's evolvement into Communism was a predestined result given its support for a short-sighted nationalism at the cost of *Zhongguo*'s economic development. Thus, after noting the arrival of British and American defence troops in Shanghai because of the Nationalist's Northern Expedition on January 26, 1927, Zheng proudly wrote in his diary that "Communism destroys Republicanism, and international supervision destroys Communism. I have said this for many years, and it will become a reality soon."⁴⁹

"ALMOST THE TIME FOR *ZHONGGUO* TO OPEN ITS DOOR TO THE WORLD":
MANCHUKUO, JAPAN, AND ZHENG XIAOXU'S INTERPRETATION OF
THE OPEN DOOR

Although the Qing Dynasty's collapse in 1912 disrupted Zheng Xiaoxu's ambitious railway projects in Manchuria and Mongolia, and the ROC managed to survive the 1920s, Japan's invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 reignited Zheng's passion for the revival of *Zhongguo* as an international market. Although describing Japan as a "hostile state" in his diary on September 21, 1931, Zheng at the same time also believed that the country could help open up *Zhongguo* by making Manchuria and Inner Mongolia "an independent state."⁵⁰ As stated on October 7, 1931, Zhang viewed temporary international assistance as central to the prosperity of a revived *Zhongguo*, and the former Qing emperor Puyi would then serve as the leader again because he was not an aggressive person who desired to disrupt the world's peace:

Both the ROC and the Nationalist Party are collapsing, so it is almost the time for *Zhongguo* to open its door to the world. Who could serve as the director of *Zhongguo*'s opening projects? I believe there are two candidates in Asia: the Japanese Emperor [Hirohito;

47 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 1373.

48 Ibid., 2130.

49 Ibid., 2131.

50 Ibid., 2342.

1901-89] and the Xuantong Emperor [Puyi]. However, if the Japanese Emperor proposes the time of *Zhongguo's* opening in front of the world, how would other countries react? Will they simply endorse the idea without considering Japan an occupying force? . . . In my opinion, the Xuantong Emperor is the best choice because he had lost his power for two decades, and a powerless individual like him does not necessarily hold racial and national prejudices, let alone the ambition of using force to bully weaker powers. To me, international supervision will take place in *Zhongguo* after the demise of Republicanism and Communism, and [the re-enthronement of] the Xuantong Emperor is the key to make this happen. If successful, *Zhongguo's* opening will be the fortune of the humankind because racial discrimination and international clashes will eventually, unconsciously disappear, [. . .] and the principles of Confucius and Mencius will become popular around the world as well.⁵¹

Here Zheng argues Japan's significance to the re-enthronement of Puyi in terms of the internationalization of *Zhongguo*. His comparison of Puyi and Hirohito deserves attention because this implies that Japan valued *Zhongguo's* righteousness and benevolence in Zheng's eyes, otherwise he would not imagine entrusting *Zhongguo's* future to Japan in his writing. In fact, Zheng already planned to use Japan to destroy the ROC in 1928, as he sailed to Tokyo from Shanghai in August that year with his first son Zheng Chui (1887-1933), "to persuade the officials in [the Japanese] imperial court of the necessity of the Qing Dynasty's revival," recalled the first director of Manchukuo's General Affairs Board, Komai Tokuzô (1885-1961).⁵² In his diary on October 13, 1928, Zheng recorded a visit of two Japanese military officials from the General Staff Office in Tokyo. They asked Zheng if he "[had] the determination of revival," encouraging him to "speak out [his] demands without hesitation." Zheng responded that he was "analyzing the strategy of [*Zhongguo's*] future opening," and that he would "absolutely ask for [Japan's help] at a right moment."⁵³ Treating the Japanese Kantô Army's conquest of Manchuria in 1931 as a "right moment" for *Zhongguo's* openness, Zheng's utopian vision motivated him to participate in the creation of Manchukuo with the Japanese in March 1932.

As the Prime Minister of Manchukuo, Zheng envisioned an Open Door policy that would actively seek out foreign operation of the country's industry and business. In comparison to the Qing Dynasty, the newly established Manchukuo was much weaker given its confined territory, scattered population, and limited financial power. On the first anniversary of Manchukuo's creation on March 1, 1933, Zheng stated that given Manchuria's "recent recovery from military unrest," it was "absolutely not realistic for the local population to develop the region based on their own power."⁵⁴ To overcome this plight, it was necessary for the government to "entrust its various industries to foreign capital and manpower." Deeming Manchukuo a "dried river that could not float any boats" and foreign investment the "water that could save that river from drought," Zheng concluded that "richer people are always those who have more ideas and ways to operate their own business."⁵⁵ If Zheng's envisioned Open Door in the late Qing era focused mainly on the use of foreign investment to develop *Zhongguo's* communications, his enthusiasm for international supervision after 1911 motivated him to entrust all of Manchukuo's riches to foreign investors. This is evident in a conversation on Oc-

51 Ibid., 2344-45.

52 Komai Tokuzô, *Tairiku e no higan* [Longing for the continent] (Tokyo: Dai Nihon yûben kai kôdan-sha, 1952), 274.

53 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 2203.

54 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 99-100.

55 Ibid., 100.

tober 5, 1932 with Narita Tsutomu, the secretary of the Vice President of the Japanese Privy Council Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867-1952):

Hiranuma's secretary Narita Tsutomu visits me. . . saying that if Japan-Manchukuo joint ventures could handle all the important [commercial and industrial affairs] in the country, and the Manchukuo government could just serve as a mediator, then half of the initial officials in charge could devote their energy to somewhere else. Besides, this will further help the state simplify its government affairs and hasten the country's development. Very good, I responded. What you just said resembles the opening policy that I have designed for *Zhongguo*. If Manchukuo's various industries could absorb the world's capital, Asia will become a manipulator of this world one day. I want to carry out your plan within the next six months by entrusting the country's profit-related rights to [Manchurian and Japanese] capitalists through official contracts; I am confident that this country will become a paradise within the next several years. You should go and persuade Mutō [Mutō Nobuyoshi (1868-1933), the Kantō Army's Commander in Chief] right now; you can say this is my plan.⁵⁶

Besides revealing his intention to reduce state intervention in Manchukuo's economy and industry, this conversation has two important messages. First, Zheng's association of Narita's suggestion with his "opening" ideals in the late Qing era reveals the consistency of his political ideas. Second, and more important, it suggests that Zheng treated Manchukuo as the orthodox governing institution—or *zhengtong*—of *Zhongguo*. Even if the Qing Dynasty, the former *zhengtong* of *Zhongguo*, required foreign assistance to develop its economy and communications, it was thus more than necessary for Manchukuo, a "desolate region" that lacked both money and manpower in Zheng's words, to accept international supervision and investment.⁵⁷ Cooperation with Japan in this case was an important step towards attracting foreign attention because in October 1932 other countries, except for Japan and El Salvador, had yet to acknowledge the legitimacy of Manchukuo.

Besides Sino-Japanese cultural proximity and concern over Manchukuo's lack of allies, Zheng Xiaoxu's long-term interaction with Japan also motivated him to treat the country as a reliable partner for *Zhongguo*'s opening. Having served as a consular official in Japan, in Tokyo, Osaka, and Kobe between May 29, 1891 and August 16, 1894, Zheng had close personal relationships with the Meiji political elite, like Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909), Mutsu Munemitsu (1844-97), and Enomoto Takeaki (1836-1908). Appreciating Japan's material achievements since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, his interactions with Japanese helped him understand their nation and its culture. In exchange, these Japanese political elites also tried to understand the Qing Dynasty by communicating with Zheng and his colleagues.⁵⁸ In 1904, when he served as the Minister of Border Defense of the southern frontier province of Guangxi, Zheng personally subsidized "eight clever and young local elites" to "study agriculture and craft" in Japan. He also planned to send "twelve talented and polite children" to Japan annually for study, expecting these students to turn Guangxi into a "prosperous and polite region" after their graduation.⁵⁹ Because Japan was the only foreign country that Zheng visited throughout his life, he was more inclined to reference Japan's experiences in the Meiji era for his own opening project for *Zhongguo*.

It is important to see Zheng's position from the perspective of a late Qing worldview, especially as reflected by the famed late Qing official Zhang

56 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 2413.

57 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 100.

58 Xu Linjiang, *Zheng Xiaoxu qian bansheng pingzhuan* [Commentary biography of Zheng Xiaoxu's early life] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2003), 50-75.

59 Ibid., 150.

Zhidong (1837-1909) who in 1898 had already stressed the importance of openness to the development of Japan from “a small nation” to “the strongest power in the East.”⁶⁰ As a private consultant, Zheng participated in planning “almost all the political, economic, and cultural activities” of Zhang Zhidong between 1895 and 1903, likely influencing the ways in which Zheng viewed the country.⁶¹ Hence, despite Sino-Japanese hostility in Manchukuo in the early 1930s due to the significant portion of Japanese among the regime’s officials, and policies that favored the Japanese while discriminating against the Manchurians, Zheng believed that they would gradually “end up cooperating with each other through reconciliation and trust” because Manchurians and Japanese shared similar objectives.⁶² For him, “it is impossible [for Manchurian and Japanese officials] to get along with each other without respecting each other’s morality and personality.”⁶³ In a letter of April 10, 1932, one of Zheng’s friends encouraged him to “respect [the people of *Zhongguo*’s] popular will; do not advocate for the abolition of racial and national boundaries.” Zheng commented on this letter with one sentence in his diary: “Should we then equate the expulsion of Japanese [from *Zhongguo*] with the popular will [of the people of *Zhongguo*]”?⁶⁴

“THE MEANS TO GOVERN *ZHONGGUO* AND EDUCATE THE PEOPLE”: THE
INFLUENCE OF *RUJIA* AND THE KINGLY WAY IN THE EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the preface of Zheng Xiaoxu’s 1934 monograph *Wangdao guankui*, an editorial of the General Affairs Board’s intelligence department conceptualizes the Kingly Way as the “fundamental [guiding principle] of [Manchukuo’s] foundation” and describes Zheng as the policy’s “first proponent.”⁶⁵ Known as *wangdao* in Chinese and *ôdô* in Japanese, the Kingly Way was originally a theory promoted by Mencius, pertaining to a monarch who was responsible to “exercise virtuous rule by respecting the people’s will.”⁶⁶ Benevolence is central to this theory, which is antithetical to the use of force to make one comply, known as *badao* in Chinese and *hadô* in Japanese.⁶⁷ Hence, *wangdao* or the Kingly Way literally means “the way of benevolence,” while *badao* means “the way of force.”

For Mencius, benevolence was more effective than force for a monarch to govern a country, based on the examples of the Shang Dynasty (c. 1600-1046 BCE) and the Zhou Dynasty because the founders of both dynasties unified *Zhongguo* with the support of the people without possessing an especially strong army. Governing a country with force cannot win its people’s hearts,

60 Zhang Zhidong, *Quanxue pian* [Exhortation to study], ed. Li Zhongxing (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998), 116.

61 Xu Linjiang, *Pingzhuan*, 76.

62 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 2376.

63 *Ibid.*, 2415.

64 *Ibid.*, 2376-7. International supervision and investment and the cultural development of *Zhongguo* are not conflicting ideas for Zheng, as this section has suggested that Zheng deemed international investment a way to realize the co-management of *Zhongguo* by major world powers given the country’s perceived chaotic status. As the coming sections suggest, Zheng believed that the involvement of international powers in Manchukuo could hasten the development and spread of *Zhongguo*’s inherited culture and morality.

65 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 1.

66 Janis Mimura, *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 53.

67 Mengzi, *Mengzi*, vol. 1, 74.

for those who follow a tyrant merely wait for an opportunity to overthrow the regime:

Those who rely on force to conquer territory in the name of benevolence could become the overlord of everyone else. However, to practice the way of force, one has to be backed up by a strong state first. In contrast, those who practice morality and benevolence could easily win the people's hearts, and this governing method does not necessarily require force to protect one's country. Tang established the Shang Dynasty with his seventy square miles of land, and King Wen [of Zhou] laid the foundation of the Zhou Dynasty with his hundred square miles of land [because they practiced the Kingly Way]. Force is not able to secure the hearts of others, as the subjugated masses do not dare to resist simply due to their lack of power. In contrast, benevolence is more reliable to attract others, just like the seventy students of Confucius who voluntarily followed his moral precepts.⁶⁸

Associating the establishment of the Shang Dynasty and the Zhou Dynasty with the practice of the Kingly Way, Mencius argued for the significance of morality rather than force to the stability of a state.

Interpreting Mencius's ideas two thousand years later, Zheng Xiaoxu distilled Mencius's notion of the Kingly Way into several sentences:

The Kingly Way was the means for benevolent monarchs in ancient times to govern *Zhongguo* and educate the people, gradually making everyone follow their rules voluntarily. This theory was meant to protect the people besides teaching them the significance of mutual respect and politeness [to stabilize the nation]. Benevolent monarchs themselves always acted and behaved based on the principles of the Kingly Way in order to serve as a model in front of everyone else, and the above reasons explain why humans managed to distinguish themselves from animals.⁶⁹

Zheng's description reveals that in his view morality was the dominant governing ideal of traditional Han society, and that the personality of monarchs could determine a dynasty's fate. In the words of Japanese journalist and Sinologist Tachibana Shiraki (1881-1945), the Kingly Way was a "political ideal that rests on the shoulders of religious beliefs" because "politics had yet to distinguish itself from religion, morality and economy [when this ideology was introduced] over two thousand years ago."⁷⁰

Rujia, which served as the ideological body of the Kingly Way, experienced dramatic changes of evaluation among the intellectuals of *Zhongguo* in the early Republican era. In 1915, publication of the periodical *Qingnian zazhi* (*Youth magazine*) by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) co-founder Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) placed *Rujia* in an unfavorable light. In the preface of the magazine's first issue, "Jinggao qingnian" [A respectful notification to the youth (of *Zhongguo*)], Chen criticized *Rujia* and encouraged young people to embrace "freedom rather than slavery; progress rather than conservatism; activism rather than retirement; internationalism rather than isolationism; practical interest rather than void rhetoric; and scientism rather than utopianism."⁷¹ Deeming the familial system of *Rujia* as the source of monarchical dictatorship in *Zhongguo*, the nationalist scholar Wu Yu (1872-1949), in his articles in *Qingnian zazhi*, contended that children's unconditional submission to their parents obliterated their dignity and independent status.⁷² Hu Shi (1891-1969) advocated for the replacement of classical language in writ-

68 Ibid.

69 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 9.

70 Tachibana Shiraki, *Shina shisō kenkyū* [A study of Chinese ideologies] (Tokyo: Nihon hyōron-sha, 1936), 474.

71 Cited in Kawajiri Fumihiko, "Kin gendai" [Contemporary and modern era], in *Gaisetsu Chūgoku shisō shi* [An overview of the history of Chinese thought], ed. Yuasa Kunihiro (Kyoto: Mineruva shobō, 2010), 202.

72 Ibid., 203.

ing with the oral language of his time, believing that people's "imitation of [the written language of] ancient saints" could not "reflect the reality, thoughts, and emotion of the present era."⁷³ At the same time, historian Kawajiri Fumihiko considers the negation of *Rujia* in the late 1910s less as a by-product of the Nationalist Revolution than as a negative intellectual response to the imperial ambitions of people like Yuan Shikai (1859-1916), Zhang Xun (1854-1923), and Kang Youwei (1858-1927) since those revivalists "more or less utilized the thoughts of *Rujia*."⁷⁴

After the 1920s, however, veneration gradually replaced negation as the defining attitude of the ROC's intellectuals towards *Rujia*. Besides the demise of imperial restorations in the 1910s and 1920s, the conclusion of the First World War in 1918 was a critical reason for this change. Witnessing the depression of Europe after the war, intellectuals in both China and Japan began to re-examine the cultures of East Asia, and their explorations generated sharp debates on the advantages and shortcomings of "Eastern" and "Western" culture.⁷⁵ Contributing to the development of pan-Asianism in Japan, in China this movement cultivated a group of intellectuals who addressed themselves as "new *Rujia*," represented by Republican scholar Liang Shuming (1893-1988). In 1922, Liang advocated for a revival of *Rujia*. He equated the "cultural and artistic restoration of *Zhongguo*" with the "restoration of the people of *Zhongguo*'s personal attitudes," treating the life of Confucius and his student Yan Hui (521-481 BCE) as the right personal model for the youth of *Zhongguo*.⁷⁶ In the 1930s, Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek; 1887-1975), the President of the ROC, further provided contemporary people with an opportunity to re-evaluate *Rujia* through the promotion of politeness (*li*), righteousness (*yi*), probity (*lian*), and shame (*chi*) during the New Life Movement.⁷⁷ This changing environment not only reveals the contradictory position of *Rujia* in the early Republican era but also suggests the necessity for an examination of the role that the concept of the Kingly Way played in the shaping of the politics of contemporary China.

Due to its emphasis on the benefits of benevolent governance, the Kingly Way had a huge influence among many contemporary observers in both China and Japan in the early twentieth century. The famed thinker and reformer Kang Youwei in 1902 advocated for the abolition of national boundaries and the creation of a "public government" for the world, as he considered the unification of the world an inevitable future of mankind.⁷⁸ A public world government would replace the governance of a benevolent monarch, and "everyone would treat each other with kindness and integrity." If so, he noted, "the world would become the property of every person; this is the meaning of great unity," proposing a worldview even more utopian than the Kingly Way.⁷⁹ Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen; 1866-1925), the founder of the ROC, was likewise a firm proponent of the Kingly Way. In his words, the Kingly Way means "the use of peaceful means to appease others," viewing the

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 204-5.

75 Ibid., 205.

76 Liang Shuming, *Dong Xi wenhua jiqi zhexue* [The cultures and philosophies of the East and the West] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999), 215.

77 Kawajiri Fumihiko, "Kin gendai," 205.

78 Kang Youwei, *Datong shu* [Book of great unity] (Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1994), 86-89.

79 Ibid., 89.

ideology as “a force of nature.”⁸⁰ In a speech that he delivered in Kobe on November 28, 1924, Sun encouraged the Japanese to choose “carefully and wisely” between becoming “an accomplice of Western force” and “the guardian of Eastern benevolence,” stressing the importance of the Kingly Way to the maintenance of Sino-Japanese friendship.⁸¹ Sun’s successor, Jiang Jieshi, contended during the Chinese War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-45) that the ROC’s Three Principles of the People was “a completely peaceful [ideology that derived from] the Kingly Way” because both ideologies emphasized benevolence. Insisting that “benevolent individuals are invincible,” Jiang used the Kingly Way to stress the legitimate governing position of the ROC.⁸²

In Manchuria after 1931, the Japanese journalist Tachibana Shiraki encouraged the Kantô Army to apply the Kingly Way to rural areas by distributing power to local autonomous organizations and letting them strive for the welfare of the ordinary people.⁸³ For Tachibana, popular Manchurian social support would be the basis of Japanese political power, and local villages should serve as the generators of that support given the region’s agrarian nature.⁸⁴ Japanese nationalist scholar Yasuoka Masahiro (1898-1983) also treated the Kingly Way as an ideological weapon for Japan to use to liberate Asia from Western influence in the 1920s, insisting that “benevolent rule” should serve as the basis of Japan’s “domestic political reform and national polity.”⁸⁵ After the creation of Manchukuo in 1932, Yasuoka invoked Mencius’s notion of benevolent rulers as “men of character,” hoping that Japan’s “men of character” would bring “about peace and stability [in Manchukuo] by cultivating the people and raising them to a more noble personal existence.”⁸⁶ Similar to Kiri Paramore’s argument that Confucianism had different forms of manifestation in traditional Asian societies, individuals in the early twentieth century interpreted the Kingly Way differently based on their own needs and objectives. All the above-mentioned figures tried to renew the ideas of *Rujia* and adapt them to a multi-national and cultural world order that Confucius or other representative thinkers of *Rujia* never contemplated.

“USING THE LOVE OF ONE’S OWN COUNTRY FOR SUBSTANCE AND UNIVERSAL
LOVE FOR PRACTICE”: PRACTICING ZHENG’S INTERPRETATION OF
THE KINGLY WAY

Different from the above figures who approached the Kingly Way mainly through an abstract theoretical level, Zheng Xiaoxu went further by casting the ideology as a fundamental national policy along with his envisioned

80 Sun Zhongshan, *Sun Zhongshan quanji* [Complete works of Sun Zhongshan], eds. Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan jindai shi yanjiusuo Zhonghua minguo shi yanjiushi, vol. 9 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), 186, 215.

81 Ibid., vol. 11, 409.

82 Jiang Jieshi, *Zongtong Jiang gong yanlun zongji* [Complete collection of President Jiang’s words], ed. Qin Xiaoyi, vol. 7 (Taipei: Zhongyang dangshi weiyuanhui, 1984), 149.

83 Shimizu Ryōtarō, “Manshūkoku tōchi kikō ni okeru senden senbu kōsaku” [About the ruling institution of Manchukuo’s propagandizing and appeasing activities], *Senshi kenkyū nenpō* [Annual report of the study of war histories] 17 (2014): 52.

84 Lincoln Li, *The China Factor in Modern Japanese Thought: The Case of Tachibana Shiraki, 1881-1945* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 62-63.

85 Roger H. Brown, “Visions of a Virtuous Manifest Destiny: Yasuoka Masahiro and Japan’s Kingly Way,” in *Pan-Asianism in Modern Japanese History: Colonialism, Regionalism and Borders*, eds. Sven Saaler and J. Victor Koschmann (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 136.

86 Ibid., 141.

Open Door for the new state of Manchukuo, trying to establish a causal relationship between the two. In his speech at a celebration for Japan's recognition of Manchukuo on October 8, 1932, Zheng referenced the traditional Han male maturity ceremony, *guanli* (the hat wearing ritual), to describe the relationship between the newly established Manchukuo and the world. In traditional Han society, boys symbolized their passage to adulthood at the age of twenty through the ritual of hat wearing. Under the witness of numerous guests, parents at this ceremony put a hat on the head on their son, signifying the "relinquishment of [the son's] childhood immaturity and the beginning of the cultivation of his adulthood morality," underscoring the point that only virtuous adults were eligible to handle their family matters, including receiving the visits of guests.⁸⁷ To ensure the understanding of his listeners, Zheng described Manchukuo as a twenty-year-old man who recently experienced the ritual of hat wearing and "opening up" as his greeting of guests, stating: "Thus a country's foundation resembles a young man who recently becomes an adult, as it will be capable of communicating with foreign countries after the restoration of its domestic order and the creation of its various governing institutions."⁸⁸ The ritual of hat wearing, however, did not necessarily guarantee the successful cultivation of one's upright character. Continuing the metaphor to the new state, Zheng asserted in an undated manuscript in 1932, that to realize this goal of governance adulthood and to "spread Manchukuo's reputation to the world," the cultivation of civilians' morality was likewise an important subject for the state because "*Zhongguo's* erstwhile morality had been totally destroyed by the Nationalist and Communist parties in the past twenty years."⁸⁹

Japan in that sense would serve as an example for Manchukuo, as the contributing factor for Japan's "political and military reputation in the world after the twentieth century" was its "erstwhile morality," while the "national destruction of *Zhongguo* was "evil karma" for its loss of morality."⁹⁰ To protect the newly revived *Zhongguo* from decadence again, international support was necessary. At the same time, it was also imperative for the state to make a set of instructive moral principles for its people and make them willing to treat foreigners with honesty, following Japan's path to prosperity. On June 3, 1932, two Japanese men visited Zheng, inviting him to record his lectures on "the Kingly Way and the Open Door onto phonograph records" for future reference.⁹¹ Although Zheng did not mention their full names and occupations, nor if he accepted their request or not, this event shows that contemporaries acknowledged Zheng's insistence on the Open Door and the Kingly Way as closely related policies instead of random whimsical ideas.

Instead of a regression to monarchical dictatorship, Zheng Xiaoxu's Kingly Way was intended as a customized moral rulebook for an internationalized new state. A benevolent monarch, or "[man] of character" in the words of Yasuoka Masahiro, was core to the Kingly Way in the principles of *Rujia*. Zheng, however, stated that his Kingly Way policy aimed at a "gradual eradication of government power through the cultivation of regional autonomy"; the later also resonated with the ideal of Tachibana Shiraki.⁹² Zheng

87 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 83.

88 Ibid., 83-84.

89 Ibid., 47-48, 85.

90 Ibid., 48.

91 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 2387.

92 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 103-104.

refrained from focusing on the behavior of powerful individuals, and instead made the Kingly Way a more universal matter through a re-interpretation of the *Rujia* term *keji fuli*. Coined by Confucius in a dialogue with Yan Hui, the term originally meant to restrain one's behavior and to obey the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty.⁹³ Zheng reinterpreted *li* (rituals [of the Zhou Dynasty]) by suggesting that morality matters to everyone in the modern world, and one should understand the term *fuli* in the present day as recovering the moralities of *Zhongguo*: in order to gain support and respect from others, one has to behave properly.⁹⁴

Although this idea may seem simple in comparison to the principles that Confucius and Mencius introduced, Zheng insisted that mutual respect was an essential component of Kingly Way politics since conflicts would cease to exist if everyone respected each other as how they should respect their parents. In his own words, "people's heartfelt embrace [of Kingly Way morality]" would lead to a "universal peace [in *Zhongguo*]," and the restoration of peace signified "the successful implementation of the Kingly Way."⁹⁵ In order to cultivate people's goodwill, "benevolence and righteousness need to serve as the basis of [Manchukuo's] national education" because:

Benevolent individuals never fail to strive for [the fortunes of] others because they have enthusiasm in heart, and righteous individuals are capable of rescuing others due to compassion and courage. If everyone in this country could possess these qualities, then we could just stand and observe the incoming successful implementation of the Kingly Way.⁹⁶

Benevolence and righteousness were the imagined cultural essences of *Zhongguo* for Zheng, and an upright person with these qualities would not feel affronted or threatened in front of foreigners. Expecting everyone to behave properly does not necessarily suggest the Kingly Way's unrealistic nature, as Zheng noted, in a manuscript on June 9, 1932, that quality discrepancy was a defining feature of human beings given the simultaneous existence of "wise, foolish, upright, and indolent individuals" in any place and time. To prevent "foolish and indolent individuals from contending for their personal interests," it was necessary to "entrust the [responsibility of enlightenment] to wise and honest individuals."⁹⁷ An opened Manchukuo required an opened mind: "If you do not deceive me, I do not have to be suspicious of you; this is how a country manages to develop itself," concluded Zheng.⁹⁸

Besides recovering the lost moralities of *Zhongguo*, Zheng argued that the Kingly Way would eventually cease all the armed conflicts in the world as long as Manchukuo continued to accept foreign assistance. According to Zheng, patriotism generated militarism, and militarism was the cause of war. Xenophobia was the basis of patriotism, something that ambitious national leaders frequently exploited to militarize society because they were "reluctant to see their countries falling behind others."⁹⁹ As for the reason why many countries still embraced militarism when the majority of them already realized its destructive forces in the early 1930s, Zheng suggested that national dignity was significant, as policy-makers often "confused compromise with

93 Yuan Qingde, *Lunyu tongshi* [A thorough interpretation of the *Analects*] (Changchun: Jilin daxue chubanshe, 2009), 252.

94 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 2.

95 Ibid., 3, 9.

96 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 159.

97 Ibid., 35.

98 Ibid., 36.

99 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 1.

fear and cowardice." Hence, they were not willing to step down during conflicts.¹⁰⁰

Using Switzerland as an example, Zheng argued that smaller and non-militarized countries were more likely to generate peace because strong powers often tend to "preserve the independence of their adjacent smaller countries to prevent direct confrontations with their rivals."¹⁰¹ Although not suggested directly in his monograph, Zheng was convinced that Switzerland's open nature, in addition to its non-militarized nature, made the country "the venue of the [1923] Treaty of Lausanne and the [1925] Geneva Protocol."¹⁰² In comparison with Switzerland, Manchukuo had another advantage—the Kingly Way ideology. Because the Kingly Way prioritized "universal love, politeness and righteousness" and devalued patriotism, it thus served as a "medicine to save [the world] from destruction," especially when all the world's major powers could witness these moralities through their participation in the development of Manchukuo's resources.¹⁰³ To that end, Zheng wanted to develop Manchuria as the Switzerland of East Asia, suggesting:

If there is a new state established with the principles of the Kingly Way in Asia today, it would benefit all the major powers in the world. Even if this new state does not possess any weapons and soldiers, all the powers in the world would serve as its protective forces because it would not be possible for any country to justify its invasion of this state.¹⁰⁴

Unlike the famed writer Lu Xun (1881-1936), who mocked the Kingly Way as an action "to stay away from the slaughterhouse due to compassion while chewing a piece of pork in one's mouth at the same time," the eradication of soldiers was a future goal for Zheng.¹⁰⁵ In the section on "Answering Others' Questions on the Kingly Way" (*Wangdao huowen*) in his monograph *Wangdao guankui*, Zheng agreed that "it is indeed not possible for [a country] to survive without self-protective forces in the present era of annexation."¹⁰⁶ In a speech to Manchukuo's army in 1932, Zheng deemed "the awareness of shame" an indispensable quality for soldiers because those who have a sense of honor "never flinch in front of powerful enemies or hesitate in front of difficulties."¹⁰⁷ Zheng in these sentences argued for the necessity of resistance when facing unjustified harassment, but based on the above analysis, he was more willing to treat foreign countries' joint assistance as the armed force of Manchukuo, expecting the world to value the Kingly Way and appreciate Manchukuo's gradual demilitarization. Even Jiang Jieshi would agree with Zheng's words, as Jiang insisted that although "*Zhongguo* never advocates for the invasion and oppression of foreign countries given its consistent embrace of the Kingly Way," the government of *Zhongguo* "must possess the power to resist those who invade and oppress *Zhongguo* in order to realize genuine peace."¹⁰⁸ From Zheng's perspective, it was not possible to convince the world of the Kingly Way's rationale without first demonstrating Manchukuo's sincerity to the world through an Open Door policy.

100 Ibid., 11.

101 Ibid., 4.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 1, 4.

104 Ibid., 4.

105 Lu Xun, "Wangdao shihua" [Notes on the Kingly Way], in *Lu Xun quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun], ed. Lu Xun xiansheng jinian weiyuanhui, vol. 4 (Shanghai: Lu Xun quanji chubanshe, 1938), 463.

106 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Wangdao guankui*, 4.

107 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 56.

108 Jiang Jieshi, *Zongji*, vol. 3, 115.

Although the Kingly Way in the early 1930s almost functioned, in the words of historian Thomas DuBois, as a “state religion” for Manchukuo, Zheng Xiaoxu never imagined assimilating the world with the Kingly Way, nor did he ambitiously plan to use the ideology to control others’ thoughts.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned above, many idealists in both China and Japan in the early twentieth century referenced the philosophy of *Rujia* for their own nationalistic and pan-nationalistic agendas. Kang Youwei described the creation of a state as “a helpless strategy for self-defence in a chaotic era,” deeming a state “the most hazardous concept in a peaceful era given its inclination for plunder and killing.”¹¹⁰ Referencing the *Rujia* notion of great unity, his ultimate objective was to create a unified and equal society for everyone in this world “without [the manipulation of] state and monarch.”¹¹¹ Sun Zhongshan, meanwhile, contended before a Japanese audience in Kobe that “the morality [of the East] is far superior to the West,” dichotomizing Asian benevolence and Western violence.¹¹² Zheng nevertheless opposed both Kang’s and Sun’s claims, as shown in his 1932 manuscript, “Bo’ai yu aiguo bian” (Debating universal love and love of one’s own country). Considering these two points he argues:

Is universal love and the love of one’s own country the same thing? I must say they are different things. Is it possible for universal love and the love of one’s own country to coexist or not? The answer is negative. Then is it possible for people to adopt one and give up the other? I would still say no. Then what should we do? I suggest using the love of one’s own country for substance and universal love for practice. In that sense, those who love their own country would also manage to love the outsiders. Even if a saint resurrects now, he would still agree with my words.¹¹³

Here Zheng imitated the sentence structure of a popular saying during the Self-strengthening Movement between the 1860s and the 1890s: “Chinese learning for substance; Western learning for practice.” Zheng implied an apparent distinction between self and other, encouraging his audience to respect the righteous and benevolent culture of *Zhongguo* before learning to care about the livelihoods of foreigners, as the latter was a guaranteed result of the former. This resonates with his analogy of the ritual of hat wearing since only righteous adults who knew how to respect their own family members truly understood the manners of hospitality.

For Zheng, any country that valued peace and cooperation deserved to coexist with *Zhongguo*—mental superiority or inferiority was beyond his concern. Expecting to cooperate with the outside world and receive the investment and supervision of foreign countries, he also refrained from overly adapting the *Rujia* concept of “world”—*tianxia* (all under the heaven)—to the multi-cultural international order of his time because a reckless claim for a Sino-centric world order would generate confrontation rather than cooperation. Although the principles of *Rujia*, including the Kingly Way, often served as a tool that monarchs and powerful scholarly factions in history exploited to advance their own interests, as Lin Chih-hung notes, Zheng regarded the ideology as a guiding moral principle, not a mental subjugation of the people.¹¹⁴ In the opening speech that he delivered at a meeting of

109 Thomas DuBois, *Empire and the Meaning of Religion in Northeast Asia: Manchuria, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 121.

110 Kang Youwei, *Datong shu*, 86.

111 Ibid., 89.

112 Sun Zhongshan, *Quanji*, vol. 11, 409.

113 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 141.

114 Lin Chih-hung, *Minguo*, 343.

Manchukuo's Department of Education in 1933, Zheng encouraged the participants to "carefully analyze the ways of teaching the Kingly Way" in schools. He wanted relevant textbooks to possess "elements of excitation and inspiration," making students and ordinary people understand the significance of "benevolence and righteousness" in a "pleasant and impressive learning environment."¹¹⁵ In the end, Zheng let the participants "freely express [their] own opinions," promising to value "any doable suggestions that [complied with] this goodwill."¹¹⁶ From here, one could realize that Zheng intended to play his role as a mediator rather than a dictator. A sentence from his poem "Wangdao" helps summarize this point: "How am I different from an old horse that knows the correct way; yet I willingly point to the flat road in front and await for the arrival of heroes."¹¹⁷

"IS HEAVEN THE ONLY ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS ME": THE FAILURE OF
ZHENG'S NATIONAL PROJECTS

On May 22, 1935, Manchukuo's newspapers reported Zheng's resignation from the Prime Ministership on the previous day and introduced readers to his successor, Zhang Jinghui (1872-1959), the head of the Senate and Minister of the Military Department.¹¹⁸ John Gunther suggests that although "for a time [Zheng] worked well with the Japanese," he eventually "came to detest them" and resigned.¹¹⁹ Zheng might not have detested the Japanese when he lost his power, but the Kantô Army's casual attitude towards practicing his envisioned Open Door and Kingly Way in the previous three years certainly disappointed him. Prasenjit Duara notes that one of the major problems of Manchukuo's Chinese-speaking government leaders was that, "they could not. . . build a strong nationalist identity that either excluded the interests of Japan or compromised the ingrained colonial sense of superiority among the Japanese in the region."¹²⁰ Zheng's Prime Ministership between 1932 and 1935 failed to unite Manchurians and Japanese under a shared moral banner because Japanese decision-makers in the Kantô Army were not interested in helping him develop Manchukuo as another government of *Zhongguo*. Treating the regime as a laboratory, the Kantô Army's imperative concern was the creation of an "autarkic sphere that included a pan-Asianist alliance, the yen bloc, and new strategies of development and mobilization" in East Asia, while the Japanese home government cared more about "what the attitude of that [the Manchukuo] government should be toward Japan's vested interests in Manchuria."¹²¹ Thus, Zheng miscalculated Japanese ambitions in the early 1930s.

Zheng's miscalculation of—or reluctance to explore—Japanese intentions owed much to his eagerness to prove, before his death, Manchukuo's rightful position in the history of *Zhongguo* and his desire to strive for the greater good of *Zhongguo*. The combination of these goals was framed by his

115 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 95.

116 Ibid., 96.

117 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Haicanglou shiji* [Haicanglou poetry collection], ed. Yang Xiaobo and Huang Shen (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2003), 409.

118 "Zheng Zongli dachen cizhi pizhun" [Prime Minister Zheng Xiaoxu's resignation has been approved], *Datong bao* [Great unity herald] (May 22, 1935): 2.

119 Gunther, *Inside Asia*, 153.

120 Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 248.

121 Ibid., 246; Akagi, "Japan and the Open Door," 55.

belief that the Manchukuo state could represent orthodox legitimacy, or *zhengtong*. As suggested at the beginning of this study, *zhengtong* was an important idea for the rulers and the bureaucrats of former dynasties. Nonetheless, attempted to define Manchukuo as *zhengtong* also presented some problems. As articulated in an essay *Zhengtong lun xia* by the famed Song Dynasty scholar Ouyang Xiu (1007-72), *zhengtong* was closely related to the unification of *Zhongguo* under one regime:

We can call those who resided in the center of the world [*tianxia*] and who assimilated the surrounding kingdoms into one entity *zhengtong*. We can also deem those who resided in the center of the world and who were determined to unify the surrounding kingdoms *zhengtong*. Even those who originated in a remote place yet managed to become the overlord of the world could be an example of *zhengtong*. When the world lacks order and a monarch due to the rise of rebels and bandits, *zhengtong* does not belong to any forces, and this kind of situation makes it possible for multiple heroes to rise at a similar time and divide the world into different regions with their respective supporters. Ideally, a big and strong force would eventually assimilate all the other forces and become the *zhengtong* [of *Zhongguo*], but sometimes it is possible that no one is able to conquer the others, and all the dividing forces are loyal practitioners of [*Zhongguo*'s] righteousness. How would we determine which particular force represents *zhengtong* in that case? Would we consider a frontier force that fails to unify the world *zhengtong*? We would not. If this situation happens one day, *zhengtong* would lose its internal value for a while [until the rise of another unifying force].¹²²

Apparently, Manchukuo would not fit into any of the above categories of *zhengtong* if it did not plan to recover the former territories of the Qing Dynasty and destroy the ROC. Lin Chih-hung notes that Zheng frequently included the term *shoujing* (retrieving the capital [Beijing]) in his later-life poems, testifying to Zheng's anxiety about shaping Manchukuo's legitimate governance.¹²³

To prevent the rise of another competitor for *zhengtong* in places like Outer Mongolia and Xinjiang, Zheng had to use the Japanese in Manchukuo and convince himself that they were reliable allies. His conversation with the Japanese House of Representatives member Kōno Ichirō (1898-1965) on October 5, 1932 supports this point. Kōno complained about "Japanese officials' occupation of [Manchukuo's] important [government] positions" and lamented that, "how could we consider the [Japanese] grasp of [Manchukuo's] rights and power a righteous action?" Zheng praised Kōno's words as "the most honest and selfless discourse" that he had heard since the regime's creation, but he was "deeply convinced" that since Japan "righteously expressed its [willingness to assist] Manchukuo first," the country "must not plan to snatch [Manchukuo's] interests from behind." In the end, Zheng encouraged Kōno to develop his words "into public opinion" after his return to Japan, so that "the whole world would trust [Japan's determination to assist Manchukuo]." ¹²⁴

Unfortunately for Zheng, "The way of benevolence," or the "Kingly Way" (*wangdao*), in reality, had often served more as a thin veneer or decoration over a hard core of "the way of force" (*badao*) for the Japanese decision-makers in Manchukuo; this more or less resembles the subordination of "morality" (*de*) to "authoritarianism" (*wei*) in the political history of China especially after the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE). Although Zheng revealed his awareness of this problem in the above conversation, he had arguably failed to generate

122 Ouyang Xiu, *Zhengtong lun xia* [On the discourse of *zhengtong*, part two], cited in Hayashi Fumitaka, "Seitō ni tsuite," 96.

123 Lin Chih-hung, *Minguo*, 340.

124 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Riji*, 2413.

a proper solution for this millennial conundrum (in other words, how to balance morality and domination) in his lifetime. Becoming the Prime Minister of Manchukuo at the age of seventy-two, though, did not leave Zheng enough time to strive to restore the fortune of *Zhongguo* using Japanese support while developing strategies to deal with potential Japanese dictatorship in the state of Manchukuo at the same time. Regarding the former as his lifetime mission and the latter as a gamble, Zheng forced himself to abandon any suspicion of the Kantô Army's ambitions for practical purposes.

The Kantô Army likely forced Zheng to resign in May 1935, as his dedication to *Zhongguo* contradicted the Army's ambition to turn Manchukuo into a pawn of a Japan-led new East Asian order. For one thing, Zheng's support for equal international trading opportunities in Manchukuo threatened Japan's vested interests there. In a 1933 article Roy Akagi contends that Japan had a "more favorably situated [position] than other powers" in Manchuria, and "should have a relatively larger trade [there]. . . for obvious economic reasons," and thus considered Japan's favorable position in Manchuria "inevitable and logical."¹²⁵

Zheng's ideological identification with *Zhongguo* also threatened Japan's supervising position in Manchukuo. Komai Tokuzô in 1944 proudly reviewed his "unspeakable and bitter struggles" for Japanese officials' positions in the government of Manchukuo in 1932. He was satisfied to see Japanese become "the supporting pillars" of the regime twelve years later because the regime "could not prosper without [the participation of] Japanese officials."¹²⁶ Later in 1952, Komai noted his displeasure when cooperating with Zheng in the State Council between March and September 1932 due to Zheng's obsession with the revival of *Zhongguo*'s traditional order:

People like Zheng Xiaoxu who came from China proper often considered too much about the feeling of the Chinese people when making critical decisions. For instance, Zheng could not firmly appreciate Japan's recognition of Manchukuo's independent status [in 1932] because he was too sensitive to others' responses in China proper and was thus not sure if his decision would lose the heart of the people of China. Zhang Jinghui, in contrast, originated in Manchuria and cared little about China proper's gains and losses. Moreover, because he was a person who did not particularly care about things, I thought he could inherit Zheng's position [in September 1932].¹²⁷

Having close personal relationships with Kantô Army decision-makers like Koiso Kuniaki (1880-1950) and Itagaki Seishirô (1885-1948), Komai agreed that an active and thoughtful prime minister on the Manchurian side was not conducive to the cultivation of Japanese power in Manchukuo. However, the Army was cautious about maintaining its superficial friendship with Zheng because it required Zheng's support in the early 1930s. This explains why the Army dismissed Komai from the General Affairs Board in September 1932 for Zheng's sake, and why Zheng still managed to plead for the regime's autonomy in March 1934 by telling the Army to "refrain from forever treating Manchukuo as a child."¹²⁸ Having secured its stranglehold over Manchukuo by May 1935, though, the Army became less and less tolerant of dissident

¹²⁵ Akagi, "Japan and the Open Door," 61.

¹²⁶ Komai Tokuzô, *Tairiku no kokorozashi* [Insignificant aspirations for the continent] (Tokyo: Dai Nihon yûben kai kôdan sha, 1944), 215-6.

¹²⁷ Komai Tokuzô, *Higan*, 275.

¹²⁸ Nihon NHK, *Huangdi de miyue: Manzhouguo zuigao de yinmi* [The emperor's secret deals: Manchukuo's supreme hidden story], trans. Li Hongjie and Ma Jinsen; ed. Xiang Linrong (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1989), 106.

voices; this made Zheng's bid for the Open Door and the Kingly Way a dismal failure.

After his exit from the inner circle, Zheng spent the rest of his life practicing calligraphy, writing poems, and occasionally meeting Manchurian and Japanese officials. In the late morning of March 28, 1938, Zheng died in Xinjing due to a duodenal ulcer and arteriosclerosis.¹²⁹ Major Manchukuo newspapers like the *Taidong ribao* and *Datong bao* memorialized him, praising his contributions to Manchukuo's foundation. Top-level Japanese officials in the regime, such as the Kantô Army's new commander, Ueda Kenkichi (1875-1962), and the new Director of the General Affairs Board, Hoshino Naoki (1892-1978), attended Zheng's memorial ceremonies. Even the Shôwa Emperor sent a telegram from Japan to Emperor Puyi expressing his sadness over Zheng's death.¹³⁰ Japanese Foreign Minister Hirota Kôki (1878-1948) praised Zheng as a respected man with both "moral prestige and an accomplished academic career." Former commander of the Kantô Army, Hishikari Takashi (1871-1952), deemed Zheng the "model of [Manchukuo's founding] spirit."¹³¹ Zheng's funeral was held on April 20, 1938 in Xinjing, attended by over three thousand Manchukuo officials and ten thousand civilians. An editorial of the *Datong bao* conceptualized the funeral as Manchukuo's most serious ceremony.¹³² Even the municipal governments of Osaka and Tokyo organized local residents to memorialize Zheng on the day of his funeral in order to express the Japanese people's respect for him.¹³³ These memorial activities are evidence that the Japanese recognized Zheng's efforts in the early years of Manchukuo in spite of considering him a potential threat to their domination. One might argue that many Japanese officials genuinely felt the need to express their gratitude to Zheng through these ceremonies. Eventually, the Manchukuo government buried Zheng in Fengtian alongside his wife, who died ten years earlier in Shanghai.¹³⁴

Regardless of Japanese acknowledgment, Zheng was likely unsatisfied with what he had accomplished in the previous forty years, especially during his tenure as the prime minister of Manchukuo. Feeling confident about his political theories, Zheng swore at the end of his discussion on the significance of mutual trust on June 9, 1932 that he was "willing to bear all the blame from those who followed [his] words yet failed to revitalize their countries."¹³⁵ After three years of service in the state, however, few people took his persuasions seriously. To express his disappointment, Zheng in the poem "Siyue shijiu ri ci guowu Zongli deyun" (Got approval for my resignation from the Prime Minister on April 19) wrote: "Is heaven the only one who

129 "Yuanxun Zheng Xiaoxu hongqu" [Founding father Zheng Xiaoxu has passed away], *Datong bao* (March 29, 1938): 2.

130 "Youbang ai wo yuanxun Zheng Xiaoxu hongqu" [Our friendly nation expresses her sadness towards our founding father Zheng Xiaoxu's death], *Datong bao* (March 30, 1938): 2.

131 "Man Ri liangguo sunshi: Guangtian Waixiang busheng tongxi" [Manchukuo's and Japan's loss: Foreign Minister Hirota suggests sorrowfully], *Datong bao* (March 30, 1938): 2.

132 "Chaoting chuochao, quanguo xia banqi: diaoli shi yansu juxing" [The imperial court is closed, all the flags in the country fly at half-mast: the funeral is held in a serious mood], *Datong bao* (April 21, 1938): 1.

133 "Zheng Xiaoxu shi guozang, Man Ri gedi yizhi yaobai" [People across Manchukuo and Japan memorialize Zheng Xiaoxu unanimously during his funeral], *Datong bao* (April 22, 1938): 2.

134 Ye Shen, Chen Bangzhi, and Dang Xiangzhou, *Zheng Xiaoxu zhuan*, 33; Qin Hancai, *Mangong canzhao ji* [Twilight in the Manchukuo imperial palace] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1998), 126.

135 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Yanjiangji*, 38.

understands me? Asked [I in front of] the willow tree in [my] courtyard.”¹³⁶ In the poem “Yuexia” (Under the moon), Zheng lamented that: “I did not expect [until this point] that life is worse than a dream; although some believe that life is like a sweet dream, I am afraid that contradicts reality.”¹³⁷ These sentences reflect Zheng’s assessment of his seventy-six years of life. To him, even if life were a dream, it was more like a nightmare filled with bitterness. Worse, few people were willing to understand his ideals in his lifetime, so perhaps his words also served as self-deprecation regarding his past experiences. Having planned to re-establish *Zhongguo* in Manchukuo and protect the country with his interpretation of the Open Door and the Kingly Way, Zheng’s failure revealed the incompatibility between his aspirations and the objectives of Japanese imperialists in the early 1930s. In siding with an inappropriate partner for an unprecedented national project, Zheng up to his death failed to truly understand the significance of Manchukuo to Japanese military expansionism in Asia.

EPILOGUE: “TELLING THE WORLD A GOOD STORY OF *ZHONGGUO*”

In 1978, three decades after mainland China’s so-called self-sufficient isolation from Western Europe and North America under the leadership of Mao Zedong (1893-1976), his successor Deng Xiaoping (1904-97) reopened the mainland’s door to foreign investment and economic assistance through the famous policy of *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up). Resonating with Zheng Xiaoxu’s insistence on the government’s use of its administrative power to guide *Zhongguo*’s openness, Deng Xiaoping relied on his authority and personal prestige in the CCP to pacify the dissidence of “veteran conservatives” when they found “new cause for complaint” about mainland China’s opening up in the 1980s and the 1990s.¹³⁸ While the constant influx of foreign money in the past forty years contributed to the rise of the PRC as the world’s second largest economic entity, rapid economic growth in the country also inspired its people to re-evaluate the culture and morality of *Rujia*. During an academic conference in Beijing in the mid-1990s, Feng Zhaokui, the vice dean of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences’ Japanese research institution, claimed that “*Zhongguo* will not threaten the world because [the PRC] will treat Kingly Way diplomacy as [its] objective from now on.”¹³⁹ To represent its interpretation of *Zhongguo*’s authentic culture in front of foreigners, the PRC used “Confucian Institutes” as the official title of its overseas Chinese language teaching institutions. In recent years, a slogan often appears in official PRC narratives: *jianghao Zhongguo gushi* (telling [the world] a good story of *Zhongguo*). This is generally interpreted as shaping a positive image of *Zhongguo* in the world through the introduction of the country’s development and culture. Whether or not the PRC’s definition of *Zhongguo* resonates with Zheng’s concept is beyond this article’s concern, but policy-makers in the PRC today nevertheless agree that only an opened *Zhongguo* has the opportunity to spread its values to the whole world. Given the PRC’s current promotion of the principles long associated with *Rujia* and its attempt to demonstrate its soft power to the world, people in mainland China

136 Zheng Xiaoxu, *Shiji*, 428.

137 Ibid., 432.

138 Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 16.

139 Amako Satoshi, *Riben ren yanli de Zhongguo* [China in the eyes of the Japanese people], trans. Fan Li (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2006), 201.

may reignite interest in Kingly Way ideology in different ways in the near future. If that happens, more people may rediscover Zheng Xiaoxu and perhaps become willing to re-examine his significance regarding the applicability of *Rujia's* moral precepts in the early twentieth century.