

University in Exile: The Limit of Academic Freedom in Chinese Wartime Higher Education

BY TIANYI DONG, University of California, Berkeley

As the Japanese army launched its comprehensive attack on China in July 1937 and invaded the cities of Beijing (then Beiping) and Tianjin, it made particular efforts to destroy or control their cultural centers: the universities. In Tianjin, it bombarded to ruins Nankai University (henceforth Nankai), which for them was “the base of insurgent activities” of the city, whereas in Beiping, although Peking University (*Beijing daxue*, henceforth Beida) and Tsinghua University (henceforth Tsinghua) were fortunate enough to escape bombardment, they saw their home campuses occupied and academic buildings seized and repurposed as military headquarters. These three of Republican China’s best universities, under the order of the Ministry of Education of the Nationalist (Kuomintang, KMT) government, united to become the National Southwest Associated University (*Guoli xinan lianhe daxue*, henceforth Lianda) and migrated to the hinterland to “preserve the essence of national culture”—first to Changsha, the capital of Hunan province on the southern bank of Yangtze River, then further to Kunming in Yunnan province of the southwest, safe from immediate Japanese incursion.¹

Lianda was not alone in its migration to the interior during the war. In Yunnan, there we also Tongji University from Shanghai, Sun Yat-sen University from Canton, and the Engineering College of Tangshan from Hebei, all of which moved from war zones in occupied

eastern provinces.² Still, Lianda was considered exceptional among them. It was widely acclaimed as the “bastion of democracy” in Nationalist China, convening the country’s best scholars and enjoying an international reputation for free inquiry, liberal education, and cutting-edge research. Lianda is often romanticized in historical scholarship as upholding its liberal ideals despite the hostile environment and the hardship of war, as well as for its unyielding resistance to an authoritarian and corrupt government. In this paper, however, I aim to argue that neither liberal democracy nor liberal arts education became the university’s fundamental policy. The core of Lianda’s intellectual identity was—and only was—academic freedom, which its professors were not able to defend against the ruling party because of their dependency on the government to sustain their privilege as a distinct social group. The loss of academic freedom for Lianda would not only signify the final demise of a liberal vision for modern China, but also symbolize one of the last stages of the growing irrelevance of intellectuals in defining the future of the nation.³

In the following pages, I will first briefly review

1 John Israel, *Lianda: a Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 12–15.

2 *Xu Yunnan tong zhi chang bian* [Continued Long Compilation of Yunnan Gazetteer] (1945, reprint, Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2010), vol. 2.49, 823.

3 My argument here engages several rather broad terms, so I try to use the very narrow and literal sense of the words: “liberal democracy” refers to government by election and constitution; “liberal-arts education” refers to a broad exposure to science and humanities, as opposed to strict vocational training; ‘academic freedom’ refers to the ability for faculty to teach and discuss ideas without restriction.

the representative literature on Lianda, then establish a chronological narrative of the status of academic freedom at the university throughout the war, and finally, by examining individual professors' writings—which have largely been mythicized and glossed over—show how Lianda's relationship with the Kuomintang led to the encroachment on its academic freedom over time. The primary sources I use include the wartime journals (primarily *Jinri pinglun* [Today's Review]) published by Lianda professors and their diaries and later memoirs, in addition to archives of Lianda and the Ministry of Education.⁴ By looking closely at the transformation of Lianda through eight years of war and its changing relationship with the ruling party, this paper aims to present a more complex picture of Lianda's wartime experience. The constant negotiation between a totalitarian government and supposedly autonomous university administration on whether academia was more an independent profession or one irresistibly attached to a national community shaped Lianda's destiny throughout the war. In the second half of this paper, I will delve deeper into the concept of academic freedom in the context of the quest for China's modernity by a throng of rivaling, conflicting forces. In this way, Lianda's singular wartime experience can shed light on the sociopolitical phenomenon of intellectual alienation, in the process of which Lianda professors lost their autonomy to the totalitarian political powers.

Literature Review: “A Bastion of Democracy”?

Narratives about the Lianda experience are abundant in Chinese scholarship, as it has long been established as the pinnacle of higher education in China. Historical studies have mostly focused on its academic achievement, practices of self-governance, and patriotic or revolutionary contributions.⁵ Xie Yong coined the term “Lianda Intellectual Group (聯大知識分子群 *Lianda Zhishi Fenzi Qun*),” including not only Lianda professors but also individuals associated with Lianda only indirectly, such as Hu Shi and Fu Sinian.⁶ This loose group of intellectuals, as characterized by Xie, collectively represented the crown jewel of Chinese academia and were bound together by their shared experience of American education and affinity for the tenets of political liberalism: constitutional democracy, freedom of speech, human rights, and international cooperation. In Xie's idealized picture, Lianda professors enjoyed the freedom to publicize their opinions, choose their institutional affiliation, and disregard instructions from the government at will, bargaining with their high social status and economic autonomy.⁷ In general, studies on various aspects of the experience and significance of Lianda stick, like Xie's, to a liberal characterization that highlights its democracy and freedom. This includes John Israel's *Lianda: A Chinese University in*

5 Xie, *Xian zheng yun dong*, 5–8.

6 Hu Shi, although not physically present in Yunnan, was heavily involved in Lianda's initial planning and maintained correspondence with Lianda throughout the war. Fu Sinian, the founder of the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica, spent his war years with the Institute instead of Lianda, but was still present in Yunnan for a period of time, kept close contact with the professors, was a major contributor to *Jinri Pinglun*, and was eventually appointed to the Lianda's standing committee in 1945 after Beida president Jiang Menglin left.

7 Xie, *Lianda and Modern Chinese Intellectuals*, 13–17, 40–41.

4 *Jinri Pinglun* (今日評論) was a journal published in Yunnan between 1939 and 1941, and the majority of its editors and contributors came from Lianda. For an overview of the journal, see Xie Hui, *Xi nan lian da yu Kangzhan shi qi de xian zheng yun dong* [The National Southwest Associated University and the Constitutional Movement during the War of Resistance] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 26–51. Quotations from the journal cited in the paper are the author's own translation.

War and Revolution, which brought the university to the attention of English readers. The central question he explores is the historical conditions that allowed a liberal education like Lianda to flourish in wartime China, and he concludes that it was a result of the legacy Lianda inherited from the faculty members of Beida, Tsinghua, and Nankai, the vast majority if not all of whom were educated in the Anglo-American academic tradition through undergraduate or doctoral studies. They formed the basis of Lianda's vision and practices of freedom.⁸

By looking at Lianda and its professors at the center of opposing forces, this paper hopes to transcend previous narratives and show that Lianda could initially enjoy certain freedoms because the KMT was still willing to preserve its intellectual and social prestige at the beginning of war. Left on its own, Lianda in fact had no power of its own to defend such freedom. In other words, freedom was a privilege that remained in the hands of the powerful in wartime China.

Higher Education under the Kuomintang before 1937: In the Shadow of War

Fighting in northern China started even before the Marco Polo Bridge incident broke out in the suburb of Beiping in 1937. In fact, the possibility of war with Japan had been looming over Beiping and Tianjin ever since the Mukden Incident in 1931.⁹ A full-scale war was only a matter of time, and the universities knew

it. In 1933, Japanese incursion was directly felt on the Beida campus as police forces came calling and helicopters droned overhead. The Tangu Truce did not alleviate the threat, as Japan continued to push for an "autonomous government" in northern China, and exchanges of gunfire continued through the early months of 1937.¹⁰ Therefore, war was at the center of the Kuomintang's considerations as it devised its education policy in the 1930s.

Chiang Kai-shek justified his government's totalitarianism by appealing to the necessity of an education system that would fuse the nation and the party together, an idea fundamental to the party's nation-building vision. Chiang Kai-shek and his party ideologues demanded that education should act as the powerhouse for the nation's economic growth and military strength by training youth to be morally self-sufficient technical experts. Ideological uniformity under the Three People's Principles would allow students to turn their attention to the study of practical skills in science and engineering, so that they could serve the material improvement of the country under the leadership of the party.¹¹ As Wen-hsin Yeh aptly put it, for KMT, "education would buttress rather than threaten the existing sociopolitical power." Measures of "partyized education" that were detested at Lianda, such as mandatory flag-raising ceremonies and military training, had in fact been long in

8 John Israel, *Lianda*, 381–82.

9 The Mukden Incident was the engineered explosion on September 18, 1931 that served as a pretext for Japan's invasion and subsequent annexation of Manchuria. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident refers to the fighting between Japanese and Chinese troops on July 7, 1937 in the outskirts of Beiping, which marked the beginning of Japan's full-scale aggression in China proper. See Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937-1945* (Boston: Houghton Miller Harcourt, 2013), 56, 79-81.

10 Chiang Monlin (Jiang Menglin), *Tides from the West* (Taipei: World Book Co., 1963), 202–6. On the Tangu Truce, which led to Chiang Kai-shek's *de facto* recognition of Manchukuo and the establishment of a demilitarized zone between its southern border and Tianjin, see Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 66.

11 The Three People's Principles (三民主義) were Nationalism, Democracy, and People's Livelihood, proposed by Sun Yat-sen in 1919 and later canonized as the Kuomintang's official ideology. On Sun Yat-sen, see Julie Lee Wei, Ramon Myers and Donald Gillin eds., *Prescriptions for Saving China: Selected Writings of Sun Yat-sen* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1994).

place at institutions more directly managed by the party, including Sun Yat-sen University in Canton, Central University in Nanjing, and Zhejiang University in Hangzhou.¹² The ability of northern universities such as Beida, Tsinghua and Nankai to keep their laissez-faire practices before 1937 was largely a result of political anarchy in the region during the 1930s. The Kuomintang was never able to fully extend its reach to the old capital. Students at Beida indulged in post-revolution loneliness in the old hermit-literati style, while Tsinghua enjoyed the security afforded by the American Boxer Fund and an enclosed suburban campus.¹³ The libertarianism at Beida and Tsinghua has indeed always been an anomaly and represented a gap in the Kuomintang's span of power.

1937-1941: The Initial Honeymoon

The Kuomintang's Extraordinary National Congress in April 1938 marked the regime's transition into wartime operation, and along with it every aspect of national life, including education. The Congress adopted the Program of Armed Resistance and National Construction, outlining the party's strategy to victory: the tasks of war efforts and nation-building should support each other and had to be carried out at the same time. This position shows that the party saw the war as an opportunity to enlarge and consolidate its control over the country's political, economic and social organizations under the pretense of war. The Program established the Three People's Principles and the "National Father" Sun Yat-sen's teaching as the highest creeds for all matters related to the resistance and national construction, and the Nationalist Party and Chiang Kai-

shek as the highest commanders of all resistance forces. In other words, the Congress accorded the party's ideology with absolute legitimacy, unchallengeable by any other competing forces. Armed with such a mandate, Chiang Kai-shek and his party were now entrusted with the authority to implement the totalitarian program that would allow him to marshal all the resources necessary for war. The goal for education would be to improve people's moral caliber, the quality of scientific research, and the training of technical experts, youth, and women through the reformation of educational institutions and textbooks.¹⁴

The war thus gave the KMT the chance to finally enforce the implementation of its long-planned "partyized education" policies. Reforming college curriculum for wartime needs had already been the ministry's policy before the war was in full swing in 1937. Chiang Kai-shek complained at the Third National Education Conference in February 1939 that he had always asked the country to "view peacetime as wartime," and when it came to war, to view wartime as peacetime. This aphorism followed the logic that on one hand, if a country were not organized at the high level of efficiency as though it were fighting a war, it would soon be left behind and wiped out by others that were. On the other hand, if the nation-building process was allowed to be hijacked by the war, resistance itself would lose its meaning.¹⁵ The legitimacy lent by the war retroactively justified the party's dictatorial practices in the Nanjing decade and normalized the extraordinary demand on education the party was about to lay out, while at the

12 Wen-hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 175-79.

13 Yeh, *The Alienated Academy*, 199-218.

14 "Program of Armed Resistance and National Construction," in Ministry of Education, *Di er ci Zhongguo jiaoyu nian jian* [The Second Education Yearbook of China] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1948), 10-11.

15 "Program of Armed Resistance and National Construction," 81.

same time limiting the possibility that patriotic fervor aroused by the war would lead to excessive radicalism.

Kuomintang's wartime education policy in the first half of the war was intended to enhance control over education in general but refrain from completely reforming it to serve the war effort—in other words, to take the lead while keeping it in check. Therefore, the government focused on reforming curriculum for wartime needs by adding subjects such as national literature, Japanese studies, defense chemistry, and military engineering to their curricula, instead of drafting students and professors into the armed forces.¹⁶ A September order also asked that the “Three People's Principles” be made a mandatory two-credit course during the first year of study.¹⁷

Lianda leadership was not as committed to liberal arts principles as scholars like John Israel would like to believe. Even before 1938, the leadership agreed to reevaluate Lianda's original curriculum to fulfill the double demands of academia and the national wartime during Lianda's brief sojourn in Hunan before Wuhan's fall.¹⁸ It appeared that Lianda's curriculum did conform to the party's expectations. In 1938, the ministry issued standardized curricula for each college: all students were required to take general courses on the Three People's

Principles, languages, philosophy, Chinese history and world history. Students were also to choose one course each in math, social sciences, and physical sciences.¹⁹ Records of Lianda's curricula show it acquiesced to this scheme. History and languages were incorporated into the general education requirement in the academic year 1939-1940. Cross-college course enrollment was also offered. In terms of war-related materials, Professor Zeng Zhaolun had been teaching Defense Chemistry all along, and Professor Wang Xinzong taught courses on the history of Sino-Japanese relations.²⁰ The ministry's requirements were at least not blatantly flouted, with the exception of a course on the Three People's Principles, which was not offered until 1943.

Intellectuals had reason to support the government's decisions at this stage of the war. Trust in Chiang Kai-shek was still high despite the presence of obstructions and setbacks, and the exuberance among intellectuals in 1939 was multifaceted. At this point, the war was considered a historic moment for Chinese patriotism and going positively. Professors at Lianda wrote about the fortification of national confidence and the improvement of military strength, especially in the Battle of Taierzhuang.²¹ They attributed the Chinese victory to Chiang Kai-shek, which bolstered his reputation.²² Professors felt that their national pride could fi-

16 Order from Ministry of Education, No. 14459, June 23, 1939. *Compilation of Higher Education Statutes*. Chinese Second Historical Archive, 5. 1947.

17 Ministry of Education (Republic of China), *Jiao yu fa ling* [Education Statutes] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shu ju, 1947), 181.

18 “Changsha linshi daxue choubei weiyuanhui gongzuo baogao shu [Work Report of the Preparatory Committee, Changsha Temporary University],” (Nov. 17, 1937) in Wang et al., *Guo li xi nan lian he daxue shi liao* [Historical Materials of the National Southwest Associated University] (Kunming: Yunnan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), vol. 1, 5. “Mei Yiqi shou ni linshi daxue Chouweihui di yi ci hui yi bao gao ti gang [Mei Yiqi's Manuscript of the Outline, First Meeting of CTU Preparatory Committee],” (Sep. 13, 1937), *ibid.*, 56-7.

19 Ministry of Education, “Second Education Yearbook,” 481-88.

20 List of course offerings by colleges, 1938-1945 in Wang et al., *Shi liao*, vol. 3, 177-85.

21 The Battle of Taierzhuang in March 1938 was the first major victory for Chinese troops during the war. Under the command of Generals Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, KMT successfully defended the strategic town in Shandong in an extraordinarily brutal fight. The victory also won international acclaim for China and Chiang Kai-shek. See Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 151-54.

22 Qian Duansheng, “Kangzhan zhi sheng de tujing [The Approach to Victory in the War],” *Jinri Pinglun* (JRPL) 1, no. 11 (Mar. 20, 1939): 3-4.

nally be legitimized in a situation where China's valiant resistance contrasted and condemned Europe's failure in Czechoslovakia.²³ Optimism was on the rise for intellectuals throughout 1938, as they finally saw the nation find its purpose and center of gravity, namely, to unite to fight a war of national survival. Pan Guangdan, professor of Sociology, saw it as China's initiation into adulthood, with the opportunity to finally try out its strength.²⁴ Fu Sinian, head of Academia Sinica and later member of Lianda's Standing Committee, argued that the enthusiasm for enlistment among the youth and patriotism among the general public was the fruit of education modernization, from late Qing to the Enlightenment of May Fourth to the national education standardization of the recent years.²⁵ Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist party were the embodiment of nationalism and the champion of hope in the early stage of the war.

Lianda professors also had something to gain from KMT's wartime education policy. Because the party stated that wartime should be treated as peacetime, university students and faculty were essentially exempted from conscription. That Lianda was able to continue its regular activities of teaching and research as a university during a total war was exceptional. The U.S.-educated professors familiar with the total war experience of World War I expected the whole country to be drafted or made to join war production—"just like in European or American modern countries." However, when the government appeared not to intend to enlist them for war, Lianda professors followed the government's lead, subscribed to the slogan that "the best way

to support the war is to study," and retreated to their ivory tower.²⁶

1941-1945: Restriction and Explosion

The situation turned sour after change in the tide of war in 1941. The outbreak of war in Europe and the Nonaggression Pact signed between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939 had already made the prospect of receiving outside assistance slim. The fall of French Indochina to Japan and the closure of British Burma Road under Japanese pressure in the summer of 1940 further isolated Chongqing and Yunnan. The United States held onto its neutrality—at least before Pearl Harbor—and Free China now had to rely on internal resources alone. On November 30th, Wang Jingwei's collaborationist regime was officially established in Nanjing and recognized by Tokyo.²⁷ All of these came as blows to Nationalist resistance, in addition to setbacks on the battlegrounds and intensified air raids on Chongqing and Kunming. It was also at this time that the Communist forces made advancements, despite the direction of Chiang to retreat. As the New Fourth Army reached Anhui, Chiang ordered all Communist troops to retreat to the north of the Yangtze before the New Year of 1941. The Communists did not comply, and fight between the two allies of the United Front broke out. The lukewarm but consistent good will accumulated in the past four years expired with a KMT victory. Although the internal fight did not continue after the incident, further alliance between the parties

26 *Lian da ba nian* [Eight years at Lianda] (Beijing: New Star Press, 2009), 6–7.

27 Wang Jingwei was Chiang's longtime rival within KMT and believed that China needed to negotiate for peace with Japan instead of resisting. He fled from Chongqing, established a separate government in Nanjing, and negotiated a "peace treaty" with Japan in 1940. It was largely unrecognized. See Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 197–210.

23 Feng Youlan, "Zhongguo bijing hai shi Zhongguo [China Is, After All, China]," JRPL 1, no. 14 (Apr. 2, 1939): 7–8.

24 Pan Guangdan, "Kangzhan de minzu yiyi [The National Significance of the War]," JRPL 1, no. 2 (Jan. 8, 1939): 4–5.

25 Fu Sinian, "Kangzhan liang nian zhi huigu [Reflection on Two Years of War]," JRPL 2, no.3 (July 9, 1939): 2–3

became impossible.²⁸

Chiang was bound to reorganize the KMT's internal regime to consolidate its control under such circumstances. Negotiation with Lianda on education policy became more like a burden for the government, and the KMT had less intention to make accommodation for Lianda's complaints, seen as injurious for war efforts. The ministry became much less lenient in terms of the implementation of its regulations. From 1941 onward, the Standing Committee of Lianda frequently received instructions from the ministry or even the Executive Yuan that ordered rules be enforced on campus, an exercise of control unseen in previous years. For instance, the standard and procedure for faculty appointment by the ministry were first issued in September 1940, prescribing degree and experience qualifications for each rank of professorship and demanding universities to submit its faculty record for inspection and accreditation.²⁹ The Ministry urged the Standing Committee to submit faculty records again 1941, but Lianda did not implement it on the pretext of understaffing. It was in 1942 under the pressure of withheld research funding that Lianda adopted the procedure and created a separate rank of associate professorship, following the ministry's arrangements.³⁰ The ministry's takeover of faculty accreditation represented a significant penetration into Lianda's autonomy, as the ability to recruit professors from a broad range of academic orientations and across the political spectrum had always been the foundation of Lianda's academic freedom.

The party's tighter grip on Lianda also encroached upon the university's control of student activ-

ities. Associations at Lianda were effectively monopolized by the Three People's Principles Youth Corps after communist students went underground in 1941.³¹ In 1943, the ministry gave university presidents the power to monitor and dismiss students' self-governing associations; the only associations allowed would be the authorized student groups.³² The Lianda administration did become stricter in its enforcement of disciplinary actions in line with these regulations. For example, a student newspaper was unprecedentedly terminated and the editors sanctioned by the Standing Committee for their "inappropriate remarks." Another student was sanctioned simply for leaving in the middle of a morning flag-raising ceremony.³³

Graduation accreditation for students had much more serious ramifications in 1941. As the Standing Committee itself was pressured to follow the ministry's instruction to organize general examination for graduating seniors, students protested in response. Beida president Jiang Menglin received confidential reports from the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (Jun-tong, the KMT's spy agency) that some "illegal elements" on campus were planning to instigate student movement against the general examination and was ordered to exercise precaution. The Standing Committee became more stringent as the semester end drew closer and threatened, per the ministry's order, to withhold diploma and job recommendations from students who refused to take the general examination and to dismiss those who prevented others from taking the exam.³⁴ Meeting minutes of the Faculty Senate do not show any student barred from graduation for not taking the exam,

28 Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 212–26.

29 *Jiao yu fa ling*, 156–7, 160.

30 174th Standing Committee meeting (Apr. 16, 1941), 232nd SC meeting (Sep. 16, 1942), 3rd Faculty Senate meeting, 1942, *ibid.*, 173, 251, 532.

31 *Lian da ba nian*, 52–54.

32 *Jiao yu fa ling*, 82.

33 215th SC meeting (May 6, 1942), 245th SC meeting (Dec. 30, 1942) in Wang et al., *Shi liao*, vol. 3, 229, 267.

34 179th to 182nd SC meeting, *ibid.*, 178–83.

but a student memoir recounts that two student leaders who protested the exam were betrayed by their classmates and committed suicide.³⁵

The government's power came from its control of university funding. Lianda's funding came from its three divisions, all of which became increasingly dependent upon the government financially. Beida had always been a public university. Nankai was originally privately funded, but it also had to rely on government subsidies during the war. After the Boxer Indemnity Fund for Tsinghua was terminated in 1940, Lianda became completely dependent on money from the Kuomintang government to operate. The close of the Burma Road also cut off Lianda's access to any external source of supply. The situation worsened as Lianda's new campus was bombed and destroyed twice in 1940 and 1941, and additional income became necessary for reconstruction.³⁶ The lack of funding was in fact crippling for Lianda during the second half of the war. The strenuous situation once pushed Lianda to the brink of disintegration, as Mei Yiqi and Jiang Menglin pondered the unequal financial contributions of the three universities to the union.³⁷

American historian John King Fairbank provided a third-party perspective on the government's leverage over Lianda through finance. While working for the Office of Strategic Services in Chongqing, Fairbank sent a letter in September 1942 to Alger Hiss, an assistant in the U.S. Office of Far Eastern Affairs, recounting the material, political, and intellectuals pressure that faced

professors at Lianda. Frequent airstrikes and inflation took their toll. Food and housing were sparse, let alone books and equipment. According to Fairbank, professors were forced to sell their books and clothes because the Kuomintang had been actively withholding funding for the university—or more precisely, not increasing funding in proportion to the rate of hyperinflation in Kunming. He concluded that the lack of funding at Lianda was a tactic that the party used to coerce Lianda into compliance, as he compared the threadbare situation of “the most convinced and determined” Tsinghua professors who opposed Chen Li-fu's tightening control over Lianda with the much more favorable condition of faculty members who showed interest in joining the party and those at the neighboring Yunnan University. Fairbank urged Washington to consider the situation on the ground in China and increase its support for Chinese intellectuals, as “Tsinghua University in particular represents an American interest in China.”³⁸ Having arrived in China only three days prior, Fairbank probably did not know at this point that if Chiang Kai-shek were to see this letter, it would only further convince him that Lianda, as an intellectual slave to the Americans, was more in want of training and indoctrination in Chinese nationalism.

The years between 1941 and 1943 also represented the darkest time on Lianda campus. Student memoirs produced by a progressive student organization *Chuxi fukan* after Lianda moved back to the north described Lianda in those years as “a wasteland with no

35 First FS meeting, 1941, *ibid.*, 528; *Lian da ba nian*, 51.

36 “Kang zhan qi zhong zhi qing hua er xu [Tsinghua during the War, Second Volume],” (1941) in Mei Yiqi, *Mei Yiqi zi shu* [Accounts of Mei Yiqi], ed. Wen Mingguo (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chuban she, 2013), 68–70.

37 Mei Yiqi, *Mei Yiqi ri ji, 1941-1946* [Mei Yiqi's Diary, 1941-1946], ed. Huang Yanfu, Wang Xiaoming (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chuban she, 2001), 18–19.

38 John K. Fairbank, *Chinabound: A Fifty Year Memoir* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 192–200. Lianda maintained a parallel structure throughout the war, meaning there was a fully functioning administration for Lianda as a whole as well as one for each of the three universities. Students who migrated to Yunnan in 1938 kept both their original enrollment and enrollment at Lianda, while new students admitted in Yunnan from 1939 onwards only had Lianda status.

water or greeneries.” Members or sympathizers of the Communist party either left for Yan’an or were forced underground after the New Fourth Army Incident. According to a memoir author, any book remotely related to “philosophy” could be confiscated and the owner interrogated. Wall newspapers, seminars, reading groups, street theaters that had been the hallmarks of Lianda student life all disappeared. Students retreated into isolation, burying themselves in study, part-time jobs, speculative profiteering, bridge, or romantic relationships. Freshmen arriving on campus were disappointed by the prevalence of coteries and the general lack of interest in study. The atmosphere at Lianda was bereft of its usual optimism and camaraderie.³⁹ Even some professors indulged in gambling.⁴⁰

At the same time, discontent was brewing under the surface. Lianda’s atmosphere evolved from sterility to politicization and polarization after 1943, when disappointment with the KMT government finally exploded. Numerous professors, Wen Yiduo in particular, were radicalized by the increasing disappointment with the Kuomintang in light of the military failure during Japan’s Ichigo Offensive and exacerbated economic destitution created by both inflation and corruption. The spirit of unity in which Lianda took so much pride during its early years had become harder and harder to maintain, especially after the December 1st Movement in 1945.

The Movement arose as Kunming’s political situation worsened and the opposition to civil war intensified in the months after Japanese capitulation on August 15th, 1945. Once Chiang Kai-shek had a free moment to deal with the dissidents in Yunnan, he started by deposing Lung Yun, the governor of Yunnan and protector

of Lianda professors, replacing him with KMT loyalist General Lu Han.⁴¹ On the night of November 25th, four universities in Kunming held a joint conference on Lianda’s campus demanding peace and gathered more than five thousand attendees. Lu’s troops invaded the campus and disrupted the event by force, prompting a general student strike and demonstration on December 1st. Four demonstrators, including two Lianda students, were killed in the police action, with thirty more injured, among them five Lianda professors.⁴²

Lianda was left riven in the aftermath of the event. Students continued the strike, demanding the investigation and punishment of the military commander responsible for the massacre. Professors initially stood in solidarity with the students, drafting petitions and negotiating with the provincial government on their behalf. Faculty members of the Departments of Law and Political Science also formed a committee that prepared to challenge the regulations against assembly and demonstration on legal grounds, and this committee even included KMT members such as Qian Duansheng, Zhou Binglin, and Yan Shutang. However, an impasse arose when the government threatened further force, while students refused to go back to class until all culprits were arrested and convicted. Divisions emerged among the faculty as they were pressured from both sides. One group tried in vain to convince students to compromise, even by threatening to resign, while the other more radical group, led by Wen Yiduo, defended students’ decision to continue the strike.⁴³

On December 11th, Mei Yiqi finally arrived in

39 *Lian da ba nian*, 3, 57, 109.

40 Mei, *Mei Yiqi ri ji*, 16.

41 Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 37–38.

42 *Lian da ba nian*, 42–44.

43 2nd – 7th FS meeting, 1945 (Nov. 29 – Dec. 19, 1945) in Wang et al., *Shi liao*, vol.3, 550–59.

Chongqing to meet with Zhu Jiahua, who had by then switched place with Chen Li-fu and became the Minister of Education. In view of the chaotic scene on campus, Mei promised Zhu that if he could not restore normal order by the end of the week, he would rather “terminate the university himself than let the government disband it.” Back in Kunming, the usually moderate and restrained President Mei could not help but voice his dissatisfaction with the “radical and incendiary speech” of Wen Yiduo. Facing equally unremitting and harsh demands from students and the government exacerbated by the incapability of professors to negotiate a peaceful compromise but adding on to the trouble with their threat to resign, Mei himself felt the urge to quit.⁴⁴ Lianda was on the verge of falling apart.

Eventually students returned to classes after the army leader promised to respect the students’ right to assemble, but the wounds at Lianda were not easily healed. Students were also disappointed by their professors and president, who had promised them freedom but ended up pressuring the students to compromise and almost dismissed the student leaders who had defied the administration’s decision to resume classes before the students’ demands were met. Students viewed the end of strike as submission to the power of the government. Mei himself was deeply disappointed by the students’ as well as Wen’s excessive provocation and vilification—it was not the kind of “freedom” and “democracy” he wanted to see with his three decades of dedication to education.⁴⁵ Pessimism again drowned the campus; student activists left, and groups disappeared.⁴⁶ Lianda was no longer a “bastion of democracy.”

⁴⁴ Mei, *Mei Yiqi ri ji*, 189–91.

⁴⁵ Mei, *Mei Yiqi ri ji*, 206–8.

⁴⁶ *Lian da ba nian*, 45, 62.

Intellectuals Embedded in the Party Establishment

To really understand Lianda’s wartime experience vis-à-vis its loss of academic freedom and democracy, we have to go back to the basic question: how did Lianda understand freedom and democracy? We have already seen that significant tension indeed existed between Lianda and the ruling party. However, instead of classifying the university and the party-government in ideological terms of liberalism versus authoritarianism, it is helpful to look at the professors’ actual rhetoric regarding the government and their relationship with the KMT party in order to see how they aligned themselves with the powerholders. Most of Lianda’s professors were in fact figures of the political establishment, rather than independent critics as many have portrayed them. Their limitation was rooted in the fact that their economic survival, social privilege, and political and cultural ideology during the war all derived from the party.

In his treatises on higher education in 1941, Mei Yiqi argued that academic freedom would be key to the ability of Chinese universities to fulfill their mission to enlighten the populace and renew their citizenship, invoking the concept of “Great Learning” in Confucian classics in its defense but reinterpreting it in the context of Republican China. His argument, echoed by many Lianda professors in various publications, distinguished academic freedom from “liberalism” and described it as the vehicle that would allow students to explore China’s pathway towards modernization with their knowledge and lead the nation through quality of character, informed reasoning, and civic discussion. Mei envisioned higher education in China as a blend of a broad foundation in the liberal arts and ethical cultivation.⁴⁷ Such a vision was in fact very much shared by

⁴⁷ Mei Yiqi, “An Interpretation of University,” *Mei Yiqi ri ji*,

the KMT, as evidenced by their standardized curricula; Mei himself also subscribed to the KMT's ideology that education, including academic freedom, should be in the service of the nation. Thus, the conformity between curricula proposed by the government and Lianda's own curricula is unsurprising. Their only conflict lay in the specific role of such freedom, as will be discussed later.

Lianda leadership also kept close contact with key functionaries in the KMT government on a personal level or were even officials themselves. Jiang Menglin, the president of Beida, was one of the chief architects of the party's new education system. He was first appointed Zhejiang Province's Commissioner of Education by Chiang Kai-shek, and later organized and presided over the National Zhejiang University, an exemplar of the KMT's partyized provincial education model. He became the Minister of Education himself a year later. In his memoir published in 1942, he still spoke approvingly of the party's reforms, including standardized school curricula and improved science teaching and physical training.⁴⁸ In fact, he promoted and enforced the party's education policies in the strictest sense while he was in Zhejiang, advocating for training students with revolutionary ideology and practices. "To manage education in the same spirit as managing the party," he wrote in the outline for partyized education in Zhejiang in 1927, "... means that those who disobey the party's discipline are counter-revolutionaries ... There is only freedom for the Party, but not for party members."⁴⁹

Such a viewpoint directly contradicted the image of a liberal intellectual, but it was in fact only natu-

ral for him to welcome and trust the Nationalists who inherited the revolutionary ideals of Sun Yat-sen, with whom he had been acquainted since his college years at Berkeley, and represented the last hope for a stable, competent government that finally unified the country after a decade of violence and chaos under warlords. When the Nationalist army marched into Hangzhou, he described himself "watching in the crowd with heart thumping against [his] ribs in ecstasy."⁵⁰ A strong identification with the emerging Chinese nation, and along with it the Nationalist party, was a much more prevalent ideology at the time.

Apart from the administrative leadership, there were also professors at Lianda closely connected with the KMT. Qian Duansheng, professor of Political Science, started as a scholar of parliamentary politics when he graduated with a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1924 but gradually shifted his academic interest to public administration—in other words, from a field of study that would challenge the Three People's Principles to one that would serve its interest. In fact, Qian made his career along with that of the party, both co-authoring *Comparative Constitutions* with Wang Shijie, the Minister of Education between 1933 and 1938, and penning his own masterpiece *Minguo zhengzhi shi* [Political History of the Republic of China] aided by the official Party History Compilation Committee, a systematic study of the KMT's political institutions.⁵¹ During the war, he was in charge of the journal *Jinri Pinglun*, which provided a forum for a variety of political opinions often at odds with those of the government. However, Qian himself only focused on functional measures that aimed at improving the effectiveness of

250-8.

48 Chiang, *Tides from the West*, 147–56.

49 *Jin dai Zhongguo jiao yu shi liao* [Historical Materials on Education in Modern China], ed. Shu Xincheng (1933, reprint, Shanghai: Shanghai shu dian, 1990) vol. 5, 24–25.

50 Chiang, *Tides from the West*, 146.

51 Boorman, Howard, and Cheng, *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), vol. 1, 377.

government, such as eliminating overlapping jurisdiction among central authorities and appointing designated personnel to improve efficiency and accountability in the government.⁵² Qian did strengthen state power in higher education as Chiang had prescribed.

Lianda professors' own political interests in the government organs were also reflected in the KMT's active organization on campus. Wang Qisheng's pioneering work on the Kuomintang's party history revealed the supportive and collaborative attitude of Lianda intellectuals towards the party by drawing on the files of Zhu Jiahua, the party's Minister of Organization during the war, available at the Academia Sinica. Wang argued that Zhu enjoyed considerable trust of intellectuals as a former university administrator and renowned geologist educated in Germany, trust unimaginable for party hacks such as Chen Li-fu. Professors joined the party to establish direct connection with Zhu so that their political agenda could receive attention in the party's inner circle, or to seek greater possibility for political advancement in general. Indeed, Lianda's crisis would come much earlier and more severely without channels within the party to secure its budget and relief from the government. Yao was able to secure additional party funding for professors who spoke at seminars and lectures sponsored by the branch, which provided a significant source of supplementary income during the precarious years of hyperinflation. Party-member professors such as Zhou Binglin (Political Science), Chen Xueping (Psychology), and Luo Changpei (Philology) also acted as mediators between the government and the university, particularly in times of crisis, by petitioning the government to increase stipend for their colleagues and students or defusing confrontation between

student groups.⁵³

Lianda professors were also part of the social establishment in terms of class composition. Intellectuals, and literate persons in general, had always been the privileged class in the landscape of Chinese social tradition. Living conditions were still considerably better for professors than for students, even though professors were also reduced to refugees and some faced significant financial pressure during the war. The fact that they were not enlisted further solidified their privilege over peasant soldiers. In Mei Yiqi's diary between 1941 and 1945, accounts of banquets with government officials, foreign guests, and other professors appear frequently during those years of hyperinflation. In 1941, on his way to Chongqing, he sympathetically describes his encounter with ailing soldiers on the same boat, but also shows his ignorance of the wartime social condition. The contrast in their food conditions was striking: Mei still had three meals each day that included rice and four dishes of vegetables with a few meat slices—much simpler than his usual diet—while the soldiers could only have two bowls of rice a day with hot pepper for seasoning. In 1943, at a weekly meeting of the Standing Committee, a dinner cost 800-900 *fabi* per table, while as late as 1945 the students' meal stipend was only 500 per month. Mei expressed his shame when he compared the extravagance common in his elite rank of the KMT with an austere war-standard dinner to which he was invited at the British embassy.⁵⁴ Given the KMT's exploitation of the peasantry to provide its soldiers with supplies, even though Lianda professors and students

52 Qian Duansheng, "Kangzhan zhi sheng de zhengzhi [Politics for Victory in the War of Resistance]," JRPL 1, no. 12 (Mar. 19, 1939): 5-7.

53 Wang Qisheng, *Ge ming yu fan ge ming: shehui wenhua shiye xia de Mingguo zhengzhi* [Revolution and Counter-revolution: Republican Politics in the Social and Cultural Sphere], (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 244-58.

54 Mei, *Mei Yiqi ri ji*, 44, 126, 138.

would harshly criticize party leaders such as H.H. Kong for self-aggrandizement while they were starving, the fact was that they themselves were part of the elite exempt from service on the battlefield.⁵⁵

Lianda was exceptional in its exclusion from wartime stringency regulations, even within the field of education. Their confrontation with the Kuomintang was at least partly due to the conflict between the perception of exceptionalism among Chinese universities and the government's effort to use wartime migration to equalize higher education. For Chen Li-fu, the minister of education, combining the three universities and moving them to Yunnan was a political necessity, but was also an initiative on the part of the government to re-organize and redistribute educational resources over-concentrated in Beiping and Tianjin to improve quality and efficiency of education in previously marginalized regions in the southwest, where in fact education was the most needed.⁵⁶ In contrast, the mentality of Lianda was that of an elite institution "preserving the nation's treasure" and carrying on education and research despite adversity. Thus, Pan Guangdan, professor of Sociology, criticized the low general admission criteria set by the government in order to simplify the procedure and provide relief for refugee students, arguing that the university's job was to cultivate talent for the nation, not provide student relief, and that the university's standard of instruction should not be sacrificed just because teenage students from the warzone could not study well for exams.⁵⁷ The sense of entitlement at Lianda among

both professors and students that came from the remnants of intellectual privilege would become the major source of their discontent with the party, which afforded them this privilege in the first place.

Space for Freedom Within the Establishment

Intellectuals of the Republican era did predominantly advocate for individual liberty. The defining figure of Beida, Cai Yuanpei, promulgated the principle of academic freedom. In fact, although Beida won its fame for the progressivism and patriotism propagated out of its campus during the May Fourth Movement, it was "freedom of thought, inclusiveness, and toleration"—as Cai described the idea of academic freedom—that took precedence. Not only did the iconoclastic Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu coexist with the culturally conservative National Essence group of Liu Shipei, the campus also honored the staunchly Confucian scholar Gu Hongming.⁵⁸

Cai's advocacy for academic freedom in fact came from the context of party politics in the 1930s, when Cai himself was a leading party ideologue. After Chiang Kai-shek took hold of Nanjing and purged communists from its ranks, the party had come to a critical point for deciding its attitude towards the student radicalism that it had incited and then disappointed during the Northern Expedition. Cai Yuanpei and the CC Clique led by the brothers Chen Guo-fu and Chen Li-fu, the would-be Minister of Education during the war, represented two competing factions within the party. The motivation for Cai's support for education's independence from politics was in fact to confront Chen Guo-fu's advocacy for continuous student-led social revolution under the guidance of the Kuomintang,

55 On the condition of the peasantry during the war, see Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction*, 45–70, 130–57.

56 Chen, *Chinese Education during the War (1937-1942)* (1942, reprint, Washington D.C.: Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1969), 3.

57 Pan Guangdan, "Du ershiqi nian du tongyi zhaosheng baogao [On the Report of General Admission in 1938]," JRPL 2, no. 9 (Aug. 20, 1939): 136-7.

58 Jerome Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: Free Press, 1981), 220.

and his Committee for Training the Masses in particular. Therefore, Cai argued not for resisting the party's ideological control of college campuses, but rather for leaving students to their studies as party doctrine was already embedded in textbooks. Moreover, there would be no more need for student politics as long as there were party organizations on campus to guide students. His idea of educational autonomy, the most idealized legacy of Beida and Lianda, in fact solidified rather than challenged the Kuomintang's policies of "party-ized education."⁵⁹

It would be more precise to describe Lianda's practice as seeking space for academic freedom within the political establishment, of which they were an integral component. Academic freedom of this fashion would advance instead of compromise nationalism, the preoccupation in both political and intellectual spheres. For example, in the inaugural issue of *Jinri Pinglun* on January 1st, 1939, Qian Duansheng implicitly criticized the party's totalitarianism by trying to distinguish "unity" (*tongyi* 統一) from "uniformity" (*yizhi* 一致). He argued that unity might be critical to national independence, but attempt to achieve uniformity in the nation could not bring actual unity. Qian reasoned that uniformity was impossible even under the tyrannical rule of Nazi Germany, let alone in China, a country which he claimed to "have traditionally favored freedom and [been] capable of exerting intellect." The "tendency, habit, and capability" of the majority of intellectuals to voice their opinions, such as the customary practices of intellectuals petitioning the government and the more recent instances of student activism, were all the result of the freedom of expression, and thus they were able to preserve the "most special and honest tradition" of loyal opposition in China. Qian's identification with Con-

fucian scholar-officials in the imperial period showed how much his cultural nationalism was sustained by the privilege of the literate in traditional China's social structure. "It is impossible, as a matter of fact, to ask Chinese, especially learned persons (*dushuren*), to be yes-men, and not grant them freedom of thought and expression."⁶⁰ His criticism of totalitarian uniformity was not a defense of freedom per se, but rather an attempt to preserve the intellectual prerogative that was quickly disappearing.

It is therefore understandable why Qian would invoke the tradition of loyal opposition instead of rely on independent criticism as he defined his relationship with the government. Academic freedom blended into nationalism, and both virtues were the shared commitment of intellectuals at Lianda, as well as of intellectuals of the Republican era in general. This is not to say that their understanding of freedom was insincere, but rather, as Qian eloquently contended, that freedom of thought was the most important among all freedoms and manifestation of the highest level of development of both individual personality and long-term progress of thought and culture in a nation. We cannot remove Lianda intellectuals and their arguments from their historical context, which was a prolonged intellectual search for reasons to be proud of their own people and culture, and for reasons to assert that modern China could be strong and free at the same time.

Space for Freedom outside the Establishment

The intellectuals at Lianda were doomed as their demands became increasingly incompatible with the intensification of war. The irreconcilable conflict between their ideology and the ruling ideology still led them to seek freedom beyond the party's maximum

59 On KMT's policy towards student activism in the 1930s, see John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China*, 23–28.

60 Qian Duansheng, "Unity and Uniformity," JRPL 1, no.3 (Jan. 5, 1939): 4-6.

tolerance. Above all, Lianda professors were first and foremost scholars and educators, inheriting the May Fourth tradition of enlightenment that had no place in the Three People's Principles. Arguing against the government propaganda that simplified and distorted facts, Pan Guangdan articulated his belief in the possibility of approaching objective truth, humanity's innate capacity to know that truth, and the role of educators to inspire that capacity. He argued that education was on the side of science, while propaganda was for zealots and ideologues.⁶¹ By distinguishing education from propaganda, Pan denied the value of any prescribed information not derived from original reasoning, and argued that universities should be an environment reserved for pure academic research, free from propaganda and political factionalism. In other words, there must be space for freedom to teach the method of searching truth outside of the party's ideological indoctrination.⁶²

The reason that academic freedom took such primacy in Lianda's understanding of freedom had to do with the context of intellectuals' overall marginalization from political power. The process by which scholars ceased to be officials in the Republic era was irreversible despite their eloquence. Intellectuals themselves increasingly identified with professional scholars instead of political maneuverers. Even the activities of Lianda's KMT branch, under the charge of Yao Congwu, were centered around scholarship rather than politics, sponsoring lecture series, political commentary journals, and academic publications. Yao himself confessed that he would not have accepted the position of branch secretary had Zhu Jiahua not been his former

teacher, and he would rather have focused on his "pure historical research." Even so, he declared to Zhu that he would not seek any personal advancement in high-level politics.⁶³

For scholars, the freedom to devote their time and energy to academic research was essential to their livelihood. How much this scholarly professionalism was ingrained in their consciousness is striking, even while facing the threat of war. The primacy of pure scholarly research is prominent in Beida historian Zheng Tianting's account of life in Kunming. He takes consolation in the fact that he managed to carry on with his research and teaching of Tang history and even break new grounds in the study of the Qing amid the isolation of exile, with the help of local materials in Yunnan. He also deeply appreciated the opportunity to associate with Tsinghua professors such as Wen Yiduo and Chen Yinque in the scenic Mengzi (branch campus of Lianda for the College of Letters in 1938) and the support they gave him for his research on Tibetan philology in Tang dynasty, something which would not have been available to him had the three universities not been merged. For Zheng, the spirit of collaboration, friendship, and dedication to serious scientific research was Lianda's most significant legacy and contribution to the war effort.⁶⁴

Zheng's preference for undisturbed free academic inquiry was exactly what Chiang Kai-shek criticized as unsuitable for wartime education. In Chiang's opening speech at the Third National Education Conference, he admonished the educators to stop championing "the much-misunderstood slogan of education independence in the past," and considering professorship as personal

61 Pan Guangdan, "Xuanchuan bu shi jiaoyu [Propaganda is not education]," JRPL 3, no. 8 (Feb. 25, 1940): 105-7.

62 Pan Guangdan, "Zai lun xuanchuan bu shi jiaoyu [Propaganda is not education, reply]," JRPL 3, no. 14 (Apr. 6, 1940): 213-6 [microfilm].

63 Wang, *Ge ming yu fan ge ming*, 243, 254.

64 Zheng, Tianting, "Dian xing ji [Account of the Journey to Yunnan]," in Wang et al., *Shi liao*, vol. 1, 82-83.

life choice or private profession outside of the nation's jurisdiction and responsibility. The time for leisurely teaching and reading behind closed doors was over, he declared, and education must be connected with the country's military, social, political and economic life. Chiang also appealed to China's age-old intellectual tradition, but in his conception, teachers and scholars were the kind of political stalwarts well versed in statecraft that he desired for his regime, as opposed to the independent but patriotic critics.⁶⁵

We can now see that academic freedom was the real point of contention between Lianda and the KMT government. The professors were willing to serve the government by carrying out social survey, defense research, or military interpreter trainings, but when it came to academic instruction, their freedom was not to be violated. The faculty senate's main objection to the ministry's order for curriculum standardization was that it would erode their independence from the ministry, the core of their collective dignity in a society where the political machine was widely stigmatized. "If the ministry gave such detailed instruction on every matter related to higher education, it would equate the universities to an office under the Ministry's Division of Higher Education ... if even the curricula taught by professors have to be designated and the content approved by the Ministry, professors would appear to students as if we were no more than ministerial clerks, and faculty would certainly be unable to wield their talent at ease."

The professors' ability to defend the scholarly autonomy so essential to their intellectual world was in fact limited. Their objections went unheard, and the

senate presumably never received a response even from the presidents. Discussion of faculty's concern with the curriculum change never came up in the meeting minutes of the Standing Committee's meeting the next day or even in the following month. The adjustment commenced nonetheless, as was shown earlier.

The irony was that the intellectuals' inability to stage an effective opposition partly came from their reorientation towards professional scholars, as circumscribed participants in society's political order instead of arbiters of it. In Feng Youlan's characterization of his role as a professor, because of the specialization of knowledge and the increasing complexity of political and social issues in contemporary society, he could only claim expertise in his own highly specialized field, and was therefore unqualified to provide overall guidance in the students' moral development, especially without such authoritative guidelines as the sacred classics or sage biographies (*shengjing xianzhuan*).⁶⁶ It was in a professional and restrained voice that Feng explained his objection by demarcating modernity from tradition, as he was an expert in the latter. Here, Feng's understanding of a professorial intellectual ran counter to that of the party. He implicitly denounced the near religious authority that the party had assigned to Sun Yat-sen's texts and teaching, and rejected the party's attempt to define, for them, what being an intellectual in order to preserve national culture was supposed to mean. In doing so, Feng did not realize that the inherent contradiction in claiming the privileges of traditional scholar-officials and modern professionals at the same time.

The relationship between Lianda and the Kuomintang finally reached the breaking point in the aftermath of the December 1st Movement of 1945. Tsinghua's future was particularly endangered as the

65 Ministry of Education, "Second Education Yearbook," 82–83. On the role of the educated elite in traditional China, or "*shi*," see Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3.

66 Feng Youlan, "On Tutorial System," *Jinri Pinglun* 1, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1939): 9–10. 1.1.1939.

home campus of radicalized professors, including sociologists Pan Guangdan and Fei Xiaotong, political scientist Zhang Xiruo, and poet Wen Yiduo, who were the most vocal in their defiance during the negotiation with the government.⁶⁷ According to Mei Yiqi's diary, Chiang Kai-shek had personally instructed Tsinghua to "restore its academic atmosphere" and pressured Mei to fire these four professors as the condition for funding its return to the north.⁶⁸ In the end, Wen Yiduo was assassinated by a KMT agent on July 15, 1946, after he publicly denounced the party for its violation of democracy and freedom at the funeral of his colleague Li Gongpu. Two months later, Lianda moved back to Beijing, but passed away along with Wen, the last major defender of academic freedom in higher education in China.

Making Sense: The Unfulfilled Project

The intellectuals eventually lost in the battle for academic freedom, just like they did on other grounds from democracy to peace. An assortment of studies in English have told this story of failure. Lloyd Eastman starts his analysis of the failures of Kuomintang's Nanjing decade with the unfulfillment of the promises of revolutions in 1911 and again in 1927.⁶⁹ Vera Schwarcz describes how the May Fourth youth, unburdened by the baggage of Confucian tradition and with boundless faith in individual capacity for knowing, yet again failed to effect meaningful social change with their popular enlightenment projects.⁷⁰ Israel has lamented

67 There was also the Democratic League, the major wartime "third force" party that challenged the Kuomintang's monopoly on governance. See Roger Jeans ed., *Roads Not Taken*.

68 Mei, *Mei Yiqi ri ji*, 293–97.

69 Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1937-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-4.

70 Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 232-5.

the loss of Lianda's liberal character after the December 1st Movement, as professors took sides and the students' democratic movement allowed them to be coopted by communists' organization.⁷¹ These narratives, invariably written from an American perspective, espouse an immense faith in the virtue of freedom and democracy. Despite the amount of respect these authors paid to the intellectuals' effort in putting up a fight, they were portrayed to be politically naïve as well as intellectually susceptible. In these retellings, academics were unable to live up to the democratic and liberal ideals they had studied in Europe and the United States, and thus failed to make modern China into a democratic country.

Even Wen-hsin Yeh, writing as an insider, herself born in Republican China, cannot help but characterize the liberal intellectuals as "the ultimate tragedy" because of their inability to change the reality that "individual worth and collective goals" were incompatible in politically troubled times. However, she also points to structural reasons that could account for the political alienation and ineffectiveness of intellectuals. The elevation of new kinds of talents, including science, technology, and commerce, and the relentless assaults on Confucian morality led to new and different types of educational institutions, but also left the country without a coherent moral framework.⁷² The struggle between Lianda professors' defense of academic freedom and educational autonomy and the party's attempt to gain full control of higher education was one of the last between two competing visions for the re-establishment of the basis of a unified national community: one based on the immense belief in individual conscience and rationality to understand and transform the country and its society, and the other that purposefully aimed for the collective

71 Israel, *Lianda*, 373–74; John Israel, "Overview," in Jeans, *Roads Not Taken*, 334-5.

72 Yeh, *The Alienated Academy*, 276–78.

material and spiritual strength that would allow China to survive in the competition of the fittest.⁷³

Within China, recent work on intellectuals in the Republican period has started to explore other dimensions of the so-called liberalism of Chinese intellectuals. Previously, Lianda's liberal orientation had been put in opposition to nationalism, because of the apparent Western roots of concepts such as constitutional democracy and individual freedom, which were often associated with imperialism. However, this is not necessarily the case. Princeton-trained historian Luo Zhitian has shown that Hu Shi, teacher and mentor of many of Lianda's professors and a May Fourth standard-bearer, had in fact carefully nested his nationalism in his thoughts on cosmopolitanism. His struggle represented the broader dilemma of intellectuals at the intersection of the Chinese nation and a Euro-American conception of modernity. Hu's support for cosmopolitan solidarity, Luo argued, was on one hand an extension of his strengthening connection with the "imagined community" of the nation, and on the other hand the vestige of cosmopolitan responsibility that traditional intellectuals (*shi*) would take upon themselves. The intellectuals' intense interest in the search for the best scenario where China could become an independent and unified nation, regardless of the solutions they proposed, and the amount of effort they put into the debate on China's nation-building strategy, were all revelations of their underlying nationalism.⁷⁴

Luo's argument demonstrates the necessity of understanding the intellectuals of Republican China outside of the binary frameworks of democracy versus dictatorship, liberalism versus nationalism, or westernization (or Americanization, in the case of Lianda) versus Confucian tradition, especially when it came to the

critical stage of the War of Resistance. These competing ideologies all exerted significant influence on Chinese intellectuals in the first part of the twentieth century, but they did not necessarily exist as dichotomies. As previous analysis has demonstrated, both sides could appeal to some aspects of a historical heritage, while neither was fully committed to democracy or a comprehensive dictatorship. The best way to understand this opposition was probably Joseph Levenson's characterization of Chinese modern intellectuals, namely, by their quest for a reconciliation that would allow one to be modern and Chinese at the same time.⁷⁵

Then how did the intellectuals eventually lose to the government? Previous studies of democratic forces in Republican China have proposed reasons such as the intellectuals' inability to mobilize military forces and to connect with the masses, their unwillingness to fully engage in the political maneuvering of government, and the fundamental irrelevance of elite values such as cosmopolitanism.⁷⁶ This paper, through the analysis of Lianda professors' experience and the changing fate of academic freedom during the war, seek to propose another reason. Failure was programmed into the intellectuals' self-contradictory relationship with the government.

From Lianda's experience, we can see that the intellectuals' interests were fundamentally aligned with that of Kuomintang during the war. Ideologically, they shared the commitment to nationalism—both in the sense of resistance against Japan and the building of national community. Politically, they could hardly sever themselves from the age-old tradition of serving the government, particularly at a time of national crisis when it was almost impossible to justify the dis-

73 Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China*, 248.

74 Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China*, 1–2.

75 Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), xviii.

76 Grieder, *Intellectuals and the State in Modern China*, 283; Jeans, *Roads Not Taken*.

tance between the Nationalist government and the nation. Economically, their livelihood, as well as ability to continue with their research during the war, relied almost entirely on provisions from the government. In fact, Lianda had already tied its destiny to that of the government the moment when it accepted the Ministry of Education's arrangement to unite and migrate to Yunnan. They could only argue for space for freedom within its established regulations, institutions, and ideology at best. When it did seek freedom outside of such establishment, it did not have any leverage against the party's power. Lianda's experience might indeed be a tragedy, and the project of seeking reconciliation between competing claims to freedom in China remained unfinished. What this paper has aimed to point to is the structural contradiction in intellectuals' role in modern Chinese society and the ways in which understanding such a contradiction can shed light on the trajectory of China's political transformation.

Putting the events surrounding academic freedom in Chinese wartime higher education in context, we could imagine that actors within and without Lianda would well understand that this war would determine the fate of a century-long project: China would either welcome its rebirth out of the final resolution of all the forces—the long list of “isms” pouring into the country since the end of 19th century—that had been pushing or driving it in so many directions, or sink into permanent demise. At the same time, it would also determine intellectuals' own position as a group after the great metamorphosis in the entire nation's social fabric. Lianda's struggle can lead us further towards the following questions: what were intellectuals' relationships with politics as well as with political power holders? What use, if any, did their knowledge have for the nation that they cared so deeply about? Did they represent a distinctive social class, or could they have blended in to the masses as a mere “element” of the society?