The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus
n-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

Collaboration in the History of Wartime East Asia

Timothy Brook

Collaboration in War and Memory in East Asia: A Symposium

This symposium on collaboration in East Asia during the Asia-Pacific War and its aftermath addresses some of the most fraught issues in historiography, historical remembrance, and contemporary politics. It also reflects on occupation states in Europe and postwar East Asia, while casting important light on contemporary issues of collaboration globally. How are we to assess occupation regimes that emerged in each East and Southeast Asian nation during the Pacific War, as well as in postwar nations including those occuped by the United States or other occupiers. Issues of collaboration in a post-colonial world may be equally salient in reflecting on the experiences of newly independent nations? The issues are closely intertwined with dominant nationalist ideologies that have characteristically obfuscated and dismissed collaborationist politics while establishing their own legitimacy, or what Timothy Brook calls their "untouchability". In the post Cold War milieu, and at a time when politicians on both sides of the Taiwan straits, and across the 38th parallel that divides North and South Korea, are redefining their relationships, it becomes possible to revisit the history of war, revolution, occupation and collaboration.

This symposium on war and collaboration in East Asia and globally features contributions by Timothy Brook, Prasenjit Duara, Suk-Jung Han, Heonik Kwon, a response by Brook, and a further conribution in the form of a response by Margherita Zanasi. The authors examine war and collaboration in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Manchukuo, in history and memory and in comparative perspective. The symposium includes the following articles:

1. Timothy Brook, Collaboration in the History of Wartime East Asia
2. Prasenjit Duara, Collaboration and the Politics of the Twentieth Century
3. Suk-Jung Han, On the Question of Collaboration in South Korea
4. Heonik Kwon, Excavating the History of Collaboration
5. Timothy Brook, Collaboration in the Postwar
6. Margherita Zanasi, New Perspectives on Chinese Collaboration

Japan Focus anticipates and welcomes responses to the symposium. These will be published in future issues. MS

Collaboration in the History of Wartime East Asia

Timothy Brook

On 30 October 1940, six days after meeting with Adolf Hitler in the railway station at Montoire, Philippe Pétain announced on French radio that "a collaboration has been envisioned between our two countries." Since then, "collaboration" has been the word by which we denigrate political cooperation with an occupying force. Pétain's choice of language to characterize the arrangement he made with Hitler—he claimed he would shield France from the greater threat of military occupation—was not of his own devising. The French army had signed an armistice with Germany four months earlier that committed French officials "to conform to the decisions of the German authorities and collaborate faithfully with them." [1] This first iteration was vague and innocent; Pétain's was not, and less and less could be. As war and occupation subordinated France's economy and polity to German control, collaboration unravelled into a tangle of compromises that few could anticipate at the outset of the war.

The purges of the winter of 1944-45, which consolidated the new postwar regimes across Europe, sealed the fate of the word. It also permitted it to expand, to refer to what Henrik Dethlefsen, writing of the term's charged history in Denmark (where the government decided to accept German tutelage), has called "the necessary adaptation of the whole society" to existing political conditions. Dethlefsen has argued that this is "a type of social behaviour which is general and which occurs in all periods of history," and that it should not be inflated to the point of ignoring the peculiar dynamics of collaboration and reducing all who lived under occupation to the degraded status of "collaborators." He suggests we restrict it to what he terms its political definition: "the continuing exercise of power under the pressure produced by the presence of an occupying power." [2] This is to say, those who collaborate must exercise power to be said to have done so.

The study of collaboration has become a rich field of research and spculation in the ongoing history of the Second World War in Europe, but collaboration was hardly unique to Europe. Three years before Pétain's meeting with Hitler, collaborative arrangements were being worked out at the far end of the Eurasian continent, in the hinterland around Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangtze River, between Chinese and Japanese. Japan through the 1920s and 1930s had been steadily encroaching on the Chinese mainland, occupying the northeast (Manchuria) in 1931 and then moving down into the Beijing region in July 1937, in both instances to international condemnation. Unable to bring the Chinese government to heel, Japan opened a second and far more violent front around Shanghai in August 1937. The Yangtze Delta—25,000 square miles of densely populated alluvial land extending from Shanghai upriver to the national capital in Nanjing—became the battleground for what Japan would call the New Order in East Asia. After the initial military onslaught that fall and winter, the shock of invasion was transmuted into the daily reality of military occupation, and conquest shifted to collaboration. Collaboration would not begin at the top as it had in France, where a hastily reorganized regime came forward to deal with Hitler. It began, rather, at the bottom, in the county towns dotting the landscape across which the Japanese army rolled westward from Shanghai that winter toward the capital, Nanjing. There, at the local level of a new regime that would gradually be brought into being, Chinese elites came forward to enter into agreements with agents of the occupying Japanese army to "exercise power under the pressure produced by the presence of an occupying power."

It was a terrifying and devastating presence. Japanese soldiers treated Chinese soldiers and civilians with astonishing violence during their invasion of the winter of 1937. The disregard for the conventions of war has left an extraordinary archive of memories. These memories converge with particular force on a single memory, the capture of the national capital on 13 December. This atrocity quickly became known in the English-speaking world as the Rape of Nanjing [Nanking]. That memory is still alive today and, together with the guerrilla resistance, is at the center of the popular conception of what Chinese call their Anti-Japanese War. But it is not the only story that can be told about those eight long years of occupation and armed resistance, which ended with Japan's surrender to the United States in 1945. There were other ways of responding to the invasion, other ways of surviving the occupation. One of these, almost entirely unstudied, was to collaborate.

Collaboration and the History of War as Resistance

The history of local collaboration between Chinese and Japanese is not a story most Chinese wish to hear, or would even recognize as their own. Collective memory recalls this time instead as a period of Japanese atrocity and Chinese suffering. This is a compelling version of the story, and one which everything written about the period reinforces: the same heroes and villains, the same desperate plight of Chinese civilians, the same gross misconduct on the part of Japanese soldiers, repeating itself, as it did in real life, over and over. To tell the story in any other way would seem merely to confirm Japan's wartime propaganda about the common cause that the yellow races should make against the colonialist white race, and so to collude in the project that that propaganda did not dare name, Japan's self-assigned right to colonize China. And yet many saw no alternative to going along with what the Japanese wanted, either because they regarded compliance as a more realistic survival strategy or, in a few cases, because they actually welcomed the conquerors as bringers of new solutions to China's problems. Contemporary Chinese consciousness has no way of making sense of such people, especially of that minority who declared themselves willing to combine a Japanese allegiance with their Chinese identity.

Chinese historians of the war have had to acknowledge that at least a few collaborated, but this acknowledgment requires a remedy of logic. One logic of explanation has been that anyone's decision to collaborate must rest on purely personal connections tying certain Chinese to Japan. These connections are assumed sufficient to explain their collaboration. Such connections are often not hard to find. The head of the Nanjing municipal government under the Japanese had a degree in law from Hosei University in Tokyo, for example, and the head of the first collaborationist regime in Shanghai had studied political economy at Waseda University. Studying in Japan meant that they had at least a common language with the occupier, which made them likely to be the first people whom Japanese agents approached in their search for local contacts. Explaining collaboration on the basis of such ties closes off any need to delve more deeply into the problem of what actually motivated these people. But the problem is not thereby solved, for the simple reason that the exceptions to this rule outnumber the examples. On the one hand. many Chinese who had personal ties with Japan chose to resist. Ma Chaojun, Nanjing's mayor in 1937, had studied aviation in Japan, yet he chose to flee west with the retreating Nationalist government rather than collaborate. On the other, most of the lesser elites who worked with the Japanese at the local level had never visited Japan. Unlike the powerful who congregated in Shanghai and Nanjing, lesser county elites led lives that were purely local, pursuing what opportunities were at hand and dealing with problems that did not extend far beyond their horizons. Searching for prior connections to Japan diverts attention from the wide spectrum of real conditions and motivations that induced some Chinese to work with the Japanese.

Wang Jingwei hosting Nazi visitors as head of State of the collaborationist regime with its capital at Nanjing from 1940

Every culture burdens collaboration as moral failure. What could otherwise be described more simply as the political arrangement of dependency under the condition of military occupation is never permitted to remain simple or purely descriptive. It invariably shifts to the language of morality, which, in Teemu Ruskola's nice phrasing, gives voice to "normative systems that posit a pre-given moral subject and then elaborate guidelines for proper actions by that subject." [3] The moral subject the word "collaboration" brings into being is a national subject first and foremost. The grounding assumption of the word is that this moral subject must act to maintain and protect that nation and no other, regardless of whether another position—which might better be termed "ethical" than "moral" (in the sense of understanding not the norms that guide the moral subject, but the norms that construct him)—can post a higher claim. For those in the grip of national identity, especially when the national cause strides the path of justice, it is almost impossible to conceive of collaboration as a legitimate alternative to patriotism.

This inconceivability is not unique to Chinese who look back at the Second World War. Rebecca West passionately expressed the same connection in The Meaning of Treason, a book she wrote cumulatively between the British treason trials of the late 1940s and the spy trials of the early 1960s. The notion that some Britons might choose to transfer their loyalty to Germany or the Soviet Union and advance those nations' interests over Britain's was, she declares flat out, "an ugly business, and it grew uglier in the handling." In her view, citizenship is a contract of honor that protects the individual, and the duty to respect that obligation is beyond ambiguity. Her indictment against men who were put on trial for treason after the war, such as Leonard Black and John Amery, both of whom ended up in Germany working for the Nazis, appears reasonable when the people involved have distateful personalities or cling to odious political ideals. Black had "a long history behind him of inextricably confused idealistic effort and paid political adventure"; Amery "had no intelligence, only a vacancy around which there rolled a snowball of Fascist chatter." [4] Their weakness, venality, and anti-Semitism make it easy for her to declare patriotism the only morally defensible stance to take in the face of Hitlerian and Soviet politics. To be fair, West takes pains to understand her subjects' moral formation in relation to the circumstances of their lives; indeed, she was able to build up far more informed portraits of her traitors than I have been able to assemble for Chinese collaborators. She finds much to help explain why the men who were put on trial worked for the German cause during the war. Yet none of it is sufficient, in her eyes, to justify the choice they made, given that most people in the same circumstances made a very different choice—and for her the natural one.

For the historian rather than the polemicist, collaboration is a difficult word to use. Its inarguable moral force sensationalizes the acts of those who fall under its label and lends the topic an energy that only wartime occupation can excite. The capacity of the word to judge, even before we know upon what basis those judgments are being made, interferes with them as well. As soon as the word is uttered, it superimposes a moral map over the political landscape it ventures to describe and thus prevents the one from being surveyed except in terms of the other. Historians may legitimately ask how the moral subject that collaboration presupposes is fashioned, but not retrospectively judge that subject's acts. We cannot rest content to accept the superimposed landscape as historical reality, but nor can we pretend it does not exist. Our task is rather to look through the moral landscape to the political one underneath and figure out what was going on.

The idea of separating the moral and the political—which work at different discursive registers while deploying much the same language—is alien to historians trained to put history to national discursive use. The looking-through that historians of Vichy France began to do in the 1980s, for instance, produced findings that went against many of the assumptions on which the French had relied since the war to insulate themselves against moral reproof. The new perspective excited a popular aversion to the Vichy regime when it exposed the degree to which French authorities had worked for German interests, most notably in assisting the Nazis' program to exterminate Jews in France. It also undermined the comfortable legacy of resistance to which French people felt entitled to lay claim by revealing that most did not work to resist the German occupation, and that many in fact abetted it. At one level, these findings confirmed the popular understanding that resistance had been the morally correct choice. In that sense, the attack on résistancialisme—the conviction that all French resisted—did not alter the value of loyalty as a transcendent virtue to an ideal of France that sustained the postwar generation. And yet the attack did put those who lived through the war on notice, unfairly or not, that they had failed to live up to the moral standards they had all along claimed as their heritage

from the war. This unpleasant and unwelcome revelation could only come out once the generation that had benefited from the myth of resistance passed away. France is still preoccupied with sorting out the legacies of that war. [5]

Compared to the French, the Chinese are at a much earlier stage in coming to terms with their occupation. On the one hand, they continue to feel aggrieved that Japan has never clarified its responsibility for the Pacific War nor provided compensation for acts of aggression and atrocities committed in China against Chinese. On the other, many Chinese are unprepared to look behind their collective memory of suffering and resistance to ask what most in the occupied zone did during the war. The myth of resistance has been a powerful moral weapon in the arsenals of violence that political elites on both sides of the Taiwan Strait have used to sustain their postwar dictatorships. Each party claims it alone defeated the Japanese, and each stakes its moral legitimacy—and its right to rule—on that claim. The consequences for thinking about the war do not end there, however. The misgovernment of China during the postwar decades has only deepened the sense of national humiliation that many Chinese have carried with them since the occupation, and which they have sought to spend down by attacking any object other than the Chinese state. To dislodge the popular image of the war and shift some of the weight of blame from external invaders—and so to begin to take responsibility for what Chinese did to Chinese during the twentieth century—threatens to expose the interests of political elites, whether revolutionary or otherwise, who promote these beliefs.

For these reasons, the moral landscape of the Japanese occupation has remained unassailable in the Chinese historiography of the war. One way of telling the story in a way that takes account of suppressed memories is by going below the superstructure of ideology and looking instead at what went on at the most local level of the occupation state. There, collaboration may at times have involved the considerations of national honor and personal integrity that haunted the metropolitan politicians of the new regime; but most of the time, collaboration involved dealing with more mundane problems such as supplying food, organizing transportation, and arranging security—the sorts of tasks that local elites and local officials have to address under any political conditions to ensure social reproduction and to maintain themselves in power. Adopting a perspective from below turns collaboration into a problem to be investigated, not a moral failure to be tagged and condemned. This is not to say that moral considerations have no place in the study of collaboration, but it is to advise that we look more closely at the conditions within which individuals made choices.

Suspending established judgments on collaboration by going to the local level is not altogether an innocent strategy. It changes the way the story gets told. General Matsui Iwane's lightning campaign from Shanghai to Nanjing in November-December 1937 is still a story of brutal invasion, but it can segue into a story of a post-conquest restabilization in which some Japanese and some Chinese negotiated a working relationship under a new structure of authority.

Gen Matsui Iwane leads victory parade in Nanjing on December 17, 1937.

It yields a history in which the aggressor sometimes appears as a sympathetic civilian working to repair the damage the army has done by recruiting locals to help with that work. It discovers the victim resurfacing as a pragmatist seeking accommodations that will allow him to re-establish his livelihood, shield his compatriots, and even build what the propagandists would soon be calling "New China." At the beginning, when local conditions were fluid and no one knew how far the Japanese would go in their offensive, even whether they would stay or leave, a few gambled on the shift and threw their lot in with the invader. As the situation across the Yangtze Delta stabilized in Japan's favor in the spring of 1938, the incentives to cooperate with the new rulers increased. And so, for all manner of reasons, many worked out accommodations with the occupation state.

The Language of Collaboration

The complexity of this sort of accommodation can be illustrated by a letter I came across in the Shanghai Municipal Archives. The letter was sent by a group of Shanghai residents to the collaborationist municipal government in January 1939 on a matter affecting the administration of their local area. The letter writers identified themselves as members of an entity calling itself the Huangpu West Residents' Association (Huangpu River borders the east side of old Shanghai). They knew well for whom the letter had to be written—the Japanese—even if it was addressed to a Shanghai official, and so strove for appropriate rhetoric. "Looking at trends across the globe, we need to grasp the spirit of New China and engage in the work of collaboration," they declared. "Not only is Japan's culture quite advanced and its financial power great, but its people are sufficiently firm and sincere that they can serve as good neighbors and guides in the project of joining our vast territory with their fine culture." The letter writers do not blush or hold back as they launch themselves deeper into this act of political performance: "The committed and benevolent Japanese who are wholeheartedly participating in this project have a deep love of China. It is because of their participation that our two great East Asian peoples can walk a limitless path toward co-prosperity and mutual support." [6]

Our first reaction to such sycophantic rhetoric will be to condemn the authors as collaborators who have thoroughly compromised themselves with the occupiers. They do not even bother to euphemize Japan, as official texts during the occupation often did, as the "friend-country" (youbang). Jumping to the quick conclusion that they were sunk in hopeless collaboration is exactly the sort of judgment I suggest we suspend. We need not assume culpability or gullibility on anyone's part in this document, either the writers of the letter or the municipal official to whom they were writing. This was a transaction between two parties, not a testimonial from one to the other. Someone in the chain of communication may have believed what was written, but we have no evidence of that. Nor need we think that they believed what they wrote in order to write it. Look at this rhetoric instead as an exchange. Managing needs and interests within the new order might well mean parroting the hyperboles of Japanese propaganda in order to get what one needed. Guaranteeing that one's language was politically appropriate to the occasion for asking and giving favors was simply what one did to get things done in the new environment.

Whether the residents of Huangpu West actually thought such things is beside the point, which is that cooperation with the Japanese, or with the Chinese proxy administration, was the modus vivendi for those who stayed behind in occupied China. Occupation creates collaboration, but the need to collaborate in

turn creates the appearance of collaborating as well as its reality. Those who chose the appearance over the reality may be hard to detect when we can only scan the surfaces of sources that are partial, in both senses of the word. So too, those who appear to have chosen the reality of collaboration may have been engaging in a calculus of options and risks different from the simplicities that hindsight, and the nationalist narrative that thrives on it, hands to us. All of which suggests to me that there are more ambiguous stories to tell about the occupation than those we have accepted or assumed.

Collaboration is a word for which there is no precise equivalent in Chinese. Whether taken in this narrower political sense, or permitted to expand out into the broader sense of simply going along with the occupier, which has come to dominate the popular pejorative use of the word, Chinese lacks a word that has been coded in the way "collaboration" has in European languages. In translating the phrase in the Huangpu West residents' letter so that they declare themselves ready to "engage in the work of collaboration," I narrowed the term they used into something less than what it says in Chinese. Their term is hezuo, a neutral expression meaning "to work together." It implies a relationship of equality, or at least of mutuality, between two parties acting in pursuit of a common goal. Hezuo in Chinese carries none of the negative tone we associate with the word "collaboration" when we use it in the context of war. Inasmuch as "working together" is what "collaboration" literally means in English, hezuo would seem to be an appropriate translation; "cooperation" also conveys the sense of this word. This is what the letter writers wanted to say, for they were set on projecting just the kind of cooperative and mutually supportive relationship that Japan as occupier hoped to have with compliant Chinese. They were not challenging the terms that Japan as a military invader imposed on the possibility of cooperation. Hezuo is the language of compliance. It is just like the language that Pétain used—except that in using it, he imbued the term with a distinctly negative connotation. For reasons that remain to be explored, the meaning of the word hezuo did not ramify, either during the war or after it, into "collaboration". The very idea that Chinese might collaborate with Japanese was, and has continued to be, regarded as unthinkable.

A fuller phrase, qin Ri hezuo, appears in the May 1939 declaration of principles of the Greater Shanghai Youth Corps, a paramilitary body organized by Japanese military officers: "feeling close to Japan and cooperating with it." [7] The collaborators and the Japanese also used tixie or "mutual support." This term appears as the fourth principle of the Great People's Association, an official pro-Japanese mobilizational organization: the full phrase is Zhong-Ri tixie, or "mutual support between China and Japan." The same document also uses xieli, or "assistance," when it announces that the association's mission is "the work of assistance and mutual support" (xieli tixie zhi gongzuo). When Kato Kozan, a pacification agent in Zhenjiang downstream from Nanjing, looked back on his team's work in a Nanjing newspaper article in mid-1939, he was pleased to report that he heard the words qinshan ("feeling close"), tixie ("mutual support"), and hezuo ("working together") on everyone's lips. [8] This was the language of the new order, and it was not intended to signal anything to be ashamed of. Had Kato been able to eavesdrop on the conversations in Zhenjiang from which he was carefully excluded, he would have heard a different term, the one by which most Chinese still refer to collaborators: the bluntly unambiguous hanjian, "traitor to the Han Chinese," an all-purpose term for evil, deception, and treason. The term leaves no middle range between innocuity and damnation, no space in which ambiguity might arise, no reason to look back and ask what might actually have been going on.

Collaboration as Analytical Shift

With the flood of interest since the 1980s in wartime collaboration in Europe have come disputes as to where the boundaries of the word "collaboration" lie. At its broadest extreme, the word is allowed to cover all manner of cooperation, active or passive, shown to the occupier; anything, in fact, that enables an occupation to continue. At the far opposite extreme lies the narrowest definition that restricts the use of the word to supportive engagement in the tasks and ideology of the occupier, for which the more specialized "collaborationism" has been proposed. [9] The first definition has the disadvantage of leaving no alternative position for ordinary people who had no choice in the matter: everyone under the condition of occupation becomes a collaborator. The invention of "collaborationism" to tag willing collaboration protects most people under an occupation state from the charge of selling out their country, but it does not make the more usual type of collaboration—selling not to the highest bidder but to the only authority doing the bidding—disappear as a problem. Indeed, differently construed, this isolation of activists as a separate category has left the way open for a universal condemnation of everyone who survived the war. Pushed to an extreme, all Germans become "Hitler's willing executioners," as one historian of the Holocaust has argued. The same logic could be used to charge the majority of French who accepted German rule as "Pétain's willing collaborators." [10] Widespread complicity gets totalized into an explanation for the Holocaust that looks in the mirror of the Final Solution and sees Germans as the Final Problem—and, if we look deeply enough, the Vichy French as well: pure victims getting the pure victimizers they require. To deem all guilty of the crimes that war permits is to erase any possibility of understanding the terrible ambivalences of living under war regimes and the tremendous ambiguities involved in making sense of everyday social action. When all distinctions among actions and motives disappear, we confuse how individuals acted with what we think they could have done, and so move to an absolute moral register where hindsight overlooks the contingencies and dangers that directed real-life choices.

Less aggressively phrased, however, this interpretation asks us to take seriously the day-to-day survival of a tyrannous regime as something that resulted at least in part from the work that the occupied did. As Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton have phrased this challenge, no occupying power "can administer territory by force alone. The most brutal and determined conqueror needs local guides and informants. Successful occupations depend heavily upon accomplices drawn from the disaffected, sympathetic, or ambitious elements within the conquered people." [11] Here they lean toward the more limited definition of collaboration, without however limiting those who fall within the category to an extreme and evil few.

I have no desire to use the Chinese case to argue for or against any particular definition of collaboration. Dethlefsen's political definition, though serviceable, is somewhat hampered for having been formulated in relation to Denmark's rather unique wartime history, in which a foreign occupying power left the existing government in place when it took control. China's wartime experience was much starker than Denmark's, or Vichy France's at least before 1942 and probably after as well. A full military invasion such as Japan's ruled out any possibility of the "exercise of power" "continuing," and it stepped up the effect of "the presence of an occupying power" to something stronger than "pressure." All this placed collaboration in the Chinese case on a steeper moral gradient than in Denmark, where soft accommodation was mostly tolerated at the time, even if it came under retrospective moral condemnation later. On the Yangtze Delta in the winter of 1937-38, harder choices had to be made, and those who decided to climb that steeper moral gradient more readily found themselves compromised and exposed.

To apply the concept of collaborationism to the Chinese who worked with the Japanese may be to misconstrue the role of ideology in the Chinese setting. The leaders of the occupation state did make statements expressing support for Japan's pan-Asianist pitch, but it is very difficult to find strong evidence that more than a few took Japanese war aims seriously. Those who were motivated to support Japan's claims did so generally from the desire to dislodge the National Government under Jiang Jieshi, not to import Japanese ideas for home use. Chinese collaborators appear to have been much more instrumental about their collaborationism than were the Japanese in their invitations to collaborate—which is perhaps why the Chinese language has not gone to the trouble to create the same discriminations of meaning that the word "collaboration" has in English. No collaborator imagined China's relationship with Japan under occupation as anything but provisional, something to be waited out until full sovereignty returned to Chinese hands; their own, needless to say.

Using the concept of collaboration thus produces many difficulties for the historian of twentieth-century East Asia, but I consider the trouble this causes worth the effort if it helps encourage a collective effort to shift the history of that time away from nationalist narratives that foretell triumph or doom and toward a more complex narrative that is capable of speaking of the suffering on all sides.

Rather than look for complexity among competing terms and definitions, it might be better to look within the plastic sphere of complicity with state power in the very broadest sense; that is, regardless of whether that power is foreign or domestic. The creation and reproduction of a state under occupation is something more convoluted than a handful of morally aberrant puppets facilitating the imposition of an external authority. Its intellectual foundations lie deeper, in the understanding Chinese have developed over at least a millennium about how local authority and elite representation are constrained by, but must also coexist interactively with, state authority. Given the scale of the Chinese polity, state authority was always positioned well outside the locality. If it often consisted of a ruling house and aristocracy that was Mongol or Tungusic, that was largely a matter of indifference at the local level, once conquest had been completed.

Whether this observation helps or hinders an understanding of what was at stake during the Japanese occupation of China depends less on the motivation of collaborators, which is often used as the litmus test for deciding whether someone was betraying "China," than on the structural environment within which

collaboration had to take place. I suggested earlier that occupation creates collaboration. It does so by presenting certain elites with opportunities not available to them under normal political circumstances, whether for good or ill. But such logic sends us off in search of motives and away from the broader issue of what collaboration consists of in the Chinese context. More saliently, Japan's wartime occupation of China created collaboration by suspending the normal channels of political mobility and political communication and requiring that they be replaced by an entirely new system, albeit in imitation of the old, and an entirely new body of personnel, though again drawing on personnel involved in previous regimes. It is for this reason that I have chosen to approach occupied China not in terms of a collaboration state, that is, one which existed purely to collaborate with the occupier. I prefer to refer to it as an occupation state: a political regime installed to administer occupied territory in the interests of the occupying power, which is slightly but significantly different. Collaboration is a necessary part of its political repertoire but is not coterminous with the structures and sanctions of the occupation regime, in which there must always be the occupiers' direct presence. Opponents applied such terms as "puppet" (kuilei) to the occupation state and its collaborators, banishing them into the netherworld of hanjian traitors, but this is not how the collaborators chose to identify their decision to hezuo or cooperate with the powers that be. Their self-identity may have been a fraudulent device to paper over the prestige and money with which the occupier rewarded them for their service, but venality is not necessarily the sole or defining mode that brings some people into a relationship of service to the occupation state.

A more open understanding of collaboration shifts the fault lines in the moral landscape of occupation from a small set of bad elements, isolated and idealized as a type, to a broader and more intricate pattern of interaction and accommodation without condemning everyone. The Chinese of the Yangtze Delta were never Matsui's willing executioners, even if many did end up going along with the powers that were, and a very few flourished, inside the occupation state. Whether this interpretation makes everyone, or no one, or someone, a collaborator is something that you, the reader, will want to decide on in relation to your own ethical judgment. All I ask of the reader is to suspend judgment as to who is guilty of what for having worked with whom until after we have seen them at work. We might consider suspending the expectation that we are called upon to judge at all, except in cases of self-advancement won at the blatant cost of the lives and dignity of others. We might look not simply for who has dealings with the Japanese, but for the harm or good they do through those dealings.

Given the violence of the occupation and the high cost for those who resisted, some colleagues have found the suggestion to include a story of collaboration alongside the more familiar tale of resistance offensive. But it seems to me that, with the ever greater distance of time, collaboration and resistance no longer stand as the utterly discrete categories they once were, at least in terms of the practices they induced. And in terms of who did what at the time, I believe we are likelier to understand those who worked with the Japanese if we go looking down in the thickets of ambiguity rather than up at either of the familiar trees of collaboration or resistance [12].

Consider one large source of ambiguity that the historical record tends to disclose when examined closely, and that is the impact of unknowable consequences. For example, detonating a land mine to blow up a troop truck carrying two dozen Japanese soldiers is an act of resistance, but when it produces retaliation resulting in the massacre of hundreds of innocent villagers in the vicinity, should that retaliation be extraneous in an evaluation of the attack? Is the righteousness of resistance so great that the responsibility for precipitating retaliatory violence can be shrugged off as unavoidable collateral damage? Or do the consequences convert this sort of resistance into an act that collaborates with the violent hegemony of occupation, inasmuch as it presented the Japanese army with an excuse to inflict suffering without need of justification or concealment? The "patriotic" interpretation of a guerrilla attack—as an act of terrorism that succeeded in tying down troops and exposing the fraudulence of Japanese claims of being in control—is strong enough in most people's minds to push an argument that reverses the significance of events back from their consequences. And yet the gesture traded well over a hundred lives to have its effect.

I invoke ambiguity not to doubt the clear fact that some collaborated and some resisted, but to question the interpretations history has attached to what might once have been the truth. If I argue against the old certainty of the resistance-collaboration polarity, it is with the hope of opening a path for historical exploration that avoids the judgments that have kept collaboration from becoming the major topic it should be in twentieth-century Chinese history: to ask that these judgments be suspended when we do the work of history. Let me note four of the judgments that have inhibited the study of collaboration in the history of wartime China.

Four Ways Truth Disappears with History

The first judgment is the nationalistic one: that most Chinese for patriotic reasons did not collaborate with the Japanese during the war, and that the few who did were craven, criminal, or corrupt. It is not difficult to understand this way of looking at the war. Resistance to Japan has been one of the defining myths of twentieth-century China. It marks the rise of China as something other than a defeated power. It enables Chinese to escape from the reputation for weakness that a century of difficult international encounters has given it. It allows Chinese to celebrate a national unity of purpose that has not been seen since the brief flurries of the 1911 Revolution or the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Given the weight of national pride that resistance is made to carry, most Chinese naturally find it difficult to digest the evidence of collaboration, except when narrowly defined as a temptation to which only the few fell. Postwar cultures elsewhere, however, have had to come to terms with the fact that collaboration went on even as resistance was pursued, and have had to come up with ways of absorbing this contradiction. Chinese have yet to face this challenge. When you speak for the nation, history is always on your side. When you allow discourse to determine narrative, "truth disappears with history." [13]

The second judgment that inhibits the history of collaboration is the partisan-political one: that collaboration and resistance were internally determined by the struggle between political competitors. In the history of wartime France, this struggle is referred to as la guerre franco-française. [14] This way of explaining collaboration shifts the charge against the Vichy regime and its supporters from colluding with the German outsiders to promoting an indigenous anti-republican and anti-democratic right. The account of the occupation as a civil war accepts that collaboration occurred, but indigenizes the causes and outcomes—in some cases to rescue Vichy with explanation, in others to damn it for its political reaction. One might think of occupied China in similar terms, as a Sino-Chinese war fought out on the backdrop of foreign occupation, the most important consequences of which were entirely internal to China's political future. But the analogy is not salient. At least until 1942, the Vichy regime was a fully French regime that was neither a creation nor entirely a creature of the Germans. True, it pursued a distinctive politics that consciously strove to roll back the policies and ideals of the Third Republic and restore an earlier imagined ethos: resistance was on the left, collaboration on the right. In wartime China, on the other hand, both the Nationalists and the Communists operated resistance regimes. Neither capitulated to Japan, and the core of the struggle with Japan was not the struggle between them. They left conservative restorationism to the various collaborationist regimes Japan sponsored in Nanjing and Beijing, none of which was able to establish itself as a viable alternative as a state. The Sino-Japanese war was only weakly a Sino-Chinese war, though that blossomed once the war of resistance was over. Both regimes have subsequently charged the other with spending more energy on la guerre sino-chinoise than on the anti-Japanese war, and have depicted the other's wartime story as a tale of sordid compromise and self-interest and its own as devoted service to the nation and the people. [15] This rivalry distracts us from seeing anything interesting or important on the part of collaborators.

The third sort of judgment that inhibits the study of collaboration—and this is rather counter-intuitive—is what I would call the humanitarian judgment. This judgment understands war as wasteful and pointless violence, and criticizes collaborators for helping to promote war or contribute to its rewards. The nationalist and the partisan keep the memory of the war alive in order to confirm national identity and reinforce political allegiance. For the humanitarian, on the other hand, the distance that is always opening up between 1945 and the present is a stretch of busy decades of wars, revolutions, and genocides for which the body count continues to mount. These postwar calamities have encouraged many to argue that the signature events of violence of the Second World War cannot be isolated from what followed, that that history did not end in 1945, and that we are still paying a high mortgage on that moral debt. A continuous history of atrocity thus runs in mimic parody alongside the normalizing narratives of modernization, democratization, and rights consciousness.

The Rape of Nanjing is one of these signature events. Some seek to downgrade Nanjing's status as an atrocity by explaining the outbreak of violence as the outcome of battle fatigue or short supplies, though my research indicates that the predations of the soldiers continued the pattern of devastation that Matsui's troops had already inflicted on civilian populations further east. Others have chosen to elevate the Rape to the status of another Holocaust, doing so in order to agitate for what they regard as unpaid judicial redress on China's behalf, but as well to publicize the dangers of war. [16] From this perspective, collaboration conspires in atrocity, and no good defense can be raised against the charge.

The humanitarian judgment against the Vichy regime in France has argued that, far from shielding the French people, collaboration yielded up Jews to Nazi extermination. Making the connection between the Holocaust and collaboration spurred new research on Vichy in the 1980s, just as the political agitation that grew up around the Rape of Nanjing in the 1990s has created new knowledge and awareness of that event. Yet the connection between atrocity and collaboration may be more convenient than substantive. The commission of atrocities certainly raised the stakes for those who considered it expedient, useful, or necessary to work with the occupier; it also affected the viability of collaboration by generating widespread repugnance for the occupier and unwillingness to go along with his plans. But these are the responses that extreme actions elicit at particular moments, not indicators of what the conditions of collaboration may have obliged in practice, nor what the cost of collaboration may be at other, less violent moments. The humanitarian judgment responds to the injustice of war, yet it cannot furnish a history of collaboration, only an opportunity to reimagine the identities we assemble around our judgments of who was right and who was wrong in a conflict.

This brings us to the fourth way of judging collaboration in the guise of explaining it, and making it disappear, and that is what I will broadly phrase as the moral judgment. Moral condemnation is never far from the other three modes, all of which claim morality as the foundation for the cases they make against collaboration. The moral judgment is resilient in the face of the deconstructions to which the other three judgments are vulnerable. Nationalism, political partisanship, and humanitarianism can be dismantled as inadequate bases for evaluating collaboration by reducing them to their particular interests, as I have just done. Even so, in the minds of those who stand apart from such claims and interests, the moral dismissal of collaboration stays alive as a value that places steadfastness above capitulation, honor above expediency. As I noted in an earlier citation of Teemu Ruskola's analysis of Orientalism's effects on our understanding of Chinese law, the word "collaboration" brings into being a moral subject who grasps the moral obligation not to collaborate with wartime occupiers. From a national perspective, this subjectivity is unexceptional. Producing it is not the historian's role, however; it is the propagandist's. The purpose of propaganda is to set up and validate what Ruskola describes as "normative systems that posit a pre-given moral subject and then elaborate guidelines for proper actions by that subject." History does not fashion moral subjects, nor produce moral knowledge. The historian's task is not to make fault claims against historical actors in the past or against readers in the present. Instead, it is to investigate the norms and conditions that produced moral subjects in the place and time under study. It is useful to ask why some Chinese chose to cooperate with the Japanese, but it may be more important to inquire why cooperation made sense to people at that time.

Making Historiographical Space for Collaboration

The value of stepping back from these judgments on collaboration is not to claim that collaboration was as good or as bad as any other choice being made that winter. It is to realize that each choice had to be made, and made through a calculation of the benefits and losses that individuals thought they could decipher at the time, before the full consequences of their actions could be known. Without question, many of those choices were venal in inspiration and destructive in impact, and the historian is not disqualified from documenting that venality and tracking the damage these choices led to, and declaring them to be such. It would be facetious to suggest that the historian must suspend personal distaste for the worst collaborations, particularly when the consequences of their collaboration were as stark as they were in a place like Nanjing. On the other hand, the historian is also responsible for documenting all that was not venal and destructive when other motivations came unto play and other consequences into view; in other words, to detect ambiguity in what a superficial reading might otherwise dismiss as confirmation of the norms by which a culture, then or now, has constructed its moral subjects.

Most vulnerable to moral judgments at the time were the educated elites, who were expected to serve the Republic and so held responsible in a way that ordinary people were not. Their obligation to make the correct choice was heightened, though also made easier, by the fact that they could afford the valor of removing themselves from the battlefield as poorer people could not, finding refuge in the international concessions in Shanghai or sitting out the war in Sichuan or Yunnan. Their exit left a far less privileged group behind to reconstitute the post-conquest economy and rebuild state administration in the face of a rapacious occupation army, a politically divided resistance, and a devastated populace enduring food and housing shortages. Calculating whether to collaborate could involve a mixture of personal salvation from the dangers of war, personal greed for the windfalls of power, or personal revulsion for any of the parties seeking power. To condemn these people under the banner of greed or treason, without looking more closely at actual circumstances, however, is to reproduce the political terrain on which they were forced to act: to mistake resistance for resistancialism. [17]

Contrary to standard views, many ordinary people seem to have been relatively indifferent to the moral claims of resistance and collaboration, and to have declined to be active partisans of either cause. Too far down the social hierarchy to take part in what Henrik Dethlefsen specified as "the continuing exercise of power under the pressure produced by the presence of an occupying power," most ordinary people got on with their lives, struggling to earn enough to survive, paying the taxes they could not evade, schooling their children in curricula they could not control, and living and working within state institutions they had neither devised nor approved. Robert McClure, a Canadian medical missionary writing from Henan in 1938, declared that the peasants of his acquaintance were "used to being conquered" by whichever political faction captured power in the province. "To people accustomed to this method of government the danger of a Japanese 'capture' was not anything to be scared of." He added that "one must assume that the Japanese were aware of this condition too." [18] Indeed, they were: Mantetsu employees doing rural surveys claimed that the villagers were as indifferent to the Nationalists as to the Japanese, and by extension to the collaborators as well. [19] The notion that the peasants regarded all state power as external and coercive was a convenient lesson for the Japanese to discover. It was also less than true, for as events showed, not all peasants collaborated with the occupation, and many kept the resistance alive. But it was a rationalization that helped some Japanese convince themselves that the occupation state was equally plausible as a government of these people, equally good or evil. It also permitted them cynically to manipulate the tokens of legitimacy and popular representation without apology.

Spokesmen for the resistance during the war worried, reasonably enough, that the occupied might be prone to accept the circumstances in which they found themselves. They knew that some were voicing an equal-evil argument in rejecting both collaboration and resistance; and not just peasants. Urbanites were particularly susceptible, and even likely to rephrase it as an equal-good argument: let any regime stand that did not oppress them. As one voice appealing for resistance put it, "Some compatriots in places that have not been trampled by the enemy don't even think of the enemy as having invaded, that it is just another change in regime and we can still go on living peacefully and taking pleasure in our work, enjoying life as before." The notion that such capitulation would leave people's lives unchanged was "a dream." [20] This author was writing in anger, warning that the costs of submitting to Japan were high. But he was writing too in fear; and what he feared was time. Time has a capacity to recast the exceptional as the ordinary, the intrusive as the diurnal, conquest as merely the next regime. It can quietly overpower the claim that submission to military domination is an illusion and make resistance seem like the illusion. Hindsight shows us now that time was on the side of the resistance. The resistance could wait out Japan's hopeless ambition to dominate all of East Asia and the Pacific. It could wait out as well the slow, seeping losses the Japanese military was suffering on the continent, confident that Japan's client states would eventually fall regardless of who was put forward to be the leader of the nation. This was not clear at first, but became so soon enough.

Time was not on the collaborators' side. The high rate of turnover among committee members indicates that most found working for the occupation state harder going than they anticipated. Some were able to lodge themselves in comfortable bureaucratic niches in the occupation state, and some were able to protect their business or family interests by doing so. Many more, unable to master the complexities of wartime politics and unwilling to stay on the invader's side when a more appealing option emerged, withdrew or were forced out. As events unfolded, collaboration proved to be politically unstable and morally awkward for both sides of the relationship. For the occupier, successes were largely apparent, costs mounted, and resistance interfered with the installation of a new order of any substance. For the occupied, the costs were also prohibitive, and the complicities and rivalries that collaboration let loose hampered the sort of political process that a regime has to undergo in order to claim legitimacy. Under such conditions, collaboration emerged as the losing option.

However complicated the reasons some people found to collaborate, their activities produced ambiguous effects and entailed difficulties in practice that the myth of heroic resisters and cringing collaborators cannot penetrate. Ambiguity does not mean inexplicability, nor does difficulty mean that collaboration contributed nothing to the power of the occupying forces. What ambiguity and difficulty mean is that we cannot deduce the causes that prompted people to act from the moral claims we impose, nor evaluate their actions solely in relation to consequences the actors could not anticipate. Easing apart historical acts from the assumptions to which nationalist sentiment has bound them, or from the moral presuppositions has left them to rust, concedes to events an indeterminacy that places them always beyond anticipation. Who could know, at the beginning, that the occupation state would not outlast Japan's defeat by one day, or that four years after that defeat, it would be replaced by a Communist state for which the costs of elite collaboration, with the Japanese, the

Nationalists, or itself, would run even higher?

Notes

[1] See Gerhard Hirschfeld's introduction to Collaboration in France: Politics and Culture during the Nazi Occupation, 1940-44, co-edited with Patrick Marsh (Oxford: Berg, 1989), p. 2.
[2] Henrik Dethlefsen, "Denmark and the German Occupation: Cooperation, Negotiation or Collaboration?," Scandanavian Journal of History 15:3 (1990), pp. 198-99.
[3] Teemu Ruskola, "Legal Orientalism," Michigan Law Review 101:1 (October 2002), p. 225.
[4] Rebecca West, The Meaning of Treason (reprint, London: Phoenix Press, 2000), pp. 94, 102, 114.
[5] On the myth of resistance in postwar France, see Henry Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991); Alan Morris, Collaboration and Resistance Reviewed: Writers and the Mode Rétro in Post-Gaullist France (New York: Berg, 1992); and Éric Conan and Henry Rousso, Vichy: An Ever-Present Past (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998).
[6] Letter from the Huangpu West Residents' Association to the Shanghai municipal government (14 January 1939), archived in the Shanghai Municipal Archives (Shanghai shi dang'anguan), File R18-126.
[7] Shanghai Municipal Archives, File R18-689.
[8] Kato Kozan's memoir, "Congshi xuanfu gongzuo zhi huigu" (My reminiscence of doing pacification work), appeared serially in the Nanjing xinbao (New Nanjing daily) on 2-3 July 1939.
[9] On "collaborationism," see Stanley Hoffman, Decline or Renewal: France since the 1930s (New York: Viking, 1974), p. 27.
[10] The phrase "Hitler's willing executioners" is the title of the controversial book in which Daniel Goldhagen argues that moral responsibility for the Holocaust falls not on a limited subset of Germans but on the German people as a whole; Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1998), p. 9.
[11] Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, Vichy France and the Jews (reprint, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. xii.
[12] "Thickets of ambiguity" is taken from Roderick Kedward's introduction to Vichy France and Resistance: Culture and Ideology, coedited with Roger Austin (London: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 5.
[13] Michael Ondaatje, Running in the Family (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), p. 53.
[14] Rousso, The Vichy Syndrome, pp. 6-8.
[15] For a more balanced assessment of the indirect negotiations between the Nationalist regime and the Japanese that is the exception proving the rule, see Huang Meizhen and Yang Hanqing, "Nationalist China's Negotiating Position During the Stalemate, 1938-1945," in Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932-45: The Limits of Accommodation, ed. David Barrett and Larry Shyu (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 56-76.
[16] For attempts to analogize the Rape of Nanjing to the Holocaust, see Joshua Fogel, The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
[17] See Rana Mitter 's critique of the effect of resistancialism on assessments of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria; The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 226.
[18] Robert McClure's comment appears in an undated letter in the United Church Archives (Victoria College, University of Toronto), Finding Aid 186, Box 8, File 141. McClure's movements behind Japanese lines induced the Japanese army in April to offer a reward for his capture; see Munroe Scott, McClure: The China Years (Toronto: Canec, 1977), p. 214.
[19] Chugoku noson kanko chosa (Studies of Chinese village customs) (reprint, Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 101-102.
[20] Zhang Yibo, Zhenjiang lunxian ji (A record of Zhenjiang under occupation) (reprint, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1999), p. 37.

Timothy Brook is concurrently Principal of St. John's College, University of British Columbia, and Shaw Professor of Chinese at Oxford University.

This article is excerpted and revised from Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 1-13, 240-48. Posted at Japan Focus on July 5, 2008.

Created by Datamomentum