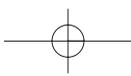
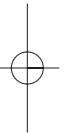


# Resisting Manchukuo



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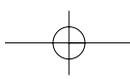
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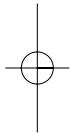
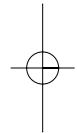
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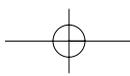
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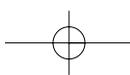


**Resisting Manchukuo:  
Chinese Women Writers and the Japanese  
Occupation**  
**Norman Smith**



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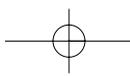
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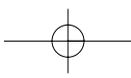
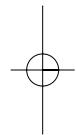
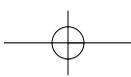
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## Introduction

In early November 1944, Mei Niang (b. 1920),<sup>1</sup> the pre-eminent woman writer in north China, travelled from her home in Beijing to Nanjing, the capital of Japan's conquests in south China and the site of notorious wartime atrocities, to attend the third and final Greater East Asia Writers' Congress (*Dadongya wenxuezhè dahui/Daitōa bungakusha taikai*). At the congress, one of Japan's most prominent colonial institutions, Mei Niang's novella *Xie* (*Crabs*) was acclaimed novel of the year, and she was fêted for her achievements as a writer, editor, and translator. Her work attracted audiences across East Asia: just the previous year, in the fall of 1943, her fame was celebrated as bookstores in Beijing and Shanghai, both occupied by the Japanese, conducted polls to determine the most beloved contemporary Chinese woman writer.<sup>2</sup> The results linked her name with that of Shanghai's Zhang Ailing (1920-95) in the catchphrase, "nan Ling, bei Mei" (the south has Zhang Ailing, the north has Mei Niang). The two women were widely acclaimed for career accomplishments in territories under Japanese domination, contexts radically different from the post-occupation period, which subsequently spawned highly politicized evaluations of their legacies.

Mei Niang solidified her position as a critic of patriarchy in China's literary world of the late 1930s, in the Japanese colonial state of Manchukuo (1932-45).<sup>3</sup> Her work was featured in Japanese-owned, Chinese-language publications for much of the occupation; she published in Beijing, Manchukuo, and Japan. Unfortunately for her, recognition of *Xie* as novel of the year by the Greater East Asia Writers' Congress came at the most inopportune time for the ambitious twenty-four year old. By 1944, Japan had been mortally weakened by war against China and the Western Allies. As the Japanese Empire tottered into its final year and colonial officials guarded against any signs of sedition, Mei Niang's attendance at the high-profile Nanjing Congress was all but mandatory, despite any personal misgivings she may have had. Less than a year after her reception, however, Japan was defeated, stripped of its colonial possessions, and those Chinese who had achieved any success under Japanese dominion were tarred for their "colonial" careers. Mei Niang, whose name

was publicly linked with the congress, paid a heavy price for her youthful ambitions.

A photograph survives from the Nanjing Congress (Figure I.1). It vividly illustrates the prominence accorded Mei Niang, a lone woman surrounded by men who also played key roles in the Japanese Empire's literary world. The group of writers, editors, and publishers is shadowed by a soldier, suggesting the dangers attendant to colonial cultural work. The photograph attests to Mei Niang's attendance at the congress, where she received her award and the substantial prize of twenty thousand yen.<sup>4</sup> Notably absent is her husband, Liu Longguang (1920-49) who, although the most prominent Chinese editor in north China, was wary of association with the congress. In the photograph, Mei Niang appears confident and self-assured, unaware that she was standing at the pinnacle of her career. Sporting a stylish leopard skin coat and a short, modern permanent wave hairstyle, she stands out among the men who surround her. But the centrality the congress photograph accorded her belies the high profiles achieved by her female peers in Manchukuo's literary world, as their male counterparts were forced into silence, exile, or the grave. Mei Niang's career successes garnered her undeniable fame, but there were other highly regarded Chinese women writers in Manchukuo: Dan Di (1916-92),<sup>5</sup> Lan Ling (1918-2003),<sup>6</sup> Wu Ying (1915-61),<sup>7</sup> Yang Xu (1918-2004),<sup>8</sup> Zhu Ti (b. 1923),<sup>9</sup> and Zuo Di (1920-76).<sup>10</sup> These seven women forged long-forgotten legacies that are



I.1 Mei Niang at the 1944 Greater East Asia Writers' Congress in Nanjing, at which Xie (*Crabs*) was acclaimed novel of the year. Mei Niang is standing behind Wang Jieren and Hou Shaojun, both kneeling.

integral to understanding Chinese cultural production in the Japanese colonial milieu.

This book interrogates the nature of Manchukuo's Chinese-language literary production at the high point of Japanese rule, focusing on the legacies of the most prolific Chinese women writers. I have two aims. The first is to paint in broad strokes the framework of Manchukuo's Chinese-language literary world. Three questions guided this endeavour: What factors induced Chinese writers to cooperate with the Japanese to work within colonial institutions in Manchukuo? How was the literature produced by Chinese writers influenced by the increasingly ponderous regulatory framework that cultural functionaries designed to control Manchukuo culture? Why were Chinese careers in that literary world subject to so much official persecution, both during and after the occupation? This study examines the specificities of literary production in Manchukuo and reflects on more universal characteristics of cultural production in colonial spaces.

The second overriding aim of this book is to contextualize the activities of the most prolific Chinese women writers in Manchukuo. How is it that Mei Niang, a woman born in Vladivostok and raised in one of the most northerly regions of China, was awarded the Japanese Empire's most prestigious literary prize in 1944? What forces propelled Mei Niang from the "backwaters" of Manchukuo to the forefront of the East Asian literary world? Were Mei Niang and her peers pressured by colonial officials to trumpet officially sanctioned ideals in their writings? Why did they pursue such high-profile careers in an unquestionably controversial context? What factors drove them to it? Their legacies were achieved at great personal cost and constitute a virtually forgotten vantage point from which to reflect on Chinese life in the Japanese colony of Manchukuo, from a women-centred perspective.

Canadian author Margaret Atwood has suggested that "literature is not only a mirror, it is also a map, a geography of the mind."<sup>11</sup> This study contextualizes the work of Manchukuo's Chinese women writers to offer a reconfigured, women-centred cultural geography of Manchukuo. These writers worked within a weighty regulatory framework to map out careers, which ultimately undermined the state that staked claim to their allegiance and sought to contour their self-identities. Restoring the women to a position that reflects their contemporary status will afford a deeper understanding of their lives and the context in which over thirty million Chinese lived in Manchukuo.

## FORMAT AND SOURCES

This book comprises eight chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction, and Chapter 2 outlines the foundations of Japanese colonial rule in Manchukuo, emphasizing the debate over ideals of womanhood that erupted in the warlord era and radiated through occupation society. As will be shown, progressive gendered ideals of modernity, as articulated with reference to May Fourth

notions of women's individual emancipation, inspired young Chinese women in Manchukuo to take advantage of the opportunities offered them by the Japanese colonial state. Chapter 3 sketches Manchukuo's literary world, outlining the boom in Chinese-language literature that followed a brief collapse of cultural production in the wake of the Japanese invasion. Contrary to popular belief, in the late 1930s and early 1940s Manchukuo was the site of a vibrant Chinese-language popular culture, which bound local writers with Chinese elsewhere, despite the shifting boundaries that accompanied the Japanese Empire's expansive growth. The endurance of May Fourth ideals attests to a cultural vitality in the Republic of China far greater than that state's contemporary economic, military, or political status suggests.

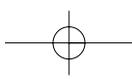
Chapter 4 recounts the lives of Dan Di, Lan Ling, Mei Niang, Wu Ying, Yang Xu, Zhu Ti, and Zuo Di. Their family backgrounds, early childhoods and education, and career paths during the occupation are reconstructed to illustrate how their legacies can enhance the understanding of Chinese life in Manchukuo. Chapters 5 and 6 introduce the main themes in their written work. Chapter 5 examines the women's critiques of Manchukuo's patriarchal foundations through the tropes of "patience and endurance"; love, marriage, and childbirth; and sexuality. This chapter highlights the feminist discourses that informed their work. Chapter 6 details the women's ambitions to "expose the reality" of Chinese lives under Japanese occupation, underlining the oppositional stances that they adopted towards what they perceived to be Manchukuo's retrogressive cultural agenda. Chapters 5 and 6 together argue the relevance of these writers' long-forgotten legacies to assessing Chinese lives under Japanese occupation.

Chapter 7 recounts the final stage of Japanese rule and the women's post-occupation lives, underlining the devastating ramifications of the writers' youthful ambitions. During the last year of the occupation, most of the women experienced official censure or worse. After the occupation, they were persecuted for presumed traitorous collaboration with the ruling Japanese. The final chapter suggests the value of pursuing Chinese women-centred perspectives in the study of Chinese lives under Japanese occupation.

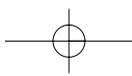
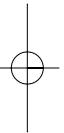
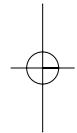
The primary literature that is the focus of this study was authored by women and written in Chinese. Secondary sources, written by women and men in Chinese and English, have been used to contextualize their legacies. Japanese sources translated into Chinese or English, including collections of colonial statutes, intelligence reports, and scholarly work, have also been consulted. The accumulated work of the seven women writers constitutes a rich Chinese-language commentary on the Japanese occupation. The volume and breadth of their collective written legacy are staggering. Works include hundreds of novellas, short stories, poems, essays, jottings (*biji*), and one play, published in major contemporary journals, newspapers, and books. These materials were published in Manchukuo, Beijing, and Japan. During the Japanese occupation, five of the authors published collected works and two

published more than one volume: Dan Di's *Andi he Mahua* (*Andi and Mahua*) (1944); Mei Niang's *Xiaojie ji* (*Young Lady's Collection*) (1936), *Di'er dai* (*The Second Generation*) (1940), *Yu* (*Fish*) (1943), and *Xie* (*Crabs*) (1944); Wu Ying's *Liang ji* (*Two Extremes*) (1939); Yang Xu's *Luoying ji* (*Collection of Fallen Petals*) (1943), and *Wo de riji* (*My Diary*) (1944); and Zhu Ti's *Ying* (*Cherry*) (1945). The region's tumultuous history has taken a heavy toll on these volumes, which were typically published in quantities of two to three thousand but are now extremely rare. Currently, no copies of Mei Niang's *Xiaojie ji* are known to exist.<sup>12</sup> One copy each of Dan Di's *Andi he Mahua* and Yang Xu's *Wo de riji* are held in Chinese libraries.

The primary sources used in this study are located in Changchun Municipal Library, Heilongjiang Provincial Library, Jilin Provincial Library, Liaoning Provincial Library, Shenyang Municipal Library, and the University of British Columbia's Asian library. In addition, original writings by Dan Di, Lan Ling, Mei Niang, Wu Ying, Yang Xu, and Zhu Ti have been made available to me by the authors themselves and by private collectors. Li Zhengzong and Zhu Ti provided me with a copy of Dan Di's still unpublished memoir, "San ru lianyu" (*Thrice into Purgatory*), and I am especially indebted for access to the private collection of Pan Wu. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.



# Resisting Manchukuo



反  
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國



Li Zhengzhong, "Fankang Manzhouguo" (Resist Manchukuo)

# 1

## Chinese Women and Cultural Production in a Japanese Colonial Context

The Japanese occupation of Manchuria began on 18 September 1931, when rogue officers of the Japanese Guangdong army blew up a railway track outside of the regional centre, Fengtian.<sup>1</sup> That explosion precipitated an invasion that within months brought virtually all of Manchuria under Japanese dominion. The region, long considered outside the borders of “China proper,” constituted “the Three Eastern Provinces” or the land that lay “beyond the pass” of the Great Wall. But with the founding of the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1912), the homeland of the Manchu peoples was solidly fixed within the Chinese imperium. The collapse of the imperial order resulted in a warlord regime that in many ways perpetuated late Qing development among the diverse population of Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Manchus, Mongols, and Russians. With the Japanese invasion, these inhabitants saw the political context in which they lived their lives dramatically transform. Japan’s rapid seizure of the region was capped by the formal establishment of Manchukuo (literally, “country of the Manchus”) on 1 March 1932. The long-term, informal participation of Japan in developing the “pioneering” Manchu homeland was supplanted by a brutal military regime driven by Japanese dreams of empire. Despite the trappings of statehood and the 1934 coronation of the Qing dynasty’s last Manchu emperor, Henry Aixin-Gioro Puyi (1908-67), Manchukuo’s independence was a sham – it was in fact a Japanese colonial enterprise. For fourteen years, more than thirty million Chinese people from all walks of life lived in Manchukuo under Japanese colonial rule. All levels of local society were forced to reconcile momentous international events with their individual lives.

Perceptions of Manchukuo have always stressed the colony’s Japanese identity. Japanese-owned media, the film and popular music industries, and official Manchukuo publications mythologized a paternal, inherently hierarchical relationship between Manchukuo and Japan; the emperor Puyi even submitted to an honorific position within the Japanese imperial family. Manchukuo was propped up by a ponderous Japanese military presence and therefore became to Chinese nationalists an intolerable symbol of Republican

China's military and political impotence and what Yamamuro Shin'ichi has recently suggested might properly be considered "an Auschwitz state or a concentration-camp state, more than just a puppet state."<sup>2</sup> The regime's racist policies privileged high-ranking Japanese and subordinated all other ethnic groups, to the extent of mandating race-based restrictions – on access to rice, wheat flour, sugar, milk products, cooking oil, matches, salt, and cotton cloth – that underlined Chinese national impotence and exacerbated contempt for Puyi's fledgling regime.<sup>3</sup> Officials attempted to superimpose upon the region's diverse ethnic makeup a Manchukuo identity from which a modern citizenry would emerge; the bureaucracy even dictated reference to the Han Chinese majority and their language as Manchukuoan.<sup>4</sup> The new terminology reflected officialdom's professed ambitions for the region, but it was not embraced by the disaffected public.

Manchukuo's instant disappearance following Japan's defeat in 1945 did little to enhance interpretations of Chinese life in the occupied territory, which were thereafter constructed on the basis of presumed loyalty to the Chinese nation-state: Chinese who fought or fled from the Japanese did so for strictly patriotic reasons, while those who remained and achieved any success under Japanese rule were tarred with epithets ranging from *kuilei* (puppet) and *pao gou* (running dog) to the ultimate condemnation, *Hanjian* (Chinese traitor). These labels contrast markedly with the term *hezuo* (to work together), that Timothy Brook has shown was used in contemporary references to Sino-Japanese cooperation in occupied south China (1937-45). Regardless of the seemingly less judgmental terminology, Brook stresses that collaboration of any sort was widely considered a "moral failure," even if it related to the performance of mundane tasks, such as supplying food, organizing transport, and arranging security.<sup>5</sup> Brook provides an important reminder that "collaboration happened when individual people in real places were forced to deal with each other."<sup>6</sup> In the south of China, many viewed the Japanese presence as a "provisional" circumstance requiring practical adaptation.<sup>7</sup> If their immediate survival hinged on "parroting the hyperboles of Japanese propaganda," they viewed this cost as minimal.<sup>8</sup> The long-term consequences of collaboration, however, were magnified for Manchuria, where the Japanese occupation lasted far longer and the populace harboured more serious doubts about the return of Chinese sovereignty. After 1949, the Maoist state (1949-76) moved to control historical narratives, restricting access to primary materials that shed any but the dimmest light on that era. Individuals who had lived through the occupation were also eager to put the dangerous ambiguity of their colonial past behind them. Understanding the Chinese *experience* of Japanese imperialism was supplanted by the imperative of demonstrating Chinese nationalist *resistance* to it. The contempt with which the entire period was treated is illustrated by the customary, and still prevalent, addition of the prefix *wei* (bogus) to all references to the Manchukuo period, for example *wei Manzhouguo* (bogus Manchukuo).

Chinese renunciation of Manchukuo mirrors English-language studies, which have tended to limit any praise for Japanese domination of the region to the area of economic development; Manchukuo has been dismissed as a cultural wasteland. To date, most work on the occupation era not only dismisses the very idea of Chinese culture in Manchukuo but silences the Chinese majority by focusing on Japanese-language sources or by depicting the Chinese as drones of Japanese economic policies, hapless puppets, or duplicitous traitors. Critics assume that no cultural achievements of any value can be attributed to Manchukuo, certainly none involving any self-respecting Chinese. Even Ronald Suleski's authoritative *The Modernization of Manchuria: An Annotated Bibliography* (1994) contains few entries on Chinese culture, and not one reference to women's experiences in particular. The same silence regarding cultural production and women's experiences characterizes most scholarly work on other occupied areas of China. Only recently have historians begun to direct attention to the "conflicting motives, tactical concessions, sheer helplessness, and all the other existential uncertainties that characterized" Chinese lives during Japanese occupation.<sup>9</sup>

In their volume on collaboration in wartime China, *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1937-45: The Limits of Accommodation*, David Barrett and Larry Shyu challenge "the moralistic framework in which wartime history is viewed," championing the extension of scholarly inquiry to subjects ranging from political activism to the movie industry, from northern China to its southern extremes.<sup>10</sup> Barrett argues the relevance of analyses of Vichy France (1940-4) to understanding colonial societies, underlining the value of distinguishing between the terms *collaboration* and *collaborationism*. This is an important distinction. He suggests that the latter term should properly be reserved for those French fascist groups that shared a "committed, ideological identification" with Germany's National Socialist program.<sup>11</sup> In Vichy France sympathy existed for the Nazi agenda, but Barrett cites a "virtual absence of [Chinese] ideological identification with Japan."<sup>12</sup> Japanese colonial propaganda, stressing a "shared race and shared culture" (*tongzhong tongwen*), rang hollow for the Chinese, who faced a brutal Japanese invasion without adequate military support from the Chinese government. Abandoned by the state, the population was forced to come to terms with the occupiers if they entertained any chance of survival; "for the great mass of the population in occupied China, there was no alternative to living with the enemy."<sup>13</sup> Yet the Chinese term *Hanjian*, once applied wholesale to the women who will be considered in this volume, and to many other Chinese as well, reflects more accurately collaborationism than collaboration. It thus has a far narrower application than has been the case. "Collaboration" may have been widespread in Japanese occupied territories, but "collaborationism" was far more rare, at least partly because the brutality of Japanese rule gave little cause for Chinese support.

As with interpretations of Nazi-occupied Europe, existing scholarship on Manchukuo (with few notable exceptions) is dominated by a Manichaean

division between collaboration and resistance. In Europe, postwar disavowal of life under the Nazis is exemplified by the appropriation of the surname of Norway's puppet ruler Vidkun Quisling as a synonym for treason while staggering numbers of French have claimed membership in that country's underground resistance. But blanket condemnation of colonial society has been problematized by the revelation of what Nicholas Dirks has identified as the "parallel mutualities of colonizers and colonized."<sup>14</sup> Focus on the culture in which colonizers and colonized were mutually embedded – as individuals and as members of communities – allows the conflicted relationships that inevitably developed between them to become more readily apparent. As the cultural milieu of colonial societies are brought to light, once strictly drawn divisions between collaboration and resistance blur.

Not surprisingly, a highly contested middle ground lies between the two extremes of collaborationism and resistance. Werner Rings's pioneering study of life in Europe under German occupation is particularly germane, for it raises a once unthinkable question, "Could not collaboration itself be a form of resistance?"<sup>15</sup> Rings examines Nazi control over Europe from the late 1930s, identifying four degrees of "collaboration" and five degrees of "resistance." According to Rings, collaboration in Nazi-occupied Europe ranged from neutrality, in order to secure basic needs for survival, to unconditional, conditional, and tactical collaboration, the last characterized by a hostile stance towards the invader.<sup>16</sup> Resistance was similarly multi-faceted: symbolic (expressing pride in native culture), polemic (fomenting protest), defensive (protecting the needy), offensive (engaging in physical combat), or enchained (continuing activities while imprisoned).<sup>17</sup> Rings assigns these stances a permeability that destabilizes the essentializing nature of post-occupation narratives: individuals could simultaneously engage in seemingly contradictory behaviour. Rings also points to a counter-intuitive representation of responses to German occupation: as German troops advanced, the "resisters" fled with whatever possessions they could muster while the "collaborators" remained to face an unknown future under the occupying forces. As a degree of normalcy developed within the colonial regimes, those who had fled came to be praised for their adversarial positions while those who had remained to cope with the new reality were condemned by the expatriates as traitors.

Keith Schoppa has compared the Vichy experience to the Japanese occupation of Shaoxing County in south China, where, he argues, "the major division [of collaboration and resistance] masked other [differences] that sometimes ran deeper still."<sup>18</sup> In Shaoxing, "collaboration was not necessarily summed up by the word betrayal; resistance did not necessarily connote nationalism."<sup>19</sup> Schoppa demonstrates how "a host of reasons shaped by personal aims and existential needs and pressures" structured elite responses to Japanese dominion.<sup>20</sup> Local desire for stability and order on the heels of calamitous Republican mismanagement "likely made Japanese collaborationist control seem less a shift in kind than of degree."<sup>21</sup> Life in wartorn China

forced difficult decisions, and “as people grappled with the often brutal realities, and as the community turned inward, it is not so much that nationalism was absent or tenuous as that it was temporarily subordinated to an array of more primordial loyalties and identities.”<sup>22</sup> Although people’s supposed degree of patriotism has dominated subsequent assessment of wartime behaviour, the necessities of day-to-day survival weighed more heavily on those Chinese who found themselves surrounded by the soldiers of imperial Japan. Survival necessitated an array of accommodation with the occupying foreigners, regardless of one’s affection for the Chinese nation.

Analysis of the colonial experience as it was lived raises awareness of the layers of influences that structured individual lives. John Boyle’s study of Wang Jingwei, the most famous Chinese collaborator, provides an explanatory framework for Wang’s high-profile departure from the Republic: individuals could be swayed to work with Japan for distinctly personal career objectives or by a desire to see China freed “from Western imperialist domination and from the specter of Bolshevization.”<sup>23</sup> Boyle reveals that individual decisions could be based on incentives ranging from greed to altruism, or any combination in between. Lo Jiu-jung has cautioned, however, that “for ordinary people, collaboration was seldom a matter of choice. It was lack of choice which ruled their lives.”<sup>24</sup> Lo reasons that harsh Republican rule in the 1930s, and widespread poverty, left ordinary people with little option but to stay and hope for the best as the Japanese foisted colonial regimes upon them. Both Boyle and Lo stress that perceptions of “the enemy” and experience of Republican rule were crucial determinants of personal behaviour in a colonial context. For many, foreign rule could be preferable to native rule. Boyle cites historian Lin Han-sheng’s observation that “in the historical experience of China ... collaboration with alien enemies has always been a common phenomenon, it has actually enriched China’s culture and enlarged her territory and influence.”<sup>25</sup> Lin’s view of historical collaboration reminds us that in the past “alien enemies” lived alongside Chinese populations that stood their ground against the ebb and flow of political borders. In *Creating a Chinese Harbin*, James Carter argues that foreign presences – Russian and Japanese – were key to the development of the city of Harbin: “Chinese nationalism in Harbin grew out of simultaneous opposition to and cooperation with the large foreign presence.”<sup>26</sup> Carter demonstrates how “Harbin’s early nationalists ... sought to enhance their city’s Chinese identity – in opposition to foreigners – while at the same time modernizing it – in cooperation with foreigners.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, foreigners inspired varied reactions, on individual, regional and national levels.

Studies on Manchuria are beginning to reveal the complex interaction of Japanese, Chinese Republican, and Russian influences during the 1920s that eventuated in Japanese domination. Japanese economic and military expansionism overwhelmed the Chinese and Russians, fostering a plurality of responses to the Japanese presence, which itself was also deeply factionalized. Rana Mitter has deconstructed the “Manchurian myth” – that a spontaneous

anti-Japanese resistance met the Japanese invasion – to show that in Manchukuo “collaborators with the Japanese, nationalist exiles from the occupation who promoted resistance, and resistance fighters on the ground in the occupied zone” were swayed by various individual, but *rarely nationalist*, agendas.<sup>28</sup> Nationalist sentiments were not the sole driving force that determined one’s position towards China, Japan, or Manchukuo. The Chinese population’s varied responses that Mitter has documented contradict long-held assumptions of an immediate, outraged backlash of Chinese patriotic resistance in the face of expanding Japanese imperialism. Mitter traces “the development of the narrative of resistance to the occupation” that played, and continues to play, a central role in the creation of regional identity.<sup>29</sup> He argues that the occupation bore several dimensions, both the long-stressed negativity of imperialist occupation *and* a more positive aspect that enabled Chinese political activists to pinpoint Japan as an imperialist aggressor against whom they could fashion an essential “nationalism of necessity” for China.<sup>30</sup> To this end, the occupation of Manchuria was used as a trope around which individuals espousing nationalist rhetoric could fashion new, grand myths to propel the masses, and themselves, towards future prosperity. Prasenjit Duara’s *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* problematizes the “facile clarity” through which the Manchurian myth and Manchukuo were long understood.<sup>31</sup> He “de-composes” the regime’s sovereignty claims, via notions of Asianism, citizenship, ideal womanhood, and native-place literature, to argue that Manchukuo was a manifestation of the “East Asian modern.”<sup>32</sup> Duara demonstrates how socio-cultural discourses were transformed by “historical, local, and regional practices and conceptions, vocabulary and symbols” to produce what supporters deemed Asia’s most modern, multi-ethnic state, blending the best of the West and the East.<sup>35</sup>

There appears to be a growing consensus among revisionist scholars that singular focus on the state in a colonial context erases the complexities that characterized contemporary life. Recent scholarship suggests that, in China and Vichy France at least, individual lives within colonial regimes were influenced by circumstances that bore little relation to one’s sense of patriotism. A myriad of pressures acted to deflect the rigid categorization that developed in postwar narratives.

#### COLONIAL CULTURE AND MANCHUKUO

Nowhere does the complexity of colonial life manifest itself more than in the arena of cultural production. Michael Adas, in his examination of colonial southeast Asia, has demonstrated how colonizers there refused to tolerate religious sects or banditry but lacked the essential language skills or appreciation for the political intent of writers to control the “cultural expression of the colonized.”<sup>34</sup> Arguing against perceptions that colonial culture serves only to legitimize the colonizing state, Adas stresses that the contradictory, interdependent

relationships between the colonizers and the colonized enabled local theatre, satire, and other vehicles for ridicule of the rulers to persist despite an often overbearing colonial presence. In France, Henri Michel, “the doyen of Resistance historians,” has similarly argued that any meaningful evaluation of the colonial legacy must situate it within its contemporary context. He proposes that “any action or writing that violates the 1940 armistice between France and Germany” must be viewed as resistance regardless of its production within a colonial framework.<sup>35</sup> Michel argues that writers in Vichy France who produced literature that denigrated German cultural or political ideals were an integral element of the French resistance against Nazi rule. Margaret Atack has also asserted that literature does not reflect resistance, but is part of it.<sup>36</sup> The present study reveals the contradictory relationships that developed within the nexus of colonialism, cultural production, and ideals of womanhood in Manchukuo.

The problem with received interpretations of colonial cultural production is superbly illustrated in Poshek Fu’s examination of the moral and political responses of Shanghai’s writing community to Japanese occupation from 1937 to 1945. Fu identifies three types of responses by intellectuals to Japanese occupation: passivity, resistance, and collaboration. Fu cites May Fourth literary influences that revolutionized concepts of individual autonomy in the 1920s and 1930s, enabling a “culture of criticism” to survive foreign occupation.<sup>37</sup> He highlights how the complex colonial environment could empower intellectuals to pursue the “cherished tradition of using literature as a political medium.”<sup>38</sup> His documentation of intensifying levels of censorship and oppression after the 1937 crackdown on publishing, and of the “dark world” (*hei’an shijie*) of Shanghai from 8 December 1941, provides significant parallels with the “dark era” (*hei’an shiqi*) of Manchukuo. More recently, Fu has further challenged the “moral binarism” that informs interpretations of colonial life, demonstrating how Shanghai filmmakers engaged in both “passive collaboration and indirect resistance.”<sup>39</sup> He compellingly argues that although “Shanghai cinema constituted an institutional part of the occupying power, it did not articulate an ideological position to legitimate that power.”<sup>40</sup> Fu cites Japanese entrepreneur Kawakita Nagamasa who “opted for co-operation [with Chinese in the film industry] – not domination – because he was concerned that if the reorganization went too far all the major stars and directors would flee to the unoccupied interior.”<sup>41</sup>

Fu brings light to a condition previously neglected by scholars: collaboration and resistance within the same institutional space. The Japanese colonial agenda in Shanghai required the participation of Chinese, which in turn necessitated their accommodation. Fu asks, “was filming any more ‘traitorous’ than, say, removing garbage or fighting fires as a profession? Of course, whether there was a difference depends on the extent to which their films participated, as cultural and social practices, *in the legitimizing discourse of the enemy*” (emphasis added).<sup>42</sup> Fu underlines an important distinction between

working with or for and *proselytizing for* the colonial state. For the vast majority of the population, work was necessary for survival. Thus, conduct should be judged “traitorous” not according to the work engaged in but rather according to whether that work legitimized the occupying power. The cinematic world of occupied Shanghai “was an institutional part of the Japanese propaganda machine, but by almost exclusively making entertainment films it resisted legitimating the occupying power. It did not participate in the legitimizing discourse of the occupation, yet it did contribute to the normalization of the banality of occupied life.”<sup>45</sup> Contemporary artists and audiences were attuned to artistic nuances that are only beginning to be incorporated into studies of colonial life. The differentiation between intellectuals who occupied colonial institutional spaces and intellectuals whose cultural productions served to legitimize Japanese colonialism points to a diverse positionality possible in colonial societies.

Analysis of the relationships within colonial cultural production highlights how writers operated through regulatory regimes constructed by officials who could be blind, sympathetic, or hostile to their activities. Through their work, writers were able to engage their audiences in reflections on contemporary life and, by association, on the colonial regime. In occupied France, writer Edith Thomas famously declared in 1942 that “not to speak the truth was to be an accomplice”; similarly, in 1939 in Manchukuo, Liang Shanding advocated “exposing reality” (*baolu zhenshi*).<sup>44</sup> Writers such as Thomas and Liang engaged with colonial institutions in order to communicate their alienation to a receptive readership. Max Adereth, describing the work of the celebrated couple Elsa Triolet and Louis Aragon, argues that “in none of these short stories is there any mention of the Resistance, all that they describe is the hopeless, heartbreaking everyday life of the time ... ‘Woe unto us’ ... said the author, and this is how his readers-cum-accomplices took it.”<sup>45</sup> Ironically, the writers forged successful colonial careers by fashioning bleak, pessimistic portraits of contemporary society. Life’s “heartbreaking” nature emerged as a dominant trope in both the literature of Vichy France and Japanese-occupied China, to reflect negatively on those colonial regimes.

Path-breaking works on the Chinese literary worlds of Japanese-occupied Beijing and Shanghai reveal that “occupation literature shows very little cultural identification with the Japanese.”<sup>46</sup> Edward Gunn, Jr. has critically appraised the literature produced in Beijing and Shanghai from 1937 to 1945, situating it within the mainstream of modern Chinese literary history and criticism. He argues that writers remained under foreign occupation because of economic necessity or ties to the city or region: “regional affiliation was decisive in their decisions” to remain under Japanese rule.<sup>47</sup> Gunn identifies a variety of Chinese responses to the Japanese, most often characterized by “resistance, dissent, or disengagement.”<sup>48</sup> The negativity of local Chinese literature testifies to the alienation most writers felt towards Japanese colonial rule. Although colonial officials attempted to rein in such negativity, they were

for the most part unsuccessful: “The failure of functionaries to inject writers with a sense of joy, confidence, and militant mission is evident not only from a perusal of the contents of the literature, but from explicit statements by Japanese critics themselves.”<sup>49</sup> Colonial officials sponsored Chinese literary production in order to legitimate their rule, but they could not completely control writers who were influenced not only by censors and state directives but also by their own agendas and audiences.

The conflicted nature of colonial cultural production is also revealed in the “triangulation between colonial Taiwan, imperial Japan, and nationalist China” that informs perceptions of Taiwanese history and identity.<sup>50</sup> Leo Ching notes how popular fiction from the Japanese-occupation era, long condemned as “enslaving literature” (*nuli hua de wenxue*), began to attract public and academic attention in the 1990s as Taiwan’s socio-political climate became more open to discussion of its colonial history; Hoshina Hironobu argues that since then the public and academic attention has “spread like a little boom.”<sup>51</sup> Ching argues that in light of Taiwan’s occupation by Manchu (1683-1895), Japanese (1895-1945), and mainland Chinese (1945- ) forces, alternate readings of “collaboration” with imperial Japan must be accommodated. Ching demonstrates that in *kōmin* (imperial peoples) literature of the early 1940s in Taiwan, “the struggle over identity emerges as the dominant discourse for the colonized,” a “necessary internalization of politics into the personal.”<sup>52</sup> The resultant, often dire, criticism of colonial society was similar to that in work by Japanese leftists. Ching cites Japanese author Hayama Yoshiki’s praise for the novel *Papaiya no aru machi* (*A Town of Papaya Trees*, 1937) by Taiwanese author Lung Ying-tung (Japanese pen name Ryu Ei-so). Hayama lauds Lung’s work for voicing “not only the cry of the Taiwanese, but also the cries of all the oppressed classes. It is in the spirit of Pushkin, Gorki, and Lu Hsün; it [has much] in common with Japanese proletarian work. It fully embodies the highest literary principles.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, this “enslaving literature” did not legitimize Japanese colonial rule but was fixed within an international context of cultural criticism. The interpretive frameworks advanced by Ching, Gunn, and Fu have valuable application to Manchukuo, where writers similarly suffered post-liberation censure for their colonial activities.

For decades after the collapse of Manchukuo, all literary production from within the colony was dismissed as the work of *Hanjian*, with the exception of the early work of those who had fled by 1935, the “exiled faction” (*liuwang pai*). Manchukuo’s “literature of the enemy occupation” (*lunxian wenxue*) was condemned wholesale for the writers’ presumed collaboration with the Japanese. During the Maoist era, Manchukuo’s writers were variously censored, imprisoned, or otherwise silenced. Ironically, the success that they attained by painting the Manchukuo period as one of unremitting bleakness contributed to their subsequent downfall. Specifically, their portraits of contemporary life made it possible, perhaps even likely, for subsequent critics to interpret that period as one in which only the most sycophantic traitors would have managed to

survive. Thus from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1970s, the writers were condemned as traitors and their legacies “frozen at the bottom of history” (*feng-dong zai lishi diceng*).<sup>54</sup>

Shangguan Ying, an avid consumer of Manchukuo literature as a child, has identified two dominant reactions to it in the Maoist era: condemnation (rejection of it as the work of traitors) and disregard (total denial of its existence).<sup>55</sup> Arguing that both stances distort the writers’ original intent as well as their impact on contemporary readers, Shangguan emphasizes that their work must be evaluated within the context of the regulatory regime in which they lived and wrote, a reading he insists highlights their insight and courage. Zhang Quan has paralleled the trauma of Japanese occupation with that of the Cultural Revolution, claiming that literati in both periods “endured humiliation in order to carry out an important mission” (*ren ru fu zhong*).<sup>56</sup> Zhang believes that their work reveals the writers’ “suffering souls and bodies” (*ling yu rou de monan zhong*) as they struggled to survive desperate circumstances.<sup>57</sup> Shangguan and Zhang represent the sea change in China regarding that country’s colonial literary legacy. However, Zhang warns that the 1996 condemnation of the immensely popular woman writer Zhang Ailing in the Chinese press as a “traitor to China” for her activities during the Japanese occupation of Shanghai illustrates continued polarization of the field.<sup>58</sup>

Post-Mao liberalization is freeing scholars to reassess received interpretations of Manchukuo’s Chinese-language literature. The first steps towards a more objective understanding of life and literature in Manchukuo were taken in China after Mao Zedong’s death, at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1978. At that meeting, the political verdict on Manchukuo literature was officially reversed, restoring the writers’ reputations and clearing the way for reassessment of their legacies. Political liberalization, increasing access to primary materials, and a resurgence in regional pride have since piqued scholarly interest in Manchukuo writers, as reflected in their presence in compendia and other major literary works. Their work was featured in two journals established in the 1980s, *Dongbei wenxue yanjiu shiliao* (*Historical Research Materials of Northeastern Literature*) and *Dongbei xiandai wenxue shiliao* (*Historical Materials of Modern Northeastern Literature*), which meld rare archival materials from the early twentieth century with later work by authors of the Northeast as well as scholarly articles. In the late 1980s two volumes of Manchukuo-era short fiction were published. The first of these, *Changye yinghuo* (*Fireflies of the Long Night*) (1986), a collection of women’s writings, went through two printings. The second is a volume of men’s fiction, *Zhuxin ji* (*Candlewick Collection*) (1989). Significantly, both collections feature work from, and do not distinguish between, the exiled faction and other Manchukuo writers. Individual volumes of collected works by Mei Niang and Zuo Di, as well as by male writers (most prominently Gu Ding and Liang Shanding), have also been published.<sup>59</sup>

The resurgence of interest in Manchukuo literature was sparked by the writers who survived the decades of Maoist persecution. In 1986, Liang Shanding was among the first in China to denounce the politicized division of Manchukuo writers into two artificial camps, a division from which he personally suffered. During the Maoist era, Liang was imprisoned for his Manchukuo career, instigating a political divorce from his wife, Zuo Di (who was sentenced to labour reform for her work and died while Liang was in jail), and alienating his children, from whom he remained estranged till his death. Liang criticized the arbitrary persecution of those who had remained in Manchukuo, arguing that the long-standing preoccupation with the exiled faction's literary legacy offers only partial, distorted perceptions of what life was really like for the thirty million Chinese who had lived under Japanese rule.<sup>60</sup> In Liang's view, the nature of Japanese imperialism and Chinese lives within it are incomprehensible as long as the voices and experiences of those who actually lived through it are ignored.

In 1991, Manchukuo literature was the subject of a scholarly conference in Shenyang, attended by Liang and many of his surviving peers, including Dan Di, Lan Ling, Li Zhengzhong (b. 1920), Mei Niang, Wang Qiuying (1913-96), Yang Xu, and Zhu Ti, among others. This event was the culmination of more than a decade of work to restore their work and names and has spurred an unprecedented range of critical analyses, unimaginable during the Maoist era.<sup>61</sup> Scholars have begun to reassess Manchukuo's Chinese-language literature, promoting its literary and historical significance and resituating it in regional, national, and international historical narratives. Since the 1990s, revisionist Chinese interpretations have been transforming perceptions of this literature from singularly treasonous to a form of patriotic resistance against Japanese oppression. Yet Prasenjit Duara has cautioned that this wholesale rehabilitation of the authors militates against accurate interpretation of their work. Specifically, he argues that Liang Shanding's acclaimed novel *Lüse de gu* (*The Green Valley*) does not promote nationalist discourses but rather the "conflict between capital and community."<sup>62</sup> Duara objects that Liang's stance should not be interpreted as anti-Japanese but rather as opposition to the particular political environment within which it was produced. Duara's work underlines the importance of contextualization and the ongoing politicization of Manchukuo's Chinese-language literature.

#### IMPERIALISM AND IDEALS OF WOMANHOOD

The collaboration/resistance dichotomy that structured post-colonial understandings of wartime activities in the 1930s and 1940s was bolstered by a truism: armed forces played pivotal, deservedly celebrated, roles in the termination of those colonial regimes. The praise accorded the military, however, had an unfortunate consequence: it downplayed less obvious ways in which individuals

could disregard, or undermine the legitimacy of, a colonial state. Margaret Attack and Paula Schwartz have questioned depictions of the French resistance that focus on combat or formal groups – foci that they argue necessarily result in the occultation of women.<sup>65</sup> They argue that colonial societies cannot be understood by focusing on institutions in which women played a minor role and which continue to eclipse women’s historical experience. Most studies of early-twentieth-century colonial societies have silenced voices that exerted considerable contemporary influence, including “new women” who advocated women’s dominion over their bodies, relationships, and careers. Feminist and revisionist studies are providing important new insight into the legacies of women long silenced in the historical record. Women may not have played dominant roles in the military or in politics, but that fact did not exclude them from colonial life: men and women were variously incorporated into colonial regimes “for different symbolic purposes.”<sup>64</sup> Colonial states have, as an essential element of their legitimation, assigned great significance to dictating ideals of womanhood.

Significant parallels exist between women’s experiences in the “dark era” of Manchukuo and those of the “dark years” (*années noires*) of German-occupied France.<sup>65</sup> In both states, colonial officials actively sought to structure popular culture and ideals of womanhood to bolster reformulated conservative agendas. In Vichy France, rejection of the triptych “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” in favour of “Work, Family, Fatherland” reflected that state’s relationship with its German overlords, who themselves touted the slogan “Children, Church, Kitchen” with regard to women’s role.<sup>66</sup> In the Vichy state, as in Manchukuo, officials directed women first to abandon and then to pursue extra-familial work, as war conditions dictated.<sup>67</sup> Each state linked national and gendered identities and sought the restoration of conservative ideals of womanhood to reflect their national aspirations; “the order of bodies [was] a fundamental dimension of the political order.”<sup>68</sup> In her examination of Vichy France, Miranda Pollard reveals how

women’s and men’s bodies, identities, and sexual activities had to be defined and regulated according to the needs of a new France that would do away with feminine frivolity, promiscuity, and egoism. Feminized desire had to be erased. The sexual discourse of paternal men and maternal women was not, therefore, some self-evident, one-dimensionally moral aspect of Vichy. This discourse was intrinsic to Vichy’s politics of antidemocracy and *rénovation*, constructing social utility and gendered citizenship in the new France.<sup>69</sup>

The *rénovation* sought by the Vichy regime explicitly cited maternal women as the embodiment of the nation’s moral order. The hard-won rights, to choice in personal relationships, pursued by French women in the early twentieth century were decried by social conservatives as emblematic of the “liberty” that had cost France its national independence. Vichy’s ascription of an exclusively

maternal ideal for women attracted right-wing supporters while it alienated more socially progressive women and men. Remarkably similar narratives were advocated by cultural functionaries in Vichy France and in Manchukuo.

In Vichy France, officials dictated that “duty and sacrifice were the new virtues” for women, with motherhood as the cornerstone of their program for national revival.<sup>70</sup> The new woman was decried as the personification of French national weakness, for her lack of devotion to the domestic sphere, where her most pressing duty was to produce babies for the nation. Thus, women’s extra-domestic freedoms were to be sacrificed for the Vichy cultural agenda, a step applauded by social conservatives. Vichy declared motherhood the ideal state for French women: “pure, clean, wholesome, blond (or not too dark), simply dressed – in conspicuous contrast to the ‘fast,’ seductive, dark New Woman. Vichy’s ideal woman was portrayed not glamorously dressed but in a housecoat; not surrounded by men or in public space but, significantly, with children and with other mothers, in a world apart, of domestic order and innocence.”<sup>71</sup> Vichy’s idealization of the domesticated mother, “in a world apart,” demonized new women, who were condemned for a pursuit of individualism associated with a weakened French state. France’s future was declared dependent upon women pursuing national, not individual, aspirations. Lucien François, editor of the journal *Votre Beauté (Your Beauty)* succinctly argued: “The truth is that motherhood causes the physical qualities of a woman to blossom, develop, [and] be revealed, at the same time as it permits her mind to achieve its supreme harmony in keeping with her unique mission.”<sup>72</sup> Motherhood thus enabled women, as mothers of France, to realize their biological, spiritual, and national destinies.

The destiny of France was thus premised upon women subordinating individual ambitions to the needs of the nation-state, which was deemed the province of men. Miranda Pollard stresses that “underlying many of these sermons on duty and virtue is indeed a determination to restate and re-inscribe patriarchal privileges.”<sup>73</sup> Pollard’s work reveals how the Vichy ambition of cultural *renovation* is incomprehensible if its patriarchal foundations remain unexamined. Manchukuo officials also sought to legitimize their discourses of morality by weaving narratives of the ideal “good wife, wise mother” (*xianqi liangmu*) into nation-building strategies. Women-authored texts provide a powerful conduit into how colonial governance and patriarchal ideals structured the life choices available to women and, more particularly, women writers. Only by extricating the lived experience of individual women from colonial and nationalist ideals of womanhood can one understand the real impact of colonial society.

After the collapse of colonial regimes in China and France, little value was assigned to women’s writings that were produced under foreign occupation and that appeared to prioritize criticism of the subjugation of women rather than of colonial subjugation per se. Jennifer Milligan argues that women writers in France during the 1920s and 1930s sustained “an overriding

aim of reformulating or rejecting traditional, reactionary notions of female identity.<sup>74</sup> Later, in Vichy France, Edith Thomas and Elsa Triolet rejected in their writings the conservatism inherent to the Vichy program. Their efforts to reaffirm the individual emancipation of women appeared to transcend national priorities. These feminist writers were first condemned by the Vichy regime as “the most hideous monster[s] that the earth can bear”<sup>75</sup> and then were left to languish, as the title of Milligan’s work suggests, as a “forgotten generation.” Similarly, Mei Niang argues that Manchukuo’s women writers were silenced in post-1949 China because of the Maoist regime’s obsession with nationalist readings of works by writers such as Xiao Hong (1911-42).<sup>76</sup> In France and Manchuria, the forgotten feminist writings constitute a missing link, the absence of which distorts literary traditions and historical records. Feminist work has been consistently downplayed in popular culture as well as by the writers themselves. Lan Ling and Zhu Ti, two of the writers examined in this study, respectively describe their writings as “little reeds” and “little grass.”<sup>77</sup> Their statements echo the claims of French *resistantes* that they were not resistance veterans, but rather that they did only “what had to be done.”<sup>78</sup> Ironically, their self-dismissive modesty has contributed to the delegitimization of the feminist discourses that they sought to popularize.

Several recent works demonstrate the potential of Chinese women-centred analyses of literary production to contribute to studies of colonial life. Rey Chow’s study of Zhang Ailing demonstrates how that author’s “modes of narration sabotage the identity that Chinese modernism seeks between ‘inner subjectivity’ and ‘new nation.’”<sup>79</sup> By analysing the significance that Zhang ascribed to portraying “the detailed and the sensuous,” Chow uncovers new readings of literary subversion, the agency of women, and the Chinese quest for modernity that are obscured by the dismissal of Zhang’s work as inconsequential.<sup>80</sup> Nicole Huang further enriches our understanding of the legacies of Shanghai’s occupation-era women writers by highlighting “the formation of a new cultural arena that was established by a group of women who not only wrote, edited, and published, but also took part in defining and transforming the structure of modern knowledge.”<sup>81</sup> Huang reveals how Zhang Ailing and her peers “manipulated textual strategies in order to compose wartime narratives in the guise of domestic and personal narratives.”<sup>82</sup> As “authoritative cultural commentators,” acutely aware of their historical position as witnesses to a fleeting moment in human history, they recorded their impressions of domestic life and daily survival.<sup>83</sup> Writing enabled them to support themselves while producing a permanent legacy of the colonial era. Huang’s work challenges arguments that link these women’s success to their production of non-political, “domestic” literature. Huang argues that their rejection of the common “themes of death, hunger, scarcity, destruction, and social instability” makes their work more difficult to interpret accurately but does not invalidate their value to understanding colonial society.<sup>84</sup>

The development of accurate interpretive frameworks for women-authored texts is also essential for Manchukuo, where long-forgotten Chinese feminist writings coexisted with the Japanese colonial cultural agenda. In the early 1930s, Xiao Hong was the first major woman writer to challenge the patriarchal ideals that she linked with Manchukuo. Xiao Hong achieved a national profile for her writings, which were lauded by China's most prominent writer, Lu Xun. Xiao's public disavowal of Manchukuo during the war invested her writing with a patriotism that has since dominated interpretation of her work. But Lydia Liu has recently pointed out that nationalism was "not the only, or even the dominant," paradigm that lay at the heart of most popular modern Chinese fiction.<sup>85</sup> Liu dissects Xiao's oft-cited novel *Sheng si chang* (*Field of Life and Death*) to reveal that novel's use of the female body as a metaphor for "viewing the rise and fall of the nation."<sup>86</sup> Liu demonstrates that Xiao's work, which is often hailed as a "national allegory," should more properly be read as criticism of patriarchy and nationalism, and not of imperialism per se.<sup>87</sup> Research by Liu, Huang, and Chow destabilizes received interpretations of mid-twentieth-century Chinese literature, suggesting the need for greater attention to time- and space-specific, *women-centred* approaches that are attuned to the cacophony of voices that characterized contemporary Chinese literary worlds.

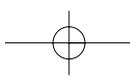
Xiao Hong abandoned Manchukuo, leaving an inspiring legacy for the young Chinese women who rose to take her place – Dan Di, Lan Ling, Mei Niang, Wu Ying, Yang Xu, Zhu Ti, and Zuo Di. These seven women together published hundreds of essays, novellas, poems, and other works critical of Manchukuo society and, especially, patriarchy. They shared complex relationships with the Manchukuo state: they were beneficiaries of the regime's cultural policies, which ultimately led to their persecution once that regime had collapsed. All of the women received part of their education and rose to intellectual maturity within Manchukuo. Their work was published in Japanese-owned institutions that blended Japanese and Chinese management, including the most prominent newspapers. Under Japanese rule, the women established formidable careers, as the nine volumes of their collected works that were published during the occupation attest. Each of the writers attained a high profile in Manchukuo, only to be condemned, ultimately, by colonial officials and their Chinese socialist successors.

In the early 1940s, colonial officials grew conscious of the transgressive nature of the writings of these women, but the writers faced far greater persecution after the occupation. Unlike Xiao Hong, who also shared an ambiguous relationship with Japan but who died during the war, these women paid dearly for their youthful careers. In 1943, Dan Di began the first of three terms of imprisonment. From 1943, work by Lan Ling, Wu Ying, Yang Xu, Zhu Ti, and Zuo Di was subjected to official investigation, censored, or banned. For nearly three decades following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in

1949, all of the women suffered for their colonial careers. Their legacy was all but erased from popular memory. The only Manchukuo women writers deemed worthy of notice or scholarly study in the Maoist era were those who had left Manchukuo and whose writings appeared to focus on anti-Japanese themes. Thus, Bai Lang (1911-80) won praise for lauding the Communist Party's leadership in the anti-Japanese struggle, while Xiao Hong's work was promoted for its patriotic stance.<sup>88</sup>

From the 1980s, a resurgence of interest in Manchukuo literature has led to an unprecedented range of interpretation of these women's work. Zhang Yumao lauds their empathy for the poor.<sup>89</sup> Shangguan Ying argues that Mei Niang's fiction is a vital record of regional history.<sup>90</sup> Xu Naixiang and Huang Wanhua favourably contrast Manchukuo's women writer's efforts to "expose reality" with the "graceful and restrained" (*wanyu*) style popularized by writers like Zhang Ailing.<sup>91</sup> The Northeast's frigid environment and its "pioneering" (*tuohuang*) lifestyle are credited with compelling local women to abandon such "graceful and restrained" writing styles to pursue "rough" (*cuye*) and "robust" (*xiongjian*) depictions of social reality.<sup>92</sup> Shen Dianhe and Huang Wanhua argue that the literature demonstrates the "passion and courage of Northeasteners" as well as the women's interest in the woman question and national liberation.<sup>93</sup> Liu Aihua argues that the writers' persistent deployment of words with negative connotations infects their work with a pessimism that reveals their antagonistic stances towards Manchukuo. Liu notes that in Dan Di's anti-imperialist novella *Andi he Mahua*, the author uses the word "sadness" (*bei'ai*) over twenty times and manipulates over two dozen different adjectives to voice emotions such as bitterness, disappointment, and pessimism to enhance the novella's negative narrative.<sup>94</sup> Feng Weiqun and Li Chunyan have lauded the "new discourses" that the post-Mao era has fostered.<sup>95</sup> This emerging body of Chinese scholarship underlines the need to re-evaluate not only the position of women in Manchukuo's literary world but the potential of women-centred approaches for the study of Japanese imperialism in Manchukuo.

The fourteen years of Japanese occupation in the Northeast permanently altered the lives of the local population. But despite the length of the occupation and its manifold ramifications for the people of the region, the Chinese cultural world of that era remains largely unexamined. Several factors have lessened the perceived value of these women's writings in particular. In China, popular fiction was long thought to have little value, historical or otherwise. Confucian maxims that directed women to "internal" household matters meant that their writings, regardless of artistic merit, were believed to have little historically relevant content. In the Maoist era, all literature from Manchukuo was tainted by its colonial genesis. Lan Ling, Mei Niang, Yang Xu, and Zhu Ti have reasoned that young people in China are currently more interested in business than culture and are repelled by the pessimistic nature of their work. The socially engaged nature of their work, which was designed



to “expose the reality” of the Japanese occupation, militates against its current popularity, since it is so closely aligned with a historical context that is overwhelmingly associated with shame. This book resurrects the legacies of these women and their ability to shine light on Chinese lives under Japanese occupation in Manchukuo.

