

The Manchukuo Nationality: Cultural, Social, and Legal Identity of a Contested State

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Abstract: This paper investigates the composition and representation of the Manchukuo nationality through legal, social, and cultural means. This paper also draws from feminist, ethnic minority, and literary writers in Manchukuo to analyze how Chinese, Korean, Manchurian, Mongolian, and Japanese citizens received Manchukuo policies. Sympathetic accounts from Japanese leftists are also consulted. Models and concepts, particularly those by Carl Schmitt, are applied to analyze Japan's conception of Manchukuo's sovereignty. Manchukuo's ethnic and national policies are also compared to those implemented in other Japanese colonies like Taiwan and Korea to evaluate Japan's treatment of local populations. Examining documentaries and propaganda films produced under government orders, this paper focuses on the projections of soft power to sustain the balance between the image of Manchukuo as an independent state and Japan's relation to it as one of "father to son". This paper also consults personal chronicles and novels from intellectuals of both Japanese and other ethnic origins to analyze their depictions of the state's treatment of the local inhabitants of Manchuria, as well as their interactions with Manchukuo's legal and political systems.

Background: Manchukuo was established by imperial Japan as a republican state and then an empire on territory belonging to the Republic of China in 1932. Although its name is suggestive of a Manchu nation-state, it was founded as a byproduct of Japanese imperial expansion and military invasion of Manchuria, and did not appeal to a Manchu heritage. To justify Manchukuo's legitimacy in the international community, Japan touted self-determination for Manchurians. Japan granted Manchukuo limited autonomy to govern its internal affairs and modernized its government through industrialization and legal reforms. Manchukuo's state-machine itself represented a hollow, titular source of political power. Communities and minorities oppressed by both the Qing empire and Japan, including political dissidents and ethnic minorities, perceived it as an opportunity to overthrow the government and seek independence through unconventional cooperation and resistance in Manchukuo's legal and propaganda institutions.

Key Word: Manchukuo; Japan; Imperialism; Sino-Japanese War; World War II; State of Exception; Propaganda.

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I. Introduction

Retrospectively, Manchukuo does not fit in to any modern East-Asian national identities and models. Though the state is commonly regarded as a byproduct of Japanese imperial expansion by revisionist historians, its creation and development encompassed a much more intricate and complex relationship between nationalities and ideologies. Bearing the titular legitimacy of the Manchu origins of the Qing Dynasty, Manchukuo's Emperor Pu Yi took the throne in 1934 and, since he had also been the last Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, he seemingly revived the formal Manchu rule over Manchuria: 'the land where the Dragon arose'. Despite these deep Manchu roots, Japan played an essential role in the formation of this state. After the Mukden Incident in 1931, where Japanese troops marched into China and attacked Chinese soldiers under the pretext that Chinese soldiers destroyed the Japanese-occupied South Manchurian Railroad, Japanese troops took over the Manchuria region of China, and the Republic of China withdrew its troops to prevent a direct military confrontation with Japan.¹ This situation provided an opportunity for the Japanese to establish the state of Manchukuo in 1932.

The republican and liberal foundations of Manchukuo contrasted its suggestive nation-state title. As Thomas David Dubois suggests, "Despite its name, Manchukuo was not intended and almost never portrayed as a polity reserved specifically for the Manchu people."² As a newly established state of "a truly unique modern

¹ John Swift, "Mukden Incident," *Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., Accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Mukden-Incident>.

² Thomas David Dubois, "Inauthentic Sovereignty: Law and Legal Institutions in Manchukuo," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 3

formation,”³ efforts were required to construct a state that was filled with “utopian adventure” and “military idealists.”⁴ Conservative Chinese nationalist ideals, progressive classical liberal forms of intellectual committees, and ethnic fusion were all promoted and mingled together to solidify the regime, and glorify and separate the Manchukuo population from its Chinese, Korean, and Japanese ethnicities.⁵ However, these policies were each created for different purposes and for the advantage of different forces in the state, often leading to contradictions. In other words, to accommodate the different, sometimes hostile relationships between the nationalities that comprised the Manchukuo population, the state implemented a variety of ideals intending to establish its authority over these areas. Yet, the presentations, if not logical juxtapositions, of these ideals, not only served to undermine their appeal, but also revealed that the Manchukuo nationality was hollow and constructed intricately as means for Japanese imperialism.⁶

To investigate these aspects, this paper focuses on Manchukuo’s limited autonomy as an independent state through examining its internal ethnic policies and Manchukuo’s complex relationship with its suzerain Japan. Under the elements of nationalism, colonization, and modernity, this paper also investigates how Manchukuo first experimented and attempted to fuse historically different and even antagonistic ethnicities, namely Chinese, Manchurians, Mongols, Koreans, and Japanese, into a nominally “liberal” state under Japan’s agenda, exploring both narratives from Manchukuo officials and local authors.

II. Society and Nationality

The Manchukuo regime failed to create a unifying nationality and social identity for its citizens, and implemented segregating hierarchies instead of promoting equality of rights. Instead of letting the national identity form organically, the Manchukuo regime intended to assign a nationality to its citizens that was neither Manchu nor Japanese, but the fusion of both cultures. For instance, this nationality encompassed Han Confucianist ideals of the Kingly Way and Reverence and the notions of modernity and industrialization from the Japanese. Moreover, the Confucian ideals and modernity inherent to the Manchukuo nationality also affected the social and gender identity of Manchukuo’s citizens.⁷

Throughout the thirteen years of the Manchukuo regime, no nationality law was officially legislated.⁸ After the retreat of the forces of the Republic of China in Manchuria, the Manchukuo state was able to extend its power over its original inhabitants; however, it was unable to impose a new identity upon the Chinese inhabitants. By using the term *Mankeito* classify Han Chinese in Manchukuo, the government intended to separate the recognition of them with the Republic of China and impose its own identity upon them. Yet, this term was often considered by Han Chinese as “an imaginary term to force the Han Chinese to disrespect their heritage; it blurred the racial or national differences between Manchus, Mongols and Han Chinese.”⁹

The Confucian traditions Manchukuo embraced as a component of its nationality resulted in social inequality and discrimination towards female citizens. The Confucian policies that were designed to exhibit the political strength of the state promoted gender hierarchies that revealed its anticipated characteristics of women: submissive, hardworking, and modest.¹⁰ These conventional expectations of the female figure were contradictory to the state’s promised emancipation and liberation from the traditional, backward, and corrupted views within the old Chinese society, and the introduction of modern ones. An artwork titled ‘A Different Women’ was first featured in *Xin Manzhou* (“New Manchuria”) in 1940; it intended to compare and contrast the stereotypical representation of empowered feminist women and women who are subservient and morally superior in following the Confucian conventionalities.¹¹ The drawing presents the new and empowered women in a slandering manner, which ridicules their participation in “lewd, lazy, and selfish” activities. On the other hand, the models of a “good wife, wise mother” involved in “cooking, doing laundry, cleaning, and helping her son and husband” juxtaposes the other type.¹² Although this artwork from the Manchukuo officials seemingly praises women who fulfill their traditional roles, the subtle pained expression on their faces reveals that the

(2010): 761, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.1017/S002191181000152X.

³ Yamamuro Shinichi, *Manchuria under Japanese Dominion*, trans. Joshua A. Fogel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4, as quoted in Xiaoyan Liu, “A State without Nationals: The Nationality Issue in Japan’s Making of Manchukuo” (master’s thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2011), 5, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.7936/K7W9577B.

⁴ Xiaoyan Liu, “A State without Nationals: The Nationality Issue in Japan’s Making of Manchukuo” (master’s thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2011), 6, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.7936/K7W9577B.

⁵ Li Narangoa, “Educating Mongols and Making ‘Citizens’ of Manchukuo,” *Inner Asia* 3, 2 (2001): 114-115, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.1163/146481701793647651.

⁶ Liu, “A State without Nationals,” 45-47.

⁷ Norman Smith, “Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo: Feminism as Anti-Colonialism in the Collected Works of Zhu Ti,” *The International History Review* 28, no. 3 (2006): 521-23, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.1080/07075332.2006.9641102.

⁸ Liu, “A State without Nationals,” 18-20.

⁹ Liu, “A State without Nationals,” 21-22.

¹⁰ Smith, “Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo,” 523.

¹¹ Smith, “Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo,” 523.

¹² Smith, “Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo,” 523.

painting's creator, Xiu Wen, opposed the appropriate image of women under Manchukuo rule, and, in fact, expressed an envious appreciation to the new woman's lifestyle.¹³

However, besides Xiu Wen's subtle envy, there was a more powerful resistance to the conflict between modernity and Confucian traditions by Manchukuo's female intellectuals. Since these modern values of Manchukuo that intended to empower its female citizens did not provide the corresponding gender equality for them, an increasing population of educated young women in Manchukuo in the 1930s turned to civil resistance. Many female writers connected with each other and criticized Manchukuo's incapability of truly empowering women, which was known as a "spiritual resistance" from the Chinese elites in Manchukuo.¹⁴ Xiao Hong, Zhu Ti, and Mei were all prominent female writers during the era who depicted the reality of the gender inequality in Manchukuo: Mei even stated in her letters written to her colleagues that "only women can change this world into heaven" in a "male chauvinist society,"¹⁵ revealing that the oppressing patriarchal quality of Manchukuo society, illustrated by its Confucian ideologies, can never be changed unless women took actions to oppose the state. As for Zhu Ti, she responded to the endangering situation of women's equality in Manchukuo by publishing several stories depicting the harsh and cruel realities of their lives in Manchukuo. In one of her novels, a girl called Yin Zi was raped; instead of punishing the criminal, her family suggested to neglect the incident as the abuse brought shame to the values of their nationality and family.¹⁶ In one of her other works, Zhu Ti narrates from the perspective of a Russian woman returning to Russia with her daughter as she thinks Manchukuo has no future. Then, the main character recalls her life in Manchukuo, and claims that she holds contempt towards Manchukuo's political system because its cities were polluted and filled with drugs.¹⁷ Her resentment towards the industrial pollution and moral filth of Manchukuo suggests that the author, as a female intellectual and a feminist, realizes that the advanced and modern values that Manchukuo seemingly embodied were unreal, and expresses her frustration towards them. Eventually, the main character enters an elusive reminiscence of the natural sceneries of Heilongjiang, a river representing Manchuria without Japanese colonization and modernity.¹⁸ In both novels, it can be interpreted that Zhu Ti disproves the construct of nationalism, whether it was Chinese or Manchukuo. For women, "as long as the Manchukuo regime did not allow its subjects to achieve their 'true character', its claims to modernity were false."¹⁹ Therefore, according to Zhu Ti, women can only be emancipated by trusting themselves and pursuing the meaning of their existence in the nature and majesty of Manchuria instead of defining themselves through Manchukuo's proposed modernity and politics.²⁰

Furthermore, the additional benefits that the Japanese citizens possessed in Manchukuo revealed the deceptive nature of the government's enactment of harmonization and equality between the races. The privileged position of the Japanese nation in Manchukuo is revealed in Japanese author Hinata Nobuo's "The Eighth Switching Point." Hinata was born in Kyoto in 1913 and migrated to Manchukuo in 1936 to work at a South Manchurian Railway Company. As he observed how the imperial hierarchy enforced the ethnic superiority of the Japanese, he wrote short stories for journals, such as *Sakubun*, in which he portrayed the lives of Chinese and Korean citizens of Manchukuo experiencing discrimination under the Japanese imperial influence. "The Eighth Switching Point" reveals the antagonism between the newly arrived Japanese and the native people of the land through the story of Zhang, a Chinese worker at the South Manchurian Railroad Company who does not speak Japanese. One day at work, Zhang accidentally derails a train due to a miscommunication with his Japanese manager. Although he did not understand the manager's command, he becomes afraid to ask again to avoid punishment and potential disfavor. However, Zhang has internalized the notion of Japanese superiority so deeply that, after the incident occurs, he blames himself for not knowing Japanese and thus causing the derailment. Akita, Zhang's Japanese colleague, represents the biased and prejudiced attitude towards the "colonized" people that was typical of the Japanese inhabitants of Manchukuo at the time. He is not even aware of the discriminating and condescending tone of his speech when he urges Zhang to stop complaining about working conditions because his tenuous efforts in the railroad system improve the quality of other people's train ride experience. Yet, the people who were able to purchase train tickets were mostly Japanese elites, the same people who were exploiting Zhang based on his inferior Chinese race.²¹

¹³ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 523.

¹⁴ Ryan Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty: Legal Activism, Rights, Consciousness, and Civil Resistance in a 'Puppet State'," *Asian Journal of Law and Society* 3, no. 2 (2016): 367, accessed February 22, 2021, doi: 10.1080/07075332.2006.9641102.

¹⁵ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 518-19.

¹⁶ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 526-27.

¹⁷ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 530.

¹⁸ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 530-31.

¹⁹ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 526.

²⁰ Smith, "Disguising Resistance in Manchukuo," 532.

²¹ Junko Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo: Hinata Nobuo and Gu Ding," *Modern Asian Studies* 49, no. 1 (2015): 91-94, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.1017/S0026749X13000541.

From the privileges granted to the Japanese by the Manchukuo government and the underlying racial hierarchy within the Manchukuo society, it is clear the Japanese were imperial colonizers from another nation, rather than citizens bearing the same nationality, and that Manchukuo's fusion of nationalities never achieved any tangible progress. Instead, the distinctions the government assigned to the different races served as a method for the Japanese population to secure advantages for itself and oppress the other nationalities in everyday activities, which, as Duara illustrated, contradicted the rhetoric of concord.²² The absence of a nationality law, social inequality, and racial hierarchies all undermined the construction and maintenance of the Manchukuo nationality. It was simply a hollow shell embodying progressive political and social ideologies such as Pan-Asianism, but its implementation and application in reality only revealed its illusory nature as Japanese imperial propaganda.

III. The Law and Nationality

The state-building process of Manchukuo was based on western liberalist ideas, shown in the establishment of its parliament. Following the precedent set by Japan's westernization policies in the 1870s, Manchukuo was established to have a national constitution that was described by legal scholar Mitani Takeshi as an "imperfect copy of the 1889 Meiji Constitution." In many instances, Japanese laws set a standard for Manchukuo laws.²³ For this reason, some discriminatory laws that existed in the Meiji Constitution made their way into the legal system of Manchukuo as well. As Dubois suggests, "like any civilizing project, the legal reform of the New East Asian order preached unity while it enshrined difference."²⁴ Still, since Japan recognized Manchukuo as an independent state, its laws were not directly applied in Manchukuo. For instance, Japan's promotion of *Naisen-Ittai* (Japan and Korea as one) prompted the state to ban corporal punishment in Korea and its Taiwan Viceroyalty to follow the laws of mainland Japan.²⁵ In Manchukuo, however, legal factions were constantly holding opposing stances against each other regarding the ban of corporal punishments. The Kwantung army, which represented the right-wing Japanese faction in Manchukuo, widely adopted the corporal punishment of laborers in areas under its control.²⁶ The Kwantung believed that, since the immigrating Chinese workers were considered foreigners, the laws of Manchukuo did not apply to them.²⁷ The advantages of such punishments to the state were expressed in Ono Jitsu's writing in the *Horitsu Shimbun*:

I will offer my opinion on the eradication of flogging from the criminal punishment system of Manchukuo. Of the thirty million people of Manchukuo, more than half are ignorant and completely illiterate barbarians. If we put every petty thief into jail, how many jails will be enough? Just feeding them every day will become a drain on the national economy.²⁸

These words reveal that Kwantung military faction's support of corporal punishment had, implicitly, disregarded the pretentious "concord" of the Manchukuo population. Instead of following the state's proposed national narratives, the Kwantung army was employing their power and authority to reverse them. Other political factions, too, divulged Manchukuo's "harmony of the five races" ideology. Instead of devising an independent legal system for itself or completely adopting the Japanese laws, Manchukuo's "legal machinery" was operated by different political groups representing the will of different nationalities, which was "seamlessly integrated into the military and security needs of the [Japanese] empire."²⁹

The uneven distribution of Manchukuo's legal power among the local ethnic groups was also evident. Manchukuo's laws were established differently for each ethnicity and encouraged unreasonable distinctions between their cultural traditions, which was contrary to the unified Manchukuo nationality it promoted. The Russian population in Manchukuo was subjected to their own territorial laws, while the Han, Mongols, and Manchus were all required to follow the same code of laws because Manchukuo authorities assumed that they shared the same marriage and inheritance customs, which was not true. The Mongols were encouraged to practice their own customs regarding law; the Chinese and Korean citizens were incorporated into a westernized legal system espoused by the Japanese.³⁰ In Jehol and Hsingan Province, the local Mongol population was even allowed to maintain their banner courts. The Koreans' legal disposition, however, was unique in Manchukuo: the Manchukuo government developed and elaborated on Korean nationality laws that were different from those

²² Duara Prasenjit, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 77, as cited in Xiaoyan Liu, "A State without Nationals: The Nationality Issue in Japan's Making of Manchukuo" (master's thesis, Washington University in St. Louis, 2011), 16, accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.7936/K7W9577B.

²³ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 297.

²⁴ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 764.

²⁵ Liu, "A State without Nationals," 26-27.

²⁶ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 757-758.

²⁷ Liu, "A State without Nationals," 40-41.

²⁸ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 757-758.

²⁹ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 765.

³⁰ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 761-762.

existing in the Japanese Empire. The Japanese promotion of the *Naisen-Ittai* policies in Korea emphasized Korea's role as a component of the Japanese empire. This meant that Koreans supposedly shared the same rights and benefits as Japanese citizens in the territories of the Japanese Empire. However, unlike *Naichi*, or Japanese coming from mainland Japan, Koreans did not have the right to naturalize into citizens of another independent state.³¹ Manchukuo, an independent state recognized by Japan, included Koreans in its racial composition and in the national foundation of harmony of the five races, which provided them with a rhetorical citizenship.³² This difference between Japan's and Manchukuo's policies pertaining to the right of Koreans to naturalize and become citizens demonstrated the Manchukuo's legal ability to construct its multi-ethnic nationalism independently. However, this construction was directly contradicting the Japanese policies regarding nationalities and ethnicities that were separated between multiple political entities, such as Koreans. These legal policies granting unequal amounts of autonomous power to individual ethnicities within the state, in addition to the vague legal stances taken by the Manchukuo and Japanese governments regarding Korean nationality, proved that Manchukuo's legal system was not always consistent with its ideals. The entanglement of both governments in a cooperative yet conflicting relationship also suggested the ambiguous composition of the Manchukuo nationality.

Manchukuo was perceived, especially by many leftist Japanese and Chinese intellectuals, as an ideal location to develop and practice ideas that were not possible to implement in Japan and China. Attracted by modern and progressive ideologies such as Pan-Asianism and national fusion, lawyers and educators became involved in Manchukuo's legal and administrative sectors.³³ However, they grew dissatisfied with the state when it exhibited its inability to enforce the modern liberal laws on which it was founded. The Hire Japanese Jurists Plan required a certain proportion of Japanese prosecutors and jurists in Manchukuo court openings. However, since the demand for Japanese legal workers increased, the standard for them decreased. On the other hand, Chinese jurists graduating from the newly established law schools in Manchukuo were unable to obtain these positions, even if they were *de jure* equal to the Japanese in the meritocratic system of Manchukuo.³⁴ This legislation not only segregated the Chinese and Japanese in the regime but revealed that the fundamental equal coexistence of ethnicities in Manchukuo society is false.

For other Chinese intellectuals, the appealing quality of the Manchukuo legal system was that "its judges rule interpedently...with no interference from any quarter...When they undertake their judicial duties, they are solemn and fair minded, with a lofty spirit of sacred inviolability."³⁵ Although the Manchukuo court was founded on such, the application of these ideals to reality led to negative consequences and disadvantages for the state. Liang Su Rong, a prosecutor in Manchukuo, frequently participated in underground KMT resistance movement and was eventually detained in 1944. Even as Japan was clearly losing the war with the ROC, the legal trials of Chinese resistance members like Liang still underwent normal procedures.³⁶ When Liang was suspected of his crime, his position as a prosecutor was not suspended from him; he remained as a prosecutor and even received routinely government rations that were better than the ones received by his Japanese guard in quantity. More bizarrely, the defense counsel of Liang, Li Zheng Zhong, was a former classmate and friend of Liang's. Through his persuasion, the court mitigated the punishment of Liang's participation in KMT resistance into a non-death sentence. In this case, it could be seen that the legal system of Manchukuo was very strict and regulated into an extent where the opinions of entrusted court members could override the authoritarian will of the state.³⁷ The independence and inviolability of the court, even when conflicting with the government's attitude, had more importance and impact under the control of the jurists. On the other hand, the interconnected relationships of Chinese intellectuals serving in the Manchukuo administration allowed them to secure benefits for each other, creating an "embryonic network" within Manchukuo.³⁸ The incident of Liang exhibits how the modernity of the state "allowed individuals who had no interest in "redeeming" the state's narratives (at least for their own sake) to nonetheless pragmatically use such resources to sustain themselves and achieve tactical goals."³⁹ Li Zheng Zhong mentions in a letter to Liang, "it's truly strange; Manchukuo was fake, but the law was real,"⁴⁰ to summarize the problems behind the modernization of Manchukuo's legal territories and its failure to support the creation of a new nationality.

³¹ Liu, "A State without Nationals," 34-35.

³² Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 290-291.

³³ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 360-61.

³⁴ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 755-56.

³⁵ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 755.

³⁶ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 366.

³⁷ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 366-367.

³⁸ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 367.

³⁹ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 367.

⁴⁰ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 366.

IV. Modernity and Nationality

The modernity within the educational, governmental, and social policies of Manchukuo achieved opposite results to their intended national harmonization. The first example to note is that, as a modern state, Manchukuo highly emphasized its education system, but this education prompted ethnic-separatism and undermined its premise of coexistence. Improved access to education served as a way to promote Manchukuo nationalism by creating a unifying bond between the five races of its constitution.⁴¹ Mongols within the state were strongly encouraged to learn the Mongolian language and receive modern education. More Mongolian students studied overseas in Japan and were directly funded by the autonomous Mongol banners or by the Japanese government.⁴² However, many Mongolian parents were concerned about their children studying abroad because this disrupted the traditional patterns of the Mongol society: less labor forces constituted by young male adult were available; the inheritance of the Buddhist monk lifestyle was endangered; and the loosely populated rural Mongol land was even more desolate as the educated Mongols tended to settle in the city.⁴³ More importantly, instead of contributing to the national fusion of Manchukuo, the Mongols who studied abroad used their education to secure benefits for their own nationalistic aims of bettering the Mongolian nation. In this case, education served as an enlightening force that empowered their own national liberation,⁴⁴ which was detrimental to the racial policies of Manchukuo. The education policies, based on an idealistic presumption that all ethnicities lacking development would willingly accept cooperation and follow Japan's plan to establish the egalitarian Pan-Asian state of Manchukuo,⁴⁵ failed to create a coexistence of national and ethnic groups as they did not adapt differently to the local needs of various groups. Through the education system, "the Japanese wanted to impose a multi-layered identity, but to produce one final loyalty: a loyalty to the Japanese emperor."⁴⁶ However, Mongol leaders and young people in Manchukuo "utilize[d] the Japanese presence, as far as possible, for their own purposes."⁴⁷ Therefore, the results from the promotion of modern education in Manchukuo eventually benefited the process of the creation of an independent Mongolia rather than incorporating Mongols into the state of Manchukuo.

The cultural hierarchy and differences in Manchukuo have not only led to misunderstandings and difficulties in communication, but also diverged the pathways of national fusion instead of mending them. Even indigenous collaborators with the Manchukuo government did not bear the elemental national fusion in mind: just like the Mongols, they sought the Japanese presence to benefit their own nation. The first example to note is that many authors who accepted cooperation with the Japanese government often reflected on the Sino-Japanese relationship in Manchukuo with a critical perspective that did not always support the state's nationalism. Gu Ding, a Chinese author in Manchukuo, wrote several literary works analyzing and criticizing the linguistic disadvantages and cultural impositions placed upon the Chinese in the early 1930s that impeded them from progressing.⁴⁸ For instance, the characters in Gu's book were all portrayed in a grotesque and strange manner, which supposedly reflected the ignorance and inability of logical reasoning of the old generation of Chinese people. Gu also viewed the Japanese language as a gateway to advancement for the Chinese since much of the modern vocabulary in Chinese was based on homonym (same meaning) sounds in Japanese.⁴⁹ The character Jing Bang in the book tries to wish his grandfather good health by saying the word *Jian Kang*, which was originally a Japanese word; however, the grandfather does not understand, and interprets it as "Jian Tang", meaning "dirty candy". In the end, the grandfather insists on calling the word dirty candy, revealing Gu's opinion that the Chinese were not willing to modernize and accept multi-ethnic culture.⁵⁰ The miscommunication between the two characters alludes to the basic construction of Manchukuo's nationalism. The two words, though having similar homonym sounds, have different ideographic (written) meaning.⁵¹ Therefore, the intentional contrast of the duality of the definitions of the two words and the actions of their corresponding characters implies Japan's failure in using similar origins and pan-Asian national similarities to construct new identities for Manchukuo.⁵² Although "the imposition of language represented defeat and cultural loss, but for Gu Ding it was a means to nationalistic end;" it was a tool for him to employ and benefit the Chinese rather than solely praising Japanese superiority.⁵³ As Gu's motives and implications of his literature suggest, Japan's attempt to forge a common Manchukuo identity based on the similarity of language was a

⁴¹Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 102.

⁴²Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 112-113.

⁴³Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 108-09.

⁴⁴Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 112-13.

⁴⁵Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 119.

⁴⁶Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 118.

⁴⁷Narangoa, "Educating Mongols," 119.

⁴⁸ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 95-96.

⁴⁹ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 105-106.

⁵⁰ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 103-106.

⁵¹ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 105.

⁵² Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 105.

⁵³ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 110.

failure: for radical leftist like Gu Ding, it represented an opportunity to civilize and revolutionize individual nationalities.

More importantly, to the Japanese in Manchukuo, the Chinese cultural identity was simply a tool for propaganda and national conversion purposes. The cultural relationship between Chinese laborers and their Japanese superiors was a common theme portrayed in Manchukuo propaganda.⁵⁴ If the Japanese superiors knew how to speak Chinese, it was presented in a condescending manner that was seemingly using the language to inspire and enlighten the backward Chinese people into fitting the state's standards. In the propaganda film *Heroes of Mining*, Japanese engineers are supervising Chinese miners. Zhang, a new worker, throws his shovel away and refuses to work because of his laziness and complaints. However, the Japanese supervisor Tashiro picks up his shovel and continues to work. After witnessing Tashiro's demonstration of the constructed social virtues such as perseverance despite the unjust labor circumstances, Zhang is so motivated by him that he decides to work harder, leading to his promotion to team leader.⁵⁵ In this film, the direct cultural comparison between the Chinese and Japanese is executed in a patriarchal manner: the Japanese kindheartedly teach their superior qualities to the Chinese people, who are rebellious, wild, and uncivilized, just like fathers guide their sons to follow them in "enthusiasm and kindness."⁵⁶ Tashiro forgiving Zhang for his impetuous decisions also symbolizes the national construction of Manchukuo, in which the modernized state was willing to accept and eradicate the inherent inferiority of Chinese citizens. By establishing a hierarchy between the Chinese and the Japanese even in its official propaganda, Manchukuo government revealed the hypocrisy of the equality of nationalities. The construction of the Japanese superiority against the inferiority of the Chinese, depicted in the film as a protective and enlightening relationship, reveals the discrimination and inequality that existed between Manchukuo's nationalities in reality.

Language was an important component of the Manchukuo nationality. The Japanese presence and influence on the state prompted Japanese to be taught as a mandatory language, and, eventually, the primary language, while also serving as a tool for social stratification and representation of power.⁵⁷ However, these ideas, hindered by the state's insufficient powers to maintain a stable administration and unrests and conflicts between nationalities, never achieved its intended effects, and added to the disintegration of the greater Manchukuo nationality. The implementation and creation of new creole languages such as the *Kyowa-Go* and *Manshu-Kana* and increasing promotion of Japanese in its education system was among many steps of cultural assimilation enacted by Manchukuo. To accommodate the national policies of Manchukuo, such as the harmony of the five races, the governments increased the popularity of *Kyowa-go* and the *Manshu-Kana* among intellectuals and scholars.⁵⁸ The *Kyowa-Go* "was made to be a combination of Japanese and Chinese with simplified grammars...interpreted as a pidgin Japanese which is composed of abbreviated Japanese particles and terminations" for a more convenient comprehension by Japanese and Chinese speakers.⁵⁹ On the other hand, the *Manshu-Kana* was a substitution of Chinese characters by the Japanese phonetic alphabet to make learning languages easier. This system was standardized by the Manchukuo regime as an effective way to decrease illiteracy rates.⁶⁰ Even though many colonized Chinese intellectuals like Gu Ding were hoping to improve the Chinese language and its accessibility in areas such as literature by accepting Japanese influences, the Manchukuo government's plans were not realistically impactful.⁶¹ The insufficient education resources of the Manchukuo government limited the spread of the new languages. One-third of the teachers in Manchuria resigned from their positions during the first year of Manchukuo rule as means of civil resistance. Many of the teachers who did not leave served as secret agents and members of the resistance force in the underground. Together with other resistance groups, such as the Chinese writers of the *Great Unity Post* and *Manchurian Review*, the opposition was able to obstruct the teaching of *Kyowa-Go* and *Manshu-Kana*.⁶² Without adopters, the language's purpose of increasing accessibility of literature for its citizens and its existence as a sub-product of racial harmonization ideals were prevented; the extension of the state's policies to the field of language was hindered by its ineffective administration, causing its failure.

⁵⁴ Wang, "Narrating War in Wartime Manchukuo," 2-3.

⁵⁵ Wang, "Narrating War in Wartime Manchukuo," 10-11.

⁵⁶ Wang, "Narrating War in Wartime Manchukuo," 11.

⁵⁷ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 100.

⁵⁸ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 106-107.

⁵⁹ "Uses of Japanese-Chinese Combined Language," Pacific War Karuta Collection, Lafayette College, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://exhibits.lafayette.edu/s/karuta/page/uses-of-japanese-chinese-combi>.

⁶⁰ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 107.

⁶¹ Agnew, "The Politics of Language in Manchukuo," 107-108.

⁶² Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 367.

V. Conclusion

Nationalism, colonization, and modernity: these essential principles of Manchukuo's identity undermined is authority and legitimacy instead of contributing to its construction. The notion of Manchukuo's nationality can be conceptualized based on the 'state of exception' proposed by the German jurist Carl Schmitt, where "some person or institution, in a given polity, capable of bringing about a total suspension of the law" applies extra-legal forces to normalize situation and become the sovereign of its polity.⁶³ The standard, or norm, of the state is manifested in its ideals of modernity, national unity, and self-strengthening, yet the state itself justified the deviations from these principles under the pretext of emergency. However, the norm of the state served as an obstacle for the declaration of its emergency. The presence of multiple power-factions within the state and their constant conflicts can be seen as the fight over the fight to determine normality in Manchukuo.⁶⁴ Therefore, the resistance to the development of the state's ideals not only placed the de jure foundations of the state in a frail position as it could not oppress the ideological extensions of itself, but implied that there was no mainstream power or public opinion to prevent or express a uniform response to the exertion of power, invalidating the justification of Manchukuo.

From the analysis of state administration policies and the examination of literary works, it is clear that Manchukuo's identity was tangled in the struggle of manifesting a mode of modernity defined by classical liberal models in Europe and the Americas in Manchu lands with Chinese, Mongol, Manchu, and Korean populations. Manchukuo's hierarchical nationality system and separation of races only served to widen the gap between the citizens of this multi-ethnic state. The constant Japanese interference and its semi-colonial domination of Manchukuo ignited international and local resistance from Manchukuo's Chinese and right-wing Japanese population. In other words, the notion of Manchukuo as a "civilizing project"⁶⁵ or "a convenient continental source for Japanese imperialists to exploit"⁶⁶ was constantly present. As Liu suggests, "the equality of formalism cannot stand for real equality."⁶⁷ Manchukuo's equal and prospective rule only reveals the underlying conflicts and pseudo-sovereignty standing on its way towards nationality.

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⁶³ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 371-372; cf. Lars Vinx, "Carl Schmitt," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, August 29, 2019), <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt/>.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, "Manchukuo's Contested Sovereignty," 372-373.

⁶⁵ Dubois, "Rule of Law in a Brave New Empire," 763-764.

⁶⁶ Liu, "A State without Nationals," 17.

⁶⁷ Liu, "A State without Nationals," 30.

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