SPEAKING TO POSTERITY: SHAME, HUMILIATION, AND THE CREATION OF CHIANG KAI-SHEK’S NANJING ERA LEGACY

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This article analyzes how Chiang Kai-shek and his secretaries formulated and reformulated Chiang’s use of shame and humiliation (chi) to legitimize his actions to posterity using as case studies three moments in the Nanjing era: the Ji’nan and Mukden Incidents; and the New Life Movement. It argues that the presence of an external threat facilitated Chiang’s use of chi to pursue his political agenda whereas internal threats (and lack of external ones) hindered it. Because Chiang faced both types of threats, his use of chi often appeared contradictory as he sought to consolidate power and to frame the discourse on national avengement. The resulting public face he and his secretaries projected to posterity suggests an important response to divided sovereignty and external aggression (and hence a particular formulation of the national identity), and reveals the limits and possibilities of shaping a leader’s political legacy based on that response.

KEYWORDS: Chiang Kai-shek, Nanjing era, shame, humiliation, political legacy, political leadership

INTRODUCTION

Political leaders wish for legacies that speak well of their decisions, and nowhere is this desire more evident than in those who have faced overwhelming defeat. In a familiar international motif that follows the trajectory of defeat by another country, the feeling of humiliation, and, ultimately, desire for vengeance,¹ pivotal to the story’s unfolding is how the country and its leader process their “humiliation.” A country’s response to defeat is often ambiguous and contested, and even strategized. In Republican China, for instance, national anxiety stemmed from the humiliation of foreign invasion and from domestic passivity to that humiliation. Hence, self-criticisms about what being Chinese meant existed alongside, and sometimes triumphed over, the desire for vengeance. In an interesting twist, the emphasis on humiliation may also have been to protect “the nation from falling into oblivion.”² While leaders are paramount actors

within this motif, researchers curiously have overlooked the process by which such leaders employ this cultural resource to shape their country’s response, advance particular outcomes, and, ultimately, persuade posterity of the rightness of their actions.  

Three reasons might be suggested for this neglect. First, the stories surrounding leaders’ use of humiliation are often unknown to outsiders. The quintessential Chinese humiliation story centering on King Goujian of Yue (越王勾践 reigned 496–465 BCE), for instance, is unfamiliar even to many Western scholars, but well known to the Chinese public. Yet, these “inside” stories facilitate a leader’s effectiveness because they provide a sense of identity for the group by telling it where it came from and suggesting a future direction for the collective. Such stories help researchers understand how political leaders construct viable responses to defeat.

A second reason for neglecting leaders is that a topic like “humiliation discourse” or “identity” lends itself to social analyses. How does an individual, for instance, change national identity? However, a political leader represents more than a single individual. A leader’s agency includes the efforts of followers and the backing of political institutions. In addition, the making of a national leader often occurs when “the conflicts and uncertainties that beset the individual intersect with those of the polity—and, especially, when the putative solutions also coincide.” In essence, how a leader personally processes humiliation can represent an important collective response to national injury.

A third reason for deemphasizing leaders lies in the difficulty of evaluating their actual impact on events. American presidents, for instance, were not necessarily more successful because they had a long list of accomplishments. Often, they were better able to “control the political definitions of their actions, [and] the terms in which their places in history are understood.” This distinction draws our attention to the importance of a leader’s authority versus a leader’s power. If power is about marshaling informal and formal resources to effect change, authority is about the “expectations that surround the exercise of power at a

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3 While scholars note that leaders as diverse as Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, and Mao Zedong have alluded to humiliation in their speeches, the storyline behind the reference is often missing. See, for example, William A. Callahan’s “National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004), 203.


particular moment, to perceptions of what is appropriate for a given president to do.” This authority hinges upon cultural warrants that serve to justify a course of action and to secure legitimacy for the changes effected.9 Hence, to a degree, the interpretation of a “successful” outcome is based on a leader’s adept use of cultural resources, such as a society’s understanding of humiliation, to justify his or her actions.

While being mindful of the complexities in studying leadership within the context of a humiliation narrative, yet convinced of its importance, this study examines the construction of a leader’s use of shame and humiliation by employing as its case study, Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石 1887–1975), a twentieth-century Chinese leader whose historical assessment still remains controversial to this day. While a leader’s actions in defeat are often difficult to justify in his or her immediate surroundings, those same actions might be vindicated by posterity, and hence, efforts to shape future generations’ telling of the story are critical towards securing a leader’s legacy.

This study derives its analysis from an intriguing political/historical document called the shilüe gaoben (事略稿本), which can be roughly translated as “draft manuscript.” Secretaries within the Office of Personal Attendants (侍從室 shizongshi), which Chiang created in 1933, were responsible for compiling and organizing Chiang’s personal writings. During the Sino-Japanese war, Chiang moved the Office to Chongqing, and there, three secretaries, who were most likely drawn from Chiang’s native place in Zhejiang, put together the shilüe under the guidance of Chen Bulei (陳布雷 1890–1948) by juxtaposing excerpts from Chiang’s diary with excerpts from his speeches, telegrams, and reports.10

In comparing the shilüe with its most similar genre equivalent, the Standard History (史錄 shilü), one finds that the political goals of the respective documents are alike: the justification of the leadership and regime (or dynasty) to posterity. A closer examination reveals that the shilüe further reflects the change from the relationship between emperor and subject to that between national leader and citizen. Hence, one might surmise that the shilüe had a broader audience in mind that, in addition to historians and the governing elite, included future Chinese citizens.

The secretaries compiling the shilüe aimed to put their subject in a favorable light. As such, one would expect distortions in the account based on purposeful omission of unfavorable facts or events relating to Chiang’s leadership. This bias is nevertheless mitigated in the shilüe because these documents were never meant for public consumption, and hence one is able to observe the selections that secretaries thought might be eliminated in the official version. More importantly, this study focuses on the public face Chiang and his coterie attempted to construct.

9 Ibid., 18.
10 These documents, which span the years 1927–1949, are housed in Academia Historica in Hsintien, Taiwan. The years 1927–1941 have thus far been published. When referring to the manuscript, I provide both the archival and published reference. For more on the methodology informing the shilüe manuscripts, please see Grace C. Huang, “Creating a Public Face for Posterity: The Making of Chiang Kai-shek’s Shilüe Manuscripts,” Modern China 36, no. 6 (November 2010), 617–43.
posterity, and therefore avoids treating the text as a sincere alignment between words and actions.

Focusing on three moments in which the language of shame and humiliation came to the fore, this study suggests that Chiang’s use of this cultural resource seemed most credible when coupled with direct external aggression and with little domestic opposition to a leader’s authority. In other words, Chiang’s use of shame and humiliation appears most resonant in the first moment with the impending “success” of the Northern Expedition, despite his having abandoned Ji’nan to the Japanese. Although Chiang’s use of this resource was laden with contradiction in the second moment, he nevertheless seems to sustain his “face” over the second military confrontation with the Japanese, in 1931. By the third moment, however, in the absence of direct Japanese military confrontation, the differences among domestic groups and severe infrastructural weakness make Chiang’s use of humiliation appear ineffective. By tracking the method by which Chiang (with the aid of others) employed shame and humiliation to construct a public face for future generations, this study hopes to contribute to a wider understanding of the limits and possibilities of shaping posterity’s evaluations of a leader’s efforts to respond to national injury.

CHI
Shame and humiliation are emotions that are hardly unique to Chinese culture. The American, Pakistani, and French cultures know them, too. Nevertheless, to borrow an insight from the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, to distill concepts from their cultural context not only dulls one’s senses but, more importantly, misses what is most interesting in their uses.11 In this spirit, this section examines a Confucian cultural resource called chi (恥), and the influences Western notions of nationalism and fascism have had on the content of chi during the Republican era. At the risk of oversimplification, this study translates chi as either “shame” or “humiliation,” depending upon the context, but will use chi when the distinction is ambiguous or refers to both meanings.

“Knowing chi (知恥 zhīchí)” implies a Confucian hierarchical worldview that is based on a framework of five relationships: ruler to ministers, husband to wife, father to son, elder brother to younger brother, and friend to friend. Although the last dyad appears egalitarian, practitioners often redefine the relationship hierarchically by attaching “older (老 lao)” or “younger (小 xiāo)” to the surname.12 Additionally, “knowing chi” involves recognizing when one has deviated from the standards set by “propriety (禮 lǐ).” Chi, along with propriety, thus defines the parameters for proper behavior within a particular relational dyad.

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12 Nevertheless, an egalitarian tendency exists within this last dyad and thus sits uneasily within the hierarchical framework. In the form of sworn brothers and secret society members, this relationship has contributed to overturning or severely weakening existing orders throughout Chinese history.
Significantly, the content of “knowing chi” differs for the superior and inferior member of each dyad. Because the superior tends to shame or humiliate the inferior (the power imbalance makes the reverse unlikely), the superior must distinguish between the two. While shaming is considered necessary to guide the inferior toward proper behavior, humiliating is not. Thus the superior must avoid being arrogant, artful, and overbearing toward the inferior.

By contrast, the inferior’s knowledge of chi involves recognizing the difference between being shamed and being humiliated. He rectifies his behavior when appropriately shamed and guards himself against humiliation. If humiliation occurs, the inferior must find ways to avenge it to recover his standing within the relationship. Finally, because the Confucian individual might be superior in one relationship but inferior in another, he should “know chi” from both perspectives.

Within this Confucian framework, the greater one’s sense of humiliation, the greater the possibility for transformative action to recover one’s standing. King Goujian illustrates this logic because his personal humiliations as the servant of the victorious enemy king motivated him, upon release, to train and prepare his people for twenty years before avenging this humiliation. In essence, the only way for Goujian to recover his personal standing was to lead his state to independence. His story gained popular currency during the Republican era as a way to understand China’s weak position vis-a-vis imperial powers.\(^{13}\)

“To know chi” also became a central tenet in neo-Confucian self-cultivation. The twelfth-century philosopher, Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130–1200), noted in the *Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸 zhongyong): “To possess the feeling of shame is to be near courage (知恥進勇 zhichi jinhu yong).” The idea was that in deeply feeling shame, one would gain the fortitude to avoid repeating the mistake again.\(^{14}\)

The Confucian hierarchical structure of chi nevertheless placed constraints on a leader. One was that a leader was unlikely to use chi against a domestic group—Chiang never thought to mobilize the populace based on “humiliation” committed by warlords because he considered them his equals. Neither did he use chi in relation to the Chinese communists, whom he considered his inferiors, often inserting the character *fei* (匪) after the surname—for example, Mao Fei Zedong. The connotation of *fei*, or “bandit,” indicated that, in Chiang’s mind, the communists, like the Taiping and Nian rebels before them, were not only his inferiors but also outsiders of the Confucian order.

A second constraint the hierarchical framework likely placed on Chiang concerned his interactions with the public. Like Yuan Shikai (袁世凱 1859–1916) before him, who had viewed the Guomindang revolutionaries as children,\(^{15}\) Chiang also tended to treat the public paternalistically. In his use of chi, Chiang never considered more autonomous agency on the public’s part to help shape the political agenda.

The constraint of discouraging a public voice might have been mitigated by Western ideas of nationalism, fascism, and even Christianity (the last will be

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\(^{13}\) Cohen, *Speaking to History*, 59.


discussed in a later section) because each contained the possibility of “unleashing” the masses. This option, however, held little attraction for Chiang. Nationalism’s influence on chi was complicated by the inability of China to stand united (as had Japan and Turkey) in the face of imperial threat and thus contained a dual aspect—the Chinese felt self-humiliation towards their inability to unite, and they suffered humiliation by imperialists who sought to take advantage of Chinese disunity. While Japanese aggression encouraged national unity and strengthened his position, Chiang refused to mobilize any group to fight against Japan because he wanted to achieve domestic unity first (“first internal pacification, then external resistance (安内攘外 anneirang-wai)”).

He therefore suppressed nationalistic feelings stoked by anti-Japanese sentiments, removing the possibility of using public support for national avengement.

The influence of fascism also met with a complicated outcome. Mussolini’s blackshirts had inspired the formation of the Society for Vigorous Practice (力行社 Lixingshe), which numbered approximately half a million in its heyday and was a front group for the blue shirts who swore loyalty to Chiang. Again, however, Chiang was unwilling to create a genuine mass movement through this group even though no true fascist party “can be or wants to be secret; its strength lies in its ability openly to propagandize and organize.”

Chiang’s sense of revenge never meant unleashing the people, but instead, was about making them endure and encouraging a consciousness about humiliation. This emphasis was connected to Chiang’s desire to delay confrontation with the Japanese, while his interest in fascism, it seemed, was related to “internal pacification” of eliminating the Chinese communists.

The cultural structure of chi, along with domestic disunity, foreign aggression, and foreign influences, both enabled and constrained Chiang’s use of the concept. What is of interest now is how Chiang and his secretaries sought rich and varied ways to harness this cultural resource to provide a coherent story about national identity and salvation, while making Chiang’s actions credible to posterity.

CONSTRUCTING CHIANG’S USE OF CHI THROUGH THREE MOMENTS

The following analysis of the three moments stresses the process by which Chiang and his secretaries attempted to justify Chiang’s legacy to posterity rather than assesses whether the actual formulations were persuasive to intended audiences at the time. It finds that Chiang and his secretaries were unable to portray an integrated public face that showed a simple path from national injury to salvation. Instead, they constructed a public face based on an

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18 Members of the Lixingshe visited Germany and Italy not specifically to study fascism but to understand how Germany and Italy escaped liberalism, which constrained Britain and France from exterminating communism from within their borders. See Wakeman, 174–75.
increasingly strategized and somewhat contradictory use of chi, but which attempted to make sense of Chiang’s actions within the confluence of internal and external threats.

**FIRST MOMENT: RESONANCE BETWEEN CHI AND GOALS**

In the first moment, the *shilüe* portrays an optimistic and well-integrated public face to posterity. Chiang was about to “unite” China through the Northern Expedition when, on May 3, 1928, he confronted the Japanese in an unexpected skirmish in Ji’nan, Shandong Province. The *shilüe* reflects how Chiang used chi to motivate himself to endure this humiliation and to persuade various audiences to accept the political trade-off of abandoning Ji’nan to the Japanese troops to complete the Northern Expedition. Because the threat was mainly external, the portrayal of Chiang’s use of chi appears to work smoothly and in tandem with his political goals.

**INSPIRED BY THE GOUJIAN STORY OF SUCCESS**

The *shilüe* highlights how Chiang modeled Goujian’s ability to “endure humiliation (忍恥 renchi).” Goujian, while seeking to increase his country’s population through special incentives and to train his people militarily for twenty years, reminded himself daily of his humiliation by eating gall before meals and before bedtime, and by sleeping on a pallet of brushwood. His actions of “lying on brushwood and tasting gall (臥薪嘗膽 woxin changdan)” thus came to symbolize the idea that enduring humiliation to strengthen oneself would ultimately allow one to avenge the humiliation. Chiang responded to the Ji’nan Incident by mentioning the need to *woxin changdan* to allied warlord Feng Yuxiang’s (馮玉祥 1882–1948) troops. In a diary excerpt from the *shilüe*, Chiang also encouraged himself to endure the Japanese officers’ humiliating treatment of himself and his negotiators, Huang Fu (黃郛 1883–1936) and Xiong Shihui (熊式輝 1893–1974), stating, “if I am unable to endure these humiliations in the short term, then I only have the bravery of the ordinary person (匹夫 pifu). And in the end, I will fail to avenge humiliation. Right now I can only endure the humiliation that the common people (普通人 putong ren) are unable to endure.”

In addition to signaling to posterity his choice to endure, Chiang also indicated that he would adapt his own version of a reminder “to lie on brushwood and taste gall.” A week after the start of the incident, he stated, “From this day on, I will rise out of bed at six o’clock. I will remind myself of this humiliation and continue to do so until the national humiliation is wiped away completely (以至國恥洗雪清淨後為止 yizhi guochi xixue jingjing hou weizhi).” Four days later, he created a “method to avenge humiliation (雪恥條曰 xuechi tiaoyue)” column in his diary:

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“Everyday, [I] will record a method on how to destroy the ‘dwarf pirates (倭寇 wokou)’ to avenge national humiliation.”22 With few exceptions, Chiang contributed to this column faithfully until Japan’s defeat in World War II.

The purpose of Chiang’s “avenging humiliation” entries was less about recording actual methods to avenge humiliation than about cultivating in himself the qualities of a leader capable of doing so. Based on a neo-Confucian understanding of self-cultivation mentioned earlier, he emphasized controlling his behavior and pursuing learning. With regard to his behavior, he had lost his temper twice in one day shortly after the Ji’nan Incident. Upon reflection, he wrote: “[I must] cultivate myself so that when [the anger] is forming in my heart, I am able to transform it into something harmonious. I should be able to do this (養其未發之中以未即發之和，庶幾其可乎 yang qiwei fazhizhong yiwei jifa zhi he, shuji qi ke hu).”23 Subsequent entries repeatedly revealed his attempts to curb his temper, indicating to posterity that for Chiang, self-control was essential to humiliation’s avengement.24

With regard to pursuing knowledge, Chiang believed that he should continually educate himself. Following the Ji’nan Incident, he stated: “From now on, I must read ten pages a day. If there is a break in the process, then I am a person who has forgotten the hatred and who is without shame (忘仇無恥之人 wangchou wuchi zhi ren).”25 Over time, the sbilüe records that Chiang read numerous biographies, histories of crucial periods, and philosophical works. He often placed his insights from these books into his avenging humiliation column, especially if they deepened his understanding of chi.26

Chiang and his secretaries would thus convey to posterity that the qualities necessary for the leader to avenge humiliation required both knowing chi and behaving in ways that exemplified this knowledge. The records also simultaneously highlighted the methodical way in which Chiang sought to avenge humiliation.

ADAPTING THE THEME OF ENDURING HUMILIATION FOR MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

In the aftermath of the Ji’nan Incident, the sbilüe also indicates that Chiang invoked the theme of withstanding humiliation to enlist party leaders, potential allies, and even the Japanese government to advance his goal of completing the Northern Expedition. One might surmise that the overall objective was to justify to posterity that he had abandoned Ji’nan for good reason and that his immediate goal of unification would serve the long-term objective of avenging the Ji’nan humiliation.

In a telegram to fellow Guomindang leaders, including Hu Hanmin (胡漢民 1879–1936), Wang Jingwei (汪精衛 1883–1944), and Sun Ke (孫科 1891–1973), Chiang explicitly linked the Ji’nan Incident to the 1645 Yangzhou (揚州) Incident,

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24 For examples, see Wang Yugao and Wang Yuzheng, Xingkeji (省克記) (Reflections and Overcoming [Difficulties]), Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek, Academia Historica, Hsintien, Taiwan, June 19, 20, 1928.
25 Wang Yugao and Wang Yuzheng, Xueji (學記) (Learning Chronology) Archives of President Chiang Kai-shek, Academia Historica, Hsintien, Taiwan, May 9, 1928.
26 For examples, see Wang, July 17, 1928; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2003, vol. 3, 528.
a battle between Ming resisters and Manchus that killed 80,000.\(^{27}\) Chiang’s secretary reinforced this connection by placing a diary entry right before the telegram, which indicated Chiang’s belief that the Ji’nan Incident was worse than the earlier incident.\(^{28}\)

After bringing the incident to life for fellow leaders, Chiang attempted to justify his political trade-off to the leaders (and to posterity) with the following appeal:

To take on the responsibility of the country, I wish to commit suicide, but because the Northern Expedition is not yet successful, the faltering wicks of the warlords will have another opportunity to re-light (必使軍閥燃將死之灰 bi shì junfa ran jiāngsì zhì huì) ... For the sake of the party, country, and citizenry, I temporarily must endure not dying and continue to move forward (而忍死須臾 ěr rèn sī xǔyú) to complete the Northern Expedition.\(^{29}\)

By connecting his enduring of the Ji’nan humiliation to the completion of the Northern Expedition, Chiang appeared both responsible (i.e., he felt that he should commit suicide for having failed to avert the humiliation in Ji’nan) and courageous (i.e., even though he wished to die, he would press on for the sake of the Northern Expedition). In this regard, his use of humiliation might be analogous to Sima Qian’s decision to endure the humiliation of castration in order to finish the Historical Records rather than take the expected and more honorable course of committing suicide. In both cases, withstanding a great humiliation was necessary to achieve a greater goal.

Potential allies were a second audience to which Chiang tailored his use of humiliation. Through a subordinate, he sought to entice high-ranking officers under the warlord Zhang Zuolin (張作霖 1875–1928) to defect by using the Ji’nan humiliation to bolster his argument that “we do not wish to be killing each other and letting the foreigners benefit.”\(^{30}\) By drawing on the well-known idiom of the fight between a snipe and a clam that causes both to be caught by the fisherman, Chiang sought to weaken Zhang’s Fengtian faction.

The Japanese government was a third audience that Chiang successfully influenced to make gains on the Northern Expedition. Through his negotiator, Huang Fu, Chiang informed the Japanese that if they left the north–south Tianjin–Jinpu railway unobstructed, allowing his troops to move freely, he would suppress the anti-Japanese movement and personally apologize to the Japanese army.\(^{31}\) Strategically, Chiang was willing to trade an apology, and thus increase the Ji’nan humiliation, for the sake of completing the Northern Expedition.

At first glance, Chiang’s use of humiliation seemed to magnify failure. He compared the Ji’nan Incident to a horrific earlier defeat that brought down the

\(^{27}\) Xiuchu Wang, Yangzhou Shiri Ji (Ten Days in Yangzhou) (Taipei: Guang Wen, 1971).


Ming dynasty; he willingly added to the humiliation by apologizing to the Japanese. Yet, paradoxically, the logic was such that the more one endured, the more motivated one became to avenge the humiliation. Hence, true to this formulation, he interpreted public protests as unproductive because only a unified and strengthened China would make avenging the Ji’nan humiliation possible. By calling attention to this great personal and collective humiliation, Chiang attempted to promote party unity and to gain potential allies to achieve the immediate goal of completing the Northern Expedition.

In this first moment, Chiang’s use of *chi* appeared coherent and full of promise, but it was built on the notion that completing the Northern Expedition would allow China to stand united against Japan. When this assumption proved false, the foundation upon which Chiang (with the aid of his secretaries) constructed a face for posterity would start to crack.

**SECOND MOMENT: RESONANCE EXPLODES**

In the summer of 1931, Sino-Japanese tensions were escalating—the more prominent triggers included the Wanbaoshan (萬寶山) Incident and the Nakamura Spy Incident, which eventually led to the invasion of Mukden on September 18, 1931. At the same time, Chiang was fighting the Chinese communists on the battlefield and fellow party members in the political arena. Given both the external and domestic problems in 1931, the *shiliie* suggests that Chiang became more strategic when invoking the theme of enduring humiliation. In addition, he also involved the public, but only passively, by pointing out the shame of Chinese disunity and its consequences for the nation’s survival. By tracking the construction of Chiang’s diversified and sometimes contradictory use of *chi*, this section investigates the reworking of *chi* to consolidate Chiang’s power and to preserve China’s sovereign identity, and which resulted in a “Goujian” public face that applied only to Chiang himself.

**SELECTIVELY ENDURING HUMILIATION**

Even without domestic disunity, invoking the Goujian model a second time for the public (and for posterity) would be difficult. A fine distinction exists, after all, between “enduring” concessions to imperial powers for the sake of future avengement and just plain weakness. In light of a second military confrontation amid Chinese disunity, the construction of Chiang’s call to endure humiliation would bear other meanings as compared with the original construction.

By this period, and with Chiang’s tacit approval, the Chinese were already deviating from the Goujian model of enduring *all* humiliations. Events leading up to the Mukden Incident reveal that the Chinese refused to cooperate or negotiate directly with the Japanese over outstanding issues such as the Wanbaoshan and the

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Nakamura Incidents. Continuing in this vein, the shilüe reveals that Chiang resisted signing any treaty with the Japanese, thus denying them formal recognition of their occupation of Manchuria.

The shilüe, however, indicates that Chiang still pursued a seemingly “Goujian” policy of non-military resistance, but the rationale for doing so differed from that of enduring the previous Ji’nan humiliation. Although the public had begun protesting that China should fight Japan and that intra-party divisions should cease, the shilüe registers that both of these were directions in which Chiang refused to go. Fighting Japan, given the severe unequal balance of powers, had to be delayed, and unity had to be achieved under his terms. The purpose of Chiang’s enduring of humiliation was no longer about China’s self-strengthening to avenge it: the policy of non-military resistance was to establish China’s “innocence” in the face of Japanese aggression. In addition, posterity would now observe Chiang silently enduring domestic attacks from internal challenges to his leadership and witness his refusal to heed the public’s call to unite and fight the Japanese, all for the purpose of consolidating authority.

If the goal of enduring humiliation had changed, the logic remained the same. In a speech included in the shilüe to a group of young men about to propagandize the need for the communist “extermination” campaigns in Henan, Hubei, and Anhui, Chiang warned that they might encounter humiliation because of their mission or their youthfulness. Rather than feel troubled, the young men should view this as an opportunity to alter their audience’s perception and eventually command their respect. To become a person of talent and to help China complete the revolution, he underscored, a person had to go through extraordinary danger and humiliation.33

The shilüe portrays Chiang as taking this advice to heart with regard to party divisiveness. After the Mukden Incident, he remained determinedly silent as fellow party members attacked him: “I am willing to take on the responsibilities for all of these calamities (其咎 qi jū). Otherwise, other than myself, there is no one who can carry this responsibility. Therefore, concerning this, I can only endure the humiliation, carrying this responsibility to death. I encourage myself.”34 A month later, with no signs of rapprochement, Chiang again noted that he had “the misfortune of accepting all of this dirtiness; I now feel even more sympathy for the wise (賢豪 xianhao) men of the past.”35

Chiang resigned from power on December 15, 1931, “in the interest of national unity and the fight against the Japanese—and to leave the way open for ‘more competent men.’”36 He was back in power, however, forty-five days later: the Whampoa generals had signaled that they would take orders only from him; the provinces withheld their salt tax revenue from the new government; even some student associations called for his return. Ultimately, the Guangdong faction capitulated, acknowledging the indispensability of Chiang’s leadership.37

34 Wang, October 10, 1931; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2004, vol. 12, 149.
Apparently, his exhortations to the young men promoting the communist annihilation campaigns worked: to accomplish something extraordinary, one had to experience danger and humiliation.

The story, however, would be incomplete without examining the origin of this intra-party divide, which began in February of 1931 when Chiang promulgated a new constitution that called for increased centralization. A party elder, Hu Hanmin, vigorously opposed this plan to which Chiang responded by imprisoning him. Many of the Guomindang elite, who sympathized with Hu, consequently formed an anti-Chiang bloc in Guangdong.

This intra-party conflict likely would have been resolved on the battlefield, with provincial militarists of Guangdong and Guangxi backing the Guangdong faction. In the wake of the Mukden Incident, however, anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese people put great pressure on the factions to end their fighting and confront Japan.\(^38\) Unable to resolve these disagreements on the battlefield, Chiang instead chose the seemingly passive approach of enduring the humiliation of intra-party attacks and criticisms. The external Japanese threat and Chiang’s advantageous position vis-a-vis other warlords and GMD leaders combined to allow the political situation to prevail in his favor. Although the *shiliu* skirts Chiang’s contribution to intra-party divisiveness, one cannot help but notice the Machiavellian message: do what is needed to consolidate power, but, when possible, cloak shady actions in virtuous, moral language.

If power consolidation led to a strategized use of enduring humiliation in the political environment, the *shiliu* nevertheless signals that Chiang sought to deepen his capacity to tolerate humiliation. Three days after the Mukden Incident, he stated: “For the sake of avenging national humiliation, there is no other who can help me carry heaven’s duty (以 國恥，余之天職責無旁貸 *yi xue guo chi, yu zhi tian zhi ze wu pang dai*).”\(^39\) Six days later, he reiterated this sentiment: “the danger and urgency of the situation had never surpassed this day, the responsibility of the difficulties and danger of the Japanese is something that I only can take on (日 難之責任余一人所應擔 *ri weinan zhi zheren yu yiren suo ying dan*).”\(^40\) In encouraging himself to withstand the pressures of invasion, disunity, and protest, Chiang was registering to posterity his increasing conviction that his fate and China’s were one and the same.

**THE SHAME OF NATIONAL DISUNITY**

Even in the midst of intra-elite struggles and intensifying conflict with the Japanese, the *shiliu* reflects that Chiang attempted to indoctrinate the public in accordance with his political goals of consolidating his rule before confronting Japan. He thus stressed the shame of disunity. In a speech to party members shortly after the Japanese invaded Mukden, Chiang noted that when Japan invaded northern China in the late nineteenth century, southern China shockingly pledged neutrality.\(^41\)


\(^40\) Wang, September 27, 1931; *Jiang Zhongzheng*, 2004, vol. 12, 105.

\(^41\) Wang, September 22, 1931; *Jiang Zhongzheng*, 2004, vol. 12, 86.
before the Incident, Chiang called attention to the disunity problem by recalling that Sun Yat-sen (孫中山 1866–1925) had described China as a plate of sand and that imperial powers preferred that China continue to humiliate itself in this way, because taking advantage of a unified country was more difficult. In highlighting yet another shameful example, Chiang argued that the Chinese lacked knowledge about treasuring flags. Even their own Guomindang headquarters left the flag flying at all times, ignoring the protocol of raising or lowering it. He noted that foreigners chuckled and sneered upon seeing the flag still flying in the evening. Without respect for the flag, he contended, the Chinese were unable to envision themselves as a united country.43

Unable to unify the country, let alone modernize it, Chiang deflected the blame of both shortcomings by focusing on the ways in which China was humiliating itself. In doing so, one might speculate that his purpose was to define a national identity to posterity that was amenable to his policies and to preserve the integrity of his leadership to posterity, which the chaotic political context continually threatened to undermine. Noticeably absent in his use of chi, however, was any idea of mobilizing the populace, and herein lay a critical constraint in Chiang’s ability to connect with the people. If a fascist understanding of nationalism meant mobilizing the people in support of the state, Chiang ignored it. The possible reasons for this were several: Chiang was constrained by the context to rally the populace to fight the Japanese; he was concerned about potential opposition, even loyal opposition; as a transitional leader, he was “modern” in communicating to the public through speeches and other forms of media but still “traditional” in thinking of the public as a passive entity; and finally, he simply may have distrusted the masses.

Hence, as much as his secretaries attempted to burnish Chiang’s public face for posterity, the inherent tensions in his method to endure humiliation and to connect with the population, as compared with his hero, Goujian, were difficult to airbrush away. The only coherent face that comes through is Chiang’s determination to maintain power.

THIRD MOMENT: THE YAWNING GAP BETWEEN REALITY AND GOALS

By 1934, Chiang’s efforts to consolidate authority had begun to bear fruit. China was more unified under his rule than in either 1928 or 1931; the major battles against warlords were over; the fifth and last “annihilation” campaign against the communists would soon begin; and finally, although the Japanese were encouraging provincial autonomy in North China, there was no direct military clash, as in the earlier moments.

Ironically, the absence of direct external aggression made constructing a coherent “face” in the shilüe more difficult. The political scientist Jeffrey Herbst notes that European countries were able to build strong nationalism (and strong states) precisely because they constantly fought external enemies. The threat of

death by invaders was enough to motivate people to rally behind their leaders and willingly make large sacrifices.\textsuperscript{44} In the absence of external aggression in the third moment, the \textit{shilüe} reveals several incongruent “faces” that might otherwise have been suppressed. On the one hand, the \textit{shilüe} juxtaposes Chiang’s deepening conviction that he was indispensable to the nation’s survival with his lowering of expectations for what he believed the people could accomplish. In addition, it contrasts the seemingly superficial rejuvenation of the public spirit through the New Life Movement against the stark reality of breakdown in military discipline. On the other hand, the \textit{shilüe} documents a “face” relatively free from inconsistency, which concerned Chiang’s efforts to indoctrinate the people about foreign humiliations. In examining this last face, however, one is further impressed with the idea that a nationalist response to humiliation is more easily built when defining oneself against the external “other” and not when criticizing the people or fighting enemies within the body politic.

**CONTRASTING EXPECTATIONS FOR HIMSELF AND THE PEOPLE**

By the third moment, the \textit{shilüe} indicates that Chiang’s belief in how China would ultimately avenge humiliation shaped his expectations about the people’s role in defending Chinese sovereignty. By March 1934, Chiang was convinced that an international war among imperial powers would occur within three years, a belief which he based on a confluence of events, including the expiration of a naval treaty among America, Britain, and Japan, the expiration of Japan’s rights and privileges within the League of Nations, and the completion of the Soviet Union’s second five-year plan. Chiang further believed that China could take advantage of this conflict to win independence.\textsuperscript{45}

This scenario differed from what the \textit{shilüe} portrays in the first moment. Chiang’s use of the Goujian story in the first instance implied that China would shoulder complete responsibility of avenging its humiliation against the imperial powers. By the third moment, however, Chiang conspicuously scaled down his expectations for China’s bearing the full brunt of avengement. As will be elaborated below, Chiang focused on small goals that would eliminate the shame of “uncitizenlike” behavior. By having China at least appear to be a well-groomed and orderly nation, Chiang believed that it could induce other nations to take it seriously.

If Chiang lowered his expectations for the Chinese citizens, the \textit{shilüe} nevertheless indicates that he raised them for himself. Of note in the secretary’s selection of Chiang’s diary entries in 1934, was an admiration of Jesus in Goujian terms, particularly of Jesus’ ability to endure great humiliation.\textsuperscript{46} In one entry, he noted, “Believers in Jesus must overcome their desires, endure humiliation, and be


\textsuperscript{46} Yuan, February 11, 1934; \textit{Jiang Zhongzheng}, 2005, vol. 24, 388. After the Mukden Incident, a symbolic conjoining of the two figures was represented in \textit{Guochi tu} (National Humiliation Illustrated) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1931 or 1932), 2nd foldout. For a reproduction, see Cohen, \textit{Speaking to History}, 71.
patient in suffering (耶稣信徒必 克己忍辱耐苦 yesu xintu bixu bei ji renru naiku). Everyday [they] must also bear the cross (十字架 shizijia) along with Jesus, to perpetuate the ideas of Jesus for the sake of redeeming the multitude (继续耶稣主义 罪人赎罪 jixu yesuzhuyi wei zhongren shuzui).”47 Chiang now called on himself to bear more humiliation than in any of the previous moments: just as Jesus forged ahead in his righteousness amid unbelievers, Chiang, as a believer, would forge ahead by educating people on “knowing chi,” preparing them for the opportune moment that would bring about China’s salvation.

Christianity’s influence on Chiang (he converted to Christianity in 1930) and his wife further reinforced the couple’s belief that they “had been divinely chosen to rule China.” The couple certainly used “Christianity to inspire, justify, and perpetuate [Chiang’s] messiah complex.” Nevertheless, following a similar pattern to that of his understanding of fascism, Chiang neither proselytized, as did his wife, nor proposed Christianity as a state religion.48 One again sees the particular modernity Chiang embraced, which acknowledged the importance of the “people” but envisioned no active role for them.

The shilie lays bare this incongruity in Chiang’s expectations for the people and for himself. Had Chiang won the civil war and subsequently played a productive hand in China’s development, his secretaries might have attempted to show Chiang’s rising expectations of the people over time. Since history bore a different outcome, one only sees the incongruence, demonstrating the limits of constructing a completely integrated face for posterity.

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE NEW LIFE MOVEMENT

Related to the above incongruence in expectations, the shilie also presents two contrasting faces to posterity: one, which Chiang projected to New Life audiences, exuded optimism and superficiality; the other, projected to his military leaders, conveyed the opposite.

In the optimistic face, the manuscripts reflect that Chiang aimed to reverse the people’s material and spiritual degeneration through launching a New Life Movement in February 1934. To define what constituted the modern citizen, Chiang drew inspiration from the politico-philosophical work entitled Guanzi (管子), and particularly from Guanzi’s conception of the Four Virtues—propriety, righteousness, integrity, and a sense of shame (禮義廉恥 liyilianchi). Drawing from the same source, Chiang also emphasized the “minor” and the “near” when considering the content of the Four Virtues: “Since those who would shepherd the people desire them even in minor matters to be meticulous in observing propriety, practicing righteousness, cultivating integrity, and displaying a sense of shame, they must prohibit even the slightest beginnings of evil. Such is the way to discipline the people … such is the basis of good order (欲 之修小禮行小義飾小廉謹小恥微邪 此勸之道也...治之本也 yu min zhi xiu xiaoli xing xiaoyi shi xiaolian jin xiao chi jin weixie. ci limin zhi dao

ye ... zhi zhi ben ye).”⁴⁹ To demonstrate why, he further observed that: “If one is unable to manage a household, how can one manage a country (室之不治何以天下國家 yishi zhi buzhi heyi tianxia guojia wei)? ... To attain what is far, one must pay attention to what is near (由近而遠之理也 youjin eryuan zhi li ye).”⁵⁰

With “minor” and “near” setting the bar for which one would judge the Four Virtues, the shiliue notes that Chiang emphasized the shame of improper behavior and dress, altering the details based on his particular audience. He called junior high school students wearing red- and green-colored clothing “barbarians” (野蠻人 yemanren) and exhorted them to keep their nails and hair cut short.⁵¹ For the boys, he noted:

There are those who like to put perfume and oil in their hair. Everyday, they spend enormous amounts of time combing and making [the hair] shiny. If this same person had short hair, we could take the money spent on perfume and oils to buy a few books that would be beneficial, and the time spent combing his hair put towards learning and acquiring skills.⁵²

For the girls, he conceded that their hair could be longer than the boys’ limit of one cun (寸) (one thumb’s width). Nevertheless, he felt that the girls’ hair was either excessively long, making them look like ghosts, or was permed in the likeness of the hairs on a beast (畜牲 chusheng).⁵³ He conveyed and tailored such vivid details to suit various audiences, whether they were school children, soldiers, or provincial officials.

In a second variation, Chiang argued that foreigners (here implying the imperialist powers) embodied the Four Virtues better than the Chinese. The Japanese, for instance, washed with only cold water. When Japanese or other foreigners had to spit, they did so in a bag or handkerchief, showing respect for public spaces.⁵⁴ By emulating foreigners in these aspects, he argued, the Chinese could also attain their level of the Four Virtues.⁵⁵ Conversely, he imagined what foreigners might say when observing the Chinese behaving or dressing improperly. He felt that the foreigners would look down upon the Chinese, thinking that they were of a lower class, like the people from Taiwan, or like barbarians.⁵⁶ By using imperial powers as a foil, Chiang hoped to appeal to the audience’s sense of shame to make them act according to his sense of correct behavior and dress.

The shiliue suggests that Chiang used the Four Virtues to define nationalism based on minor accomplishable details. Deviating from his definitions implied

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weakness and was a source of shame. In the speech in which he criticized the hair styles of the boys and girls, he further argued that by neglecting their appearance, they would expose the weakness of the country.\textsuperscript{57} Chiang’s approach was clearly top down—that of a Confucian superior educating an inferior. It drew from a selective admiration of fascist military discipline and from the critiques of “John Chinaman” a generation earlier that implicitly equated good manners with overthrowing imperialism.\textsuperscript{58} Given the little time that China had to prepare, his use of the Four Virtues was less about fundamentally restructuring society and more about preparing China for the opportune moment to seize independence.

Although several scholars have noted that Chiang’s purpose for the New Life Movement was unmistakably modern and national,\textsuperscript{59} they also note its distinct failures, including its superficiality and reinforcement of fissures in Chinese society relating to religion, new social demarcations, and transformations in the routines of public and private life.\textsuperscript{60} Missing from these scholars’ accounts, however, is the construction of another public face outside of the New Life Movement that underlined the severity of the problems inherent in the modernizing and nation-building project.

During this period, the \textit{shiliu} also includes several of Chiang’s telegrams that addressed the breakdown of military discipline. Although the Guomindang army had eventually quelled the anti-Chiang Fujian rebellion in January 1934, Chiang still expressed concern over the soldiers’ behavior. In a telegram to General Jiang Dingwen (蔣鼎文 1896–1974), on March 11, 1934, he reviewed the army’s behavior and noted that even though the entire tenth division was sent to defend a narrow road at Yibar (驛坂), the Fujian rebels nevertheless escaped. In addition, when the soldiers reached Quanzhou (泉州), they sought prostitutes, gambled, forcefully entered homes and boats to rape and pillage, and urinated into water wells. This behavior, Chiang further observed, lacked any sense of shame and led him to ask, “How can we call this a revolutionary army?”\textsuperscript{61}

Rectifying such behavior seemed much more critical than ensuring the correct length of hair on a student’s head, and certainly, in the secretary’s excerpt of Chiang’s telegram to the general, Chiang demanded strict disciplinary measures. Nevertheless, Chiang’s overall approach was to ignore the source of the discipline problems and to exhort the army to behave like a modern national army, one that refrained from banditry after defeat and avoided provoking the people.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{57} Yuan, May 9, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2006, vol. 26, 59.


\textsuperscript{60} Van de Ven, 370.

\textsuperscript{61} Yuan, March 11, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2006, vol. 25, 121.

\textsuperscript{62} An important source for this breakdown stemmed from the way Chiang expanded his army. Rather than gain willing volunteers for the civil volunteer units, local village elites dragooned them, leading to a deterioration in the quality of troops. Fenby, \textit{Chiang Kai-shek}, 218–19.
In the secretary’s selections from the New Life speeches, Chiang elliptically alluded to such problems, but stripped them of their true severity. In a March 5 New Life speech at the military headquarters in Nanchang, he observed:

A soldier puts his hand down before the superior finishes his salute. This lacks correct protocol, and so, propriety remains unrealized (這就是無節成禮 zhe jiushi wuji buchengli). The subordinate is not saluting the superior. One might as well say that the superior is saluting the subordinate ... You must wait until the superior receives the salute, his eyes looking at yours, and finishes his salute, and then you can respectfully and solemnly put your hand down.63

Chiang then pointed out that in foreign countries, such tasks were performed smoothly even when several thousand troops were involved. Somehow, if Chiang’s soldiers knew how to salute correctly, they would be the modern army the new China needed.

Analyzing Chiang’s use of chi inside and outside the New Life Movement brings into sharp relief the seemingly unbridgeable gap between reality and goals. Without foreign aggression to draw attention away from this gap, the secretaries of the shilüe were unable to reconcile a public face that addressed only symptoms and not the source of problems and yet professed to rejuvenate the people and army.

INDOCTRINATING HUMILIATION

Unlike the “faces” described above, constructing Chiang’s face for posterity in the area of indoctrination appeared free from contradiction in large part because the foil was the external other. The shilüe shows that Chiang would sometimes mull over an event or policy to see whether it counted as a “humiliation.” For instance, Chiang noted that, at first glance, the Nine Powers Treaty signed in 1922 seemed advantageous for China. Nine countries (Belgium, the British Empire, China, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Portugal, and the United States) had signed it to “stabilize conditions in the Far East, to safeguard the rights and interests of China, and to promote intercourse between China and the other Powers upon the basis of equality of opportunity.”64 Yet in thinking about the treaty twelve years later, Chiang noted with dismay its unenforceability. None of the countries had punished Japan for invading Manchuria in 1931; only the USA had protested and called for economic sanctions. Hence, in his mind, the treaty now constituted a “humiliation.” In comparing this treaty with other humiliations in his diary, Chiang concluded that even the Japanese Twenty-One Demands in 1915 were less devastating. He would now have to bear this additional humiliation and


shoulder the responsibility to avenge it.\textsuperscript{65} In revisiting the treaty ten days later, he remarked that the people should feel ashamed: “To rely only on others to speak in accordance with justice and to forget to seek after self-strengthening, this is the country’s greatest worry and humiliation.”\textsuperscript{66} The Nine Powers Treaty example outlined a process to posterity of how Chiang defined humiliations, including their relative severity, and noted whether the public felt the same way.

In addition, the shilüe reflects how Chiang sought to shape the public’s view. Once he decided that something constituted a humiliation, Chiang disseminated his idea as an indisputable truth. On March 27, 1934, for instance, he wrote in his diary of his decision to issue a textbook on common sense because he felt that the people had “accumulated too much weakness and were confused with stupidity (積弱昏愚 jiruo hunyu).”\textsuperscript{67} He sent a telegram to his chief-of-staff, Xiong Shihui, listing thirty-eight items to be included in the textbook, which encompassed a basic knowledge of world affairs, science, the environment, and the people’s obligation and responsibility to the country. Several items explicitly attempted to inculcate Chiang’s idea of the Chinese nation through a description of humiliations: item four aimed to give a brief history, including the year and month, of the territory China had lost; item twenty-six aimed to describe the foreign concessions and China’s powers to deal with foreigners, and item twenty-nine aimed to give a short history of revenge and of avenging humiliation throughout the Chinese dynasties.\textsuperscript{68}

Continuing in this vein, he telegrammed Xiong the next day to gather examples in history that explained the Four Virtues and of people who stood up to barbarians and who refused to bow to foreigners. He asked that a special committee or perhaps some old Confucian scholars could select the materials. Finally, to speed up matters, he asked that Xiong submit these materials within a few days.\textsuperscript{69}

In addition, the shilüe also shows how Chiang offered models for the people to emulate. After noting in his diary that the people should be aware that the path to recovery was through the examples of Goujian and Yue Fei (岳飛 1103–1142), he telegraphed his chief secretary, Chen Bulei, to put together a single small edition on Goujian, appending the biography of Goujian’s adviser, Fan Li (范蠡), and of Da Fu Zhong (大夫種), who was given as a gift to the enemy king’s grand steward, Bo Pi (伯駱). He also requested that an edition on Yue Fei be printed.\textsuperscript{70}

In this moment, the shilüe depicts Chiang’s construction of a Chinese identity based on a three-year time frame in which China would prepare to gain its independence. Because of the time constraint, he appeared to short-circuit the process of building strength from weakness in his appeal to the citizens’ and soldiers’ sense of shame. Instead, he put forward a strategic goal of addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of problems. Perhaps the more persuasive face to posterity can be found in his attempts to shape the population’s understanding of national humiliation.

\textsuperscript{67} Yuan, March 27, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2006, vol. 25, 361.
\textsuperscript{68} Yuan, March 27, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2006, vol. 25, 362.
\textsuperscript{69} Yuan, March 28, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2006, vol. 25, 370.
\textsuperscript{70} Yuan, February 17, 1934; Jiang Zhongzheng, 2005, vol. 24, 450.
CONCLUSION

If Chiang and his secretaries constructed a relatively coherent “face” in the first moment based on anticipated national unity and subsequent avengement of national humiliation, then the failure of the Northern Expedition challenged the credibility of this face; after all, Chiang was unable to immediately avenge the Ji’nan humiliation. Instead, Chiang used chi as part of a strategy to pursue the intermediate goals of preserving Chinese sovereignty and consolidating his power.

In his use of shame towards the populace, Chiang focused, the shilüe reveals, on either the symbolic (e.g., respect for the flag) or on outward behavior and appearances rather than on the substantive problems related to Chinese disunity, poverty, and so on. The resulting face unavoidably encourages skepticism as to whether the rhetoric matched reality. One reason for pressing on with such rhetoric may have been to preserve the integrity of his leadership by deflecting attention from his inability to unite or develop the country. Another reason may have been his sense of urgency to impart his vision of the “proper” citizen for the purposes of positioning China to free itself from the imperial yoke. The outcome was that Chiang, while acknowledging the importance of the people in his construction of the national identity, envisioned giving the people little voice outside of his prescriptions and policy agenda.

Domestic disunity also constrained Chiang from mobilizing humiliation to its full potential. Although in the first moment, Chiang called on various audiences to endure the Ji’nan humiliation collectively via Goujian’s powerful method of “lying on brushwood and tasting gall,” in the second moment he diluted the potency of the theme through his selective use of it: he took a hardlined approach in diplomatic and economic matters to preserve a semblance of strength against the imperial powers, yet advocated non-resistance when threatened militarily. In addition, even as he portrayed himself as willingly enduring the insults by fellow Guomindang members after the Mukden Incident, he had instigated the problem in the first place by putting a senior ranking member under house arrest earlier that year for opposing him. Finally, if the point of enduring humiliation was to self-strengthen and become independent, Chiang was further deviating from this path as he sought to rely on international aid to resolve the Mukden Incident and on imperial powers fighting each other to seize China’s independence.

Despite his superficial use of shame towards the populace and strategic use of enduring humiliation to balance internal and external threats, Chiang is portrayed in the shilüe as following the Goujian story closely with regard to motivating himself to become the kind of leader who could avenge humiliation. Based on the logic that a great avenger of humiliation implied a great sufferer of it, Chiang modeled himself after Goujian to withstand humiliations, when the desire might have been to lash out or resist. Over time, one can track the increasing confidence in his leadership as he initially encouraged himself to endure humiliation that the ordinary person was unable to bear, and by the second and third moments, respectively, began to identify his leadership with the fate of the nation and then to feel certain of his ability to “save” the nation. Hence the Goujian story would motivate all of his intermediate, if sometimes contradictory, steps in service of the nebulous, distant goal of revenge. The shilüe’s revelation of the growing contradiction between his expectations for himself versus his expectations for the people, however, limits a full vindication of his strategy to posterity.
One might also suggest that Chiang’s particular use of chi represented an important response to China’s problems and thus resonated with certain segments of the population, because they, too, would understand and feel the contradictions inherent in the times: of resisting versus enduring imperial aggression, of unity versus disunity (e.g., unity against Japan was good, but why submit to the rule of another competing domestic group?), and finally, of the need to improve infrastructure and develop the people’s talents when lacking the resources to do so. Hence, posterity might conclude that selective endurance for China and for the leader, while detracting from an integrated understanding of chi, was a necessary tactic for survival.

Ironically, although Chiang failed to achieve national unity, Guomindang historiography credits him for successfully avenging humiliation in 1943 by having most of the unequal treaties abrogated (with the exception of that concerning Hong Kong).\(^7^1\) Still, one only has to observe the current spate of books analyzing the nature of China’s “rise” in the twenty-first century to realize that although Chinese feelings of insecurity—and thus the power of past humiliations—are diminishing, the use of humiliation is still tightly intertwined with the country’s national identity, especially with respect to its relations with Japan, Taiwan, and the United States. In addition, if Chiang’s formulation of the national identity gave the people little autonomous agency, one can still detect echoes of that formulation in China’s present government. If the case of Chiang’s leadership is to serve as our guide, one has little doubt that, where relevant, China’s current and future leaders will use history (and Chiang’s role in it) and the cultural resources of shame and humiliation to define and redefine China’s national identity. More importantly, they will use such tools to advance their own agendas and shape a favorable political legacy.

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\(^7^1\) The historian Dong Wang notes the rivalry between the GMD and CCP over which group successfully avenged the hundred years of humiliation (“The Discourse of Unequal Treaties in Modern China,” Pacific Affairs, 76, no. 3 (fall, 2003), 400). While Chiang’s biographer, Hollington K. Tong, argues that the elimination of the unequal treaties was one of Chiang’s main achievements (Chiang Kai-shek (Taipei: China Publishing Company, 1953), 170), CCP historiography points to Mao’s speech at the first plenary session as the definitive moment of revenge where Mao stated that “The Chinese People Have Stood Up!” September 21, 1949 Opening Address by Mao Zedong at First Plenary Session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. UCLA Asia Institute: East Asian Documents <http://www.international.ucla.edu/eas/documents/mao490921.htm> [accessed May 18, 2010].