Modern Asian Studies

Special Issue:

China in world War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy

Introduction

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Modern Asian Studies **45,** 2 (2011) pp. 225–240. © Cambridge University Press 2011
doi:10.1017/S0026749X10000387 First published online 10 February 2011

*China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy**

RANA MITTER

Institute for Chinese Studies, University of Oxford, Walton Street, Oxford, OX1 2HG UK,
Email: rana.mitter@chinese.ox.ac.uk

AARON WILLIAM MOORE

School of Arts, Histories, and Cultures, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL UK,
Email: aaron.moore@manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

China's long war against Japan from 1937 to 1945 has remained in the shadows of historiography until recently, both in China and abroad. In recent years, the opening of archives and a widening of the opportunity to discuss the more controversial aspects of the wartime period in China itself have restored World War II in China ('the War of Resistance to Japan') to a much more central place in historical interpretation. Among the areas that this issue covers are the new socio-political history of the war that seeks to restore rationality to the policies of the Guomindang (Nationalist) party, as well as a new understanding in post-war China of the meaning of the war against Japan in shaping Cold War and post-Cold War politics in China. In doing so, it seeks to make more explicit the link between themes that shaped the experience of World War II in China to the war's legacy

* This special issue features papers presented at conferences at the Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, St Antony's College, Oxford University, and the History Faculty of Oxford University, which were organized by the co-editors, with organization by Akiko Frellesvig. Funding was provided by a Leverhulme Research Leadership Award (China's War with Japan programme at Oxford University), the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, the Oxford University Press John Fell Fund, and St Antony's College, Oxford. We are very grateful to all those who have offered commentaries and suggestions, including anonymous readers for *Modern Asian Studies*, as well as Guido Samarani, S. A. Smith, Hans J. van de Ven, and Barak Kushner. We also offer sincere thanks to Lily Chang for her extensive work in preparing the papers for publication. The China's War with Japan programme at Oxford University can be accessed at: www.history.ox.ac.uk/china [accessed 30 November 2010].

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in later politics and the uses of memory of the conflict in contemporary Chinese society.

Introduction

Between July 1937 and August 1945, the two most powerful nations of East Asia, China and Japan, were at war.[1] The fighting expanded from a local, undeclared clash in northern China to a total war of rival ideologies that would become part of the global conflict of World War II. Although the exact figures may never be known, estimates suggest that the war cost 15 million Chinese lives, made 60 to 95 million refugees homeless, and destroyed the painstaking modernization that had accompanied the rise of Chinese nationalism over the previous half-century.[2] One could make a plausible claim that the war was the single most devastating event in China's modern history, yet for decades, the debates surrounding it have existed in a historiographical penumbra. Since 1945, both in China and in the west, the history of the war *in its own right* has not been a central part of the historical agenda.

[1] In China, the official position on the War of Resistance since the early 2000s has been that it was a 'fourteen-year' rather than 'eight-year' war, that is, that it began with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931. Japanese scholars have long spoken of a 'fifteen-year' war. These papers will retain the 'eight-year' timing that was most common during the war itself; it seems to us that the total nature of the war after 1937 does make it significantly different from the events that came before.

[2] On the death toll, see 'Introduction', in Lary, D. and MacKinnon, S. (2001). *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, pp. 3–17. On refugees, see MacKinnon, S. (2008). *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, pp. 46–48. Other important works include: Peattie, M., Drea, E., and van de Ven, H., eds (2010). *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford; MacKinnon, S., Lary, D. and Vogel, E., eds (2007). *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–45*, Stanford: Stanford University Press; Henriot, C. and Yeh, W-h., eds (2004). *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Yeh, W-h., ed. (1998). *Wartime Shanghai*, London, Routledge; Wakeman, F. (1996). *The Shanghai Badlands: Wartime Terrorism and Urban Crime, 1937–1941*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. In Chinese, a major single-volume history of the war is Zhang, X., ed. (2001). *Zhongguo kangri zhanzheng shi (1931–1945)* [*History of the War of Resistance to Japan, 1931–1945*], Nanjing daxue chubanshe, Nanjing. The key journal is: *Kangri zhanzheng yanjiu* [*The Journal of Studies of China's War of Resistance against Japan*], Institute of Modern History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. Updates on research in English, Chinese, and Japanese on the Sino-Japanese War are regularly posted by Harvard University's Joint Study of the Sino-Japanese War, led by Ezra Vogel.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In most belligerent countries, whether they were on the side of the Allies or the Axis, the history of World War II has become a central part of those societies' understanding of themselves. In contrast, the war in the China Theatre has never achieved that central status of national myth. In China itself, debates on the war have generally been part of a wider argument about the origins of the Chinese Communist revolution. The Guomindang (GMD) (the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek) led China in the war against Japan, but then lost the Civil War to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Zedong. This made any positive or even nuanced mention of the GMD's role in victory over Japan politically toxic in the mainland, as it would impair the narrative of Chinese Communist nationalism and social reform as the force that saved China from the invaders. Outside China, the war in China has been seen as a secondary or even tertiary theatre of war: important not so much because of what happened there, but because of what it meant for other fronts in the war (such as the Japanese home islands and empire as a whole, or the British Empire in South Asia).

But in recent years, the debate about World War II in China has moved to centre stage. Particularly as China's own global role expands in a way unrecognizable even two or three decades ago, the historiographical relevance and the contemporary significance of the wartime era has grown ever greater. The combination of access to archives in China as well as the greater openness of the society itself have come together to create a new atmosphere for critical research on the period and its legacy. Collectively, the papers in this special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* examine the experience of World War II in China (1937–1945), and then go on to explore the ways in which the legacy and memory of conflict have been structured through social organizations, media, and state policies in China and East Asia more widely. It is crucial that historical memory be examined through the lens of more than one discipline, because it is not only a product of language and media, but also of socio-political organization. Consequently, this special issue combines the approaches of history and political science.[3]

[3] However, there have in recent years been important sets of publications dedicated to examining aspects of the war against Japan; among these are special editions of *Modern Asian Studies* **30:4** (1996) on 'War in the making of modern China', and *Intelligence and National Security*, **16:4** (Winter 2001) on 'Secret Services in China in World War II', both edited by Hans van de Ven; *Journal of Contemporary China* **18:59**

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Experience

The papers in the first half of this special edition seek to make explicit a historiographical agenda that has changed significantly in recent years. For decades, both in China and in the west, the wartime period in China was seen only in terms of one narrative: the rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In this context, the most powerful western academic debate was over the significance of the peasant revolution and its origins in wartime China, sparked by Chalmers Johnson's powerful argument about the origins of peasant nationalism in China, and responded to by Mark Selden, who stressed the social elements of the revolution.[4] As the wartime peasant revolution ('the Yenan way') became the originary myth of the CCP, along with the Long March, it also shaped perceptions of the wartime period's importance in contemporary China, even as China moved away from the era of Mao to one of reform-era urbanization and industrialization.[5]

It became clear by the 1980s that this vision of the wartime period was no longer sufficient, and the impression that only the Communist experience and narrative was of significance in understanding the war against the Japanese was subjected to serious revision. The work on the CCP base areas was rigorous and necessary (and much of it stands at the centre of historical discussion even today), but by focusing attention on the Communist story alone, it made the experience of the rest of wartime China essentially a foil to another narrative that was really more about 1949 than it was about 1945.

Instead, a new social and political history has been emerging which pays attention to the history of wartime in the regions of China ruled by the Guomindang. Between 1928 and 1937, Chiang Kai-shek's National Government ruled from its new capital at Nanjing: its experiment in statecraft has been the subject of fierce debate within

(March 2009) on 'New Discoveries from Chiang Kai-shek's Diary', edited by Tai-chun Kuo; and Lary, D., *Scars of War*.

[4] Johnson, C. (1962). *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China, 1937–1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford; Selden, M. (1971). *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. For a lucid account of the debate, see Pepper, S. (2004). The Political Odyssey of an Intellectual Construct: Peasant Nationalism and the Study of China's Revolutionary History—A Review Essay, *Journal of Asian Studies*, **63**, 105–125.

[5] Mitter, R. (2005). Modernity, Internationalization, and War in the History of Modern China, *The Historical Journal*, **48:2**, 536.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the field, but the weight of research within the last few years has moved from an overall negative assessment to a cautiously positive analysis of many aspects of its developmental state.[6] In this narrative, the outbreak of total war in 1937 becomes the key turning point, the moment at which the Guomindang's experiment in government was (ultimately fatally) blown off course by an external shock. The Nationalist state that is foregrounded in the papers in this volume is certainly no bastion of pre-Cold War democracy (the 'Free China' of its own wartime propaganda), but nor is it simply a corrupt and brutally ineffective regime brought down by its own follies. Furthermore, and crucially, it is a regime that can be understood only in the context of its wartime Communist counterpart (alongside its collaborationist challengers).[7] The new political and social history of wartime China does not seek to restore the GMD to the picture at the price of ignoring the previously historiographically dominant Communist experience. Instead it seeks to draw a wider picture of social and political change in Nationalist China, rather than suggesting that the former was an unchanging or backward foil to the radicalism of the CCP. All modernizing regimes in China (Nationalist, Communist, and the collaborationist regime established in 1940 in Nanjing under former Nationalist leader Wang Jingwei) wanted social change, and the level of that change was a question of degree: it was not the case that one regime embraced change and others merely opposed it. The new picture drawn is suggestive, not least because it stresses similarities as much as differences between the GMD and CCP visions of modernity that would emerge from wartime. Freed from the melodrama of Cold War stereotypes, the Nationalist state that is emerging from the new social history is an intriguing counterfactual, a non-Communist developmental state that bears more than a passing resemblance to the Chinese state of today. It was also the site of a great social experiment, in which the relationship between the party-state and wider society resulted in a much more collective approach to everything from the economy to welfare provision to health care.

[6] An important set of essays that reassesses the record of the Nationalist government, particularly in the pre-war years, is Wakeman, F. and Edmonds, R. L. (2000). *Reappraising Republican China*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

[7] Dryburgh, M. (2009). Rewriting Collaboration: China, Japan, and the Self in the Diaries of Bai Jianwu, *The Journal of Asian Studies* **68:3** (August), 689–714; Zanasi, M. (2008). Globalizing Hanjian: The Suzhou Trials and the Post-World War II Discourse on Collaboration, *The American Historical Review* **113:3** (June), 731–751.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The indictments of the GMD from previous generations—that it was corrupt, inconsistent, and incompetent, particularly in the later years of the war—still have a great deal of validity: a more positive interpretation should certainly not become a whitewash. But the new framework gives the government more credit than it has previously had for the social changes it *did* make, often under immensely difficult circumstances, as it coped with the influx of millions of refugees and massive aerial bombings. It moves away from the characterization of the GMD as a failed state ('the abortive revolution', in the indictment of Lloyd Eastman), and instead sees it as a state attempting a project of state-building in which its intentions ultimately outran its capacity.[8] Repeatedly, the rhetoric of Chiang Kai-shek and the party as a whole drew on the idea that the War of Resistance was a continuation of the agenda of 1911 and 1927, that is, the revolutions that had overturned the imperial system and then brought the GMD itself to power.

Many of the social phenomena associated with the CCP—the use of popular cultural forms to spread propaganda, attempts to mobilize women, and an increase in the social obligations of the state toward the underprivileged in society—can clearly be identified as part of the GMD's agenda. In this collection, Rana Mitter's essay provides an analysis of some key areas of GMD social policy, relating in particular to refugee relief and propaganda efforts as they related to the creation of a new form of citizenship. There should be a lively debate on whether the Nationalist provision of welfare and mobilization of citizenship was inferior to the Communist one, but it is clear that the two must be actively contrasted with each other, rather than being treated in isolation. Similarly, the economic history of the period also demands reassessment. The economic disaster of the late wartime period, marked by hyperinflation and black marketeering, has long been known, and the fact that it coincided with the most important period of Allied military presence in China meant that it has been highly visible in most accounts of the period. However, the earlier period of the war (prior to Pearl Harbor, at least until 1940) marked a much more promising period of economic retrenchment, with abundant harvests keeping food supplies reasonably plentiful and prices low.[9] Felix Boecking's paper restores economic rationality

[8] Eastman, L. (1974). *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[9] van de Ven, H. (2003). *War and Nationalism in Modern China, 1925–1945*, pp. 258–63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to the GMD. Du Yuesheng, the gangster who knew from experience that all governments were cash-hungry, proclaimed as early as 1937 that 'modern war is economic war, and as long as the economy is not exhausted, the war can be maintained and its conclusion foreseen'.[10] Boecking demonstrates that the incompetence of the GMD in administering 'Free' China during the early 1940s was significantly due to their own shortcomings, but also attributable to the loss of customs duties. Indeed, the 'socialist' state building tactics to which the Nationalists resorted (as a result of their loss of the Maritime Customs Bureau's lucrative control over ports such as Shanghai) made them not dissimilar to their bitter rivals in Manchukuo, where 'during the execution of wartime mobilization, currency was inflated, causing toxic price expansion, so that the maintenance of low commodity prices required total and thorough economic control'—or, indeed, similar to wartime Japan itself.[11] The economic chaos that engulfed China in the war years remains undeniable, yet initial successes are also clear, and the eventual collapse of the regime's tariff policy is attributed in significant part to factors outside the government's control, such as the increasing geographical isolation of the authorities in the temporary wartime capital at Chongqing.

In addition to rethinking the period's economic history, a revisionist view of GMD policies on identity becomes key to the wartime years. The Guomindang's vision of wartime modernity, like that of its founder Sun Yat-sen, was based on an idea of citizenship that drew on combining different ethnic groupings into a new form of civic identity. A new imaginary of the Chinese geobody was created by the forced migration west: Andres Rodriguez's paper here shows the way in which the GMD sought to use its involuntary move

[10] Du Yuesheng funded early GMD state-building efforts, particularly in policing and intelligence, through a government-approved domination of Shanghai's opium market. See Wakeman, F. (2003). *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, p. 82; Du Yuesheng, 'Choumou gongzuo gailun', in Shanghai-shi dang'anguan. (1990). *Shanghai-shi gejie kangdi houyuanhui* (*Relief associations in Shanghai resisting the enemy*) (Shanghai-shi dang'anguan chuban, 1990), p. 516.

[11] 'Furumi Atsushi (Guhai Zhong) zhi bigong' (4 July, 1954) in Zhongyang dang'anguan *et al*. (1991). *Riben diguozhuyi qinhua dang'an ziliao xuanbian: 14, Dongbei jingji caituo* (*Selected documents on the Japanese imperialist invasion of China: 14, The Plundering of the Northeastern economy*) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1991), p. 763. The author of the memorandum was a mid-level finance bureaucrat in Manchukuo's government; Barnhart, M. (1987). *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, especially pp. 150–152.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to an unfamiliar part of the country to rethink ideas of national identity. In addition to reconstructing the GMD's efforts on behalf of national defence, Rodriguez reminds us that not all of those who worked on behalf of the Party shared the same opinions on topics such as national reconstruction or even the role of non-Han ethnic groups in the Chinese resistance effort. For example, his research uncovers a plethora of Chinese government-sponsored ethnographers who eschewed the facile discourse of assimilation in favour of a multi-ethnic anti-imperialist front. These findings are not insignificant, considering the tenor of wartime GMD military reports from the borderlands:

> All people within the borders of the Chinese Republic are equal. . .and must both fulfil their duties to the nation and respect the nation's laws. This is the holy task of national citizens. . .The Yi people of today murder, steal, and pillage cities exactly like traitorous armies (*weijun*). . ..[12]

Military reports on the Yi 'barbarians' stated that they had 'no government and do not respect law, no organization, and are illiterate, but are savage and fearless fighters that are not easy to exterminate', and that the 'subjugation' of the Yi borderlands could take 'hundreds of years like Xinjiang'. Nevertheless, even within the military community, GMD operatives stressed that any training cadre who goes to these borderlands must 'understand Yi work and language', defying crude assimilationist logic.[13] Rodriguez's findings regarding divisions within the GMD concerning the mobilization of the borderlands are clearly part of an important debate about the diversity of political thought amongst members of the government of the time.[14]

Furthermore, by examining the public 'spin' of the war effort in China, the contributors take an important step towards understanding why the Nationalist regime has been vilified for most of the post-war period. The GMD frequently 'spoke' to those behind the front lines, through news reports, propaganda, and films. In the process,

[12] Di-2 lishi dang'anguan (No. 2 National Archives, Nanjing): 787/1419/0140: 'Xikang-sheng suiqing wenjian', 1940.4 and 1940.3.12 reports.

[13] Ibid.

[14] For an account of this debate seen from the angle of the Chinese Communist Party, see Liu X. (2003). *Frontier Passages: Ethnopolitics and the Rise of Chinese Communism, 1921–1945*, Stanford University Press, Stanford. On Chiang Kai-shek's view, see Lin, H.-T. (2009). War, Leadership and Ethnopolitics: Chiang Kai-shek and China's frontiers, 1941–1945, *Journal of Contemporary China*, **18:59**, 201–218.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the GMD attempted to have ordinary Chinese identify with both the Party and the nation, equating the two. Indeed, terms such as 'national reconstruction' (*jianguo*), 'national salvation' (*jiuguo*), and 'war of resistance' (*kangzhan*) rarely appear apart from one another in Nationalist wartime discourse. Following closely on the heels of the New Life Movement (*Xin shenghuo yundong*), the GMD state used the war experience to experiment with new social management techniques; these mainly aimed to create a sense of citizenship and responsibility that would survive the war and would help them in post-war nation-building projects (including the growing civil war with the CCP). In newspapers such as *Saodangbao*, descriptions of the bombing of Chongqing shared space with articles on homelessness, advertisements for skin creams, Ford trucks, personal advertisements, and detailed news reports on the war in Europe.[15] This was an internationalized state in the making.

The restoration of the GMD as an active agent in the narrative of the war years in China is change long overdue. After all, the majority of China's territory was in fact under Nationalist, not Communist (or Japanese) influence, during the war years. Yet the result of the change in emphasis is also to give a new vitality to the study of the CCP. For many years, the concentration on the narrative based on Mao's rise to power in Yan'an tended to subsume questions of identity under the category of class and an essentially inward-directed narrative. The restoration of the GMD to the story enables new, comparative questions to be asked. What were the similarities and differences between the social reform policies of the two parties? How far was class an important identity during the war years, and did it trump national and ethnic identity? Even where it is the CCP that remains the focus, the comparisons with the GMD now stand much more centrally in the debate.[16]

The realignment of Chinese domestic politics during the war also took place in a changing international context. Another narrative that has been less visible than it might be in the narrative of

[15] Guojia lishi dang'anguan (National Historical Archive, Taipei, Taiwan): 0019–2: *Saodangbao* (junshi), 1938–1939 (Chongqing). Coverage during the defense of Wuhan, produced in Hankou, is in 0019–3.

[16] See, for example, Lai, S. X. (2011). *Springboard to Victory: Shandong Province and Chinese Communist Military and Political Strength, 1937–1945*, Brill, Leiden, as an example of this more integrated history.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

wartime China is the integration of China into wider global trends that emerged from the circumstances of war. Boecking's paper notes the importance of the Maritime Customs Service, the distinctive Chinese government agency that was staffed largely by foreigners until the 1920s, and which played a key role in the restoration of tariff autonomy for the Guomindang. Matthew Johnson examines the history of the Office of War Information (OWI), whose propaganda efforts are shown not merely as an aspect of wider American policy or intelligence efforts, but rather as part of a transnational effort that provided an alternative narrative to two of the other major political frameworks of the era: first, the Japanese-sponsored idea of a 'pan-Asianism' in which the Japanese empire would be dominant, and then the idea of propaganda as a purely nationalist construct (here the contrasts in Johnson's paper with the very nationalistic GMD efforts detailed at local level in Mitter's paper are notable). The transnational influence of intellectual currents is also important: Rodriguez's paper suggests that global social scientific methodology fed into existing indigenous discourses of identity. All these transnational flows, fed by the war, stand alongside the other internationalisms that shape the period. On the CCP side, the links with Moscow have become more prominent in our understanding of the wartime period.[17] In addition, the Wang Jingwei regime was also aware of its placing as part of a wider set of negotiations between Axis and Allies: Zhou Fohai, a minister in Wang's government throughout its whole life, frequently found himself reflecting on the comparisons between his own experience in Nanjing and events in Vichy France or occupied Europe.[18] He had signed up to a different sort of internationalism; the 'pan-Asian' vision offered by Japan turned out to be hollow, but that should not obscure its attractiveness to those (such as Chinese nationalists like Wang Jingwei) who wished to find an alternative to the idea that internationalisation necessarily meant westernisation. Debates about modernization also drew on internationally-driven discourses about welfare and the role of the state in providing for its citizens.

[17] Sheng, M. (1997). *Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, pp. 31–56.

[18] Cai Dejin. (1986). *Zhou Fohai riji* [The diary of Zhou Fohai], Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, Beijing, especially entries for 1944–1945.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Memory

A reoriented history of the war itself also provides the space for a reinterpretation of memory of the war. Navigating the space between remembrance, on one extreme, and the manipulation of representation, on the other, without resorting to a post-modernist equation of the two, requires a thorough understanding of how narratives of experience and remembrance are constructed. Discussing Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah*, Dominick LaCapra noted the importance of the right of the traumatized to *reject* remembrance. Any *forced* attempt to revisit the past risks further traumatization or, perhaps worse yet, manipulation of subject and memory by those who would pry the past from the minds of the afflicted. Commenting on this view during his discussion of the problems surrounding war memory in East Asia, Takahashi Tetsuya observed that if the freedom *from* remembering is not observed, 'one does not know the difference between the traumatic past that should be recalled and [acts of] resistance against that memory'.[19] In the case of the devastating total war between China and Japan from 1937 to 1945, 'resistance' and 'memory', as well as manipulation, do not only describe the experience of the war, but are also important tropes from wartime and post-war discourse with which scholars are in continual struggle. It is possible that the 'War of Resistance', as the conflict is frequently named in China, is both a struggle with the enemy, and a war waged on the memories of those who experienced it. The second half of the volume consists of papers that will map the course from narrating wartime experience to expressing post-war memories in China and East Asia more widely.

Control over narrative was a key concern of all the major actors in the war from the outbreak of hostilities, and GMD public descriptions of the war effort were also aimed at their enemies and allies. Contemporary American accounts, particularly those penned by first-hand observers such as Joseph Stilwell, Edgar Snow, John Service, and Agnes Smedley, which have enjoyed numerous reprints, focused on the difficulty of working with Nationalist officials and their apparent incompetence. These accounts were rarely contextualized within the long history of the war itself. For example, by the time Stilwell arrived in Chongqing the best units of the Chinese army had already been

[19] Takahashi T. (2004). *Shōgen no poritikkusu*, Miraisha, Tokyo, p. 52–53.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

largely destroyed, and rapid promotion of junior officers seriously affected efficacy in the ranks. Furthermore, as Johnson shows, many Americans worked with Communists behind enemy lines, not the Nationalists, and, consequently, antagonistic CCP views of their erstwhile 'allies' often filtered back to the United States. Even at the heart of propaganda production, Japanese POWs (who composed anti-war pamphlets on behalf of the GMD) complained about the Party's obstinacy, corruption, and oppressive tactics.[20] Nevertheless, in the GMD's wartime capital, Japanese communist Kaji Wataru was still occasionally permitted to distribute left-wing literature to these captives, despite the collapse of the Second United Front in 1940.[21] It seems unlikely that, during and after the Rectification Campaign, such ideological infiltration would have been permitted in Yan'an.

The first section of this special edition shows how the wartime state generated the experiences and materials that would later become the raw materials of remembrance. Prior to the retreat of the GMD from mainland China, the war was already becoming a subject of nostalgia and remembrance, largely in line with how it was represented during the war. Memories of the Nationalist wartime capital of Chongqing remained relevant in the late 1940s when films, such as 'The Clouds and Moon over an Eight Thousand Mile Road'[22], inspired Cang Kejia to write,

> Ah, I can see you now, the centre of resistance, the wartime capital...Watching this film, as if I were waiting for an old dream to re-heat on the stove, my thoughts went back to my war buddies and all of the terrible events of the past, and, just as when I wrote this article, deep feelings were aroused like waves in a powerful storm.[23]

[20] Ritsumeikan kokusai heiwa shiryōkan (Kaji Wataru): 'Uchimura Akira', 'Nikki', 1943.11.29, 12.1.

[21] See Kikuchi Kazutaka interview with former GMD POW Matsuhara Kenji, in Kikuchi (2003). Nihon Hansen heishi to Nicchū sensō: Jūkei Kokumin seifu chiiki no hokuryo shūyōjo to kanren sasete [Japanese Veterans against the Second Sino-Japanese War: On the Chongqing GMD Government's POW Camps], Ocha no mizu shobō, Tokyo, p. 378. Kikuchi's interviews reveal the extent to which United States intelligence officers had penetrated Chinese rear areas, with 'Nisei' (second generation Japanese Americans) interrogators turning up in some of the most remote positions where Japanese prisoners were held by Chinese forces.

[22] Baqianlilu yun he yue, 1947.

[23] Cang Kejia (2002). Cong yinmu kandao le wo ziji [Seeing Oneself in the Cinema] in *Wenhuibao* (10 February 1947) reprinted in Ding, Y. ed. (2002). Bainian Zhongguo dianying lilun wenxuan [Texts and Theory on One Hundred Years of Chinese Cinema], v. 1, Wenhua yishu chubanshe, Beijing, pp. 300–301.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Collectively, the essays in this section address the way in which the wartime generation has attempted, with both success and failure, to communicate its experiences to post-war audiences.

An important first step in analysing this process is to determine what *changed* from wartime representations of battle to those of the post-war. Parks M. Coble begins by explaining how narratives that would have been familiar during the war in China were then used (and misused) in the ongoing project of constructing a memory of that war. Coble reminds readers that events contemporary audiences strongly associate with the war, such as the Nanjing Massacre, were not strongly emphasized during the war itself.[24] Conversely, conflicts considered monumental at the time, such as the battle for Wuhan[25] or aerial bombardment of major Chinese cities, seem less important to post-war audiences—or are almost completely unknown. Indeed, the GMD's mobilizational discourse focused heavily on heroic *sacrifice*:

> The spirit of all of our society's citizens is not sufficiently high, and every man and woman in China has yet to realize that they are but one cell in this battle. . .they have not yet all felt an omnipresent sense of tension, to sacrifice everything and resolve to fight to the death. That is to say, our national spiritual mobilisation has not yet achieved the greatest requirement of warfare that lies before us.[26]

The Nationalist government promoted publications that portrayed national forces in a heroic, not victimized, light. Still, Chinese propaganda aimed at soldiers often emphasized the 'atrocities' (*baoxing*) committed by the Japanese army against Chinese civilians. One GMD Division Commander recorded the appearance of 'experts' (*jishu renyuan*) from the central government amongst his troop, scrambling to document 'the various atrocities of the invading enemy that drive both man and heaven into fury' (*ling ren tian gong fen*).[27] Chinese soldiers often recorded these 'atrocities' in their diaries.

[24] Nanjing's rise to prominence in post-war memory is covered at length by Yoshida T. (2006). *The Making of the 'Rape of Nanking': History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States*, Oxford University Press, Oxford. See especially Chapter 2, where he discusses Nanjing's comparative lack of centrality during the war itself.

[25] See MacKinnon, *Wuhan 1938*.

[26] Quanmin zhoukan shelun: zenme yang dadao quanguo guomin jingshen zongdongyuan [Social Theory for the People's Weekly: How We Should Mobilise All of the People of the Nation] from Quanmin zhoukan [People's Weekly], **1:15** (19 March, 1938), in Zhou Tiandu, ed. (2006). Jiuguohui shiliaoji [Documents of the National Salvation Society], Zhongyang bianze chubanshe, Beijing, p. 507.

[27] Di-2 lishi dang'anguan (Nanjing): 787/15386: Author Unknown, 'Di-64-shi Qinan yidai zhenzhong riji', 1937.8.14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nevertheless, publications aimed at rear areas, especially the big dailies such as *Dagongbao*, rather sought to give the people heroes whom they might feel inspired to support. The extraordinary blow that the Nationalists suffered at the hands of the Japanese invasion force was thus under-emphasized, making later faults in GMD administration difficult to comprehend.

Of course, this may only be confusing to post-war audiences, not the soldiers themselves. Aaron William Moore introduces the writings of veterans in Taiwan, China, and Japan, analysing the reasons behind the considerable consistency in their accounts, and why these stories have factored into post-war memory narratives in such a seemingly insignificant way. By stressing the importance of wartime experience in the formation of their language, Moore explains why veterans have been inconvenient spokesmen for post-war political campaigns. Neil Diamant shows another side to why veterans have been silent in mainland China: the Communist government's containment of frustrated war 'heroes' has necessitated a structural 'silencing' at the most basic level. Significant in this process has been the de-organization of soldiers and the absence of veterans' groups in Communist China—a comparatively strange phenomenon that Diamant explains. James Reilly also describes why such organizations might be threatening to the state in mainland China, even in the present. Rather than appeal to simple models of the state and Chinese nationalism—a tap that can be turned on and off by puppet masters in Beijing—Reilly shows how risky runaway patriotism can be for even an authoritarian government, thus helping us to understand why the central government deals with the wartime generation and historical memory very carefully.

What comes through especially clearly is that the CCP control of the mainland had, for many years, prevented the vast majority of Chinese from narrating their experiences during the war. Although publications in Taiwan also suffered from an acrimonious political environment that influenced publishing, the exiled Nationalist regime had ample opportunities to discuss their wartime experience. By contrast, as Diamant shows, the CCP was constantly mobilizing for war against multiple potential foes, especially the United States. The war against Japan, in which the CCP played a lesser role than the GMD, was not to be the focus of discourse, and most publishers in China understood this. Furthermore, veterans always posed a risk to the Communist state, possessing both military knowledge and powerful bonds that ultimately lay outside of the Party itself. Most

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

importantly, because of the enmity that continued to exist between the CCP and the GMD, most veterans of the war (who fought with the Nationalists) were concerned about being branded 'Rightists', 'counter-revolutionaries', or other dangerous political epithets in Communist China. Moore shows that the non-Communist members of the wartime generation were only given a significant voice in memorial publications by the mid-1980s, by which time veterans of the war were in their elder years, with failing memories and decades of silence in between.

Post-war Chinese engagement with the wartime generation was not only hamstrung by decades of domestic political instability, failing personal memories, and the state's mistreatment of veterans, but also by the structure of discourse through which investigations of the generation's experience was conducted. In Taiwan, the Chinese Nationalist regime was in the process of losing its political credibility at the hands of pre-1949 residents of the island, who were weary of hearing about the war on the mainland. More importantly, remembrance in the Chinese diaspora was arguably distorted by efforts in Japan, and by Japanese reporters. Because of reporters such as Honda Katsuichi and others, well-intended efforts to publicize the 1937–1938 massacre in Nanjing (one of many) transformed into political firestorms that spilled over into China, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora, transferring attention from the historical record in favour of singular events and victim narratives.

Conclusion

For a conflict that was by definition global, the history of World War II has been surprisingly fragmented. The Cold War meant that many of the major belligerent powers tended to reflect their own histories, or those of their regions, in their post-war narratives: Britain told a story about fighting 'alone', while France created a national myth that glorified the resistance and made collaboration into an anomaly. China, meanwhile, elided its wartime experience into the Yan'an narrative and closed off other periods for discussion. New stories did emerge in the post-Cold War era; it was then, for instance, that the massive Soviet contribution to the European theatre of the war was brought centrally into the western narrative. Similarly, the significance of China's war against Japan for global as well as national and regional histories has really only been made central to the wider

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press

historiography of the world war since the 1990s, and is still a work in progress.

This special issue therefore offers a long view of the evolution of our memory of the war in China; importantly, it does not artificially separate this process of memory formation from wartime experience. The connections between experience and memory, state and society, and media and language are especially important now that the wartime generation is disappearing. How they experienced those times—both through combat and representations of combat, as well as the post-war aftermath—is critical to grasping how those born after these events learn about them. By combining historical and political science methodology, these papers identify key factors in past discourse, as well as state and society that shape the very language used to narrate war experience for us in the present.

Virginia Woolf remarked that she kept a diary to keep her memories from disappearing into the dark abyss of oblivion. In this volume, historians and political scientists have sought out, if not 'justice', then at least 'evidence' of how we have recorded and remembered the most destructive war of the last century, in part as a contribution to defence *against* forgetting. Is this wise? Marc Augé has often argued against the sanctity of memory, and especially against those who would 'seek justice' by enforcing a confrontation with the past.[28] Surely, this will continue to be a painful process, but whose feelings are protected by covering our eyes with tales of heroism and national unity—or, worse still, silence and 'oblivion'? The priests of Yasukuni Shrine defend the 'bereaved' families of the war-dead by layers of ritualized obfuscation, thereby assuaging pain with silence, but others, including veterans, continue to combat oblivion. Meanwhile the war itself continues to have purchase in the contemporary politics of the People's Republic of China, and the continuing tension between the China and Japan of the past and the present shows no signs of fading. Perhaps such painful remembrance is the last sacrifice demanded by the war.

[28] Auge, M. (2004). *Oblivion*, trans. De Jager, M.. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X10000387 Published online by Cambridge University Press