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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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Wars as Dividing Lines? Rethinking the Significance of the Sino-Japanese War in Twentieth Century China

Abstract Historical periodization frequently takes wars as turning points—as ruptures that signify the end or beginning of an era. At the same time, front lines have often been taken as boundaries that contain the activities of one side or the other. Thus, discontinuity and disjuncture rather than continuity and fluidity have often been the points of emphasis among historians who have taken war events as turning points, or who have seen lines of combat as impermeable. A new focus on the Sino-Japanese War period has begun to reveal ways in which that moment served not as an interruption but as a part of longer term processes of change and development that characterized China's mid-twentieth century. It also permits us to gain a deeper understanding of the fluidity of human movement and socio-economic interaction that frequently crossed both political and military boundaries and to think about similarities, linkages, and differences between various Chinese spaces. The aim of this paper is to consider ways in which the new generation of scholarship on the Sino-Japanese War period offers new ways of thinking about continuity, change, similarity and difference across both temporal and physical boundaries that have served as the parameters for much of the earlier scholarship on the period. To this end, the paper examines recent literature on the Sino-Japanese War period, as well as literature that crosses that period, to examine ways in which this historiography has challenged conventional periodizations and political and geographical delineations.

Keywords Sino-Japanese War, western China, collaboration, development, impact of war

After spending decades in the shadow of the Chinese Civil War, the Sino-Japanese War is finally having its day as, over the past decade or two, scholars have begun to

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pay attention to the social, cultural, economic, and political features of the period between 1931 and 1945. As scholars bring this period out of its comparative obscurity, they provide insight that can permit us to disentangle it from narratives that treat it primarily as an anomalous interruption of ordinary historical processes. To a large extent, the war has been painted as an interruption to internal processes that was caused by an external force. As Diana Lary has observed, "The war was a long and painful hiatus in the processes of change, many of which were distorted and even aborted by the war."[1] In other words, the war disrupted everything and brought long-term processes of change to a standstill. And for many people and institutions, this was undoubtedly true. But surely some processes of change carried on in spite of (or maybe even because of) the war, and the lives of some Chinese must have been comparatively untouched by war. Moreover, the war provided a range of opportunities to both individuals and institutions. For example, it offered economic opportunity for a range of entrepreneurs in both inland and occupied China just as it provide opportunities for actors such as the Communist Party. Thinking of the war as a hiatus, while true in certain respects, may lead us to overlook the many ways in which Chinese society, economy and politics did carry on or adapt to changing circumstances during the wartime period. Understanding the full scope of interruption, change and continuity in wartime China requires that we think about both time and space differently than conventional narratives of modern China have done.

This paper traces some of the ways in which recent English-language scholarship has begun to challenge some of the conventional periodizations, geographical delineations, and political narratives that have characterized our understanding of the wartime period and its place in the larger narrative of modern Chinese history. It contends that ultimately, by looking comparatively at social and economic activities, interactions, and experiences across China during the war period, and by examining how these activities, interactions and experiences both were and were not part of the longer continuum of modern Chinese history, we will have a fuller and richer picture of modern China that enables a more thorough understanding of complex processes of change.

Narratives of modern China have been heavily shaped by the narrators' political views and personal experiences. Even when scholars have striven for objectivity, they have been challenged by the biases of their sources. Wars and political struggles bring out strong feelings that often find their way into the sources. This is particularly the case for the Sino-Japanese War—even commonly used names of which (e.g., War of Resistance Against Japan) are politicized. As Parks Coble observed in his recent volume, *China's War Reporters*, "the particular way that

[1] Diana Lary, "Review," 423.

war memory has developed has distorted historical scholarship"[2] by focusing great attention on particular aspects of the war, such as atrocity, and overlooking many other dimensions of the war itself and of life in wartime China.[3]

Many of the early war narratives—the ones that defined how Westerners would understand and write about the war for years to come—were written by participant observers, including Chinese and American civil servants, military figures, academics, journalists, and social activists. Chinese wartime narrators were, for the most part, coastal refugees who had fled west in the late 1930s. Western wartime narrators tended to be in China on behalf of a government or engaged in some sort of social activist project. Most Westerners wrote disparagingly of the Nationalists, and many wrote excitedly about the Communists. Most Chinese wrote passionately about the strength and endurance of the Chinese people and looked forward to a bright future when the Japanese would be cast off. Many of these English-language wartime narratives, even the ones that were not overtly propagandistic, painted the Sino-Japanese War as an interlude, an interruption of a set of processes of political and economic modernization that would be resumed at the end of the war.[4]

Aside from the writings of participant observers, for a long time there simply was not much English language historiography on the war, and much of what was written focused on diplomacy and economics.[5] For many years, the war, and wartime Chinese experiences, were largely forgotten by Western scholars who were, on the whole, more interested in explaining the rise of the Chinese Communist Party and who, for the most part, did not seek those explanations in the Sino-Japanese War.[6] As Steven Levine wrote in the introduction to the 1992

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[2] Parks M. Coble, *China's War Reporters: The Legacy of Resistance against Japan*, 5.

[3] Ibid.

[4] See, for example, George Edward Taylor, *The Struggle for North China*; Agnes Smedley, *Battle Hymn of China*; Yutang Lin, *Between Tears and Laughter*; Yutang Lin, *The Vigil of a Nation*; Robert Payne, *Chungking Diary*; Robert Payne, *Forever China*; Theodore White, *Thunder Out of China*.

[5] Early scholarly works include Arthur N. Young, *China's Wartime Finance and Inflation, 1937–1945*; Barbara Tuchman, *Stillwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–1945*; John Hunter Boyle, *China and Japan at War: The Politics of Collaboration*; Wiliam L. Tung, *V. K. Wellington Koo and China's Wartime Diplomacy*; Paul K. T. Sih, *Nationalist China During the Sino-Japanese War*.

[6] Exceptions include Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power: The Emergence of Revolutionary China*; Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Nationalist China at War: Military Defeats and Political Collapse, 1937–45*; and Lloyd Eastman, *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949*.

volume *China's Bitter Victory*, "Our century has been so rich in wars, it is little wonder that memories of the Sino-Japanese War of 1931–45 have long since faded from the consciousness of all but the two peoples directly involved in the conflict."[7] Levine and his co-editors and authors sought to fill this lacuna in Western scholarship, arguing that the Sino-Japanese War deserved scholarly attention because of its significance within the context of the larger World War, and its impact on domestic Chinese politics and economy.

Levine's contention that the Sino-Japanese War was important to the outcome of the later Chinese Civil War was certainly not new. Chalmers Johnson had started scholars down that path with his 1962 volume *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power*. Johnson's work led other scholars to take a critical look at the activities of both the CCP and the KMT, spawning a body of literature that examined the Sino-Japanese War as an opportunity for Communist mobilization.[8] In other respects, however, the narrative tropes that had emerged in the writings of participant reporters during and immediately after the Sino-Japanese War continued to shape the way scholars wove the wartime period into their analysis of China's mid-century transformations.

Levine's volume called on scholars to fill that historiographical gap and argued for the construction of a holistic portrait of wartime China. The essays in the volume engaged with a number of important questions about the changing role of the state, the impact of the war on society, the legacies of the war, Chinese foreign relations and periodization of modern Chinese history. Twenty-five years later, we are still trying to answer these questions and others, and although we now know much more than we did, we are still grappling with the problems of fitting this knowledge into a larger narrative and figuring out what that narrative should be.

The 1990s were characterized by a new wave of literature on the war period that focused on interactions between China and Japan, and yielded some high profile works on Japanese atrocities. Studies such as Iris Chang's *Rape of Nanking* brought to English language readers much of the simmering anger towards the Japanese that had been kept alive in China in the years since the war and, combined with other work on Japanese atrocities such as Yuki Tanaka's *Hidden Horrors* and George Hick's *The Comfort Women*, reinvigorated old narratives by

[7] Steven I. Levine, "Introduction," *China's Bitter Victory*, xvii.

[8] Peter Schran, *Guerilla Economy: The Development of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region, 1937–1945*; Pauline Keating, *Two Revolutions: Village Reconstruction and the Cooperative Movement in Northern Shaanxi, 1932–1945*; Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937–1945*; Odoric Wou, *Mobilizing the Masses: Building Revolution in Henan*; Feng Chongyi and David S. G. Goodman, eds., *North China at War, 1937–1945*; etc.

bolstering them with new information.[9] Of greater significance to scholars attempting to build a holistic picture of twentieth century China were the numerous studies on collaboration that began to come out during the 1990s.

Over the past two decades, as archival sources have become available and as a growing number of scholars have become interested in the wartime period, first a trickle and more recently a rapidly growing body of scholarship has investigated other dimensions of the wartime experience and shifted the focus away from high politics, military action, international relations and atrocity. This newer scholarship has explored everything from education and healthcare to labor, economic development, and institution building in both occupied and free regions of China. Although we are still far from having a comprehensive picture of China during the war, we are getting closer. Whereas earlier scholarship that centered on the domestic and international politics of the war tended to solidify the dominant narratives of modern Chinese history, this expansion of our knowledge of wartime China can permit us to question old narratives and to challenge old ways of thinking about the importance of the temporal and spatial markers of war to the longer processes of Chinese history. Should the war be understood as a hiatus? And what sort of picture do we get if we attempt to include all parts of China?

Relatively few older studies looked at how the wartime period affected change or continuity over time except in ways that solidified narratives regarding the failings of the Kuomintang (KMT), new strategies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), or savagery of the Japanese. And only recently have scholars begun to consider the wartime period as a moment when things other than war or political change happened. It is clear that the more we know about the lives of people during the wartime period, the more we might see it as a period of continuity, and the more likely we are to view the political and social changes and movements that took place after the war as having come out of the war. In an effort to present the war as a starting point and a defining moment that affected later developments, Diana Lary, for example, argues in *The Chinese People at War* that the Sino-Japanese War left a lasting impact on China's social fabric, devastating lives and creating the conditions for the success of the Chinese Communists.[10] If we are to look at the continuum of the 20th century, then this approach makes sense. What happened in the wartime period that shaped what followed?

We can also look at the wartime as an end point, as the culmination of processes

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[9] Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*; George L. Hicks, *The Comfort Women: Japan's Brutal Regime of Enforced Prostitution in the Second World War*; Yuki Tanaka, *Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes in World War II*.

[10] Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945*, 12–13, 208–11.

that started at some earlier point, but that did not necessarily continue following the war, or as a starting point for processes that were not well underway prior to the war's outbreak. My own current (not yet published) research on tong oil, for example, shows how disruptive the war was both to the tong oil market and to tong tree cultivation practices in spite of the fact that the war generated a new domestic market for tong oil as a petroleum substitute. That market did not develop enough during the war, and was no longer necessary after the war, and foreign markets also had considerably diminished demand in the postwar era. As a consequence, what had been China's largest pre-war export never revived after the war. If the war interrupted a set of processes, however, it also spawned a new set of processes. Development of China's petroleum reserves, for example, was just beginning during the war, and although Chinese petroleum only minimally helped the overall war effort, these wartime development efforts formed the foundation, in terms of both specific oil wells and knowledge and skills gained through the process, upon which China's postwar petroleum industry was built.

We can also view the war as a moment on a longer continuum. This is becoming especially apparent as scholars explore new areas such as labor, agricultural practice, medicine, industry, commodities and environment. Joshua Howard's *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenals, 1937–1953*, for example, shows that the CCP continued to recruit support among factory workers during the war, and in so doing he disrupts the conventional narrative that emphasizes the CCP's shift away from mobilizing the industrial working class after 1927 in favor of recruiting almost exclusively among the peasants. His work on the wartime period clearly shows a line of continuity from the 1920s through to the 1950s that complicates our understanding of the evolution of CCP mobilization strategies. Seung-Joon Lee's article on diet also illustrates this approach, arguing that state-led dietary reform campaigns of the war era were not simply products of the wartime moment, but resulted instead from popular urban concerns about health and interest in cooking that had been growing since the 1920s. Thomas Mullaney's recent article on the Sino-Japanese typewriter looks at the process through which Japanese companies, which began to penetrate the Chinese typewriter market in the 1920s, came to dominate that market during the Sino-Japanese War.[11] Studies like these illuminate important questions about the role of the war in shaping ongoing processes: What processes that were already underway came to a head or changed direction during/because of the war? What things that might not otherwise have happened were facilitated by the war? What things simply ended

[11] Joshua Howard, *Workers at War: Labor in China's Arsenals, 1937–1953*; Seung-Joon Lee, "The Patriot's Scientific Diet: Nutrition Science and Dietary Reform Campaigns in China, 1910s–1950s"; Thomas S. Mullaney, "Controlling the Kanjisphere: The Rise of the Japanese Typewriter and the Birth of CJK."

during the war and did not come back? In what ways were things that happened during the wartime period simply continuations of processes that were already underway? For decades, scholars working on the rise of the Communist Party have explored one way in which the war created opportunity, but what else did it catalyze, and to what extent were those changes permanent, or at least lasting?

Comparatively few scholars have investigated, for example, the massive development efforts undertaken by the KMT in inland China during the war or the extent to which the CCP (or, for that matter, even the KMT) built on those institutional, industrial, agricultural and/or infrastructural foundations. Early work on this includes William Kirby's article on "Continuity and Change in Modern China," in which he argues that there was "significant policy and personnel continuity" between the KMT and the CCP eras; Joseph Esherick similarly observed that there were "areas where the Guomindang paved the way for the Communists, where the latter built on the foundations laid by the former."[12]

More recently, Morris Bian has taken the lead in developing this field, arguing that the KMT's wartime efforts to rationalize government planning formed a foundation for the later emphasis on central planning and planned economies that characterized both the KMT and the CCP after 1949.[13] Bian has also argued that the transformations in regional state enterprise in Guizhou during and after the war show that "the impact of the Chinese Revolution on Guizhou's regional economic institutions was far less revolutionary than what we have been led to believe."[14] Whereas Bian's work looks for continuity (and change) within institutions across time, Judd Kinzley finds continuity in a very different way. He looks comparatively at two moments, and sees continuity in government reactions to external crises. Kinzley's investigation of the Sichuan village Panzhihua's development from a village into a steel producing area reveals that external crises (the Sino-Japanese War in the 1930s, and tensions with the USSR and the US in the 1960s) were the driving force behind the economic development policies of two different governments at two different moments. Wars with external actors catalyzed the development of Panzhihua's steel industry and did so in similar ways, even under two very different political systems. Without these crises, would

[12] William C. Kirby, "Continuity and Change in Modern China: Economic Planning on the Mainland and on Taiwan, 1943–1958," 123; Joseph W. Esherick, "Ten Theses on the Chinese Revolution," 48.

[13] Morris L. Bian, "Building State Structure: Guomindang Institutional Rationalization during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945."

[14] Morris L. Bian, "Redefining the Chinese Revolution: The Transformation and Evolution of Guizhou's Regional State Enterprises, 1937–1957," 316.

Panzhihua have developed as it did?[15] By taking a longitudinal approach to examining specific institutions in specific locations, these scholars are able to make claims that extend across conventional temporal breaks and that contribute nuance to our understanding of the longer trajectory of 20th century Chinese history.

Similarly, the idea of taking snapshots of particular moments during the war also seems to have considerable promise as a strategy to move us away from narratives that are built around temporal breaks that we can, of course, see most clearly with hindsight. What insights can we gain from examining the thinking and actions of people who were acting without knowledge of that impending break? Documents about war production and post war planning that were generated by both US and ROC government representatives in the spring, summer and fall of 1945, for example, tell us a great deal about the thinking in that moment, but they also tell us that thinking did not immediately shift in early August 1945 with the Japanese surrender. Even if conditions changed dramatically with the end of the war, it turns out that the mindsets and actions of the planners did not change swiftly to accommodate the changes in real circumstances. In fact, they stayed the course well into the fall of 1945 and possibly beyond. From this example we can observe that the events that we assume must have been major ruptures may not always have been felt or understood at the time in the way in which hindsight has suggested we should see them. Historical snapshots may help us to better contextualize the actions of the people we study.

Timothy Brook, for example, takes a snapshot of the early part of the war in his work on collaboration. His exploration of reactions to and interactions with Japanese agents at the beginning of the war helps us to understand the choices individual actors made in the moment in which they made them. By taking a snapshot approach, and by disconnecting that moment from later narratives that place these actions into a conceptual framework of resistance and collaboration, Brook shows us the pitfalls of expanding studies too far across time. Longer narratives often sacrifice deep understanding of the complexities of a moment in favor of a teleology that is based on moral judgment. As Brook notes of the people he studies, "each choice had to be made, and . . . it was made, through a complex calculation of the benefits and losses that individuals thought they could decipher at the time, before the full consequences of their actions could be known."[16]

Building upon Brook's approach, Esherick and Combs's edited volume, *1943: China at the Crossroads*, also looks at a series of different processes that were occurring in 1943 in order to better understand what may have caused the crises of

[15] Judd C. Kinzley, "Crisis and the Development of China's Southwestern Periphery: The Transformation of Panzhihua, 1936–1969."

[16] Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China*, 245.

1944 that were long blamed on Chiang Kai-shek's inept leadership but that have more recently been understood as having resulted largely from the failures of Stillwell's Burma Campaign. Neither explanation seemed adequate to the book's authors, who argue that "by exploring in detail the events that shaped the national narrative, one discovers a host of individuals making a variety of choices that, if made differently, could well have altered the course of history."[17] Like Brook, the contributors to the Esherick and Combs volume focus on a short moment in time, and in doing so, they are able to gain a different perspective than scholars who have sought to fit their research into a longer narrative.

The growing trend to examine the wartime period as part of a continuum that affected all dimensions of life and economy, rather than simply as an aberration that created vacuums that allowed for political change, is promising. So, too, are new scholarly efforts to expand the narrative by looking at spaces that were previously understudied. Studies that employ new ways of thinking about time and space as they relate to the wartime period have the potential not only to reveal how much more complicated the wartime period was than the old conventional "good and bad" narratives suggest, they may also shed more light on the postwar period. Until recently, most scholarship ignored large swathes of China, failed to consider interaction between different parts of China and didnot look comparatively at different parts of China.

As Kinzley and Bian's studies demonstrate, scholars have indeed begun to break away from some of the territorial boundaries that have confined the study of the Sino-Japanese War period. Aside from studies of major cities or politically significant regions such as Chongqing, Kunming, Shanghai, Nanjing, Notheast China, and Communist controlled parts of the Shaan-Gan-Ning Region, locally based studies that illuminate what life was like during the wartime period have been scarce, though we are beginning to see more. In addition to Bian's examination of Guizhou, and Kinzley's examination of Panzhihua, a number of recent books and articles have explored the war's impact on specific locales, including Wuhan (MacKinnon), Henan (Muscolino), Guilin (Zhu), Prosperity Village in Sichuan (Crook et al.), West Hunan (McCord), Beijing (Ma), and the greater Yangzi River Delta (Brook).[18] These studies, especially when taken

[17] Jeseph W. Esherick and Matthew P. Combs, eds., *1943: China at the Crossroads*, xiii.

[18] Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938*; Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River and beyond, 1938–1950*; Pingchao Zhu, *Wartime Culture in Guilin, 1938–1944: A City at War*; Isabel Brown Crook, *Prosperity's Predicament: Identity, Reform, and Resistance in Rural Wartime China*; Edward A. McCord, "Ethnic Revolt, State-Building and Patriotism in Republican China: The 1937 West Hunan Miao Abolish-Military-Land Resist-Japan Uprising"; Zhao Ma, *Runaway Wives, Urban Crimes, and Survival Tactics in Wartime Beijing, 1937–1949*; Brook, *Collaboration.*

together, help clarify the extraordinary diversity of experience that people across China had during the war.

In particular, a number of recent studies have explored the impact of the war on the land and people of western China. As scholars such as Kinzley, Joseph Lawson, Hsiao-ting Lin, Micah Muscolino and Andres Rodriguez have effectively shown, the Sino-Japanese War fundamentally changed the ways in which Chinese governments and people engaged with the expansive territories of the northwest and southwest.[19] Some of these changes had enduring consequences. These scholars show how the movement of people—refugees, scientists, entrepreneurs, settlers—from east to west during the war had an impact on the land, how it was understood and described, the way it was used, and the structures that governed it. They also show how government sought to make use of these lands and their resources to support a growing population and a war effort. In addition, both Muscolino and Kinzley show that changes wrought during the war, even changes resulting from policies of what would eventually prove to be a failed government, did have an enduring impact.

The removal of both the Communist and Nationalist governments to Western China in the 1930s led both political groups, and the intellectuals and bureaucrats associated with them, to begin thinking about ways of more effectively integrating the regions into the national polity and economy. For example, the war afforded the Nationalist government greater opportunity to exert central control over frontier education and created a greater urgency for the civilizing mission of such projects that had begun before the war began.[20] At the same time, the CCP also expanded its authority and developed methods it would use later through land reform and political reorganization of some of the territories it controlled.[21] As

[19] Hsiao-ting Lin, "Nationalists, Muslim Warlords, and the 'Great Northwestern Development' in Pre-Communist China"; Micah S. Muscolino, "Refugees, Land Reclamation, and Militarized Landscapes in Wartime China: Huanglongshan, Shaanxi, 1937–1945"; Andres Rodriguez, "Building the Nation, Serving the Frontier: Mobilizing and Reconstructing China's Borderlands during the War of Resistance (1937–1945)"; Micah S. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China*; Joseph Lawson, "Unsettled Lands: Labour and Land Cultivation in Western China during the War of Resistance (1937–1945)."

[20] See William Haas, "Qinghai Across Frontiers: State- and Nation-Building under the Ma Family, 1911–1949," chap. 5. Haas does not actually make an argument about the role of the war in the evolution of education in Qinghai, but the evidence he presents clearly shows that the central government's activities and influence in the region increased markedly after 1938 and particularly in the early 1940s.

[21] David S. G. Goodman, "Reinterpreting the Sino-Japanese War: 1939–1940, Peasant Mobilization and the Road to the PRC."

Kinzley argues in his dissertation on resource development and national integration of Xinjiang, the outbreak of war "forced the so-called 'Xinjiang problem' to the top of Republican leaders' to do lists," leading to new and more concerted efforts at economic and political integration of Xinjiang into the ROC. The wartime, he argues, "transformed Xinjiang forever," establishing patterns of resource extraction and heavy industry that remain in place to this day.[22] So far, though, comparatively little work has been done to uncover the many lines of continuity.

In addition to these explorations of the impact of the war on previously lesser-studied territories, a number of more recent studies have examined the movement of people across regions. Keith Schoppa's excellent study of the refugee experience examines the movement of both people and goods across the lines of war.[23] MacKinnon, in *Wuhan, 1938*, looks at cultural change in Wuhan that resulted from the influx of refugees and Zhu's volume does something similar for Guilin. Muscolino explores the environmental and human consequences of a government land reclamation project that utilized refugee labor in Shaanxi. These studies all remind us of the human movements that characterized the wartime period but provide us with more insight into the refugee experience than was offered by narratives of heroic treks that characterized much of the earlier literature on the topic. Less well studied are the flow of people, albeit surely more of a trickle than a flow, in the other direction—from west to east—and the flows of goods and communications back and forth across front lines that are evident in the primary sources.

A good deal of the early literature (and as we have just seen, some of the more recent literature) on the period followed the westward migration and focused on the stories of individuals who chose to resist (or escape) the Japanese from the comparative safety of inland China. There is also, of course, a sizable literature about war atrocity that provides accounts of people who were victimized by the Japanese military. Considerably fewer scholars have looked at the lives of more ordinary people who stayed put during the war and who did not have extraordinary experiences. Fu, Yeh, Henriot, Brook, Mitter, Coble, Barrett, Shyu and Taylor all look at the people who stayed put during the war, many of whom collaborated to some degree or another with the Japanese. These more recent texts have sought to add some nuance to our understanding of collaboration, and to move us away from the stark judgmentalism that characterized many earlier narratives. Brook, in particular, aimed to disrupt the national resistance narrative that dominated the historiography on the war and to "show that the occupation experience is as much a part of China's history during the years 1937 to 1945 as the

[22] Kinzley, "Staking Claims to China's Borderlands: Oil, Ores and State-building in Xinjiang Province, 1893–1964," 189–90.

[23] R. Keith Schoppa, *In a Sea of Bitterness: Refugees during the Sino-Japanese War*.

more familiar story of resistance."[24] Aside from Mitter's volume on Notheast China, however, most of these texts focus on the lower Yangzi River delta and thus provide only part of the regional picture. Of considerable value would be a broadly comparative volume that explores the dimensions of collaboration across a set of different regions.

That said, Brook's volume does offer a comparative perspective by using a series of county-level case studies from across the Yangzi Delta. His multi-county study reveals that for the Yangzi Delta region, at any rate, "Although pacification got worked out in ways contingent on the particularities of the place, the process tended to be the same everywhere." In every place that Brook investigated, some segment of the local elite opted to engage with the new Japanese authorities.[25] While Brook identifies commonality of human experience across the counties that he studies, the few other examples of cross-regional scholarship on the wartime period come to a different conclusion. The essays in the Esherick and Combs volume *1943: China at the Crossroads*, look at a set of regions that are quite distant from each other, including such places as Hong Kong, Hunan, Chongqing and Xinjiang and make it clear that the experiences of people in wartime China varied dramatically depending on where they were.

Perhaps the best example so far of a comparative regions perspective can be found in MacKinnon, Lary and Vogel's edited volume, *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945*. By including scholarly investigations of the impact of the war on numerous regions, the volume makes very clear that there was no shared experience of the war across all regions or segments of Chinese society. The war played out differently in different places that had diverse experiences with Japanese occupiers, Chinese government(s), and military engagement.[26] These comparative studies, along with works on individual regions, when taken as a whole, begin to give us a richer sense of the diversity of experience across China. But we would be

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[24] Brook, *Collaboration*, 31. See also, Poshek Fu, *Passivity, Resistance, and Collaboration: Intellectual Choices in Occupied Shanghai, 1937–1945*; Wen-hsin Yeh, ed., *Wartime Shanghai*; Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Collaboration, and Resistance in Modern China*; David P. Barrett and Lawrence N. Shyu, *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932–1945: The Limits of Accommodation*; Parks M. Coble, *Chinese Capitalists in Japan's New Order: The Occupied Lower Yangzi, 1937–1945*; Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds., *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation*; Jeremy E. Taylor, "Cartoons and Collaboration in Wartime China: The Mobilization of Chinese Cartoonists under Japanese Occupation."

[25] Brook, *Collaboration*, 30.

[26] Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945.*

well served by more works that look at more than one region comparatively and also by more works on less studied areas such as the northwest, unoccupied southeastern areas such as Fujian and Jiangxi, and the inland and southern occupied areas.

Many of the sources that historians, particularly those working on national political history, use were produced by people for whom the war was indeed a massive and painful interruption, one that caused them to completely uproot their lives. Coastal bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, scholars, artists, and other kinds of refugees were the primary narrators of the war, and their written products—papers, notes, memoirs, etc.—are the sources upon which we have based our own narratives. The changes in their lives—their movements, economic and social activities, residence in new places—also interrupted, or at least changed, the lives of the many people who already lived in the regions to which refugees migrated, but to date there has been comparatively little scholarship that captures the experiences and perspectives of native residents of Western China. We still do not have adequate answers to the following questions: Did everyone experience the war as an interruption? What remained the same? And, for those who experienced the war as an interruption, was it *just* an interruption, or did they simply perceive it as such even though the changes it wrought were actually permanent?

As noted above, historians working on collaboration and other topics in occupied areas have begun to fill in some of the blanks by uncovering other sources that tell us about economy and society under Japanese occupation and about ways in which the many millions of people who did not make the trek West were affected by the war, but there is still much that we could learn about occupied China. It seems a bit more challenging to find sources that reveal to us (except through the eyes of outside observers[27]) the concerns and interests of native residents of "free China," though there is some scholarship along these lines such as Danke Li's *Echoes of Chongqing, Women in Wartime China* and Joshua Howard's recent article on women workers in Chongqing Cotton Mills.[28] For the most part, however, scholarship on society and culture in unoccupied areas has focused either on refugee society and culture—John Israel's *Lianda*, Pingchao

[27] There are many, many scholarly studies, memoirs, and government reports produced during the war that provide information about the land and people of western China, but that were almost all produced by refugee or foreign reporters, bureaucrats, and social scientists. Disentangling the voices and experiences of the "natives" from the perspectives and interpretations of the observers can be a challenge.

[28] Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China*; Joshua Howard, "The Politicization of Women Worker at War: Labour in Chongqing's Cotton Mills during the Sino-Japanese War."

Zhu's *Wartime Culture in Guilin*, and Steven MacKinnon's *Wuhan 1938*—or on the observations that refugees made of the new environment they found themselves in.[29] Even studies on borderlands, such as Andres Rodriguez's "Building the Nation, Serving the Frontier," which examines efforts to reconstruct the Tibetan borderlands during the war, are based on Chinese sources because so many Chinese scholars and bureaucrats were engaged in exploration and cataloguing the borderlands during the wartime period. Erik Mueggler's *Paper Road*, which traces the activities of both Western and Yunnanese botanists in Naxi regions of Yunnan, is unusual in that it develops for the reader a sense of the ways in which local residents were affected by, participated in, and shaped the activities of outsiders in the region, but only the final chapter is on the wartime period, and even then the war seems incidental to the broader narrative, which, of course, may tell us something about the limited impact of the war on this particular community.[30] It seems likely that as scholars make more use of local archives in western China, they will find more sources that permit them to access the voices of local inhabitants so that we may better understand the interaction between the war and the region.

Gradually over the past two decades, and increasingly over the past several years, we have finally begun to build the holistic picture of wartime China that Levine called for in 1992. But it is a picture that still has many missing pixels. Nonetheless, the pieces of the picture that we do have reveal the significance of the period in the larger continuum of modern Chinese history. We now have enough information to understand that the war did not, in every realm, represent a great rupture with the past, and that many processes that unfolded after the war had their roots in activities that were undertaken during, and often because of, the war. Those fragments also begin to show us some of the ways in which the many parts of China were interconnected while at the same time revealing the diverse experiences of China's regions.

How we think about time and space matters. By thinking differently about the beginning and end points of our studies, and about how the spaces that we study compare and contrast to each other, we have the potential to complicate, and possibly to correct, the dominant narratives of twentieth century China. Only by disrupting the conventional narratives are we likely to get a fuller and more meaningful picture of wartime China, and to understand how it fits into the larger picture of modern Chinese history.

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[29] John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution*; Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938*; Pingchao Zhu, *Wartime Culture in Guilin, 1938–1944*.

[30] Erik Mueggler, *The Paper Road: Archive and Experience in the Exploration of West China and Tibet*.

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