

Zhou Zuoren's collaboration and the question of “shattered jade”

By Susan Daruvala

论文摘要：本文试图从两方面解释周作人与日合作的原因。首先从历史情境着手，其次爬梳周作人秉持的两个理念：独立个体的重要性、独立判断的能力。本文将讨论周作人没有离开北平的理由，以及舆论视他为‘汉奸’的始末，并对 1939 年元旦周作人谋刺事件提出不同解释。有人表示此事的动机为‘宁为玉碎不为瓦全’。本论文也引用周作人 1949 年 7 月给周恩来的信，信上重申他向来反对传统礼教的桎梏，并希望在新政府领导之下有所改变。

关键词：周作人；合作；汉奸；卢品飞；上下权威关系；伦常

This paper seeks to understand Zhou Zuoren's collaboration with the Japanese, seeing it both as the outcome of contingent decisions made in a rapidly changing historical environment and of Zhou's longstanding views on the relationship of the individual to authority.

I will begin by outlining briefly some ideas about collaboration. The historian Poshek Fu divided the choices available to literary figures who had remained in Shanghai as passivity 隐退, resistance 反抗 and collaboration 合作¹. His book presents a grim picture of the harsh economic and social reali-

1 Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai 1937-45*. (Stanford: 1993); 灰色上海 1937-45: 中国文人的隐退, 反抗与合作 (北京: 三联, 2012)

ties of the period and also brings to life the complex networks of brutality and coercion that emerged as underground agents of the Nationalist (Guomindang) Party and its intelligence agencies, the Communist Party (CCP), and those working for the Nanjing regime of Wang Jingwei 汪精卫 carried out assassinations or terrorist attacks. One aim of Fu's book is to provide a nuanced picture of how Chinese writers and publishers functioned under occupation, hence his tripartite division of choices. He is particularly concerned with what he calls "the dilemma of private and public morality: concern for family and survival" as against "patriotic commitment and dignity."² His book brings out how much "passivity," the very fact of having remained in the occupied area rather than travelling inland, required ongoing justification and self-justification. It is clear that in Fu's view public morality should always trump private morality, which contains the germs of self-interest, and this seems to have been the ideal in terms of which those of whom he writes saw the world. We could describe this ideal as the "discourse of loyalty" crystallized in the concept of *hanjian* 汉奸 (traitor), analysed by Frederick Wakeman as semantically entwining "both political treason and ethnic transgression" and equating "humankind-ness with Han-ness", as a result of which to be a *hanjian* was "to lose one's capacity for moral judgment" and be little better than an animal.³

Following fighting in north China after the Lugouqiao incident on 7 July 1937, Peking came under air attack on 26 July and fell on 28th July.⁴ Shortly thereafter the Japanese army organized a Peace Maintenance Committee 治安维持会. Peking literary figures had already been leaving for the south so that they could take part in what was heralded as an anti-Japanese war—in February that year the CCP called on the GMD to stop "civil war" (内战) in order to resist Japan.⁵

2 Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, Collaboration*, xiii

3 Frederick Wakeman, "Hanjian (Traitor)!" in Wen-Hsin Yeh ed. *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (California, 2000), 298-301.

4 Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan 1937-45*, (Penguin), 84.

Zhou Zuoren was the most prominent May Fourth intellectual and the only major writer left in Peking after 1937, the painful symbolism of which was magnified by the fact he was the younger brother of Lu Xun. After the Lugouqiao incident many Peking intellectuals left the city, but Zhou Zuoren stayed on. Zhou's failure to join the relocation of Peking University inland after the fall of Peking in July 1937 attracted widespread condemnation at the time. Eventually he took up a post in the now "puppet" Peking University in August 1939 before going on in 1941 to become Education Minister in the North China Government installed by the Japanese. After the war he was put on trial by the GMD in 1946, and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment, reduced to ten on appeal. In January 1949 the GMD president Li Zongren 李宗仁 ordered the release of political prisoners and Zhou returned to Peking in August. He spent the rest of his life working on translations from ancient Greek but he disappeared from public view. He died in 1967 while in captivity during the Cultural Revolution. In the 1980s new information about particular aspects of his life came to light, as I will detail below, but there is as yet no consensus on how to evaluate Zhou's actions, and the title of "hanjian" continues to be applied to him. His actions are also placed in a narrative framework shaped by the public appeals and statements of the Chinese intellectuals in the unoccupied areas, so that he is always found wanting against their collective voice. Following the current Ministry of Education instructions that educational texts must now date the beginning of the Anti-Japanese War from 1932, rather than 1937, signalling a harder line on the topic, it is unlikely that this will change.

Zhou been outspoken in his condemnation of Japanese militarism, warning in 1927 that although in intellectual and artistic terms no country was closer to China than Japan, in the present context "undemocratic Japan, ruled by military men and the rich and powerful is a threat and a danger to China

5 Zhang Juxiang, Zhang Tierong, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography of Zhou Zuoren), (Tianjin: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), 517.

which China must resolutely resist out of concern for its own survival.”⁶ However, in 1934, having returned from his first trip to Japan in 15 years, he suggested it was unrealistic to think China would be able to fight Japan, given that Japan had a much bigger navy.⁷ Six months later he published the first of a series of four essays titled “A personal view of Japan” (日本的管窥) in which he tried to address the disparity between the qualities he had admired in Japan, such as cleanliness and a love of beauty and the ugly face of Japanese conduct towards China. In the final article, written in July 1937, he concluded that he had failed to understand those parts of Japanese culture, such as its indigenous religious heritage which he suspected had contributed to Japan’s current policies. Presumably he meant the construction of the divine status of the emperor which was strengthened in the 1930s.

After Lu Xun’s death in October 1936 and as tension mounted with Japan, many intellectuals were anxious that Zhou Zuoren should leave Peking and come to Shanghai where his prestige would add weight to the resistance war movement. As Zhou Jianren, the third of the Zhou brothers wrote in an article in 1983, Feng Xuefeng, a literary critic and friend of Lu Xun, had toyed with the idea of sending someone from “progressive forces” to contact Zhou.⁸ Around the time of the Marco Polo Bridge incident Zheng Zhenduo 郑振铎, another important May Fourth figure suggested that the time had come to leave Peking, but Zhou disagreed on the grounds that it would be impossible to fight Japan, as Japan was already in China and “our door is wide open.” Zheng put this down to Zhou’s ‘defeatism’. Zhou had also told Zheng he was afraid that Lu Xun’s “clique,” no doubt a reference to the League of Left Wing Writers, would make things difficult for him.⁹

6 Zhou Zuoren, “An Assessment of the Expel Japan Movement” (排日平议), in Zhong Shuhe 钟叔河 ed. *Zhou Zuoren wenlei bian* 周作人文类编 (Changsha: Hunan wenyi chubanshe, 1998), vol. 7, pp. 694-695.

7 Zhou Zuoren, “Abandoning civilian life and taking up arms” (弃文就武), in Zhong ed. *Zhou Zuoren wenlei bian* 周作人文类编 vol. 10, pp. 49-52.

8 Zhou Jianren, “Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren” cited in Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 537.

Zhou's reluctance to leave Peking also had a lot to do with his family situation. He had nine dependents, including his mother, his son 丰一, his Japanese wife Hata Nobuko (羽太信子), her younger sister Hata Yoshiko (芳子) who was the abandoned wife of Zhou Jianren, Yoshiko's sons 丰二 and 丰三 and daughter 静子, plus Lu Xun's first wife Zhu An.¹⁰ There had been some uncomfortable moments in December 1936 when Zhou Jianren had come to Peking with his partner 王蕴如 with whom he had started another family in 1925, to celebrate the 80th birthday of his mother. An argument had flared between Nobuko, Yoshiko and Jianren about the Japanese presence in the three north-eastern provinces.¹¹ Other reports state that when Zhou did discuss the possibility of leaving Peking with his wife and family, Nobuko felt that it would be safer to stay than leave.¹²

Public pressure on Zhou continued. In August 1937 Guo Moruo wrote an open letter to Zhou titled "Amidst the clamour of national disaster, my thoughts of Zhitang" (国难声中怀知堂), urging him to leave Peking and come south as that would send a strong signal to the Japanese that their actions were unconscionable. In November in a letter to Tao Kangde 陶坑德, the highly successful editor and business partner of Lin Yutang, Zhou acknowledged Guo Moruo's letter but merely referred again to his "family burden" without mentioning the injunction to move south. He also asked that people should not see the professors remaining in Beijing as Li Ling 李陵, [the Han dynasty general who defected to the Xiongnu], but as Su Shi 苏轼, [the Song poet who underwent several periods of internal exile].¹³ In December he made an arrangement with the Chinese Education and Culture Foundation 中华教育文化基金会 set up by Hu Shi to translate Greek classics into Chinese.

9 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 536.

10 Wang Xirong, 王锡荣, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions about the Life of Zhou Zuoren), (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2005), p. 176.

11 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), p. 518.

12 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 537.

13 Wang, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 174-5; 张铁荣 Zhang Tierong, 周作人平议 (Zhou Zuoren: An Appraisal), rev. ed. (Shanghai: Yuandong chubanshe, 2010), 257.

He was to submit 20,000 characters each month, for which he would be paid 200 yuan. He started work on the Greek compendium of myths attributed to Apollodorus.¹⁴

In his posthumously published memoirs¹⁵, Zhou described the situation at Peking University:

After the Mukden Incident [18th Sept 1931], the whole of the Northeast fell, and the Guomindang Government took the decision to use non-resistance and preserve its strength for the civil war, whereupon the Japanese invaders nibbled away and Eastern Hebei became a war zone until the July 7th Incident (1937), when they moved to occupy Peking and Tianjin. The GMD already had a well-thought out stratagem in place and the military and political arms of government had already withdrawn and valuable cultural relics had also nearly all been shipped out, so the task that remained was to move the universities. Peking University, where I worked, moved first to Changsha, and then to Kunming where it merged with Qinghua University to form the [National Southwest Associated University] 国立西南联合大学 [known in abbreviated form as] Lianda. The full-time teaching staff were all expected to go, except for the old or infirm and those burdened by family. At that time, I was 53, so certainly not old, but I had too many dependents so I was one of those classed as unable to leave. I don't remember where it was we met, as my diary for that year has disappeared but I remember the second meeting was held on 29th November 1937 in the home of Mr Meng Xinshi (孟心史 i.e. 孟森 1868-1937). Mr Meng was already bedridden and

14 Zhang 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 542.

15 Zhou began writing his memoirs in essay form in December 1960, at the request of Cao Juren 草聚仁, the Zhejiang-born journalist and writer who moved to Hong Kong in 1950. The essays began appearing in Xin Wanbao 新晚报 in 1964 and in two volumes in 1970 as 知堂回想录 (Memories of Wisdom Studio) (HK: San Yu 三育 Stationery and Publishing Co). The earliest record I can find of a Chinese edition dates from 2002. A complete restored edition of 知堂回想录 edited by 止庵 is to be published in summer 2019.

could not get up, so we had this last meeting in his sitting room, although our host could not join us. Afterwards, Peking University decided that Meng Xinshi, Ma Youyu 马幼渔 [裕藻], Feng Hanshu 冯汉叔 [冯祖荀] and I should be designated as professors remaining in Beiping, with a monthly stipend of 50 yuan. At the end of that year, [University] President Jiang [Menglin] 蒋梦林 sent me a telegram to say that we should protect university property, but before two months had passed, Meng Xinshi had passed away.¹⁶

By the end of December, Zhou had taken one of his first actions to protect the university. He was approached by someone from the Natural Sciences Department who said Japanese troops intended to requisition the Natural Sciences Faculty building within two days. Of the four professors left, Meng Sen had already died and Ma Youyu was unwilling to be involved, so Zhou wrote a letter on behalf of himself and Feng (who was a mathematician) and they prevailed upon Tang Erhe 汤尔和, the Education Minister in the Provisional Government to speak to the Japanese commander that evening, with the result that the building was left untouched.¹⁷

However, on 9th February 1938, under the auspices of the *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun* a conference to regenerate Chinese culture (更生中国文化建设座谈会) was held in Peking, which Zhou is widely believed to have attended, along with the newly appointed President of Beida He Qigong 何其巩 and Tang Erhe. This was a game-changer, for as Zhou's *Chronological Biography* puts it, "it marked the beginning of Zhou's move to the enemy".¹⁸ On 28th April a

16 Zhou Zuoren '176: 北大的南迁' (Chapter 176: Beida moves south) in 知堂回想录 (Memories) 2: 565-566. Although the appointment of the four professors is mentioned in Gunn Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse: Chinese Literature in Shanghai and Peking 1937-45* (New York, Columbia 1980), (p. 151-2) and in Ernst Wolff's study of Zhou Zuoren (1971), both based on a letter Zhou had written published in Hong Kong in 1966, the information does not appear in either the 1985 nor the revised expanded 2000 edition of Zhou's *Nianpu*.

17 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 542.

18 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 545. "这是周作人的附逆投敌的起始."

translation of a report from the *Osaka Mainichi Shimbun* was published in Shanghai's 文摘. 战时旬刊 (The Digest: Wartime 10-day journal), together with a photograph of the gathering including Zhou. This caused immediate uproar and on 5th May the Wuhan Cultural Resistance Committee 武汉文化界抗敌协会 denounced Zhou and the others as traitors who were forthwith expelled from cultural circles. On May 14th an open letter signed by Mao Dun, Lao She, Yu Dafu and 16 others expressed deep disappointment and shame at Zhou's actions, but said because of his past contributions they would forgive him if he came over to the struggle. However on 21st May 抗战文艺 (Resistance Literature) published an editorial statement according to which Zhou had written to a friend to say that the photograph had been altered and that the report was false. The journal said it would publish Zhou's letter the following week, but never did.¹⁹

According to Wang Xirong, the letter was to Zhou's Shanghai-based friend Zhou Li'an and said he was going to ask someone to look for information about the conference, adding "This whole year, I have only been doing translation...Next academic year, through a friend, I shall be teaching four hours a week at Yanjing University. It won't bring in very much, but at least I won't be unemployed."²⁰ No further information emerged about the conference, and Wang concludes that the truth remains a mystery. His own opinion was that Zhou was probably playing them along, because he did not categorically deny having been at the conference. On June 3rd, the Shaan Gan Ning Border Area National Salvation Committee published an open telegram condemning Zhou.

In September, Hu Shi sent Zhou a cryptic poem saying that he had dreamt about a "Buddhist monk" drinking tea in Zhou's studio and then travelling south, and that he (Hu Shi) was now longing to see his friend. Zhou replied in an equally cryptic poem that the monk had too many old and

19 Wang, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 175-77.

20 As Zhou noted in his memoirs, cited in Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 552, both Yanjing and Furen Universities were Christian, and so were left alone by the Japanese.

young to care for in his monastery but that he hoped to be able to "look his friend in the eye" in the future.²¹

During August and September a number of "puppet" organizations also contacted Zhou and offered him positions, which he turned down. These included teaching posts at the Women's College, Beijing Teachers Training College and a request from Tang Erhe that he become president of Peking University, which he declined. In December he refused to be interviewed by a journalist from *Asahi Shimbun*.²²

In autumn 1938 Zhou started to publish again, giving some essays that he had written before the occupation to the new literary journal *Shuofeng* 朔风 set up in October 1938 by the owner of the Dongfang bookstore and edited by Fang Jisheng 方纪生, with the aim of providing reading matter and "sustenance of spirit" for the intellectual class but without discussing the political situation.²³

On New Year's Day 1939, Zhou was visited at home by two young men who claimed to be students at the Sino-Japanese College 天津中日学院 in Tianjin and opened fire on him and his protégé Shen Qiwu 沈启无 who happened to be there.²⁴ Neither Zhou nor Shen was badly injured, but the would-be assassins killed Zhou's rickshaw driver and injured several others as they fled.²⁵ It has never been established who was behind the attempt. Zhou said in his memoirs that he believed the Japanese were behind it, while the Japanese suspected Guomindang agents.²⁶

21 An English translation of both poems is to be found in Ernst Wolff, *Chou Tso-jen*, (New York: Twayne, 1971) 6-7. For the Chinese texts, see Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 558.

22 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 557, 562.

23 Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 17. Gunn relates that Fang was dropped as editor by the eighth issue and the original contributors disappeared as it turned into a propaganda vehicle.

24 The Sino-Japanese College was set up in 1925 as part of a Japanese initiative to train students who intended eventually to go to Japan to study. Zhou Zuoren and four other Beida professors had been on the college's education committee, although apparently not very much involved with the college. See Zhang, 周作人平议 *Zhou Zuoren: An Appraisal* revised edition (Shanghai Yuandong chubanshe, 2010), 279-286.

25 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 565-6.

Whatever the truth of the matter might be, on January 12th Zhou accepted the post of head librarian at Peking University and in effect began working for a “puppet organization.”²⁷

After the war several individuals claimed to have been involved in the assassination attempt, beginning with Loo Pin-Fei, a Chinese living in the US who recounts in his book *It is Dark Underground* how, aged 17, he had joined a small group of Shanghai teenagers anxious to fight the Japanese. They had gone to Tianjin and thence to Peking where they signed up for university courses and then recruited fellow students, carrying out acts of terror where possible.²⁸ The group was known as the Special Youth Group and eventually had 2,000 members, but organized in small cells who did not know each other. One of the distinguishing marks of the group was that they were not attached to any political party, and members were free to join any party they liked, on the grounds that they “were fighting for China, not parties.”²⁹ Loo describes how after some successful terrorist activities, the organization was contacted by a Chongqing government agent named Ma Yun-shan who was anxious to work with them and who agreed to provide financial support and arms. Eventually Ma brought Loo orders to assassinate Zhou. It is worth quoting the relevant passage for the reasons it gives for the order:

“This is not a personal visit,” he said at once. “I have brought a message from my leader. In your college there is a professor who is one of the educational leaders of China, a man with profound influence over the

26 Zhou, 元旦的刺客, ‘New Year’s Day Assassins’ in 知堂回想录 (Memories) 2: 575. Wang Xirong 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions) (141) makes the valid point that it is hard to see why the Japanese would want to assassinate Zhou. However as we know there were sharp bureaucratic divisions and policy struggles within the Nationalist, Communist and Japanese institutions and no doubt among their intelligence agencies as well, we cannot rule out the possibility that the assassination attempt was Japanese-backed.

27 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 568.

28 Loo Pin-Fei, *It is Dark Underground* (W. G Putnam and Sons, 1946) Now available online at [https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.\\$b747502;view=1up;seq=92](https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.$b747502;view=1up;seq=92)

29 Loo, *It is Dark Underground*, 74.

people. He has agreed to go over to the puppet government to head their educational department. Such a move would have far-reaching effect because the people hold him in high respect and have faith in his judgment. The decision of a man of his type to work with the enemy would be more devastating than any amount of Jap propaganda. He must be put out of the way before he makes a public announcement of his intention."

"Who is he?"

"Chow Tso-jen, dean of arts and literature in your school."

Chow! I knew him well, a fat, middle-aged man, about fifty-six, with a handful of whiskers on his chin. No wonder the Central Government was appalled at his selling out to the enemy! Everyone in school loved him. Chow's reputation as a scholar was second only to that of Dr Hu Shih, promotor of the Chinese language, *Pai Hua*. For years he had been a leader in the new literary movement in China. His reputation was high, not only in China, but in Japan, where he had studied for several years.

"Can't you warn him?" I asked. The waste of such a man was a tragedy, even with all his weakness. If we could make him harmless and still be enriched by his knowledge, it would be better than wiping out with a bullet his irreplaceable scholarship.

"My dear friend," Ma replied, "we have warned him repeatedly. Do you think we would kill a man as lightly as we would pick up a straw?" He glanced at me curiously. "Don't pity him, Loo. This is our duty. 'Rather be a broken jade than a whole tile.' Word just came today from Chungking. The man must be put to death before he can do incalculable harm in the educational field."³⁰

Zhou Zuoren himself read the book in the 1962 and wrote to his friend Bao Yaoming 鲍耀明 that he was impressed by Lu's command of English but

30 Ibid, 82-83.

that he had got several facts wrong—e.g. he claimed that three people were involved whereas Zhou was certain there had been only two, also that the book referred to Zhou becoming head of the government's Education Department, which he did not do until 1941.³¹ A third possibility put forward in 1947 in the Taiwan journal 台湾文化 by Hong Yanqiu 洪炎秋 was that the assassination attempt was carried out by a fellow student of Zhou's nephew Fengsan, who was in Furen University Middle School. According to this account:

“Fengsan was similar in temperament to his cousin Fengyi, [Zhou's] eldest son; although they had Japanese blood in them, they were both extremely patriotic anti-Japanese youths. Because of this, Fengsan appeared more and more melancholy and depressed so that in the end his classmates asked him what was up, and he explained the situation to everybody. One of his fierce fellow-students told Fengsan, “Since your uncle cannot leave, nor is he willing to come out [publicly] the situation has now become very messy. In order to make sure his reputation remains stainless, the best thing we could do would be simply to find a way to get him killed, so that he achieves virtue through death. 令伯既然走又不能, 出又不甘, 情势演变到了这步田地, 为保他一生清白的令名起见, 我们倒不如干脆设法把他弄死, 使他得以杀身成仁. Fengsan thought that his fellow-student was just joking, so he laughed it off, he never expected that he would be serious about it and make secret preparations...”³²

The article links the failure of the attempt to save Zhou's honour to the suicide of 19 year-old Fengsan in March 1941, when he shot himself with a gun belonging to one of the Japanese military police assigned to guard Zhou. However this argument is rejected by Ni Moyan 倪墨炎, who suggests it was because of the ongoing family conflict arising from his parents' separa-

31 Wang Xirong, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 142-3.

32 Ibid, 143.

tion and Zhou Jianren's decision to no longer recognise him as his son.³³ It is of course impossible to know what triggered Fengsan's suicide, but perhaps rather than seeking a mono-causal explanation it is more likely that the factors we know of: depression and the emotional pressures brought both by his uncle's having taken on the position of Education Minister after Tang Erhe's death in November 1941 and the family conflict might all have contributed to his state of mind.

In 1992 a fourth possibility came to light with the publication of an essay by Fan Xu 范旭 who entered Yanjing University in 1938 as a first year undergraduate reading economics. As a middle-school student in Tianjin he had joined a secret organization known as the Traitor Elimination Resistance Group 抗日锄奸团 dedicated to killing those deemed traitors. Further information surfaced, suggesting that the group was run by the Guomindang's Juntong.³⁴ In the end, the discrepancies in the narratives of what the exact sequence of events had been and who had taken part have never been accounted for, so that no definitive answer has ever been possible as to who was responsible. However, at the end of his useful account of the various possibilities Wang Xirong hypothesizes that perhaps all the groups referred to—the Lu Pin-Fee group, Zhou Fengsan's classmates and those in Fan Xu's account—were linked. In fact, the narratives might be three different accounts by people who had been members of one group.³⁵ This is a strong and reasonable hypothesis. Interestingly, the preface to Loo Pin-fei's book was written by the President of Yanjing University, J. Leighton Stuart (1876-1962) and gives some credence to Loo's account, although it should be noted that he begins by stating that he had not read the manuscript:

Owing to the exigencies of travel it was not possible for me to read the

33 Ni Moyan, 中国的叛徒与隐士 cited in the Baike entry for Zhou Jianren <http://baike.baidu.com/item/周建人>

34 Wang, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 146.

35 Wang 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 153-154.

manuscript of this book before it went to press. But I do know the author and I admire him for the courage and patriotic zeal with which in his student days he tried to do his bit toward resisting Japanese aggression. He was one among many of those students who both before and after the invasion of North China did all they could to arouse the will and conscience of their countrymen to this menace, to warn or “liquidate” such Chinese as succumbed to Japanese intimidation or bribery, or who in other ways tried to frustrate the sinister Japanese designs.³⁶

These are, of course, words written in the aftermath of, or very close to the Japanese defeat, when it was possible for the university’s President to acknowledge such happenings. A valuable study by Sophia Lee which examines the situation of Yanjing University between 1937 and 1941 cites archival material which shows that the would-be assassins were in fact first-year students at Yanjing University.³⁷ Drawing on the University’s Administrative Correspondence archive, Lee cites a letter Leighton Stuart wrote to the Trustees explain that he knew the students involved but hesitated to take action against them for fear of attracting attention or endangering his sources.³⁸

As already mentioned, Tang Erhe died of illness in early November 1940. Zhou wrote a poem mourning him and praising him for the good he had done for the country, no doubt a reference to his contributions to medical education.³⁹ On December 19th, the Political Council of the Nanjing government formally approved an order that Zhou Zuoren should be appointed to the Political Council of the North China government and also member of the Standing Committee and Minister of Education 教育总署督办 and he officially

36 Loo, *It is Dark Underground*, 1. The preface has not been quoted in full, as the remainder is just general praise for Chinese youth.

37 Sophia Lee, “Yanjing University 1937-1941: Autonomy or Compromise?” *Sino-Japanese Studies* (December 1989) available at <https://chinajapan.org/articles/02.1/02.1.42-68lee.pdf>

38 Lee, “Yanjing University 1937-1941: Autonomy or Compromise?,” 54-55.

took up the post on 1st January 1941.⁴⁰

Obviously, before that point came, various people must have been involved in the decision and also in contacting Zhou. In August 1986, 文教资料 (Culture and Education Materials) published information on the 'inside story' of how Zhou Zuoren came to take up the post. The first piece, based on an interview with Wang Dingnan 王定南, the secretary of the CCP's Special Committee for Peking (中共北平特委书记) from 1938 to 1942, explained that after discussion, Wang and his colleagues had decided that it was imperative to prevent Miao Bin 缪斌 the vice-president of the Japanese propaganda organization New People's Society 新民会 from being made Education Minister, and that Zhou Zuoren would be a much better choice.⁴¹ According to Wang's account, he had asked Xu Baokui 许宝骥, an acquaintance of Zhou's, to persuade Zhou to agree to being put forward for the post. Although initially reluctant, Zhou had acquiesced when he realised the request came from

39 The poem is reproduced in Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological biography) 598. On Tang Erhe see Boorman, ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*. Tang (1873-1940) was a Japanese-trained physician and anti-Manchu revolutionary who founded and served as chancellor of Peking Medical College. He returned to the political scene in 1926 as minister of the interior in Wellington Koo's cabinet and then accepted a post in Manchuria when Koo's cabinet was dissolved, serving under Zhang Zuolin and Zhang Xueliang, but returned Beijing after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. *BDRC* 3: 228-230.

40 Zhang, 周作人年谱 (Chronological Biography), 601: 607. Zhou remained in post as Education Minister until he was replaced in April 1943 and became a member of the North China Political Commission 华北政委会.

41 Wang, 周作人人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 156 cites an excerpt from an oral interview with Wang Dingnan. Miao Bin came from Wuxi, Jiangsu, the son of a Daoist priest. He had been one of the founders of the Sun Yatsen Study Society at Whampoa in December 1925 and took part in the Northern Expedition. Appointed chief of police in Jiangsu in 1928 he was dismissed on corruption charges two years later, then returned to Wuxi and married the niece of the industrialist Rong Zongjing and became chief manager of his flour mills. Miao began to advocate Sino-Japanese cooperation, winning the approval of some GMD leaders and the enmity of others. (It is worth noting in passing that Rong's business activities fit in closely with the *minzu* model of economic development promoted by Wang Jingwei.) After the war began in 1937 Miao moved to Peking, but coming into conflict with other members of the government there, he fled to Nanjing in 1940. See Boorman, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* and Wakeman, "Hanjian (Traitor)!", 323-324. On Rong's business activities see Margherita Zanasi, *Saving the Nation: Economic Modernity in Republican China* passim.

the Communist Party. Several other accounts all corroborated this.

These revelations naturally attracted a lot of outside attention, particularly in the Hong Kong press, and also transfixed the academic community in China, because if Zhou had acted on CCP orders he should no longer be seen as a traitor and so Chinese history and the history of modern Chinese literature would have to be rewritten.⁴² In November 1986 Xu Baokui himself wrote a clarification, explaining that at the time Miao was supported by one faction of Japanese, while Zhou was seen as preferable by another.⁴³ Given that he had already accepted a post at Beida, he had “already had one foot in the water” and was simply the lesser of two evils. Moreover, the Japanese side that supported Zhou was much stronger than those who wanted Miao. However, Xu when talking to Zhou did say that if by allowing himself to be put forward for the post Miao Bin was excluded, “that would be an act of merit” 只要排掉了繆斌，就是一种功德。” He put it to Zhou that while in the post he could act according to the principle of “积极中消极，这又是消极中积极”—that is to say, to take a passive attitude while fulfilling his role, and thus be doing something positive. As to the question of how far Zhou had succeeded or failed, he could not say. On the question of the CCP’s involvement in the decision to approach Zhou, he could only say that Wang Dingnan was certainly involved, and that without his agreement he (Xu) would not have approached Zhou. “But as for whether it constituted a decision of the party organization, I am not sure, and whether Wang reported it to the Party, and if he did, what level of the Party leadership, I have never asked.... When speaking to Zhou, I certainly did not mention any Party connection.”⁴⁴

Wang Dingnan also published a statement about the case, noting that although he had agreed with colleagues in 1938 that Zhou was the better

42 Wang 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 158.

43 Xu Baokui 许宝骥, ‘周作人出任华北教育督办伪职的经过’, (How Zhou Zuoren came to take the post of Education Minister in the collaborationist North China government) 新文学史料, 1987: 2 (217-219).

44 Xu Baokui, 周作人出任华北教育督办 (How Zhou Zuoren came to take the post etc.), 219.

than Miao, he had never sent anyone to speak to Zhou, and he denied putting forward the 积极中消极, 这又是消极中积极 principle. The Party's policy was to oppose any individual taking on any puppet post, something Zhou had already done so that his move to Education Minister was simply a promotion. The message he sent to all collaborators at the time was this: "To attach oneself to the enemy earns the disgust of one's contemporaries and brings shame to one's descendants." 依附敌人既为当代人所不齿, 也贻后代子孙羞.⁴⁵ Although collaborators might sometimes be useful in post, as a matter of principle it was better that break with the Japanese and by urging them to do so, the party was carrying out the principle of "君子爱人以德" –the ruler supports a person in the practice of virtue."

In response to all the questions raised by the documents first published in 文教资料, in November 1986 the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing organized a major conference of literary specialists and historians to consider whether or not Zhou had been a traitor. The general conclusion was that the claim about CCP involvement was unfounded, that Zhou had not been friendly to the CCP in the past, that he fulfilled his role as Education Minister, travelled and made speeches and that his political position had been that of a traitor. Moreover he had written a series of poisonous essays which had boosted the Japanese.⁴⁶

I will return to the question of the articles later—these are in fact the same essays for which he attacked in Japan in 1943 as "a reactionary old writer" and which Edward Gunn described as "a challenge to Japanese propagandists."⁴⁷ But for now I would like to switch focus to Zhou's activities during the war, by drawing on the transcript of his trial.⁴⁸

Zhou stood accused of having "enslaved education to serve the Japanese"

45 Wang Dingnan 王定南, '我对周作人任伪职一事的声命, (My statement about Zhou Zuoren's taking the collaborationist post) 新文学史料, 1987: 2 (220-221) Both Xu and Wang's articles cited here had originally been published at the end of 1986 elsewhere.

46 Wang, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 159-164.

47 Gunn *Unwelcome Muse*, 161, 165-6.

by serving in the university which had become a puppet organization, of having promoted cultural exchange with the enemy, helped the enemy to investigate North China's natural resources and put out a propaganda newspaper in support of the enemy (p. 1432)⁴⁹ In his defence, evidence was produced that Zhou i) had protected the 460,00 or so Chinese and Western books in Beida library and in other places such as Qinghua and had bought 330,000 rare books for Beida library; ii) had kept curricula as much as possible like the old ones and those in rear areas; hiring policies also followed the old Beida and Qinghua models iii) as Education Minister he had protected students by ordering that they should concentrate on their studies and not take part in political activities. He had also not allowed money to be deducted from salaries in support of buying aircraft. He saved many educational and underground workers from prison [names given]. [1436] After the start of the Pacific War he published articles satirizing the Japanese and asserting that the Chinese people's thought was always Confucian. (1436). He used his positions throughout to exercise passive resistance against the enemy. (1438). One of Zhou's achievements at Beida was to keep English (which other institutions dared not offer), on the curriculum for four hours a week, the same amount of time as Japanese. After the Pacific War started the Japanese wanted it to be increased to 12 hours but Zhou managed to keep it at six. (1440-41). Zhou also kept Beida's anniversary date of December 17th, rather than change it to the Japanese date (marking their takeover) of August 1st, his intention being to signify that "the Beida spirit had not died." (1442)

In his defence statement Zhou noted that he had worked in education since 1912. When, urged by Tang Erhe, he had overcome his misgivings about becoming a bureaucrat and accepted the professorship and head of

48 Nanjing Municipal Archives 南京市档案馆编 (ed). 审讯汪伪汉奸笔录 (Record of Court Hearings of Collaborationist Wang Government Traitors), (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1992), pp. 1424-1493. Page numbers will be given in brackets in the text.

49 Responding to the charge about natural resources, Zhou stated that the university's Japanese-run Economics Unit did so, but he was not involved. (1428)

department posts in August 1939, he made it his maxim that "though the school was collaborationist, the students were not collaborators; although politics were collaborationist, education should not be made to collaborate." 二十八年, 伪北京大学成立, 开办文学院, 嘱被告担任院长之职, 被告以为学校可伪, 学生不伪, 政治虽伪, 教育不可使伪。(1448) He had been head of the Faculty of Literature at Beida for six years and Education Minister for two, and the other posts he had held were all subsidiary, either ex-officio or posts held in name only, such as the position on the board of the propaganda newspaper Huabei Xinbao. (1449) Zhou had promoted a youth corps (青少年团) which, contrary to the prosecution's charge that it showed his pro-Japanese stance, competed with the New People's Society by promoting physical training and deflecting the students from ideology. (1449-1450) Finally Zhou noted that he had joined puppet organizations in order to protect education and that there had not been a single day when he did not have some friction with the Asian Development Board 兴亚会 or the New People's Society and that he knew he could not succeed in everything. But after the Japanese defeat, the [Guomindang] Education Minister Zhu Jiahua 朱家骅 had made a speech in Peking asserting that North China's education had never been enslaved (1449), which could be seen as a vindication.⁵⁰

Zhou's belief in the necessity of education and his valorisation of the individual and the use of individual judgment and action had been a hallmark of his earliest thinking. His 1918 article "A Literature of Man" 人的文学 pushed him to the intellectual forefront of the May Fourth Movement. In it, Zhou argued that humanity is one and that each individual is a part of it. This basic relationship was something that had always existed for "as soon as men were born in the world, humaneness was born," although Europe had only been aware of it from the 15th century and in China "the problem of man has never been solved, let alone of women and children." Literature should foster this ideal by advocating the new scientific view of man as an evolved crea-

50 As reported in the North China Daily 华北日报 17th November 1945.

ture, whose body and spirit should be seen in harmony, not conflict. The touchstone for literature was whether it promoted an individualistic humanism or an inhuman view of life. The scientific view of man embraced by Zhou paid great attention to women and children who should no longer be considered as chattels belonging to husbands or parents.

This idea of the basic equality of persons was to figure in his understanding of his position and his actions, as we will see. What distinguished Zhou from many others was his sceptical attitude towards the *hanjian* discourse itself. Very early on in his career, in his 1922 essay "In my own Garden" Zhou called on society to allow people to respect their individuality, as by doing so, they would repay their debt to society. To refuse this principle and force people to conform to social expectations would be "as unreasonable as enforcing loyalty to the ruler in the name of Confucian prescribed relationships and forcing people to go to war in the name of the nation," he said, referring to the hierarchical pairings which had been codified in the Han dynasty to structure society (ruler-subject, father son, husband-wife, elder and younger brother and friend- friend.)

我们自己的园地是文艺，这是要在先声明的。我并非厌薄别种活动而不屑为，——我平常承认各种活动于生活都是必要，实在是小半由于没有这种的材能，大半由于缺少这样的趣味，所以不得不在这中间定一个去就。但我对于这个选择并不后悔，并不惭愧园地的小与出产的薄弱而且似乎无用。依了自己的心的倾向，去种蔷薇地丁，这是尊重个性的正当办法，即使如别人所说各人果真应报社会的恩，我也相信已经报答了，因为社会不但需要果蔬药材，却也一样迫切的需要蔷薇与地丁，——如有蔑视这些的社会，那便是白痴的，只有形体而没有精神生活的社会，我们没有去顾视他的必要。倘若用了什么名义，强迫人牺牲了个性去侍奉白痴的社会，——美其名曰迎合社会心理，——那简直与借了伦常之名强人忠君，借了国家之名强人战争一样的不合理了。⁵¹

Zhou always separated these codified Confucian hierarchical relation-

51 Zhou, 自己的园地 (In my own garden), Zhong Shuhe ed. 周作人文类编, 3: 63-3.

ships from his own understanding of Confucianism. He identified in particular with the iconoclast Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), who equated propriety 礼 with following one's innate capacity for moral judgment. In 1932, lecturing on the origins of the New Literature movement, Zhou argued that self-expression and a modern type of individualism had emerged in the late Ming, but had then been repressed in the Qing dynasty, leading to the May Fourth reaction against intolerant Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Zhou considered that the New Literature had been transformed by modern Western scientific views of man, but that the fundamental tenor of the modern essay remained Confucian and Daoist, which he considered not to be a problem, because these philosophies in their original form focussed on the material world of human feelings and the natural order of things (renqing wuli 人情物理).

Japanese propaganda in occupied China criticized the GMD and CCP for being infected with Western thinking and called for China to rid itself of such rubbish. In this endeavour Japan would lead and guide China, which had forgotten its Confucian heritage, to an East Asian cultural renaissance. As already mentioned, one of Zhou's most important actions during the war was to write a series of essays which forcefully rejected this line of thinking.⁵² The essay "The Issue of China's Thought," 中国的思想问题 first published in November 1942 was described at his trial as "his most obvious resistance to the Japanese." (1436) He began the essay by describing himself as optimistic about Chinese thinking which was inherently healthy and had deep roots and exemplified by the Ru teachings of Confucius and Mencius. He argued that the core of Confucian doctrine was epitomised in two passages in the Mencius as truthfulness to the principles of human nature which resulted in benevolence, put into practice through loyalty 忠 and empathy 恕, and which since the term "humanitarianism" might cause misunderstanding could be called "the way of man."⁵³ "[...] 儒家的根本思想是仁，分别之为忠恕，而仍一以

52 See Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 151-171, for a very useful discussion of the essays.

53 The quotations were from Mencius, Book 4 Ch 29 on Yu and Ji, and Book 1Part 1 Ch 27 on the livelihood of the people (五亩之托，树之以桑) Zhou also drew on Qing thinkers in his essay.

贯之，如人道主义的名称有误解，此或可称为人之道也。It was exemplified by the altruism and good government of the legendary kings Yu and Ji, who understood that benevolence and survival were linked. This common sense, practical approach to life was understood by every Chinese, from the sages to the lowliest illiterate, but anyone who tried to push them into a fanatical belief system would be rewarded by chaos. "What the Chinese want from life is very simple, but it is also very direct: a Chinese seeks to live. Because of his inborn moral sense he does not wish to harm others in order to benefit himself, but he cannot, like a saint, harm himself in order to benefit others. Other peoples with religious beliefs may dream that the kingdom of heaven is near and step into blazing fires in order to win eternal life, but Chinese people do not have this kind of belief, and they are not willing to sacrifice themselves for gods or the way. However they will sometimes step into raging flames out of desperation when they feel that there is no hope in their lives."⁵⁴

The dig at Japanese ideological practices is clear here. In a talk given in 1941 Zhou had linked the Chinese view of life to the view of man as a biological creature, and went on to call for more study of Western civilization which had given birth to science. The only reason Chinese civilization had not done so was because of the examination system, but given China's healthy approach to life, science education could flourish here.⁵⁵ Openness to the West was obviously another area where Zhou was going against Japanese propaganda. In August 1943 at the Greater East Asia Literary Conference held in Tokyo, he was denounced by the Japanese army propaganda advisor in North China, Kataoka Teppei 片冈铁兵, as a reactionary old writer who was attacking the system of East Asian thought they were building and who brought together China's old ideologies and the Western literary spirit.⁵⁶

54 Zhou, 中国的思想问题 (The Issue of Chinese Thought), in Zhong Shuhe ed. 周作人文类编 vol.1, pp 810-817.

55 Zhou, 中国的国民思想 (China's National Thought), in Zhong Shuhe ed. 周作人文类编 vol.1, pp 796-809.

In 1987, published along with the documents claiming that the CCP had been behind the request that Zhou take on the Education Minister post was a letter Zhou wrote to Zhou Enlai in July 1949 as the civil war ushered in the epic changes of the new era. He had been immensely heartened, Zhou said, to hear of how the Communist government was handling the women's issue, the question of peasant livelihood and reports about the discipline of Communist troops. Now perhaps some of the hopes for change that had been entertained since the 1911 revolution would be realized.

He had always opposed the Confucian prescribed relationships and felt that in China the ruler/subject relationship was modelled on the man/woman relationship, making it particularly pernicious. While citizens had a moral obligation towards the nation and people, to see this relationship only in terms of the chaste womanhood of Confucian propriety was outmoded. This is an important statement of his position:

中国的君臣关系则是以男女为模范。。其 最明显最普遍的联系，则是所谓忠贞、气节，都是说明臣的地位身份于妾妇一直，这是现今看来顶不合理的事。。。我相信民国的道德惟应代表人民的利益。。我的反礼 教的思想，后来行事有些与此相关，因此说是得罪名教，我可以承认，若是得罪民族，则自己相信没有这个意思。

[Zhou's letter to Zhou Enlai, 4 July 1949]

So, Zhou explained, in his case he had accepted the Education Minister post in order to mitigate as far as he could Japanese interference and oppression. He felt that this was the right thing to do, although fleeing to unoccupied China and teaching there for a few years would have been much easier. "If people say I've offended Confucian propriety I can accept that, but if they

56 Gunn, *Unwelcome Muse*, 165-168; Trial transcript 1434-5. There is a sobering backstory here: Kataoka's attack gave rise to the question of how he had come to know of the content of Zhou's essays. It transpired that the source was Shen Qiwu, Zhou's protégé who was with him during the assassination attack. Shen's motivation was complicated—he was involved in a dispute over the editorship of a journal and hoped to push things in his favour this way. See Wang Xirong, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 238-241.

I've offended the people of the nation, I don't believe it to be true," he wrote. So my point is that Zhou rejected the idea that there was only one way to act in the wartime situation. He did not make his decision lightly and he had to be persuaded to accept different posts, but he refused to accept that one showed one's loyalty was through blind obedience and death. And he very clearly saw the analogy with the demand for chastity among women which made them into the property of their husbands. As we see from Loo's account quoted above, the rationale for killing Zhou was precisely that it was preferable to be "broken jade" than a whole tile.

The discussions about Zhou's guilt or otherwise continued in China into the early 1990s as new pieces of information emerged, but I will just mention two: one was the claim that underground CCP workers did not consider Zhou to be a *hanjian* as demonstrated by articles supporting him after Kataoka's attack, reportedly with the sanction of Pan Hannian 潘汉年, the senior CCP intelligence chief. Moreover, after the Japanese surrender, arrangements were put in place to enable Zhou to travel to CCP-held Zhangjiakou to protect him from the GMD, but Zhou refused to go on the grounds that he had nothing to be ashamed of.⁵⁷ Another is the intriguing fact that the word *hanjian* was not used in a footnote about him in the authoritative 毛泽东著作选读, published in 1986.⁵⁸ It is clear that how the concept of *hanjian* is applied will depend at least in part on contemporary political circumstances.⁵⁹ As Brook notes, "the myth of resistance has been a powerful moral weapon in the arsenals that political elites on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have used to sustain their post-war dictatorships."⁶⁰ Scholarship takes place within the con-

57 Wang Xirong 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 168-70.

58 Wang Xirong, 周作人生平疑案 (Disputed Questions), 172-73.

59 For example, Pan Hannian was accused in 1955 of having been in contact with Wang Jingwei in 1943 and spent the rest of his life doing reform through labour, although rehabilitated in 1982. See Xiaohong Xiao-Planes, "The Pan Hannian affair and power struggles at the top of the CCP (1953-55), *China Perspectives*,

60 Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Harvard 2007), 6.

straints of politics, the discursive paradigms in place, and contingency—sometimes the lucky find of new sources. It is also pushed forward by the tireless effort of those working to uncover historical fact. This was demonstrated most forcefully at the International Conference on Zhou Zuoren held at Waseda University in July 2018. It is also worth noting that a project to produce an expanded *Chronological Biography* of Zhou Zuoren 周作人年谱长编 was launched in 2016. As set out by Zhang Tierong, joint editor of the first two editions, it aims to correct numerous errors and draw on a wider range of materials. Zhang noted that the earlier editions suffered from the fact that Zhou was a very difficult topic and those involved felt a need to protect themselves from trouble.⁶¹

This brings us again to consider that one reason the issue of collaboration has proved hard to deal with is because the discourse of *hanjian* itself is essentially asymmetric, being underpinned by the Confucian five relationships in which the relationship between the state and its people are modelled on those between the parents and child. Just as the child exists to serve its parents, the individual must serve the state. It is a hierarchical relationship in which the state's claims have priority over the individual.⁶² This was illustrated by the metaphor of "broken jade" used in Loo Pin-fei's narrative. It is echoed in Wang Dingnan's comment that "the ruler supports the person in the practice of virtue." Xu Baokui recalls how during the Thought Reform movement just after Liberation he was attacked for his reasoning that Zhou had already served in one collaborationist post and so asking him to take on another one was simply "pushing the boat further in the water."⁶³

61 Zhang Tierong, 要注意资料和文本的细节--《周作人年谱长编》编纂体会 The need to pay attention to materials and textual details: a personal view of the compilation of the *Expanded Chronological Biography of Zhou Zuoren* 现代中文学刊 2016: 6 (96). I am grateful to Emilie YY Yeh for bringing this to my attention.

62 I am drawing on the ideas of Anthony C. Yu, first set out in "Enduring Change: Confucianism and the Prospect of Human Rights," *Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies*, 2 (October 2000).

63 Xu Baokui, 周作人出任华北教育督办 (How Zhou Zuoren came to take the post etc.), 218.

By breaking away from such a discourse, Zhou was able to act in a way which actually resulted in genuine acts of resistance to the enemy. His actions during the occupation and his clear explanations during his trial and in his letter to Zhou Enlai provide an example of individual responsibility and courage.