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**Wang Xitian and the Chinese Experience in Imperial Tokyo, 1899-1923: Class, Violence,
and the Formation of a New National Consciousness**

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April 4, 2022

Introduction

The Death of One Chinese Man in the Japanese Empire

The date was September 12th, 1923; the time was a little before dawn. Four men were descending from Sakai Bridge near Komatsu River in Tokyo's Kameido District, approaching the embankment. Three of them were Japanese soldiers. The fourth was a young Chinese man named Wang Xitian.¹ As they walked closer to a concrete pillar, the officer among the three soldiers, Sasaki Heikichi, suggested, "Let's take a short break here." Wang complied, leaning against the pillar, facing Sasaki. As he did so, a fifth figure—another Japanese soldier—emerged from behind the pillar he was leaning on. The soldier drew his knife and slashed at Wang's neck from behind. Wang fell forward. He was dead in no time. His killer met Sasaki's eyes, and walked away in silence.²

The killer's name was Kakiuchi Yasuo. Almost sixty years later, in 1981, he would confess to having followed Sasaki's order of "getting rid of one man."³ But back on September 12th, 1923, everything was done in secrecy: Kakiuchi's identity was not revealed, nor was any information of Wang's death. It would take several decades for Wang's family and friends to learn that the missing 27-year-old, who set out to check on a community of Chinese workers in the aftermath of the Great Kantō Earthquake, was in fact murdered. In the interim, the Japanese government would conceal the truth behind Wang's death, despite persistent pressure and queries from Chinese authorities.

¹ All Chinese and Japanese names in this essay are written in the way they are spoken in the original language, i.e. surname before given name.

² Tahara Yō, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin: Ō Kiten Jiken wo Tsuisekisuru* (Tōkyō: Iwanamishoten, 2014), 68.

³ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 7.

Who, then, was Wang Xitian? There is little written about his life, and almost nothing in English.⁴ In general, moreover, the mass killing of Chinese people in Tokyo after the earthquake in 1923 has received very little attention in English scholarship and has been overshadowed by the larger scale massacre of Koreans. From a smattering of Chinese and Japanese sources, however, fragments of Wang Xitian's life can be pieced together to form a larger picture that shows his life at the intersection of two vastly different Chinese experiences in early 20th century Tokyo: that of the well-educated nationalist student, on the one hand, and that of the exploited migrant worker on the other. While the two experiences seem dichotomized, Wang, a student-turned activist whose work engaged with both nationalism and workers' rights, linked them. His life, death, and social connections reflect not only the breadth of the Chinese experiences in Tokyo, but also the intricate desires and anxieties within the Empire of Japan.

This thesis examines the way Wang served as a bridge between two worlds. The first two sections focus not on Wang's biographical details, but rather on the physical spaces in Tokyo he lived in, and the Chinese experiences these physical spaces represent. The first section explores the student-formed Chinatown in Kanda and its rising Chinese nationalism through literary and political movements. The second section spotlights the formation of a Chinese workers' neighborhood in Ōshima-machi and the marginalization and violence they faced. Then, the third section examines how Wang Xitian's life relates to both neighborhoods, and how his activism led to his death. Finally, the fourth section discusses the first three sections in a larger historical framework, and investigates how they relate to insecurities of, and opportunities within, the Empire of Japan in the early 20th century.

⁴ Some secondary literature, like Eric Han's book on the Yokohama Chinatown, mention his name in passing; however, there is no biographical work on his life in English.

This thesis argues that the Chinese experience in early 20th century Tokyo was socioeconomically dichotomized yet consistently reflected Japan's desire to classify and control foreign populations at its core. It also suggests a significant change over time: between the formation of the Kanda Chinatown and the Ōshima-machi worker community, a new Chinese nationalism characterized less by class and more by ethnicity was formed in Tokyo, under the influence of changing politics in China, growing tensions in Sino-Japan relations, and the spread of new international ideas. This new national consciousness unified the previously dichotomized Chinese experiences in Tokyo to some extent, causing figures like Wang Xitian to connect the well-educated students with the more marginalized workers; its offensive nature to Japan's system of social classification also caused the empire to see people like Wang as a threat, which eventually resulted in the simultaneous panicked massacre of the Chinese and the murder of Wang after the earthquake in 1923.

Why Tokyo, and Why Wang Xitian?

There has been scholarship examining Chinese populations in the Empire of Japan, but very little has been specifically written about the Chinese in Tokyo. Eric Han's *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown* examines the divisions and integrations within the Chinatown community in Yokohama, but the differences between Yokohama and Tokyo were significant.⁵ Yokohama was a treaty port; Tokyo was an imperial capital, whose planning reflected both population mobility and national image-building. The way Tokyo handled migrant populations, therefore, can reflect much more about the empire's anxieties and desires.

⁵ Eric C. Han, *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown: Yokohama 1894-1972* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020).

As for the Chinese experience in Tokyo, most secondary literature has been biographical, focusing on the life of prominent figures such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, Zhou Enlai, Lu Xun and Yu Dafu. Detailed as these biographies can be, they reflect only the lives of a selected elite minority, instead of a more comprehensive picture of Chinese experiences across various classes. There is also David Ambaras's *Japan's Imperial Underworlds*, which examines connections between Japan and more socioeconomically disadvantaged Chinese citizens.⁶ Ambaras, however, focuses on the connections between Japan and the southern China town of Fuqing formed through marriages, while this thesis focuses on migrant workers from Wenzhou and Chuzhou in eastern China who ended up in Ōshima-machi through the labor market. Furthermore, using the life of Wang Xitian as an analytical lens, this thesis aims to suggest how the elites' and the workers' experiences intertwined in the early 20th century Tokyo.

I. The Kanda Chinatown and Burgeoning Chinese Nationalism

The Student-based Chinatown of Jinbochō, Kanda

Jinbochō, Kanda, located a little north of the Imperial Palace, is known today for its plethora of used bookstores. Back in the early 20th century, however, it was one of Tokyo's major Chinatowns and housed thousands of Chinese residents.⁷ Unlike the famous Chinatowns in Yokohama or Kobe, the Chinatown in Kanda was short-lived: Japanese scholar Kashima Shigeru calls it a "Dream Chinatown," one that lasted no more than three decades and hardly has any traces left nowadays.⁸

⁶ David R. Ambaras, *Japan's Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁷ Kashima Shigeru, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō: Sekai Isanteki "Hon no Machi" no Tanjō kara Genzai made* (Tōkyō: Chikuma Shobō, 2017), 280.

⁸ Kashima, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō*, 272.

The short-lived fate of the Kanda Chinatown is closely related to the way it was formed. While the Chinatowns in Yokohama and Kobe were formed through the necessity of international trade and opportunities for wealth in port cities, the majority of Kanda Chinatown's residents pursued not wealth, but education: they were mostly Chinese students, who left China for Japan's opportunities in higher education. According to architecture historian Fujinori Terunobu, the "three defining conditions of a Chinatown" are the presence of restaurants, barbers, and tailors. All three most definitely existed in Kanda in the early 20th century.⁹ These businesses were established to serve the core population of this Chinatown: students. Fujinori also notes that after the Great Kantō Earthquake, when most Chinese students evacuated from Kanda, local businesses closed down as well, further confirming that the Kanda Chinatown was formed through living necessities and social connections of Chinese students.¹⁰

The origins of this student-based Chinatown can be traced back to efforts of the educator Kanō Jigorō, who founded in 1896, under the advice of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Saionji Kinmochi, a small private school for fourteen Chinese international students sponsored by the Qing government.¹¹ The school was located in Misakichō, Kanda, and taught subjects including Japanese, mathematics, sciences and physical education; by 1899, seven students graduated and returned to China, becoming prominent figures in government or educational institutions.¹² The success of Kanō's first students encouraged the Qing government to continue sending students to Japan, and Kanō expanded his school, naming it Hirofumi (*Hongwen* in Chinese) Academy.¹³

⁹ Kashima, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō*, 271.

¹⁰ Kashima, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō*, 271.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 273.

¹² *Ibid*, 274.

¹³ Initially, the school was named 弘文学院, but as the character 弘 is a "taboo character" that appeared in Qing Emperor Qianlong's given name, it later got renamed 宏文学院, a name with the same pronunciation but a different first character.

With more demands for educational resources, more schools, including the famous East Asia High School which many prominent Chinese political figures later attended, were founded in the first decade of the 20th century.¹⁴ By 1906, there were already over ten thousand Chinese students in Japan, and Kanda was often their first destination.¹⁵

The Life of Zhou Enlai and Lu Xun in the Kanda Chinatown

For the first three decades of the 20th century, the Kanda Chinatown continued to house students who would become influential political and literary figures in China. Given the literacy and popularity of such figures, many primary sources about their lives in Japan remain, and can serve as important indications of the Chinese student's experience in Tokyo at the time. One of the most well-preserved sources is the diary of 19-year-old Zhou Enlai, who would later become the first Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China. Zhou studied and lived in Kanda from 1917 to 1918, attending East Asia High School while preparing for the entrance exams of two Japanese preparatory schools, Tokyo Higher Normal School and Tokyo First Higher School. Zhou's time in Kanda was short: he returned to China briefly for a month after failing the entrance exams to both schools, then, upon returning to Japan in September 1918, moved to Waseda to live in a communal dorm.¹⁶ However, during his time there, Zhou recorded many moments that reflect the social connections, interactions, and lifestyles of Chinese students in the Kanda Chinatown.

As Zhou notes in his diary the exact names of visitors he met with and wrote to each day, it is easy to observe how the Chinese students in Kanda formed a close-knit social network,

¹⁴ Kashima, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō*, 279.

¹⁵ Li Lianqing, *Lu Xun yu Riben* (Beijing: Shijiezhishi Chubanshe, 1984), 110.

¹⁶ Yabuki Susumu, *Shū Onrai "jūkyūsai no Tōkyō nikki"* (Tōkyō: Shōgakkan, 1999), 372.

helping each other with housing, sharing news about college entrance exams, and even supporting each other financially. On January 31, 1918, for instance, Zhou's friend and former secondary school classmate Wang Pushan recommended that Zhou move in with him, while Zhou "let [his landlord] know that two other friends would like to move into [his old] place."¹⁷ As limited housing resources made it hard for Chinese students to rent places in Tokyo, the spontaneous social network provided much mutual support for living. Similarly, as the students were mostly aiming for the same goals of entering Japanese colleges, news about exams circulated fast among them: in March 1918, Zhou realized he had not passed the entrance exam to Tokyo Higher Normal School before the results got publicly announced, for he learned about his friend Zhang Honghao's admission into the same school with Japanese people.¹⁸ Zhou also received financial support from his social connections: the editor of Zhou's diary in Japanese, Yabuki Susumu, notes that Zhou borrowed and received from friends a total of 687.2 *yuan*—a considerable amount for a student—for living and educational expenses over the course of twenty-one months in Japan.¹⁹

While studying was the main task for students in Kanda, there was also entertainment and social life recorded in Zhou's diary. Zhou often wrote about social interactions: visiting friend's houses, eating out in local restaurants, discussing politics and philosophy, and occasionally going to movies, shows, and department stores. On the evening of January 6, 1918, for instance, Zhou and his friends "went to Asakusa to see an operetta together."²⁰ While Kanda had many Chinese restaurants that served as gathering spots for Chinese students, it remained mainly a residential district; for entertainment, therefore, the students often ventured out into the nearby districts of

¹⁷ Zhou Enlai, "January 31, 1918," from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji* (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Zhou, "March 16, 1918," from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*

¹⁹ Yabuki, *Shū Onrai "jūkyūsai no Tōkyō nikki,"* 338.

²⁰ Zhou, "January 6, 1918," from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

Ueno, Hibiya and Asakusa. Asakusa was a hub for cinematic and performance arts, while Ueno and Hibiya, with their parks, became ideal spots for walks.²¹ Zhou, after taking his first entrance exam on March 9, 1918, went to Hibiya park for a stroll with Wang Pushan: he wrote about seeing groups of Japanese students, male and female, strolling, reading, and playing sports in the park, and feeling how “it all contained an educational value” that exceeded children’s play in China he had seen.²²

Entertainment for Chinese students, however, could also be critiqued. The famous Chinese writer and nationalist pioneer Lu Xun, who spent eight years in Japan prior to Zhou’s arrival in Tokyo, recounts his distaste for Chinese students’ indulgence in social activities in his personal essay, “Mr. Fujino.” “In the foyer of the Chinese Students’ Association, there are a few books available for purchase, which makes it sometimes worthwhile to visit,” Lu writes. “But in the evening, clamorous footsteps often resound on the floor of one of the rooms, and the air is full of smoke: someone who is well versed in current affairs will explain, ‘They’re learning how to dance.’”²³

Lu, like Zhou Enlai, lived in the Kanda Chinatown. He first arrived at Tokyo in the spring of 1902, as a Qing-sponsored student at Hirofumi Academy.²⁴ He soon made literature his vessel for nationalist ideals, as his works often reflected a sentiment of helping Chinese-speaking populations understand their role in the world through international episodes. He translated the French novelist Jules Verne’s science fiction *From the Earth to the Moon* from Japanese into Chinese, in the hope of helping Chinese people “improve their thoughts and understand the way

²¹ Yabuki, *Shū Onrai “jūkyūsai no Tōkyō nikki,”* 246.

²² Zhou, “March 9, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lū Ri Riji*.

²³ Lu Xun, “Mr. Fujino,” from *Zhao Hua Xi Shi* (Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 1932).

²⁴ Li, *Lu Xun yu Riben*, 1.

of world civilizations” through reading science fiction.²⁵ After briefly studying medicine in Sendai, Lu returned to Tokyo as a full-time writer, participating in nationalist Zhang Taiyan’s anti-Qing organization, the Restoration Society, while writing essays for Chinese publications founded in Japan.²⁶ He left Japan for China in 1909, assumed teaching roles in higher education, and formed bigger literary circles that promoted nationalist ideals.

Lu’s experience reflects how, reinforced by the high concentration of literate students willing to observe and absorb modern ideas, the development of Chinese nationalist literature in Kanda was swift and prevalent. While figures like Lu explored nationalist literary expressions, however, other students in Kanda started seeking ways of politically improving their homeland. Many, like Lu, arrived in Japan to study, either under their families’ or their own desire to self-improve and advance onto a successful career, but were soon exposed to new experiences and ideas that shifted the emphasis on their identity as students to a new emphasis on their identity as Chinese nationals. This resulted in the growth of offshore Chinese nationalism in Kanda, as the Chinatown became a new location for intellectual conversations and political gatherings.

The Greater Context of Offshore Chinese Nationalism

Arguably, the formation of the Kanda Chinatown back in the 1890s was already inseparable from Chinese nationalism and the desire to better improve China as a country: when Hirofumi Academy was founded, students arrived on Qing government funding, and returned to China for prominent government posts. Imperial reformists like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, leaders of the Hundred-Day Reform of 1898, fled to Japan after their internal reforms failed, and

²⁵ Lu Xun, trans. 1903, *From the Earth to the Moon*, from *Lu Xun Quan Ji* (Beijing: People’s Literature Publishing House, 1973), Introduction.

²⁶ Li, *Lu Xun yu Riben*, 111.

continued to spread their political ideas through established newspapers.²⁷ Later on, when students like Lu Xun interacted with ideas of Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Taiyan in the 1900s, they engaged with Chinese nationalism in a more radical form: a democratic one that focused on overthrowing, instead of improving and preserving, the imperial regime of the Qing Dynasty.²⁸ By the end of the 20th century's first decade—when Lu left Japan—there were already signs of change over time in the political ideas circulated among student communities in Kanda.

In the next decade, however, this already-changing form of student nationalism further radicalized. It was characterized by two significant new trends: first, a rising anti-Japanese sentiment and second, a strong curiosity and interest in emerging socialist ideas. To examine these two trends, the greater historical context needs to be surveyed. The 1910s witnessed a series of historical events that greatly influenced China's international status. The first of these was the Wuchang Uprising in 1911, which marked the collapse of the imperial Qing Dynasty, followed by Sun Yat-sen's founding of the Republic of China in 1912. While the idea of a republic without a monarch was refreshing to many, the newness of the state and its internal political conflicts also made it susceptible to foreign interference. Japan, as China's neighboring country, developed an increasingly aggressive attitude toward China in the 1910s and exhibited signs of further infringement upon Chinese sovereignty: the most infamous event that occurred in this period was the Twenty-one Demands of 1915, which granted Japan special privileges in China during World War I.²⁹

The signing of the Twenty-one Demands incited great animosity toward Japan and dissatisfaction with China's republican government among the Chinese students studying in

²⁷ Han, *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown*, 59.

²⁸ Li, *Lu Xun yu Riben*, 120.

²⁹ "Twenty-One Demands," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc.), accessed March 31, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Twenty-one-Demands>.

Tokyo. The students referred to May 7, the day when Japan released an ultimatum that eventually led to the signing of the demands, as a “memorial day for the country’s shame (*guochi jinianri*),” a term they would continue to use over the next few years. Zhou Enlai wrote the words “remembering the country’s shame (*guochi jinian*)” in his diary on May 7, 1918, under the section where he usually copied excerpts from Confucian texts.³⁰ Similarly, Wang Xitian, whose life this essay will further explore, signed the words “memorial day for the country’s shame” next to the date on a confirmation receipt of tuition checks addressed to the Manchurian government on May 7, 1920, as if criticizing the ineptness of the government.³¹

As Sino-Japanese tensions further grew in the late 1910s, anti-Japanese nationalist sentiments among the students at Kanda grew even stronger and more direct forms of protests and activism arose. A representative example was the protest that followed the signing of a secret pact that granted Japan more military agency along the Sino-Russian border, referred to as the Sino-Japanese Joint Defense Agreement in 1918. Angered by the signing of the pact, students in Kanda carried out a large-scale organized protest in which they stopped attending classes and collectively left Japan to return to China; Zhou Enlai’s diary describes the organizing that went into this protest, stating that “on May 5, various local student organizations in Tokyo met and reached the consensus that... they would unite to face a common enemy [Japan]... and elect student leaders to organize the collective return [of students to China].”³² The students’ return stirred reactions from the Chinese government: the Jilin provincial government, for instance, made an announcement on May 28 advising Jilin students in Tokyo to “stop listening to rumors

³⁰ Zhou, “May 7, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

³¹ “Receipt, May 7, 1920,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian* (Jilin: Changchun Publishing House, 1996), 106.

³² Zhou, “May 5, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

and not give up [their] studies.”³³ The mass return of students from Japan and the spread of international news among student communities in Beijing eventually led to a series of student protests in mainland China that culminated in the May Fourth Movement in 1919 following the Treaty of Versailles, marking the transfer of an offshore nationalist movement to within the borders of China.³⁴

While there was an increasing anti-Japanese sentiment among Chinese students in Tokyo, many students were also affected by socialism, which became prevalent after the successful Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. Kashima Shigeru referred to Kanda as the “cradle of Chinese Communism,” as news about the new Russian government were imported to Japan before they were to China, and Kanda, with its high density of young intellectuals, soon became a place with frequent exposure and exchanges of Bolshevik ideas.³⁵ This, too, is reflected in Zhou Enlai’s diary: on April 23, 1918, less than half a year after Lenin’s October Revolution, Zhou picked up a newly published book called *Russian Studies* from Kanda’s Tōkyōdō Bookstore and, after analyzing Russia’s current political factions, commented that “Russia will now become the first experimental field in the world for building a socialist country.”³⁶ Although Zhou did not fully subscribe to communist and socialist ideas at this time, his analysis certainly shows both a deep interest in those ideas and the accessibility of such ideas in the Kanda Chinatown.

Under such circumstances, a student living in Kanda in the late 1910s was receiving a radically different set of information and ideas from a Qing-sponsored student at Hirofumi

³³ “Letter From Jilin Ministry of Education to Manager of Students in Japan Concerning Rumors of Returning to the Country,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 13.

³⁴ Xie Jiemei, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” in *Wang Xitian Jinian Wenji* (Jilin: Changchun Publishing House, 1996), pp. 226-302, 237.

³⁵ Kashima, *Kanda Jinbō-chō Shoshigai Kō*, 286.

³⁶ Zhou, “April 23, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

Academy in the 1890s. Students in Kanda in the late 1910s perceived the Chinese identity, the stakes for their home country, and the possibilities for China's future in a very different way: there was a stronger sense of a "common enemy" that mitigated internal disagreements within China, and socialist ideas weakened the socioeconomic borders that separated the well-educated Chinese elite—often constituting most of the students in Tokyo—from less-educated, poorer Chinese people. This change in time would eventually lead to the students' integration with another emerging Chinese population in Tokyo at the time: that of the Chinese migrant workers.

II. Migrant Workers of Ōshima-machi and the Post-Earthquake Violence

The Origins of Chinese Workers in Japan and Imperial Rescript 352

The experience of migrant workers in early 20th century Tokyo was vastly different from, yet subtly intertwined with, that of the students. Compared to the students, workers received much more hostility, faced a more direct threat of expulsion, and suffered not only from Japan's anti-Chinese sentiments but also from the discrimination of fellow Chinese elite migrants. As literacy rates of migrant workers were low, there remain hardly any sources about their subjective experience; however, some evidence of their lives can be seen through local newspapers and accounts of students whose activist work involved the assistance of laborers.

The earliest Chinese migrant populations to arrive near Tokyo Bay did not settle in the city of Tokyo itself; instead, they formed communities in the treaty port of Yokohama, following the end of Tokugawa maritime restrictions in 1854. The Yokohama Chinatown was part of the Foreign Settlement district, since foreigners were still not granted mixed residence with Japanese locals.³⁷ As Japan rose as an empire on the global level toward the end of the 19th century,

³⁷ Han, *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown*, 29.

however, it decided to terminate the Foreign Settlement and allow mixed residence with foreigners outside of treaty ports starting July 17, 1899.³⁸ The “foreigners” discussed, however, did not include a large proportion of Qing subjects: Chinese migrant workers.

On July 27, 1899, Japan promulgated Imperial Rescript 352, which announced that “[Chinese] laborers without special permission from government authorities would not be permitted to live or work outside of the Foreign Settlement or the zone of mixed residence,” as an amendment to its new mixed residence policy.³⁹ Imperial Rescript 352 barred Chinese migrant workers, either already living in Japan or not yet arrived, from entering Tokyo, while other Chinese nationals such as businessmen, students and scholars were able to live and work in the city as they pleased. Therefore, while schools were founded in Kanda and students from China continuously arrived in Japan, there was a long hiatus in the migration of lower-class Chinese workers.

This division between the elite and non-elite Chinese populations was enabled not only by the Japanese government, but also by members of the well-educated Chinese elite at the time. When there was much debate in Japan concerning whether to grant Chinese nationals mixed residence, prominent Chinese figures in Yokohama like Liang Qichao, former Qing official who initiated the Hundred-Day Reform, petitioned for mixed residence by arguing how much “people of business” differed from Chinese manual laborers, who were regarded as avaricious, unclean, and ought to be excluded in Japan as much as they were in the United States and Australia.⁴⁰ In his political newspaper, *The China Discussion*, Liang published an article in July 1899 that argued how Chinese merchants’ activities might boost the Japanese economy, and how the

³⁸ Han, *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown*, 73.

³⁹ National Archives of Japan Digital Archives, “Imperial Rescript 352, Meiji 32,” accessed Mar 31, 2022, <https://www.digital.archives.go.jp/file/160411.html>.

⁴⁰ Han, *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown*, 75.

empire could use the capital its neighboring country's elites.⁴¹ Manual laborers, Liang argues, were uneducated, unsanitary, and asked for wages so low that they harmed the Japanese labor market's balance; "people of business," however, did not possess any of the qualities that excluded them from the right of mixed residence.⁴² Therefore, he argued Japan needed to exclude only Chinese migrant workers.

In keeping with this kind of thinking, the promulgated rescript classified Chinese migrant populations in the country, specifying "laborers" as needing special permission to be granted mixed residence, whereas rich "merchants" automatically obtained mixed residence in Yokohama, Tokyo and beyond. The rules set by this rescript, however, underwent a series of challenges in the first two decades of the 20th century, especially after the country transitioned into the Taishō Period after the Meiji Emperor's death. Japanese politics in this period was characterized by a combination of relaxed government surveillance and domestic social protests; historian Andrew Gordon describes Japan as undergoing a transition from "imperial bureaucracy" to "imperial democracy," where a political order formerly established by oligarchs was replaced by more liberal political structures that granted workers and farmers more agency.⁴³ This new agency was reflected among not only domestic workers but also foreign ones: with weaker government control over immigration, the previous line between merchants and laborers was blurred, and Chinese migrant workers communities started to form in Tokyo, taking advantage of the flaws in Imperial Rescript 352: groups started entering the country as merchants, but stayed as manual laborers.

⁴¹ *The China Discussion* is the official English name for the newspaper; its Chinese name was *Qing Yi Bao*, and it was co-founded by Liang and a fellow Yokohama elite merchant, Feng Jingru.

⁴² "Ji Zhongguoren Qingqiu Neidi Zaju Shi." *The China Discussion*. July 1899, 5.

⁴³ Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 9.

Migrant Workers in Tokyo Managed by the Empire

Beginning in 1919, there was an influx of merchants from the province of Zhejiang on China's east coast to Japan. Prompted by the decline in European trading opportunities following World War I, a man from Chuzhou, a city in Zhejiang, first brought stoneware to Japan for sale; then, a man from the neighboring city of Wenzhou made a fortune out of selling umbrellas. With news of sales opportunities traveling between social networks in Zhejiang, groups of Wenzhou and Chuzhou merchants, as well as a smaller portion from the northern province of Shandong, traveled to Japan with umbrellas and other artifacts, hoping to make a fortune: their destinations included Nagasaki, Moji, Kobe, Osaka, Nagoya, Tokyo, and Hokkaido (Fig. 1).⁴⁴

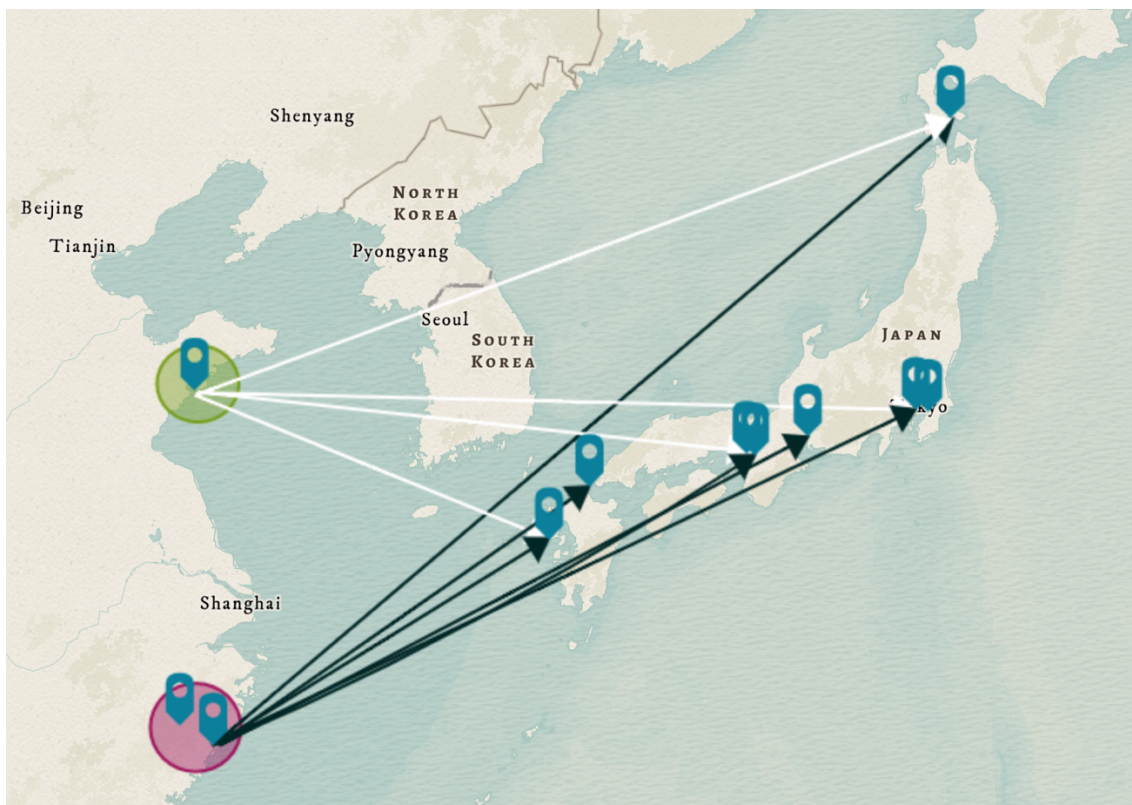


Fig. 1. Migration patterns of Chinese merchants to Japan in the early Taishō Period.

⁴⁴ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 240.

While many merchants still traveled to treaty ports with established Chinese communities, many others also traveled to major cities like Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, as their identity as merchants allowed them the status of mixed residence. It is estimated that from the winter of 1920 to the spring of 1922, more than 3500 merchants from Wenzhou and Chuzhou lived in Japan.⁴⁵ However, as stocks of their goods ran out, they looked for other means of living. Many were recruited by Japanese factory owners to conduct manual labor in ironwork, woodwork, glasswork, pencil-making, pen-making, or weaving.

As more news about job opportunities in Japan spread through local social networks in Wenzhou and Chuzhou, more left for Japan to do manual labor. By 1923, the number of Chinese migrant workers in Japan was over 7000.⁴⁶ Many of them lived in Tokyo: it was estimated that in this year there were around 4500 Chinese in Tokyo, and around 2000 were migrant workers.⁴⁷ Given that a series of mass deportations—which this thesis will later discuss in depth—happened a year before the estimate was made, the actual number of Chinese workers who entered Tokyo over the course of four years was even greater. Most migrant workers received minimum wage and were living in clustered dorms with poor living and sanitary conditions. Two recorded clusters of Chinese workers lived respectively on the eastern and northeastern side of Tokyo, away from the city’s center, near the Edogawa River. Compared to the proximity of Kanda to Tokyo’s city center, the detachment of the workers’ communities from city life in Tokyo and the stark contrast between the student and worker groups’ residence locations is apparent (Fig. 2). This divide fits with the general geography of working-class communities in Tokyo, and

⁴⁵ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 240.

⁴⁶ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 241.

⁴⁷ Seiichi Imai and Fumiko Niki, *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken* (Tōkyō: Akashi Shoten, 2008), 52.

suggests that Chinese experiences in Tokyo at this time were divided by class instead of by ethnicity at least to some extent.



Fig. 2. Chinese population clusters in Tokyo around 1920.

Initially, there was little response from the Japanese government to the growing Chinese manual laborer population. As the number of Chinese migrant workers in major Japanese cities accumulated, however, local governments and police forces that had been previously oblivious felt the need to manage them. The previous relaxation of surveillance allowed Chinese nationals to arrive in Japanese cities as merchants but live as migrant workers. Therefore, authorities in turn used the same tool that allowed them in to drive them out: Imperial Rescript 352. In August 1922, Tokyo started a series of actions against Chinese manual laborers.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I first discovered information on such deportations in Chinese biographical sources on Wang Xitian about the origins of his activist work with workers; as sources indicate Wang started his Mutual Aid Association project after some deportations in the summer of 1922, I went through the local news' online archives to look for news related to Chinese workers, and then discovered the specific dates.

On August 12, 1922, eighty-two Chinese migrant workers in the neighborhood of Minami-Senju, on the northeastern side of Tokyo, had their homes inspected by the police. The inspections revealed that they did not hold special permission for mixed residence; the workers were warned that according to Imperial Rescript 352, if they could not obtain permissions they would be deported by force.⁴⁹ Both the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun* newspapers reported this event, and identified the laborers to be deported as Chinese nationals from Wenzhou who first arrived in Japan as clothing and umbrella merchants. “Many arrived a year ago, selling sweets, umbrellas, medicine and fans, but as their goods could not sell they recently became manual laborers,” *Asahi* reported. “At least 300 live in the jurisdictions of the Senju Police Office, and there are 30 people living in the same house with only 30 *sen* to spare a day, causing a hygiene hazard.”⁵⁰ The news report then quotes Chief Takefuji of the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department’s Foreign Affairs Section: “the Chinese workers live unsanitary lives and gamble all day and night, and are disruptive in terms of hygiene, behavior and language; therefore those corrupted individuals need to be gathered and sent back to their own country.”⁵¹

The Metropolitan Police Department then targeted the Chinese communities in Kameido and Ōshima-machi, where more workers resided. On August 17, “around two hundred and fifty to sixty Chinamen conducting lower-class labor work were ordered to be deported.”⁵² Around the same time, eighteen Chinese workers in a woodwork factory in Fukagawa district were not granted special permission to stay as technical workers and were deported.⁵³ The reasons given

⁴⁹ “Minamisenu kan'nai no shinajin hachijūni-meī ni keikoku,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 12, 1922, p. 5.

⁵⁰ “Shinajin rōdōsha ni totsuzen no kikoku meirei,” *Asahi Shimbun*, August 12, 1922, p. 9. 30 *sen* roughly equals to 30 cents.

⁵¹ “Shinajin rōdōsha ni totsuzen no kikoku meirei,” *Asahi Shimbun*, August 12, 1922, p. 9.

⁵² “Shinajin rōdōsha ni doshidoshi taikyo meirei, chikaku nihyaku gorokujū-meī wo opparafu hōshin,” *Asahi Shimbun*, August 17, 1922, p. 9.

⁵³ “Fukagawa Kameido no shinajin ni mo chikaku taikyo meirei wo dasu,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 17, 1922, p. 5.

for deportation, aside from the official Imperial Rescript 352, were usually lack of hygiene and “proper behavior.”⁵⁴ A desire to sanitize the empire is reflected through the deportations: as the state exercises authority over its local populations, it expels the factors that disturbed the city’s hygiene and the empire’s image. This desire to connect the health of the individual to the health of the empire was a recurring theme in imperial Japan, and can be reflected in the empire’s sanitization of other colonial spaces with foreign populations, such as the treaty port of Tianjin as studied by Ruth Rogaski in her book *Hygienic Modernity*.⁵⁵

Those attempts at managing the population did not go without a response. In fact, as a response, local populations started self-managing to better comply with guidelines presented by the empire. The deportations in 1922 triggered a series of movements and self-regulations responding to the issue of hygiene targeted by the Japanese government in local Chinese communities, many supported by the well-educated Chinese community. Unlike in 1899, when the non-laborer Chinese populations sought to distinguish themselves from the laborer populations, in 1922 the non-laborer population—students in particular—exhibited a strong sense of solidarity with the workers. The new nationalist and socialist ideas that influenced the students in the 1910s contributed directly to the establishment of this sense of solidarity: as students saw themselves less as a special class of “Chinese elite” and more as members of a persecuted nation, they became more concerned by the inequalities and injustices their working-class compatriots faced.

On August 19, two days after the mass deportations at Ōshima-machi, the *Yomiuri* reported that a group of local Chinese students had gathered at the Chinese Students’ Hall at

⁵⁴ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 243.

⁵⁵ Ruth Rogaski. *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 187.

Kanda with representatives from labor parties in Japan, before heading off to the Metropolitan Police Department to appeal for the Chinese migrant workers and try to obtain permission for them to stay in Japan.⁵⁶ Two other Chinese students led another group that protested inhumane investigations by the police, after police officers stripped Chinese workers for physical examination.⁵⁷ Despite mostly coming from prominent families in China, having been granted mixed residence, and belonging to the “Chinese elite” represented by figures like Liang Qichao in the previous decades, many students, out of leftist and humanist ideas, felt a need to help with the situation of migrant workers.

On the one hand, those activist actions exhibited the agency of the Chinese population in Tokyo and their ability to adjust and respond to imperial requests from the Japanese government, indicating that they were not merely subject to absolute power in the empire. Yet on the other hand, the fact that local populations must comply with the rules set by the empire in order to maintain their status reflects their lack of agency; the fact that workers were not able to organize movements against the deportations themselves and had to rely on the more well-educated, more elite student population indicates the huge power difference not only defined by nationality, but also defined by class. Nonetheless, despite this gap, the students’ activism still shows how a new Chinese national consciousness has enabled solidarity between Chinese populations of various classes, merging dichotomized experiences in the empire’s core.

The Ōshima-machi Incident

⁵⁶ “Shinajin rōdōsha tsuihō wa nisshi no shinzen wo sogai suru—to daihyō-sha ga sōkan to shushō ni chinjō,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 19, 1922, p. 5.

⁵⁷ “Shinajin rōdōsha tsuihō wa nisshi no shinzen wo sogai suru—to daihyō-sha ga sōkan to shushō ni chinjō,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 19, 1922, p. 5.

Following the student activism and internal reforms within the Chinese communities, the migrant worker communities seemingly existed in Tokyo in peace for about a year, their living conditions improving. However, the tension that existed between the authorities and those migrant populations did not disappear: under the surface, xenophobia simmered. The Chinese population, especially the migrant worker population, was still perceived as a foreign, backward, and unpopular entity by Japan. In a little over a year after the deportations, an earthquake saw the underlying tensions explode into conflict and violence.

On September 1, 1923, an earthquake registering around 7.9 on the Richter scale—later known as the Great Kantō Earthquake—struck eastern Japan. In Tokyo, 58,104 died and over 10,000 went missing, while roughly 48 percent of families had their homes destroyed.⁵⁸ Riots and violence ensued after the earthquake, the most infamous of which being the killing of thousands of Koreans under rumors of them committing arson and rape: historian Michael Weiner describes the local massacres as enabled by government authorities and martial laws.⁵⁹ Martial law authorities also transported and detained over twenty thousand Koreans in the month of September.⁶⁰ It is generally agreed among historians that three major massacres and assassinations happened right after the earthquake: the massacre of Koreans, the killing of ten Japanese labor union leaders in Kameido, and the assassination of anarchists Ōsugi Sakae and Itō Noe as well as Ōsugi's nephew.⁶¹ All three incidents reflect that authority at the time desired to further cleanse the empire of factors threatening the purity and stability of Japanese society.

⁵⁸ J. Charles Schencking, *The Great Kantō Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press), Chapter 1.

⁵⁹ Michael Weiner, "Koreans in the Aftermath of the Kanto Earthquake of 1923," *Immigrants & Minorities* 2, no. 1 (1983): pp. 5-32, 13.

⁶⁰ Schencking, *The Great Kantō Earthquake and the Chimera of National Reconstruction in Japan*, Chapter 2.

⁶¹ Matsuoka Bunhei, "Another Massacre: The Great Kantō Earthquake and Chinese in Japan," in *Wang Xitian Jinian Wenji* (Jilin: Changchun Publishing House, 1996), pp. 184-206, 184.

There is, however, one more incident rarely examined by historians: the massacre at Ōshima-machi of Chinese migrant workers.

The exact number of Chinese workers killed at Ōshima-machi remains uncertain, but according to historian Tahara Yō, police documents indicated the deaths of about 320~330 Chinese residents who were posthumously “confirmed as Koreans.”⁶² The actual number of total killings was higher: according to historian Seiichi Imai, among the estimated 6000 “Koreans” killed in Tokyo after the earthquake, more than 600 were Chinese; around 500 were killed in the vicinities of Ōshima-machi.⁶³ While many perpetrators of the violence were local vigilante corps that consisted of young Japanese civilians, there was also a strong military presence. The diary of a low-rank Japanese soldier named Kubono Shigeji provides some of the most detailed first-hand descriptions of the military’s involvement in the massacre.

According to Kubono, the soldiers set out from their camps in the direction of Kameido and Komatsu River on September 2, with the initial purpose of “saving lives of people... in the sea of fire.”⁶⁴ On September 3, however, they received the order that there were Korean people poisoning wells, setting fire to houses, and raping local women; as a response, the soldiers marched to Ōshima-machi with guns, Japanese swords, and bamboo spears, killing “Koreans” before throwing their bodies into the river.⁶⁵ Kubono’s diary does not identify any victims of the massacre as Chinese; since he also recorded that the troops “sending more than a thousand and two hundred Chinese and Koreans to the city of Narashino” for containment purposes, it is likely

⁶² Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 45.

⁶³ Imai and Niki, *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, 51.

⁶⁴ Kubono Shigeji, “Kubono’s Diary,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 164-169, 164.

⁶⁵ Kubono Shigeji, “Kubono’s Diary,” 165.

that he believed that the troops only killed Koreans.⁶⁶ On September 29, Kubono heard from a fellow soldier that “around 200 Korean laborers” were killed.⁶⁷

However, despite the lack of identification of the victims as Chinese in Kubono’s diary, Japanese officials were aware that not everyone killed was Korean. An internal account from the Tokyo Metropolitan Police dated September 6, 1923, used the word *shisenjin*, meaning “Chinese and Koreans,” to describe the victims of the killings by military forces and vigilante corps.⁶⁸ While the killing of Koreans were more easily publicized, there was an active effort from Japanese officials to censor information that identified the victims as Chinese in the next few months. On November 7, following a series of questions and investigations from the Chinese side, an article titled “Atrocities toward the Chinese (*shinajin saigan jiken*)” that revealed the killing of “more than three hundred Chinese... killed near the workers’ dorms at Ōshima-machi from September 5th to 9th” was scheduled to be published in the *Yomiuri*.⁶⁹ The publication, however, was banned by the government, following a cabinet meeting that decided to conceal the truth of the massacre.⁷⁰ Later on, on December 8, a group of cabinet ministers and high-rank government officials met and prepared an official testimony that attributed most of the Chinese casualties to the earthquake itself instead of murder, and designed ambiguous answers regarding the identity of the perpetrators of “mistaken killings.”⁷¹

It is evident that Japan, throughout the months following the Ōshima-machi massacre, attempted to conceal the truth under a fear that it would further cause anti-Japanese sentiments

⁶⁶ Kubono Shigeji, “Kubono’s Diary,” 166.

⁶⁷ Kubono Shigeji, “Kubono’s Diary,” 168.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 127.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 131.

⁷⁰ “Photocopy of ‘Shinajin Saigan Jiken’ from *Yomiuri*,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian* (Jilin: Changchun Publishing House, 1996), 194.

⁷¹ “Chūgokugawa no Ōshū Daikō, December 12,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 390-392, 390.

among the Chinese and serious foreign affairs repercussions. In the year following the earthquake, the Republic of China sent groups of investigators following informal news that hundreds of Chinese were killed in Tokyo. A Japanese diplomat in China name Nishida Koichi compiled a report on January 11, 1924, regarding a trip to Japan by Chinese government-sponsored investigators: Nishida advised that the Japanese government ought to “not let this event trigger worse tensions between China and Japan,” and noted that the killings at Ōshima-machi could be framed as “an emergency response given the situation of the earthquake, which leaves room for nuanced negotiations.”⁷² However, Nishida identified another incident as less negotiable for the Chinese: the killing of Wang Xitian presented at the beginning of this essay, which, “compared to the Ōshima-machi killings, [the Chinese investigators] cared more about.”⁷³ His report implies that Wang’s death resulted from the same causes that led to the massacre of workers at Ōshima-machi, while his social and educational status set his importance apart from the workers. This, of course, suggests that nation had not, in fact, completely overshadowed class, but it also raises the question of Wang’s connection to his working-class compatriots. In order to address this question and fully evaluate the significance of his death, Wang’s life leading up to 1923 needs to be examined in depth.

III. The Life and Death of Activist Wang Xitian

Wang Xitian as a Student in Tokyo

⁷² “Report to Minister Matsui of Foreign Affairs, No. 126,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 218.

⁷³ “Report to Minister Matsui of Foreign Affairs, No. 126,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 218.

Wang Xitian was born in 1896 in Changchun, a town in Jilin Province, Manchuria, to an affluent mine owner's family.⁷⁴ He was enrolled in Jilin Provincial High School in 1912 under his former name Wang Xijing, and started studying in Japan in 1914, attending language school; he was first listed as a student at Kanda's Seisaku Preparatory School and then at Kanda's East Asia High school (which Zhou Enlai later attended) in the provincial survey forms.⁷⁵ A provincial record dated September 28, 1916 identifies him as a "student studying in Tokyo at his own expense (*liudong zifeisheng*)".⁷⁶

In November, 1916, Wang was listed—along with eight other students—as a candidate for Changchun's local scholarship (*xianfei*), after the disqualification of two former scholarship recipients; it is unclear whether he received said scholarship.⁷⁷ However, in the subsequent year, with his admission into Tokyo's First Higher School—the preparatory school often seen as Tokyo University's biggest feeder school, and one of the two schools whose entrance exams Zhou Enlai failed in 1918—Wang was qualified for and started receiving Jilin's provincial scholarship (*shengfei*).⁷⁸ His time at First Higher School started in September, 1917, and he would remain a registered student there until May, 1919.⁷⁹

Wang's two years at First Higher School were also the two years when his life in Tokyo overlapped with Zhou Enlai's. Zhou's diary recorded nine visits to his place by Wang—and often with other friends—within the first four months of 1918, on January 6, February 25, March

⁷⁴ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to chūgokujin*, 72.

⁷⁵ "Jilin Province *Liuri Guanfei & Zifeisheng* Survey Forms," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 30-66, 30-31.

⁷⁶ "Letter from Changchun Mayor Peng Shutang, September 28, 1916," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 10-11, 10.

⁷⁷ "Letter from Changchun Mayor Peng Shutang, November 4, 1916," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 11-12, 12.

⁷⁸ "Letter from *Liuri* Students Manager Xu Mengying, July 16, 1917," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 13.

⁷⁹ "Jilin Province *Liuri Guanfei & Zifeisheng* Survey Forms," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 30-66, 51.

10, March 16, March 29, April 4, April 5, April 8, and April 20 respectively.⁸⁰ The visits were often recorded as followed by long talks or dinner with a group of friends. In an interview in 1961, Zhou described him and Wang as being “on very good terms.”⁸¹

Zhou also described Wang as a “devout Christian.”⁸² In the booklet *Brief History on Wang Xitian’s Life* compiled by Xie Jiemei, Wang’s other close friend in Tokyo, Wang’s conversion to Christianity was attributed to the influence of his friends in Tokyo.⁸³ According to Xie, Wang was a frequent smoker and drinker back in Jilin; however, after coming to Tokyo, “as all his friends were moral and pure... he naturally corrected all bad habits in the past.”⁸⁴ Then, after attending multiple religious gatherings at the Tokyo Chinese YMCA in Kanda, Wang converted to Christianity in 1916, quit smoking and drinking, and remained involved with YMCA-related activities for the rest of his life, even becoming a YMCA officer and establishing a new location for the organization on the second floor of a chapel on Kanda’s Hill of Kudan.⁸⁵ Christianity was one of the two vital factors that defined Wang’s experience as a student in Tokyo; the other was nationalism.

Wang’s Life as a Nationalist and Activist

As formerly discussed, the internal and external pressures in China following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the series of military threats posed by Japan exacerbated Sino-Japan relationships in the 1910s, and among the Chinese students of Tokyo, a strong nationalist

⁸⁰ Zhou, *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

⁸¹ Ma Dezhong, “Zhou Zongli Tan Wang Xitian,” in *Wang Xitian Jinian Wenji* (Jilin: Changchun Publishing House, 1996), pp. 7-9, 7.

⁸² Ma, “Zhou Zongli Tan Wang Xitian,” 7.

⁸³ It is likely that the “friends” Xie referred to are Chinese friends; however, there is also much evidence that Wang developed connections with the Japanese Christian community in Tokyo as well.

⁸⁴ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 234.

⁸⁵ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 235.

sentiment arose. Wang was a prominent nationalist figure in the Chinese student community; according to Xie Jiemei, there were often nationalist student meetings held to discuss the future of China and how to make the country stronger, and “whenever there was a meeting, [Wang] would always attend.”⁸⁶

In early April, 1918, following the spread of news regarding the secret signing of the Sino-Japanese Joint Defense Agreement, Wang made a speech to a group of students, arguing that “there is no use in studying when our country is no longer going to be a country; the only plan for any student is to quit school in Japan and fight for the cancellation of the pact.”⁸⁷ A subsequent gathering at a restaurant called Genjukkan in Kanda was held to discuss details of this plan and solicit consensus from all regional Chinese students’ associations; the meeting was halted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police, and several students leaders, including Wang Xitian, were detained for a day.⁸⁸ The exact date of this gathering is unclear: Xie recounts it as being “a day in April,” but Zhou Enlai’s diary does not start recording student gatherings and discussions about returning to China until May 2. Zhou mentions a “collective meeting of all regional student associations” on the evening of May 4, which, given the temporal accuracy of diaries, is possibly the actual date when Wang was detained.⁸⁹ There was, however, no mention of the detention in Zhou’s diary; the cause of this missing information might have been Zhou’s disapproval of this activity, as he indicated that he, desiring to stay in Japan and continue his studies, “passively opposed the proposal to return to China and said nothing [at the local students’ gathering].”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 236.

⁸⁷ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 236.

⁸⁸ Xie & Yabuki both mentioned this incident.

⁸⁹ Zhou, “May 4, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

⁹⁰ Zhou, “May 4, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

Despite the meeting reaching a consensus on returning to China, not all Chinese students chose to do so, and not all chose to do so immediately. Wang Xitian, however, set off to China immediately to spread the news about the secret pacts to students in Beijing: he departed on May 7 from Yokohama, and Zhou Enlai recorded in his diary that he “met Xitian and several others around noon and saw them off to Yokohama.”⁹¹ Ironically, Wang received the tuition checks for June from the Jilin government on May 5, two days prior to his departure: he still confirmed the reception of the check, but, when signing the receipt, purposefully left the “address in Tokyo” section blank.⁹²

Documents from the Jilin government indicate that among all Jilin students studying in Japan, only two students returned to China following the meeting, Wang being one of them.⁹³ In the same document, the government announced that all students who returned to China would stop receiving government funding; if they still did not return to Tokyo in the fall, their scholarship would be terminated as well as their student status.⁹⁴ Presumably it was under this pressure that Wang returned to Japan in the fall. Although Xie’s account states that he did not return to Japan until the winter, Wang’s date of return was recorded as September 4 in official reports.⁹⁵

Wang was, however, extremely unhappy with the situation in Tokyo and sought ways to no longer study in Japan. Judging from the receipts of his tuition checks, he lived in Tokyo until the summer of 1919, with his last Tokyo address listed as “the Kanda Chinese YMCA” on June

⁹¹ Zhou, “May 7, 1918,” from *Zhou Enlai Lü Ri Riji*.

⁹² “Receipt, May 5, 1918,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 74.

⁹³ “Letter from Liuri Students Manager Xu Mengying, June 19, 1918,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 14.

⁹⁴ “Letter from Liuri Students Manager Xu Mengying, June 19, 1918,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 14.

⁹⁵ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 237 & “Report from Liuri Students Manager on Fall Tuition, October 12, 1918,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 17-19, 18.

27.⁹⁶ On the September check, however, the address became “Nagoya.”⁹⁷ Wang had transferred to Nagoya’s Eighth Higher School.⁹⁸ There he majored in French and German Studies, and soon began seeking ways of studying abroad in European countries in order to leave Japan.

On October 4, 1920, Wang sent a letter to the Jilin Ministry of Education, petitioning to transfer his scholarship in Japan to Germany; he explained that he transferred to Eighth Higher School to study German and French politics and economics, and that since his German had improved enough for attending lectures taught fully in German and the German currency has dropped in value, he wished to, “using the same price, study German knowledge in Germany instead of studying a replicated version in Japan.”⁹⁹ The Ministry, however, turned down Wang’s request at the end of the month, as “there was no precedent of transferring from a Japanese institution to a western one.”¹⁰⁰ A few rounds of petitions ensued in the following year but to no avail, as the Jilin government was unwilling to spend more money on the transfer process; Wang’s plan to study in Germany was eventually aborted. In February of 1920, Wang was also diagnosed with tuberculosis. As a result of the severity of the disease combined with the impossibility to study in Europe with his degree, Wang stopped attending school in the spring of 1921.¹⁰¹

Stopping his studies at Eighth Higher School marked the end of Wang’s life as a student; he spent half a year on the coast of Nagaoka recovering from tuberculosis, before returning to

⁹⁶ “Receipt, June 27, 1919,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 94.

⁹⁷ “Receipt, August 11, 1919,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 95.

⁹⁸ “Jilin Province *Liuri Guanfei & Zifeisheng* Survey Forms,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 30-66, 55.

⁹⁹ “Letter from Wang Xitian Concerning Transfer to Germany,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ “Response to Wang Xitian’s Request to Transfer to Germany,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 23-24, 23.

¹⁰¹ “Medical Certificate,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 117; Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 237.

Tokyo in the fall of 1921. Upon his return to Tokyo, Wang officially terminated his government scholarship under the pretext of “severe illness.”¹⁰² He became no longer a student, but a full-time activist: he first started working for the Kanda YMCA, assisting both students and manual laborers associated with the organization.¹⁰³

This transition also marked the shift of Wang’s activist work: while he focused on anti-Japanese nationalistic protests among students, Wang also started to unite student populations with migrant workers after moving back to Tokyo, emphasizing the formation of a shared nationalistic identity purely by ethnicity. When Wang was studying in both Tokyo and Nagoya, he had already observed seeing the difficult living situation of Chinese workers in both locations.¹⁰⁴ After moving back to Tokyo, he started the most significant project of his life: the Mutual Aid Association.

The Founding of the Mutual Aid Association

The origins of the Mutual Aid Association can be traced back to Wang Xitian’s time in Nagoya, when he started discussing with his friend and fellow Chinese student, Wang Zhaocheng, about ways to improve the workers’ lives.¹⁰⁵ When Wang Xitian returned to Tokyo to commence his work at the Kanda YMCA, Wang Zhaocheng, still attending the Eighth Higher School, ran a pilot residential program named “Mutual Aid Dorm (*Gongjihao*)” for the workers in Nagoya, and lived with them in order to assist them.¹⁰⁶ Wang Xitian and Wang Zhaocheng then proposed plans for improving the workers’ lives at student conferences held in Hakone and

¹⁰² “Letter from Xu Mengying Requesting Wang Xitian’s Scholarship Termination,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, 28.

¹⁰³ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 238.

¹⁰⁴ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 241.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 242.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 241.

Ōhara in June and July of 1922, calling students' attention to the hardships migrant workers were undergoing. Japanese social activists, such as Pastor Yamamuro Gunpei from the Salvation Army, also attended these meetings.¹⁰⁷

The proposals might have remained theoretical, had the mass deportations of Chinese migrant workers from Tokyo in 1922 not happened directly following the two conferences. As an instant response to the deportations in Tokyo as well as a continued effort since Wang's Nagoya days, the Mutual Aid Association of Chinese Workers in Japan (*Qiaori Gongjihui*) was officially founded. The Mutual Aid Association was based in Ōshima-machi, where the Chinese worker population was the most concentrated, and Wang also established there communal dorms for Chinese workers in order to help "improve their lives and counter the suppression from the Japanese."¹⁰⁸

In order to prevent more deportations under the pretext of improper behavior and lack of hygiene, Wang designed a set of rules in the lodging houses that regulated Chinese workers' lifestyles: banning the use of Opium and gambling in the residence, requiring daily cleaning of the rooms, and allowing no more than one person per mat when sleeping.¹⁰⁹ Regarding the issue of hygiene, specifically, Wang hired a doctor friend of his, Sun Shaotang, to investigate the sanitary conditions of worker residents and investigate the cause of diseases and set up a health station for the Chinese workers.¹¹⁰ Wang also held daily Japanese classes for workers in Ōshima-machi.¹¹¹ This educational effort indicates Wang's desire to help the workers not only avoid

¹⁰⁷ Xie, "Wang Xitian Xiaoshi," 241.

¹⁰⁸ Xie, "Wang Xitian Xiaoshi," 242-243.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 244.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 245.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 246.

deportation by the direct issue of hygiene, but also gain more agency through mastering the Japanese language.

On December 1, 1922, Wang resigned from his job at the Kanda Chinese YMCA. In his resignation letter, Wang stated that he “was obliged to work at the Mutual Aid Association for the two to three thousands of fellow countrymen who came to Japan, and could not handle the obligation simultaneously with his tasks at the YMCA; and therefore [is] fully dissociating himself from the YMCA starting December 1, 1922, and offer [his] full service to the Mutual Aid Association founded for the fellow countrymen doing manual labor.”¹¹² In 1923, Wang’s official registered address in Chinese government records has become one in Ōshima-machi, very possibly the Mutual Aid Association office.¹¹³ If the former termination of his government-sponsored scholarship marks Wang’s transition from a student to a full-time activist, then his resignation from the YMCA marks a more specific career transition for Wang, one defined by his full dedication to the cause of improving manual laborers’ lives, a cause that blurs the preexisting socioeconomic borders that set students apart from migrant workers and reunites the two different Chinese identities in Tokyo under common ethnicity.

The specific work Wang conducted also reflects his aspiration: unifying the migrant workers with the students and having both populations accepted into the Empire of Japan’s society. His reforms were mainly an immediate response to Japanese attempts at purging the Chinese migrant workers from the core of the empire: his focus on hygiene, morality and education reflect the attempt to make Chinese workers no longer seem like “Others” in the empire. This aspiration also brought dangers: as Wang’s work countered not only anti-Chinese

¹¹² Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 243.

¹¹³ “Location of Jilin Students in Tokyo, Summer 1923,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 123-124, 124.

sentiments but also anti-laborer sentiments, he was in close contact with like-minded Japanese socialist activists at the time, which led to the police's suspicions that he was involved with anarchist groups that sought to topple the order established by the government.¹¹⁴ As early as April, 1922, when Wang was still working at the Kanda YMCA, the police was already monitoring his activities at student gatherings, seeking "suspicious signs."¹¹⁵ Later, when the Mutual Aid Association was founded, Wang's actions were further monitored by the police, as he was marked as a "Chinese to pay attention to (*yōchūi chūgokujin*)" in official documents.¹¹⁶ As surveillance and tension accumulated with Wang's increased activism, conflict between the authority and the activists inevitably occurred, culminating in his murder at Sakai Bridge following the massacre at Ōshima-machi.

The Murder at Sakai Bridge: Causes and Consequences

When the Great Kantō Earthquake and the massacre at Ōshima-machi happened, the Mutual Aid Association was still a young organization, having existed for only slightly over a year. As Ōshima-machi was far from the city center and traffic was cut off during the earthquake, leaders of the Mutual Aid Association—who were mostly students living in districts like Kanda and Waseda, closer to the center of Tokyo—knew very little about what happened to the migrant workers. But on September 9, Wang Xitian, concerned about the condition of workers, traveled to Ōshima-machi on a bicycle. He never returned. On the morning of

¹¹⁴ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 94.

¹¹⁵ "Report from Mayor of Shizuoka on Chinese YMCA Activities," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 183-184, 183.

¹¹⁶ "Yōchūi Chūgokujin ni kansuru Ken," from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 260-261, 261.

September 12, Wang was secretly executed by Kakiuchi Yasuo under Sakai Bridge, operating under Sasaki Heikichi's demand of "getting rid of one man."¹¹⁷

In his oral historical testimony to Tahara Yō, Kakiuchi confessed that he did not know why Wang was executed; he received the order from Sasaki, and assumed that Sasaki "received orders from higher up as well."¹¹⁸ Kakiuchi did not realize how prominent a figure in the Tokyo Chinese community Wang was until later; however, when he received the order to execute Wang, he felt that it was an honorable task that would show to his supervisors his skills as a swordsman. A close friend of his in the army boasted about "finishing off 200 [Koreans and Chinese] at Ōshima-machi on September 3," and Kakiuchi admitted that he felt jealous and hoped for a similar opportunity where he could "discipline the Koreans and Chinese," without considering whether the Chinese man he was ordered to kill had actually committed any crime that made him deserve death.¹¹⁹ The secrecy of Wang's identity was well-maintained even to the lower-rank Japanese soldiers. In his diary, Kubono, who participated in the Ōshima massacre, also states that he did not know about the murder until reading about Wang's missing in the October 18 *Yomiuri* and subsequently hearing about it from a sentry: "They mutilated Wang's face and limbs, burned his clothes, and took away the 10.7 yen as well as a pen he carried; the killing became a secret among the officers."¹²⁰

Japan continued to conceal and censor news about Wang's death afterwards, preparing official statements that claimed that Wang was released by the army before he went missing. Given Wang's status, the censorship process operated at a very high level in the government. At

¹¹⁷ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 7.

¹¹⁸ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 7.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹²⁰ "Ōkiten no Yukuefumei wo Hōjiru Shimbun Kirinuki," from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 130-133, 130; Kubono, "Kubono's Diary," 169.

a meeting on October 13, 1923, the post-earthquake Martial Law Enforcement Committee crafted an “official statement” whose editorial process involved four ministers in the cabinet. The testimony goes as follows: Wang was among the Chinese escorted to Narashino on September 11, and Sasaki, responsible for the escort, heard the news that Wang was “a leader of the anti-Japanese Chinese and ought to be paid extra attention to.”¹²¹ Therefore, fearing that Wang would incite anti-Japanese sentiments among the Chinese at Narashino, Sasaki asked the Kameido Police to detain Wang temporarily and later took him back and questioned him; after the questioning Sasaki decided Wang was “not a dangerous person after all” and released him, watching him head toward Komatsu River.¹²²

This narrative would continuously be revised and repeated over the next months and years, as the Chinese government sent out official inquiries and even investigators to “look into the truth behind the mistaken killing of Chinese after the earthquake.”¹²³ The investigators met with Japan’s Minister of War and the Chief of Tokyo Metropolitan Police on November 29, 1923, where the official narrative was told once more: that Wang was questioned and released by Sasaki, when the latter realized that he was “well-educated and spoke good Japanese, and had no need to be contained in Narashino like the manual laborers.”¹²⁴ Interestingly enough, the reasons presented for the feigned release of Wang was that he belonged to an “elite class” different from the migrant workers, seemingly reflecting a continued divide between the way students and workers were treated in Tokyo; in fact, however, Wang’s activism had made him as dangerous

¹²¹ “October 13, 1923, Kakugen Shireibu Oboegaki,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, 369.

¹²² “October 13, 1923, Kakugen Shireibu Oboegaki,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, 369.

¹²³ “Wang Zhengting shi no Danwa ni kanshi Houkoku no Ken,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 521-522, 521.

¹²⁴ “Record of Chinese Investigators’ Conversation with Japanese Minister of War and Chief of Tokyo Metropolitan Police,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 202-203, 203.

as, or even more dangerous than, the migrant workers threatening the stability of the empire, and made his execution a necessity.

While the Japanese government continued to suppress news about what happened to Wang and didn't confirm his death in public until after World War II, Wang's fate was inferred by his friends and fellow leaders of the Mutual Aid Association. A few years later, Wang's friend from his Nagoya days and Vice President of the Mutual Aid Association, Wang Zhaocheng, analyzed seven reasons for his death: "that he was a Chinese man opposing Japanese authority, a close friend of Japanese socialists, and an honest and straightforward man; that he founded the Mutual Aid Association, certain Japanese people hated him, the earthquake happened, and he witnessed the massacre at Ōshima-machi."¹²⁵ Wang Zhaocheng also analyzed the reasons for the killings of Chinese migrant workers: xenophobia in Japan and the fact that Chinese workers were asking for much lower wages and causing an imbalance in the Japanese labor market.¹²⁶

Wang Zhaocheng's analyses are surely accurate; but in addition, the killings also reflect another phenomenon in Tokyo directly after the earthquake. In a time of destruction, the empire sought stability and manageability. While there was national anxiety and hostility toward foreign workers, the fact that both workers and members of the elite class like Wang faced violence—Wang Zhaocheng himself, for instance, was injured by the police and soon deported under suspicions of espionage—reflects that at a time of crisis, after the earthquake, socioeconomic boundaries were blurred and only national boundaries were emphasized.¹²⁷ In fact, even national

¹²⁵ Xie, "Wang Xitian Xiaoshi," 260.

¹²⁶ Xie, "Wang Xitian Xiaoshi," 262.

¹²⁷ Imai and Niki, *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, 69.

boundaries were blurred: the Japanese authority followed a new “imperial boundary” that distinguished those belonging to the empire from those who did not.

The most evident example is the connection between the purging of foreigners to the purging of socialists after the earthquake. Michael Weiner, when discussing the massacre of Koreans after the earthquake, argues that the Japanese government made a conscious effort to link the image of dissident Koreans to the image of radical Japanese socialists.¹²⁸ The assassination of Japanese radicals Ōsugi Sakae and Itō Noe occurred less than two weeks following the massacre of Chinese and Koreans, and was attributed to by Tahara Yō as part of the empire’s same regulatory effort.¹²⁹ Wang Xitian, too, because of his fluency in Japanese, was in close contact with many Japanese socialists, mostly Christian social activists: besides Yamamuro Gunpei, who participated in the founding of Mutual Aid Association, Wang’s closest Japanese friends include peace activist Kagawa Toyohiko, Christian scientist Satō Sadakichi, and socialist author Okino Iwasaburo.¹³⁰ Those connections further resulted in the Japanese government’s suspicions of his activities, and accelerated their extermination of him. Despite being of different ethnicities and nationalities, Chinese migrant workers, activists like Wang, Japanese labor union leaders, and anarchists like Ōsugi all disrupted the imperial order to some extent: the asking for lower wages disrupted the preexisting labor market balance, and the activism disrupted the preexisting social order established through classification. Therefore, all of them became “Others,” those who did not belong in the empire, and were therefore to be exterminated when the empire was at its most vulnerable state after the earthquake.

¹²⁸ Weiner, “Koreans in the Aftermath of the Kanto Earthquake of 1923,” 12.

¹²⁹ Tahara, *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin*, 113.

¹³⁰ Xie, “Wang Xitian Xiaoshi,” 239.

IV. The “Chinese Experience”: Simultaneous Marginalization and Unification in Tokyo

The Empire’s Attitude: From Classification to Elimination

Having discussed the experience of students in Kanda, of migrant workers in Ōshimamachi, and of Wang Xitian, whose life intersected with both experiences, the question arises: how should the Chinese experience in Tokyo in the early 20th century be summarized? To answer this question, two aspects need to be examined: the Empire of Japan’s actions towards the Chinese population, and the agency and attitude of Chinese residents themselves. In both cases there can be seen a change over time, a transition from separated experiences to a unified experience.

From the Empire of Japan’s perspective, various actions were taken to manage the Chinese in Tokyo. Imperial Rescript 352, which excluded Chinese workers from the empire’s core, and the establishment of Hirofumi Academy, which welcomed wealthy elite Chinese nationals to pursue higher education, occurred around the same time at the turn of the century. This stark contrast in expulsion and reception reflects Japan’s desire to classify its residents and maintain a homogeneous category of well-educated residents who spoke the Japanese language, contributed to the growth of national economy, and assisted the empire’s image-building.

Japan, however, never truly accepted even the elite members of the Chinese community as part of the empire. While the empire’s peaceful façade of acceptance and coexistence with the Chinese elite could be maintained under normal circumstances, events such as the detention of students following the protests in 1918 and the subsequent surveillance, imprisonment and even murder of student activists reflect how quickly the empire was able to identify members of the elite as threats to the stability of the state. In 1923, when the earthquake occurred, both migrant workers *and* activists were contained, deported, and killed. In Japanese government documents

that discussed Wang Xitian's death, there was an emphasis on the perception of Wang as an "prominent anti-Japanese leader" who threatened social stability and incited anti-Japanese sentiments among local Chinese populations.¹³¹ Wang's work, on the other hand, merely involved the improvement of workers' lives and the securing of workers' basic rights. However, as he attempted to unify the formerly classified Chinese nationals and act as the well-educated agent for the exploited manual laborers, he was seen as a disruptive force to the empire and therefore eliminated.

There were recurring themes in Japan's treatment of its Chinese migrant populations that reflected anxieties within the empire: the maintaining of a westernized national image, the state control over hygiene, and the fear of unrest and uprisings, especially in times of great social instability. The empire was not only purging physical disturbances such as the lack of hygiene and "morality," but also political and ideological disturbances such as anarchism and socialism from its system through violence, which can be inferred through the assassinations of radical Japanese nationals around the same time as Wang's death.

It is also worth noting that Japan's marginalization and control of its Chinese populations was not without constraints; the empire's relation with China on a country-to-country level still prevent Japan from exercising absolute power over its Chinese populations. Most violence occurred on a local level, such as the attack on Ōshima-machi by vigilante corps. The state, on the other hand, maintained a diplomatic image and attempted to preserve a peaceful diplomatic appearance through the concealing of truths; it even sought to separate itself from the local perpetrators of violence. The Head of Tokyo Metropolitan Police even sent police forces to Ōshima-machi in October 1923, "pretending to investigate the truth and severely punishing those

¹³¹ "October 13, 1923, Kakugen Shireibu Oboegaki," from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, 369.

who killed the Chinese, therefore causing panic among the soldiers and young vigilante corps in the region and denying the state's association with the incident."¹³² While it was the empire's desire to manage its population and purge the disturbances, its absolute power was also checked by the foreign affairs pressure on an international level.

Changes within the Chinese Population: The Formation of a New National Identity

There was also much change in the attitude of Chinese residents toward their own countrymen over time. In the 1890s, Chinese elites like Liang Qichao played along with Japan's ideas of classification, even assisting Japan's actions. Liang was very much a Chinese nationalist, and his efforts to help Chinese merchants obtain status of mixed residence reflected a certain solidarity among Chinese nationals; however, his nationalism was a selective, elite nationalism, and the solidarity was restricted to among members of higher socioeconomic standing. It was under such ideas that mixed residence for Chinese merchants and students were granted, and Imperial Rescript 352 promulgated; the Kanda Chinatown was founded upon such early ideas of selective nationalism.

However, as the international political landscape shifted in the early 20th century and new ideas continually reached the Chinese populations in Tokyo, Chinese nationalism there started taking a different form. By the time the migrant workers from Wenzhou and Chuzhou, taking advantage of the loopholes of Imperial Rescript 352, arrived in Tokyo, the intellectual landscape among Chinese elites in Tokyo was already vastly different. The Ōshima-machi migrant worker community was a very new one compared to the Kanda Chinatown community; during the two decades between the formation of the two communities, the combination of stronger anti-

¹³² "Decision on Response to Wang Xitian Incident," from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 196-199, 197.

Japanese sentiments and socialist ideas sculpted a new form of Chinese nationalism that was more ethnicity-based and less about socioeconomic standing. There was both more intellectual exchanges, as indicated by the formation of nationalist literary circles, and more political activism, as indicated by the student organizations' engagement in international politics and the anti-Japanese protests following unequal treaties. It was under such contexts that figures like Wang Xitian emerged, acting as bridges between the two formerly dichotomized Chinese experiences.

Wang Xitian was unique in some ways, as he was extremely radical and one of the first Chinese students to officially attempt adapting the migrant workers into a more normalized, mainstream Japanese life. However, he was also not entirely unique: many other students shared his sentiments to different degrees. When the Mutual Aid Association was founded, there were twenty officers other than Wang, all of whom were Chinese students in Tokyo.¹³³ When the Ōshima-machi massacre happened, eight other students—including Wang Zhaocheng—were “identified as Koreans” and injured by the vigilante corps. Although there was no clear indication if all the students attacked were directly involved in the Mutual Aid Association's work, it is likely that they were targeted since the vigilante corps, despite seeing their proofs of identity as Chinese students, still insisted that they were Korean and attacked them.¹³⁴ Even among students who did not share Wang's radical activism and the violent treatment he received, there was still a strong sentiment of sympathy toward migrant workers: Zhou Enlai, whose political stance as a student in Tokyo was so mild that he wasn't even willing to return to China

¹³³ “Nikagakukai ni yoru Tōkyōshi fukin rōdōsha oyobi Kyōsaikai Jigyō Jyōkō,” from Imai and Niki, ed., *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai Ka No Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken*, pp. 250-254, 253.

¹³⁴ “Protest from Chinese Ambassador Shi Lü, October 20, 1923,” from Jilin Provincial Archives, ed., *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian*, pp. 268-269, 268.

following the 1918 protests, recounted discussing ways to improve the lives of Chinese workers in coal mines with Wang Xitian and Wang Pushan.¹³⁵

It is particularly interesting that Zhou, whose ties to socialism and communism were not so evident when he was a student in the Kanda Chinatown, got fully involved with the activism in mainland China following the May Fourth Movement and subscribed to communism, later becoming one of the key figures in the newly formed Chinese Communist Party. His experience suggests a radicalization in the transmitting of nationalist ideas from Japan to China: as offshore nationalism became local and more populations were motivated by the same ideas, students like Zhou also developed more radical political ideas. Nonetheless, those ideas originated from Zhou's time in Tokyo; the Kanda Chinatown, as a key location for the development of Chinese intellectual networks, played a vital role in the formation of a new Chinese nationalism that was closely related to socialist ideas, and contributed to the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.

What happened to the Chinese in Tokyo after 1923?

Finally, it is worth noting that despite the escalating tensions between China and Japan in the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese population in Tokyo did not disappear. In fact, there was much continuity: even the Kanda Chinatown, which Kashima Shigeru argued was mostly destroyed in the earthquake, did not completely vanish right away. Although many students chose to return to China, some others chose to stay. In fact, even after the war broke out between Japan and China in 1937, students continued to arrive in Tokyo as government-sponsored study in Japan was still permitted, since the Republic of China still maintained diplomatic ties to Japan during the war.

¹³⁵ Ma, "Zhou Zongli Tan Wang Xitian," 7.

The Chinese scholar Paul Yu-kuang Sun, whose letters are preserved in the Yale Divinity School Library, was an example of someone who studied in Japan using government funds at the height of World War II.¹³⁶ Sun was a student in Tokyo in 1939, at Waseda University. In a letter addressed to his daughter’s family in 1981, Sun recounts the time he spent in Japan: he “first lived in the dorms of Higashi-Nakano, before moving into the dorms in Kanda.”¹³⁷ Kanda, at the time, had already become a district known for its bookstores—the fame it would carry up to this day—and Sun remembers spending hours in the bookstores each day.¹³⁸ Sun also describes how he would often visit famous author Natsume Sōseki’s grave not so far from campus, and how he first read Edgar Snow’s account of the Chinese Communist Party, *Red Star Over China*, in Waseda University’s library.¹³⁹ Sun’s experience suggests that Chinese students in Tokyo at the time still closely interacted with both literary ideas and radical politics, a continuation of what was happening earlier on in the century; the students in Tokyo were still being exposed to leftist ideas that had formerly inspired figures like Wang Xitian, that had contributed to the closing of socioeconomic gaps between various “Chinese populations” and “Chinese experiences,” to the formation and consolidation of a unified ethnic identity and one shared “Chinese experience.”

(Word Count: 12,499)

¹³⁶ Paul Sun, *Paul Yu-kuang Sun: Calligraphy, Letters and Diaries*, ed. Kang-I Sun Chang (Taipei: Xiuwei Zixun Keji Gufen Youxian Gongsi, 2019), 4.

¹³⁷ Paul Yu-kuang Sun, “Letter dated June 21, 1981 (i.e., Father’s Day),” From Box 3, Folder 5, in *Paul Yu-kuang Sun Papers* (RG 316), Special Collections, Yale Divinity School Library.

¹³⁸ Sun, “Letter dated June 21, 1981 (i.e., Father’s Day).”

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

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Bibliographical Essay: A Journey through the Life and Legacy of Wang Xitian

I probably first came across the name of Wang Xitian toward the end of 2020, back when I had no idea of who he was and had no idea that I would spend an entire year reading and writing about his life. When discussing potential periods and groups to look into for research projects, Professor Botsman suggested to me the first few decades of the early 20th century, and fleetingly mentioned the names of a few social activists; Wang's was very likely among them. But back then, I was still considering doing something with Japan-related primary sources at Yale's archives, and didn't give Wang much thought. It wasn't until half a year later that he came up again in another conversation with Professor Botsman, and I decided to take a look at his Japanese Wikipedia page.

The page didn't contain much information: it summarized his life as a student in Tokyo, mentioned that he was in Tokyo at the same time as Zhou Enlai, and talked about his assassination by the Japanese army. Then, I was already considering writing something about the Chinese population in Tokyo and using Zhou Enlai's diary as a primary source, so I thought Wang could be included as a diversifying factor, as his experience and fate was surely different from Zhou Enlai's. I realized almost all the references on the Wikipedia page pointed to one book: Tahara Yō's *Kantō Daishinsai to Chūgokujin: Ō Kiten Jiken wo Tsuisekisuru (The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Chinese: Tracing the Wang Xitian Incident)*. It turned out that there were only two copies of this book in university libraries across the United States, and Yale did not have a copy. As I waited for Japanese librarian Haruko Nakamura's order of the book to arrive, I mused upon the lack of Wang Xitian-related research in English scholarship, and started considering studying his life as of some meaning: after all, one advantage I had as a trilingual

individual was that I could read sources about this person in Chinese and Japanese, and present his life to an English-speaking audience that had never heard of it through my writing.

As I waited for the book to arrive, I started reading one of the most readily available and famous primary sources this essay used: Zhou Enlai's diary in Japan. Back then, my plan was to present a spectrum of Chinese experiences in the early 20th-century Tokyo, and include small sections on a variety of figures from political and literary spheres. However, as I read, the diary started surprising me. I did not realize that this diary was not an excerpt from Zhou's life-long habit of diary-keeping, but the *only* time in his entire life that he wrote a diary; I also did not realize that the "published" diary in Chinese was in fact poorly photocopied and not transcribed. As a result, I had to borrow a transcribed and translated Japanese version of the diary (Yabuki's version) in order to make sense of all of the cursive. But most of all, I saw Wang Xitian's name in Zhou's diary: not once, not twice, but twenty-eight times within the course of less than half a year. As I saw Zhou Enlai's description of his social circles, of their gatherings and correspondences, I started considering more how the figures I thought of writing on connected to each other and formed their own community.

It was around the same time that I started taking Professor Hannah Shepherd's "Colonial Cities" seminar, which inspired me to think about imperial spaces and their relation to different groups. I read Eric Han's *Rise of a Japanese Chinatown* when I was working on a mapping project on Yokohama for that class, and read about the evolution of diversified Chinese experiences in the treaty port of Yokohama, how the Chinese-speaking districts of Yokohama were in fact divided according to socioeconomic class and political faction. It was in the same book that I read about Liang Qichao's articles that advocated for selective Chinese mixed residence and led to Imperial Rescript 352. Slowly, things I had been reading started to piece

together into a larger picture: segregation by socioeconomic class, imperial management of foreign populations, spatial clusters in which various Chinese experiences occurred. Just like in Yokohama, in Tokyo there was also division; Zhou Enlai and his circle of Chinese students had a starkly different experience from Chinese workers, and Wang Xitian, with his background as a student and his advocacy for workers' rights, became a bridge that linked the two experiences. The importance of Wang Xitian's life revealed itself to me.

After Tahara's book arrived, I dove into it, attempting to find more facts and sources on Wang Xitian's life. The book was very valuable; although it focused on the murder of Wang Xitian and the massacre of the Chinese workers in Tokyo after the 1923 earthquake, it also had considerable amounts of facts about Wang's life. Unfortunately, like many Japanese academic volumes (as I later learned from Professor Botsman), this book was very ambiguous about its specific sources and there were no footnotes. However, this book had a unique valuable aspect: Tahara tracked down the man who killed Wang, and managed to get a testimony from him that contained unparalleled details on the specifics of Wang's murder. Therefore, sections of this book became primary sources on their own.

As I struggled to find more primary sources on Wang, I accidentally went down an Internet rabbit hole in late November that led me to the knowledge that Jilin Province in China, where Wang was from, had published two volumes named *Wang Xitian Jinian Wenji (Anthology in Memory of Wang Xitian)* and *Wang Xitian Dangan Shiliao Xuanbian (Selected Historical Archives on Wang Xitian)* to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Wang's birth. Without knowing at all what those two volumes contained, I immediately asked Yale's Chinese librarian Michael Meng to order them for me from China. That turned out to be the best decision I made throughout the writing of this thesis, for the two volumes contained some of my most valuable

primary sources. The *Shiliao Xuanbian* consisted of government correspondence between China and Japan relevant to Wang's death and a very complete collection of bureaucratic documents related to Wang's student days, such as registration forms, stipend checks, and application letters to the government; it not only transcribed most, but also included plenty of photocopied pages of original documents from the archives. The discovery of Wang signing "memorial day for the country's shame" next to his name on a government stipend check was made here, along with many other details that helped me reconstruct Wang's life. The *Jinian Wenji*, on the other hand, contained a collection of biographical articles on Wang's life across the last century.

I was, however, always wary that these two Chinese sources were published in the 90s and inevitably influenced by CCP censorship and propaganda. Especially given Wang's connection to Zhou Enlai and other figures central to CCP's founding, I was extremely cautious of the tone of the sources and the way they were selected and presented. In particular, I tried to avoid two types of sources as much as possible: biographical work written after the Communist takeover of China in 1949, for they heavily romanticized Wang's life and always portrayed him as a figure who sacrificed his future for China; and sources that were translated from Japanese, for translation itself could be intentionally curated to serve propagandic purposes. Among all the primary sources present in those two volumes, I found earlier sources written in Chinese the most reliable, as well as a particular piece of biographical work, Xie Jiemei's *Wang Xitian Xiaoshi (Brief History on Wang Xitian's Life)*. Although this piece was also written after Wang's death for commemorative purposes, Xie's identity as Wang's contemporary and close friend made his account more reliable than later ones. I do realize the source's limitations: Xie's potential romanticization of Wang's life and the natural flaws of his own memory. In order to avoid the two, I filtered the more emotional sections and focused on factual ones, and confirmed

important dates and timelines with the bureaucratic sources in the Jilin Archives (it turned out that Xie's account was very aligned with the timeline pieced together from the archives, which increased his reliability for me and made me more unafraid to refer to Xie's quotes).

As for primary sources originally written in Japanese, I initially had trouble locating them; but as I was reluctant to use Chinese translations of Japanese sources for reasons stated above, I started looking under specific names that occurred multiple times in secondary literature. That was when Imai Seiichi's name came up: one of his books was listed as one of Tahara's main sources, and he was quoted several times by scholars in the *Jinian Wenji*. With Haruko Nakamura's help, I successfully located a published primary source collection edited by Imai, *Shiryōshū, Kantō Daishinsai-ka no Chūgokujin Gyakusatsu Jiken (Archives for the Massacre of Chinese after the Great Kantō Earthquake)*. Initially I thought it might provide some contexts for Wang's death, but I realized, after reading through the thick volume, that it contained *both* police records that proved the surveillance of Wang by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police *and* formerly top-secret records on the concealing of Wang's death and the Ōshima-machi massacre! There were also other valuable Japanese primary sources, including Kubono's diary and the banned *Yomiuri* article on Wang's death. This volume, along with the two from Jilin Archives, became one of my best collection of sources. I was extremely lucky to come across a subject hardly written about by scholars but with a plethora of published primary sources; at a time like this when I couldn't easily travel to Jilin or Tokyo to consult the sources, these published volumes made my research possible.

While I consulted primary sources in Chinese and Japanese and pieced together Wang's life, I also kept researching the two populations he linked together, and the spatial distribution of these populations in Tokyo. The location and life of students was easier to figure out: as Zhou's

diary as well as Yabuki's commentaries consistently mentioned Kanda, I did more research into the history of Kanda, and came across the Kashima book that discussed the history of the Kanda Chinatown. As for the life of individuals, the prominent nature of many students and their identity as prolific writers made their histories easily accessible; but this accessibility also made writing about their lives less original, because the literary figures are so well-known. Eventually, when revising my thesis, I cut out a 1500-word section on the literary landscape in early 20th century Kanda, one that elaborated on Lu Xun's nationalist publications and the founding of the Creation Society by Guo Moruo and Yu Dafu. Although I gathered interesting information on the social networks of such figures, compared to the rest of this thesis, that section was indeed less unique. In the end, I condensed the section on Kanda and focused on the location as a site for intellectual exchanges and growing national consciousness rather than the life of individuals there.

The research on Ōshima-machi and the workers, on the other hand, was a completely different experience. Before I encountered the Imai volume, I almost had no sources relevant to the workers; Xie Jiemei wrote about the workers, but in a more generalized way and focused more on what Wang did for the workers than on the life of workers themselves. However, Xie mentioned the deportations as a reason for Wang's founding of Mutual Aid Associations. Therefore, I employed the most basic method: keyword-searching in *Yomiuri*'s online database. I tried multiple keywords, and eventually located the report on the Minami-Senju deportations; the rough time matched Xie's description, so I searched through every issue in that month and found more information on the Ōshima-machi deportations. Then I searched for issues on and around the same dates in the *Asahi* archives—for their articles, unlike *Yomiuri*, do not have keyword search and can only be searched by date—to compare details and ascertain accuracy. These

newspaper searches, as well as parts of the section on Imperial Rescript 352 and the two maps in said section, were made during the writing of the final paper for Professor Shepherd's "Colonial Cities" seminar on the management of Chinese populations over time by the Japanese government in Tokyo. While the same sources were used, this thesis focuses less on colonial themes present in Japan's management of its cities and more on the internal division and subsequent effort of unification among Chinese populations in Tokyo, an effort Wang Xitian represents to some extent.

In the end, I was able to link the three sections—students, workers, and Wang Xitian—using primary sources, and fit them into a larger historical context through consulting secondary sources on Japan's imperial democracy at the time and responses to the earthquake. The process was difficult, but rewarding: not only was the formation of an argument satisfying, there were also interesting moments in sources that made me laugh or stop to reflect. Zhou Enlai's diary still remains one of my favorite sources, for in the brief year he cared to record his everyday life as a student, I discovered and resonated with many of his struggles: his statement that he would study 13 hours a day after realizing he failed an entrance exam, his one day of diary written in English right before an English exam, even his reluctance to return to China as a protest of the secret pact (for he, presumably, was about to take another entrance exam soon) made him more real a person than I have ever encountered in history books and official accounts (which might be the reason there was no widely circulated, fully transcribed versions of his diary in China).

The same applies for Wang Xitian: when I saw his continuously failed plans to transfer his scholarship to Germany due to bureaucratic inefficiency, I immediately sympathized with his frustration; when I read his letter applying to cancel his scholarship for "severe health issues," I laughed because I knew he was really just transitioning to social work and making up an excuse

for the government. Those extremely relatable moments made me feel more affiliated to those historical figures as people and more passionate about writing out their lives, telling their stories through my 50-page project, for the way they so definitely and energetically existed should not be so easily forgotten. Nor should violence and the injustice people like Wang faced be forgotten; but I hope this essay lets Wang Xitian be remembered not by the way he died, but by the way he lived. Short-lived as his activism and the façade of peace maintained for Chinese workers in Tokyo were, they had their own continued legacy, one that gave me hope in a world today where we can often feel our agency is lost in uncontrollable events arguably equally disruptive as the Great Kantō Earthquake.

Finally, I owe the information in the final section about the legacy of the Kanda Chinatown to Professor Kang-I Sun Chang, who has generously offered me her time for an oral interview and a copy of her father's letter about his time in Tokyo. I was initially having trouble fitting this valuable information into my thesis, for Paul Sun arrived in Tokyo way later than the other people I was writing about; however, it has turned out to be the perfect ending for the thesis, for it shows how the Kanda Chinatown lived on, if not in physical form, then in spirit, through the generations of Chinese students who continued to live in Japan.