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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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New Chinese Military History, 1839–1951: What's the Story?

Abstract Since 1990, New Chinese Military History in the West has remedied scholarly neglect of Chinese warfare and changed the usual stories of modern China. These studies disproved Orientalist assumptions of a unique "Chinese way of war" or a strategic culture that avoided aggressive confrontation. Scholars also challenge the assumption that Confucian immobility led to a clash of civilizations and decisive defeat in the Opium Wars, First Sino-Japanese War, and Boxer War of 1900. In fact, Qing officials were quick and successful in creating a new military regime. New military histories of the warlords, the Sino-Japanese Wars, and the Chinese Civil War show that developing new types of warfare was central in creating the new nation. All these wars split the country into factions that were supported by outside powers: they were internationalized civil wars. The article also asks how the choice of terms, labels, and categories shapes interpretations and political messages.

Keywords historiography, New Military History, New Chinese Military History, war, warfare, Opium Wars, Taiping Rebellion, Boxer Uprising, Sino-Japanese War, War of Resistance, World War Two in Asia

Warfare created all modern nations, yet after the Second World War historians in the West, many of whom had themselves served in the military (some in China), did not pay serious attention to Chinese warfare or military history.[1] The grand story was "China's response to the West"—nation-building, modernization,

[1] Though they have not seen this article, I thank Ezra Vogel and the international scholars of the Sino-Japanese War Project for showing me this field. David Buck, John Carroll, Bernard Mosher, and Roger Thompson advised on particular points. Peter Carroll, Laura Hein, and the Northwestern University East Asian Research Seminar (EARS) provided critical reaction.

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cultural or intellectual change, and revolution—while military history was primarily the study of campaigns and battles. Diana Lary wrote in 1980 that the practitioners of this "old" military history "have often been retired professional soldiers, or academics who have accepted their definition of what military history is all about." This type of writing, she went on, is "not much use as an explanatory or analytic technique." Hans van de Ven complained in 1996 that the study of Chinese warfare had been a "step-child" and that New Military History in Europe showed historians of China what they had missed: How "war-making has remade states, shaped national identities, transformed organizational and managerial practices, and propelled important social, demographic, economic, and cultural developments."[2]

New Chinese Military History, if I may coin a label, changed all that. Scholars realized that they did not need to be militarists to do military history any more than to be women to do women's history or Chinese revolutionaries to study Mao. They formed "The Society for Chinese Military History" and by 2012 the editors of its *Journal of Chinese Military History* could introduce their inaugural issue by saying that "in the West, Chinese military history has been emerging as a new and important Sinological field in its own right since around 1990."[3]

This essay asks how New Chinese Military History disrupts the usual stories of modern China or tells them in different ways and how names, labels, and categories shape interpretations and political messages. Other articles in this issue address how new histories deal with the experience of war, the role of war in state-building, and war's social impact, so I will not address those questions here, and regretfully, there is not room for most studies published before 1990.[4]

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[2] Diana Lary, "Warlord Studies," 451; Hans van de Ven, "War in the Making of Modern China," 737, n756. For more background see Peter Paret, "The History of War and the New Military History"; Robert M. Citino, "Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction." Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History,* devotes a chapter to "Redressing Eurocentrism." Readable surveys that show war in modern Chinese history without being military history include Michael H. Hunt and Steven I. Levine, *Arc of Empire: America's Wars in Asia from the Philippines to Vietnam*; Robert A. Bickers, *The Scramble for China: Foreign Devils in the Qing Empire, 1800–1914*; Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and the World since 1750.*

[3] David A. Graff and David Curtis Wright, "Inaugural Essay from the Editors," 1–2.

[4] Surveys that include references to studies before 1990 include: Edward L. Dreyer, *China at War, 1901–1949*; Bruce A. Elleman, *Modern Chinese Warfare, 1795–1989*; *A Military History of China*, edited by David A. Graff, Robin D. S. Higham; Xiaobing Li, *China at War: An Encyclopedia*; Peter Lorge, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb*; Peter M. Worthing, *A Military History of Modern China: From the Manchu Conquest to Tian'anmen Square.* Important articles are collected in *Warfare in China since 1600*, edited by Kenneth Swope.

Modern China's Long Internationalized Civil War: A Wave?

"War" is a remarkably loose and powerful three-letter word for a concept that has gone feral, often as a metaphor; following warfare in modern China runs into problems because "war" means different things in different times and places. "War" in "The Opium War" is quite a different process from "war" in "The Sino-Japanese War" or "The Chinese Civil War." War as organized conflict between two nations involves unclear assumptions. On the one hand, nations are either at war or at peace, and once the war-switch flips to "on," the only objective is victory. On the other hand, Clausewitz's hoary 19th century apothegm, "war is politics by other means," treats war and peace as continuity and implies that leaders need to keep long-range national interest in mind. Historians try to create clarity with categories and labels, but popular usage takes on a life of its own. David Reynolds points out that the labels on a war are "as important as the events themselves" and are "rarely neutral." The terms "guerilla war," "war of resistance," "war of liberation," "war of independence," or "police action" reflect political points of view. In the modern world all wars are more-or-less civil wars, revolutions are certainly civil wars, and all wars are internationalized even when they are not proxy wars.[5]

"Battle" is another term of useful promiscuity. John A. Lynn's global history compares battle across time and space to reveal cultural differences and historical change. Yuval N. Harari looks at one category of battles, the "decisive battle, but notes that New Military Historians prefer to look at strategic debates and military systems in their overall social and political context. They de-emphasize set-piece battles and tactics, perhaps to get away from reductionist history such as "The Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World." He concedes that decisive battles sometimes did change the course of history, perhaps in just a few hours, but more often the vision of a "decisive battle" summoned armies to disaster.[6]

Still, some historians see decisive battles, says Harari, as "deterministic Darwinian tests, or as the just judgments of the God of history" that would "prove in an objective way who was superior." Harari notes that Victor Davis Hanson, a specialist in ancient Greece and Rome, chose "landmark battles" that may not have been decisive but that show "why the West has won": The "civic militarism" of the Greeks generated a "Western Way of Warfare." Hanson says the West's advantage in battle was due to a "long-standing . . . cultural stance toward

[5] David Reynolds, "The Origins of the Two 'World Wars': Historical Discourse and International Politics," 29; David Armitage, *Civil Wars: A History in Ideas*, 196–97.

[6] John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*; Yuval N. Harari "The Concept of 'Decisive Battles' in World History," 259–60.

rationalism, free inquiry, and the dissemination of knowledge that has its roots in classical antiquity." The West deserved to win.[7]

In brief, feral "war" and promiscuous "battle" are yet to be caged or confined in well-bounded categories but they can be put to work if handled with care. An analogy may help. Early physicists trying to categorize the nature of light were puzzled by a "duality paradox": Light behaves both as a series of individual particles and as a wave. Analyzing war in modern China raises a similar ontological challenge in categorizing warfare, wars, and battles. What do we learn if we tell the story of China in recent centuries not as a succession of particular wars and battles but as one grand "wave" of internationalized civil wars with the globe, not the self-confined nation, as the space in which it took place?

Warfare with Chinese Characteristics?

New Chinese military historians first assailed a Great Wall of Orientalist cliché that saw a unique and holistic "Chinese Way of War" that was not merely different from but opposite to a "Western Way of War." If the West was warlike, dynamic, and world-conquering, China was a peaceful, unchanging, and isolationist civilization where the civic virtue *wen* outranked the warlike virtue *wu*. Peter Lorge declared that the "erroneous notion that there is a Chinese way in warfare lies at the heart of the misunderstanding of Chinese military history" and Hans van de Ven decried the myth that Chinese culture "abhorred the use of violence, preferred defense over offense, and favored the indirect approach to frontal assaults and total destruction of the enemy."[8]

Military historians asked how Chinese fought wars; political scientists in international relations asked *when* they decided the fight them—what was their strategic culture? Alastair Ian Johnston found two streams of Chinese strategic culture, one a Confucian-Mencian tendency that avoided warfare and favored "accommodationist and defensive strategies," a tendency that reflected a "worldview of relatively complacent superiority." The second stream, however, held that if the state wanted peace it must prepare for war, but that campaigns of aggression were wise only if they could be successful and the state could afford them. David Kang found welcome for his thesis that the late imperial Tribute

[7] Harari "The Concept of 'Decisive Battles'," 252; Victor Davis Hanson, *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power*, 18–22.

[8] Peter Lorge, "Discovering War in Chinese History," 1; Hans van de Ven, "Introduction," 1. See also: Endymion Wilkinson, "War," 339; Jeremy Black, *Rethinking Military History*, 88–89; Peter Allan Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795*, 2; Graff and Higham, eds., *A Military History of China*, 12.

System was responsible for avoiding state-on state conflict because of a Confucian respect for hierarchy, status, and hegemony, that is, shared cultural values. Critics replied that the system worked best for Korea and Vietnam and that Kang did not include domestic rebellions or warfare in Central Asia. Wang Yuan-kang, however, drew more agreement with his conclusion that Chinese strategic realists behave like those in other times and places. Their choices were not a function of cultural values but of relative power: "China adopts a defensive/accommodationist grand strategy during periods of relative weakness and an offensive one during periods of relative strength."[9]

New military historians did not find Western superiority, cultural clash, or unique ways of warfare. Tonio Andrade's grand synthetic narrative, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*, published in 2016, explains instead that in the early modern period military technology, such as gunpowder, bombs, firearms, and cannons, developed by competitive exchange across Eurasia creating diversity, progress and slippage, parallel inventions, and interaction on a more-or-less equal basis in what he calls the "Early Gunpowder Age." Evelyn Sakakida Rawski further de-centers the story of the period Song through Ming by looking from the peripheries rather than from the North China plain, noting the military strategies and new weaponry that emerged in frontier warfare. Kenneth Swope's ground-breaking monographs resurrect the Three Great Campaigns of the 1570s through the 1610s and the military collapse of the dynasty. The "First Great East Asian War" (Swope's resonant term) in the 1590s pitted Jurchen, Mongol, Han Chinese, Korean, and Japan against each other in combinations of enemies and allies until rebellion and exhaustion cleared the field for the Manchus.[10]

The Manchu Great Qing Empire is one of history's great military enterprises; war, battle, and strategy were existential issues. After the Manchus created

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[9] Charles Horner, "The Qing Dynasty and the Pax Manjurica," 54–84; Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, 1–2; David C. Kang, *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*; Kang, "Response: Theory and Empirics in the Study of East Asian International Relations," in "Special Issue: The Tributary System"; Yuan-kang Wang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, 192.

[10] Evelyn Sakakida Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives*, 80–87; Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 172–81, 311; Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China*, 127–28; Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpen's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598*; Kenneth Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–44*; James B. Lewis, "International Relations and the Imjin War."

multi-ethnic armies to conquer "China Proper," the Qianlong emperor led Ten Great Campaigns whose gunpowder weapons gave his armies unprecedented power to subjugate or exterminate traditional Inner Asian enemies. Peter Perdue's meticulous and imaginative history details how provisioning these campaigns also permanently changed the finances and governance of the home provinces. Though these conquests took place within the borders of what is now China, even modern nationalists do not call them "civil wars." Chinese technology and tactics were also effective enough to defeat the Dutch on Taiwan in the 1670s, achieving what Tonio Andrade calls "China's first great victory over the West." To be sure, Qing armies barely prevailed when they invaded Burma and were defeated in Vietnam in 1789, but the point remains: The early Manchu emperors appropriated technologies that they found useful but passed over others that did not fit Chinese circumstances. European cannons, for instance, were less effective against Chinese city walls, which were flatter and more solid than European ones. By the 18th century, warfare, expansion, and military prowess became what Johanna Waley-Cohen calls the "defining features of the age" and government was "increasingly run like a military operation by men whose chief claim to fame was their success in war."[11]

The Qing *Pax Manjurica* of the eighteenth century established peace and commerce and dulled the dynasty's competitive edge. Across the continent, just as the Manchus were gaining control of China, the Thirty Years War was ended with the Westphalian Treaty of 1648. The Treaty fostered an international system of wars and shifting alliances among roughly equal secular states. Over the next century and a half, Darwinian warfare between the British and French empires, capped by the Napoleonic wars, forced improvement in the design, production, and deployment of weaponry, especially muskets, gunpowder, and artillery. Army command, tactics, and structure improved radically. Financing these wars and mobilizing citizens to fight them changed the relation of ruler to ruled and pushed Western European monarchies into nation-states. The contrast between the two ends of the continent in the eighteenth century opened what Andrade calls the "Great Military Divergence."[12]

This Great Military Divergence fostered a Great Ontological Divergence, to coin another label. Early eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers such as

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[11] Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*; Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 96–102; Tonio Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory over the West*; Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and the Military under the Qing Dynasty*, 13–14, 8.

[12] Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and the Rise of the West in World History*, 311.

Montesquieu proposed categories of international law that were based on universal reason and that applied equally to all countries, whether Christian, Muslim, barbarian, or infidel. But the encounter of European empires with other parts of the world brought a "counter-revolution" that was articulated by an eminent late eighteenth century jurist: "The usages of the civilized nations of Christendom" were not the law of the "tame, but ancient and immoveable civilization of China . . . the meek and servile natives of Hindoostan . . . [or] the gross and incorrigible rudeness of the Ottomans."[13]

The Great Military Divergence in Action

1. The Opium Wars: Wakening from a Pipe Dream?

The Opium War was decisive battle that later Western histories portrayed as an inevitable clash of civilizations that demonstrated the backward immobility of Chinese civilization and that later Chinese nationalists portrayed as demonstrating the backward immobility of the Manchus. Western victory was a foregone conclusion that hardly needed to be explained, only narrated. Before the war there was no such sense of certainty, which appeared only in retrospect. In 1793, when Lord Macartney came to petition the Qianlong Emperor, their two empires were still roughly equal in overall military power. Opium came and silver went, then in June 1840, four steam-powered gunboats arrived (reinforced the next spring by the aptly named HMS *Nemesis*) accompanied by a multi-ethnic strike force from Bengal that was trained to fire improved muskets and cannons with far greater speed and accuracy. In a typical encounter, a Madras artillery regiment reduced the Yangzi port of Dinghai to ruins in just nine minutes. The court decided to negotiate. Mao Haijian specifies the ways Qing armies had failed to maintain progress in munitions and hardware, organization, personnel policies, wages, and training, although they did keep pace with the British in corruption. Qing officials almost immediately resumed military studies and instructed craftsmen how to copy captured armament, gunboats, and cannons. Some models failed because craftsmen did not understand how the originals worked or did not have drafting skills or machine tools to produce them in quantity, but later historians did not focus on these specifics. They assumed that the problem to explain was China's laggard response.[14]

[13] David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought*, 39.

[14] Julia Lovell, *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*, 31–32, 99, 111; Mao Haijian, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 27–72; Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 257–60. Amitaj Ghosh, *River of Smoke*, features well-researched but imaginative battle-scenes.

Winners are said to write history, but the term "Opium War" is losers' rhetoric. Foreign Secretary Palmerston might have preferred "The War for Free Trade," or "China Intervention," but "Opium War" appeared among the British opposition almost immediately. The present Chinese term "*Yapian zhanzheng*," a calque of the English "Opium War," only came into use well into the twentieth century to label the start of the Century of Humiliation (nationalists did not consider "The Stop-The-Outflow-of-Silver War").[15]

Official terms and categories were of little use in conceiving the problem. Dynastic convention offered only two categories for dealing with rebels—soothing or extermination—and a strictly-regulated bureaucratic vocabulary did not fit unregulated events. A year after the British had ravaged the coast, writes Julia Lovell, officials "still had trouble dignifying the hostilities with the term 'war,'" and the emperor "had little idea that he was supposed to be at war with Britain, or why." Officials preferred *bianxian*—"border provocation" or "quarrel"—and treated the affair as "atomized into a series of clashes along China's coast." The court termed the British "clowns," "bandits," "pirates," "robbers," and "rebels." Memorials reported fictional victories and ignored British technology and demands. These memorials were filed in the "Archive for Seizure and Extermination."[16]

The Opium War is a prototype of the internationalized civil wars to come. Border-hopping alliances in the opium trade made both sides rich. British merchants made indirect common cause with the Hoppo, trade officials, inland wholesalers and retailers, smugglers, and consumers; the dynasty's vertical line of bureaucracy went to war with this horizonal cosmopolitan network. Popular involvement was small-scale but premonitory. When British soldiers in the Canton delta looted a tomb and were said to have raped a local woman, tens of thousands of men armed with three-pronged spears, shields, and daggers rallied at Sanyuanli village. In two days of skirmishes they killed several British soldiers before local officials intervened. Imperial officials were trapped between their bosses and their subjects and between strategies of confrontation and negotiation. When Lin Zexu tried to exterminate the foreign-domestic alliance, he was smashed from abroad; when the Manchu officials Qiying and Qishan tried prudent negotiation, they were scapegoated and smashed from above.[17]

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[15] Lovell, *Opium War*, 243, 32–38; Lovell, "Introduction," xii–xiv.

[16] Lovell, "The Opium War and China's 'Century of Humiliation'," 153–60; Lovell, *Opium War*, 121.

[17] Mao Haijian, *The Qing Empire and the Opium War*, 31–32; Lovell, *Opium War*, 121, 157–62.

2. Taipings: The Internationalized Heavenly Civil War

The Christian rebels of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom started north from the mountains of Guangxi in 1850 armed with swords and spears and overwhelmed government troops who were not much better armed. The rebels nearly toppled the dynasty and inspired what Andrade calls "the most significant military experimentation since the seventeenth century." The Taipings boasted charismatic leadership, since after all, their king was a younger brother of Jesus; brilliant generals and military strategy, such as the upriver feint and crossing of the Yangzi; the unifying appeals of Christian righteousness, land distribution, and booty; and disciplined battle tactics, such as crouching tiger, crab formation, host and guest. Their successes forced the Manchu court to turn to Han Chinese officials, such as Zeng Guofan, a muscular Confucian from Hunan who initially failed so hopelessly that he attempted suicide. Zeng then bypassed the ineffective regular armies and studied the manuals of the Ming dynasty general Qi Jiguang on village recruitment, unit organization, and drill practices to assemble a well-paid new army that was loyal to its local gentry paymasters. Zeng combined innovative tactics with remorseless persistence and marched with bloody execution through Taiping provinces much as General Sherman marched through Georgia.[18]

There was word-wrangling then and later over how to categorize the Taiping movement. Was this a rebellion, a revolution, a civil war, or simply a "descent into anarchy"? The chief British official in Shanghai ignored missionaries who claimed this was a Christian revolution and concluded that the existing dynasty would best guarantee British access to its fabulous markets. He saw only "rebellion" and ordered letters from the Taiping King to be returned unopened.[19] Platt argues for "civil war." Western historians, says Platt, "have long taken the side of the dynasty, at least in their terminology." He concedes that the Taiping:

> Were indeed rebels, but to call the entire war the Taiping Rebellion is to cast the rebels forever in the wrong, and to lay all the blame on them for defying their legitimate rulers and destroying what one might surmise was otherwise a peaceful and stable empire.[20]

This civil war, Platt continues, was "necessarily international." Earlier studies played down the impact of British and American-led armies, but Platt found that

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[18] Stephen R. Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom: China, the West, and the Epic Story of the Taiping Civil War*, 126–39; Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 275–77.

[19] Platt, *Autumn in the Heavenly Kingdom*, 357–60.

[20] Ibid., xxvii–xxviii.

Taiping and imperial forces were so "intractably balanced that the outcome was to a large degree determined by the diplomatic and military interventions of outsiders in the early 1860s." Because the British were engaged elsewhere and could not afford to intervene in both the Middle Kingdom and the Cotton Kingdom, Platt argueed that "neutrality in the U.S. Civil War came at the expense of abandoning it in China."[21]

3. Pedagogical Warfare and the Failure of Success

British and French coastal strikes in the 1850s did not aim to gain territory so much as to teach China a lesson. In 1859 Qing armies applied what they had learned when their new artillery at Fort Dagu in Tianjin sank four British gunboats and their snipers picked off soldiers who forced their way ashore after being denied permission to land. The scandalized British and their French allies returned late the next summer to teach the emperor another lesson by looting and burning his Summer Palace. The smoke lingered over the capital for weeks; the desire for revenge lasted for generations.[22]

The Manchu court responded prudently by creating a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and starting a crash course on international law, but the key "strength" in the Self-Strengthening Movement of the 1870s and 1880s was military. Western historians at first concluded that the Confucian values of the dynasty were incompatible with modernization, but later studies found that that impeccably Confucian provincial governors such as Li Hongzhang in the north and Zhang Zhidong in the south created up-to-date navies financed by customs tariffs and new taxes on trade. Chinese armories built and serviced warships of all sorts—wood or iron hulls, paddle-wheel or double screw propulsion, single, compound, or triple-compound engines. The strongest of the four Qing fleets was Li's Beiyang fleet, which more or less equaled the entire Japanese navy. Both British and Japanese experts agreed that China had the advantage. [23]

Korea became the proving ground. When Japan backed a reform coup, Li Hongzhang ordered his twenty-six-year-old protégé, Yuan Shikai, to suppress it. Yuan came from a family of officials but had applied his Confucian learning to a military career. After further skirmishes, on August 1, 1894 Japan declared war,

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[21] Ibid., xxiv.

[22] James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth Century China*, 40–48; Bickers, *Scramble for China*, 148.

[23] Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 273–75; Benjamin A. Elman, "Naval Warfare and the Refraction of China's Self-Strengthening Reforms into Scientific and Technological Failure, 1865–1895," 319.

defeated Yuan's troops in the Battle of Pyongyang, then engaged Li's fleet near the mouth of the Yalu River. The twelve Beiyang ships could fire a heavier single salvo but Japan's twelve ships could fire more rapidly and throw three times the weight. The southern fleet did not come as backup, which made it easy for Japanese officers to outmaneuver and sink the Beiyang fleet in just a few hours. The Japanese army could then land unopposed and be freely re-supplied for a victorious siege of numerically superior Qing forces. Alan Fung writes that "scholars have unwittingly engaged themselves in a witch-hunt for the inadequacies of the Chinese army and navy" and have presented a "shopping-list" of problems: "Poor armaments, inadequate training, poor leadership, low morale and so on." But Fung rejects assertions that China's army was less modern—troops had Mauser breech-loaders and Krupp artillery—and concludes that the defensive strategy "was on the whole a well-advised one," since the Japanese needed a decisive victory while the Chinese could bide their time.[24]

The problem was not technological or cultural, it was political disorganization and cross purposes. The Qing supported more than a hundred thousand soldiers in armies founded in the seventeenth century and the court could neither join them a centralized command nor transfer their funding modern armies. Accordingly, the officers in these units were poorly trained in their modern weapons and inexperienced in battle. Superior numbers were wasted when modern Han Chinese units distrusted Manchu commanders.[25] S. C. M Paine concludes that Japanese leaders and public were mistaken to think that Japan had won: "Actually, their adversaries had lost." She carefully explains the decisiveness of battle: If China had won, then Russia, France, and Britain would not have staged the 1895 Triple Intervention to take away Japan's war prizes, and Russia would not have felt it necessary to confront Japan in Manchuria, leading to war in 1905. China supplied the powers with a "spectacle of incompetence" that sparked the "scramble for concessions" that in turn provoked the Boxers.[26] The court sent Li Hongzhang to Japan to negotiate the settlement.

4. Thinking Outside the Boxers

The Boxer story emerging from the torrid summer of 1900 was that young peasant men who thought they were invulnerable to bullets went on a murderous rampage

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[24] Allen Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895," 1018–19, 1030.

[25] Andrade, *Gunpowder Age*, 275; Elman, "Naval Warfare," 320.

[26] S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power and Primacy*, 19, 367–69.

against Christians for being Christian and missionaries for being foreign. Allied armies rescued the foreigners besieged in the Beijing Legation Quarter. Later stories added that the Allies went on a months-long rampage of terrorism and revenge, and portrayed Boxers either as xenophobes conducting virtual pogroms against cosmopolitans or as sincere but unorganized anti-imperialists.[27] British called the conflict in South Africa the "Boer War," but the invasion and months of fighting at almost the same time in China were a rebellion or an uprising, not a war.

When the Boxer "not-a-war" is called a war, the story changes. Jane Elliot's 2002 "revised view," while it stretches points and underplays the xenophobia of the Boxers, seriously undermines the story of the Qing armies as backward losers with detailed descriptions of late-Qing military capabilities and the battles of 1900. The regular armies fought professionally but the dynasty was simultaneously resisting the Russians in the north, repelling British tentacles in Tibet, and suppressing rebellions in Inner Asia.

When she received (partially faked) reports that Allied troops had landed without declaring war or negotiating, the Empress Dowager vacillated. The Allies were serial invaders and she assumed that they were about to invade again and ordered that the officials who opposed the Boxers and favored negotiation be executed by public beheading. On June 21st she ordered (undeclared) war and switched policy from suppressing the Boxers to deputizing them as patriotic militia. Yuan Shikai chose not to send troops from nearby Shandong, Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong ignored the Cixi's orders, and regular army generals in Beijing covertly misdirected their forces and refrained from using their Krupp artillery. Roger Thompson call this the "China War of 1900," and sees a virtual civil war between Li Hongzhang's Westernizing regime in North China, whose mantle was bestowed on Yuan Shikai, and Zhang Zhidong's southern faction, whose Shanxi operation was taken over after 1911 by Yan Xishan.[28]

The labels "Boxer Rebellion," "Boxer Uprising," and "Boxer War" categorize the whole sorry affair under one rubric. But a chain of events is not defined by its first link; a spark can start one, but the spark is not the same as the prairie fire. The war was between the dynasty and the Allied invaders, not between the dynasty and the Boxers or mainly between the Allies and the Boxers.

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[27] For a discussion of the vast Boxer literature see Paul Cohen, *History in Three Keys: The Boxers as Event, Experience, and Myth*.

[28] Jane E. Elliott, *Some Did It for Civilisation, Some Did It for Their Country: A Revised View of the Boxer War*, xxvii–xxviii, 381–82; Roger R. Thompson, "Military Dimensions of the 'Boxer Uprising' in Shanxi, 1898–1901," 318–19.

The term "Boxer" is a colloquial and faintly comic translation of *Yihequan*, more literally "Righteous Fists," "Harmonious Fists," or "Fists of Righteous Harmony." It was coined in the autumn of 1899 almost certainly by the sharp-tongued Shandong missionary Arthur H. Smith.[29] "Boxer" did not change to reflect the switch from *Yihequan* (Righteous Fist) to *Yihetuan* (Righteous Militia), which made the group semi-official. "Rebellion" is rhetorical prestidigitation to create plausible deniability for the Manchu court and to obscure Cixi's responsibility for the Boxers. Smith was adamant that this was in no sense a "rebellion." Smith explained the flip-flop clearly:

> The Chinese authorities decided at first to represent the Boxer movement as the work of boys and peasants, and in its later stages as a great popular uprising, too extensive for the Government to control . . . ."[30]

The legalities are once again cloudy—for one thing, the June 21st edict was not released to the public or formally delivered to foreign governments but was simply a *de facto* declaration of war. China had attended the Hague Conference of 1899 but did not sign the Treaty that legally defined war. Thoralf Klein puts it well:

> Legal discourse thus created a double ambivalence on the Allied side: At a theoretical level, the intervention was designed to enforce international law in a country that refused to acknowledge it. At a practical level, the method of enforcing international law consisted in its constant violation.[31]

The historian Michael Hunt uses the word "fiction" to describe Li Hongzhang and Zhang Zhidong's assurance to Allied diplomats that Cixi's official directive did not represent official policy. President William McKinley could then instruct American diplomats "to behave generally as if the United States and the other powers were not at war with China but instead only engaged in cooperation with friendly officials." [32] The not-a-war of 1900 was another Great East Asian War, expanded to include the American empire. The policy of extermination having once more failed, Li Hongzhang was once again tasked with negotiation.

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[29] Our Own Correspondent, "Western Shantung: The Boxer Rebellion."

[30] Arthur Henderson Smith, *China in Convulsion*, vol. I, 242, 593.

[31] Thoralf Klein, "The Boxer War-the Boxer Uprising."

[32] Michael H. Hunt, *The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and China to 1914*, 195–97.

The Military Republic and Military Revolution

The military transformation of China after 1900 was at least as consequential as its intellectual or cultural transformation. The winner of the 1911 Revolution was the counter-revolutionary general, Yuan Shikai but once again losers drafted the history, later proclaiming the civilian Sun Yat-sen the "Father of the Republic."[33] Though extensive fighting broke out between the northern and southern armies, and there was wide-spread massacre of Manchus, Yuan shed less blood in coming to power than the Qing had done or the People's Republic would. Stephen Halsey's powerful analysis of longer trends does not treat 1911 as a rupture but as the succession of another in a lineage of authoritarian state-builders who developed the "link between warfare, taxation, and bureaucratic growth" that culminated in the "mature military-fiscal state" of the 1950s.[34] To return to the heuristic suggestion at the beginning of this article, this revolutionary civil war is in that continuous wave.

What does it do to label these events a "revolution"? Beware: The word "revolution" is another shape-changer that does different work at different times. In the months following what was only later called the "Wuchang Uprising" of October 1911, Peter Zarrow found that leading newspapers were slow to use the word "revolution" (*geming*). They called events "banditry," "chaos," or "revolts." The gradual deployment of the term "revolution" did not merely describe events, Zarrow says, but shaped goals and actions. Over the previous decade self-styled revolutionaries developed a "narrative framework of revolution" that legitimized some actions but not others. Their concept of revolution was civilian.[35]

In the decades following the 1919 Versailles Conference, warfare would change what "revolution" meant: Internationally, the new warfare was the anti-colonial War of Liberation; domestically, the new form was the Revolutionary War drawn from a Leninist playbook. Xu Guoqi's work tells how the Great War in Europe created a sense of "shared history" across Asia, shook the rule of the old imperial powers, and discredited the European civilizational model. Mahatma Gandhi, Ho Chi-minh, and Syngman Rhee led liberation movements that were not (or not yet) liberation wars. Japan aspired to achieve pan-Asian liberation first by its example

[33] Peter M. Worthing, "China's Modern Wars, 1911–Present," is a well-informed traversal of new and classic works.

[34] Stephen R. Halsey, *The Quest for Power*, 8, 16–18, and chap. 5, "Guns."

[35] Peter Zarrow, "Chinese Press Accounts of the 1911 Revolution: Seeing 'Revolution'," 233–56. For examples of how narrative scripts shape revolution, see Keith Michael Baker, Dan Edelstein, eds., *Scripting Revolution: A Historical Approach to the Comparative Study of Revolutions*.

and then by force; Chinese Nationalist and Communist revolutionaries also aspired to lead Asian liberation but had to wait until they had the clout.[36]

1. Warlords, Civil Warlords, National Warlords, and Revolutionary Warlords

"Warlord" is another unfortunate but indelible label that muddles distinctions by putting all varieties in the same category as the despicable "Dog Meat General" and casting military men as usurpers and power-stealers, not power-builders. The term *junfá* was the Chinese reading of the Japanese term *gunbatsu*, itself a calque from German or English terms. It probably first appeared in an essay written in 1918 by Chen Duxiu to warn Chinese youth away from military solutions. Over the next decade, *junfá* was used to label enemies as feudal remnants, tools of imperialism and capitalist bosses, as when Mao called Chiang Kai-shek one. Treaty Port stereotypes portrayed warlords as "mercenary in purpose, reliant on ritual rather than real battle, and preferring 'silver bullets' (bribes) to the genuine article." Chinese wars were "Celestial Opera Bouffe." [37]

But why is Wu Peifu a warlord and Chiang Kai-shek not? Diana Lary's still insightful 1980 state-of-the-warlord-field article treated "warlord" as an almost self-evident category. She admitted that some scholars used "more decorous, value-free terms," such as "militarist" or "provincial militarist" and objected that to call Chiang Kai-shek a warlord was "simply not fair." She wrote that "while it is true that no warlord ever referred to himself as a warlord, [a] spade is a spade, and a rose is a rose." And a warlord is a warlord. Some argued that mid-19th century regional military centers survived to the Warlord Era, but Lary quipped that these scholars traced an "irrevocable process in which Zeng Guofan enters one end of a tunnel and Wu Peifu pops out the other end." She pointed the finger of shame at Yuan Shikai for "fostering an atmosphere and a political-military system in which their transfer from generals in a centralized army to independent warlords was as smooth as tobogganing down a hill."[38]

New Chinese Military History put warfare into warlord studies. The classic monographs were not so much military history as biographical and political studies, but Edward McCord used new military approaches in his specific account of how civilians in Hunan and Hubei created "warlords" after Yuan's death in 1916 by

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[36] Xu Guoqi, *Asia and the Great War: A Shared History*; Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New Identity and Internationalization*.

[37] Arthur Waldron, "The Warlord: Twentieth Chinese Understandings of Violence, Militarism, and Imperialism,"1083–86.

[38] Diana Lary, "Warlord Studies," 442–49. For a synthesis of early studies, see James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration*, 57–69.

turning for support to soldiers who gradually took power for themselves. The massive civil war between Wu Peifu and Zhang Zuolin in 1924–25 used Great War style warfare, with mines and barbed wire, armored trains, air bombardment, and huge bodies of troops. These warlords were not zombies who came down a tunnel from the 19th century, but were as modern as the machine guns and artillery they bought from foreign arms merchants. Arthur Waldron powerfully argues that this war wiped the slate clean for the Nationalist and Communist parties, whose popular mobilization, economic warfare, subversion, infiltration, and propaganda, adds Han van de Ven, created a new "battlefield" that was "dispersed in space and time, and involved all areas of life."[39]

The Nationalists took first crack at this new revolutionary war. Sun Yat-sen, aware even before Mao that power came from the barrel of a gun, turned to Chiang Kai-shek, who gradually took power for himself. Chiang was first of all a professional soldier who trained at Yuan's Baoding Military Academy and briefly at a military prep school in Japan and whose Whampoa Military Academy produced a generation of professional officers.[40] Donald Jordan's sympathetic account of the Northern Expedition disputes Harold Isaacs's influential charge that the "tragedy of the Chinese revolution" was Chiang's reactionary suppression of bottom-up popular mobilization. Jordan argues that it was Chiang's top-down military leadership that brought the Nationalist Revolution to power.[41]

2. **Great East Asian War, 1937–45**

Hans van de Ven looked at the state of devastation in both countries in 1945 and took a tragic view: "This was all avoidable." In 1937, the Nationalists and Japan both opposed communism in China, Russian expansion in Northeast Asia, and European colonial rule. China's ties with the United States were only somewhat warmer than Japan's. By refusing to back or even compromise with the Nationalists, the Japanese military in China fed what they wanted to destroy. The

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[39] Edward Allen McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism*; Arthur Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924–1925*; Hans van de Ven, "New States of War: Communist and Nationalist Warfare and State Building (1928–1934)," 25; Anthony B. Chan, *Arming the Chinese: The Western Armaments Trade in Warlord China, 1920–1928*.

[40] Colin Green, "Turning Bad Iron into Polished Steel: Whampoa and the Rehabilitation of the Chinese Soldier"; Peter M. Worthing, *General He Yingqin: The Rise and Fall of Nationalist China*; Chang Jui-te, "The National Army from Whampoa to 1949."

[41] Harold Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*; Donald A. Jordan, *The Northern Expedition: China's National Revolution of 1926–1928*.

Nationalist government by 1937 had solid plans for a new fiscal bureaucratic state, but Chinese Communists took advantage of the war to initiate a new type of warfare that changed the relation of government to society. Warfare in its depth and battle in its fickle decisiveness made the difference.[42]

After the war, English language scholarship, mainly diplomatic and battle history, explored mainly the United States and the Pacific War.[43] Controversies over war memory and responsibility arose in the 1970s, but Chinese, Japanese, and English language scholars had little interaction with each other and did not agree even on terminology, topics, or research problems. To explore differences and establish common questions, Ezra F. Vogel, Yang Tianshi, and Yamada Tatsuo convened Western, Chinese, and Japanese scholars in a series of conferences that produced foundational conference volumes.[44]

The countries could not even agree on what to call it, when it started, or who was involved. "Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945" is a label for a single war when in fact there were many overlapping and interlocking wars. "War of Resistance," the standard term in the People's Republic, limits the war to China, as do "China Incident," a Japanese nationalist term, and "China War." "Pacific War" is the war between Japan and the United States after 1941. "World War Ⅱ" is a retronym coined only on its own eve to link and equate European and Japanese fascism. The Great War then became World War I, even though, as Gerhard L. Weinberg insists, the two wars were starkly different. In the first, the sides fought over boundaries, colonial possessions, and naval power, but each expected the other to survive; the second was "a struggle not only for control of territory and resources but about who would live and control the resources of the globe." Japan's wars in 1931 and 1937, says Weinberg, belonged to the late nineteenth century pattern of imperial aggression; unlike Germany, Japan initially aimed for a local, limited war to expand power *in* China, not the disappearance *of* China, much less the extermination of the Chinese people.[45]

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[42] Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China, 1937–1952*, 207, 8–10.

[43] For this scholarship see David M. Gordon, "The China-Japan War, 1931–1945"; Steve Phillips, "A Selected Bibliography of English Language Sources."

[44] Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra F. Vogel, eds., *China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945*; Mark R. Peattie, Edward J. Drea, and Hans van de Ven, eds., *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*; Hans van de Ven, Diana Lary, and Stephen R. MacKinnon, eds., *Negotiating China's Destiny in World War II*.

[45] Hans van de Ven, *China at War,* 10–12; Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, 1–2.

War tipped toward inevitable in 1928 when the arrival of the Nationalist Northern Expedition in North China challenged Japanese control and sparked what Chi Man Kwong calls a "war for Northeast Asia." Against standing orders, local Japanese commanders moved troops to Jinan, ostensibly to protect Japanese civilians, where they killed several thousand civilians, then tortured and executed the team Chiang sent to negotiate. When the Japanese Kwantung Army set up the state of Manchukuo in 1931, Chiang Kai-shek prudently swallowed his outrage, ordered Zhang Xueliang's Nationalist troops to withdraw, and followed the policy of "first internal pacification and then external resistance," that is, to eliminate the Communist threat, train loyal troops, and only then take on the Japanese. The Shanghai War (or Shanghai Incident) of 1932 ended in a simmering truce that left factions in both countries eager to go to war.[46]

The textbook date for the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War is July 7, 1937, but Chiang juggled options even after Japanese troops ravaged Tianjin and took Peking at the end of the month. There were good reasons to hesitate: Western powers were standing off, though the Soviet Union quickly agreed to send aid; munitions and arms were low; the treasury was running dry; the campaigns against the Communists were still going (Chiang agreed to the new United Front only September 23); and even supporters warned him not to ignite an unwinnable war. Finally, urged by his German advisors to be aggressive, he ordered 750,000 troops to Shanghai against the 250,00 Japanese troops: "Shanghai must be held." The Battle of Shanghai began August 13 and soon escalated into the bloodiest conflict anywhere in the world since the Great War, costing some 187,000 Chinese military casualties, including many from German-trained Reformed Divisions, and countless civilians. Japanese had air and naval support and better supplies of more effective weapons, but Nationalist troops were no longer out-maneuvered or out-fought. An intelligence failure let three Japanese divisions land unopposed at Hangzhou, south of Shanghai, on November 5. Chiang ordered withdrawal three days later.[47]

For China, the battle was a futile sacrifice and for Japan a costly and indecisive victory, but the publics of both countries were euphoric. The Japanese command had sought a decisive battle to break Chinese will and was both shocked by the resistance and logistically unprepared for the land campaigns that would soon trap them in a quagmire of blood. Japanese troops had neither rations or winter

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[46] Chi Man Kwong, *War and Geopolitics in Interwar Manchuria: Zhang Zuolin and the Fengtian Clique During the Northern Expedition*. Donald A. Jordan, *China's Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932*.

[47] Hans van de Ven, *China at War*, 75–85; Yang Tianshi, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Battles of Shanghai and Nanjing," 143–54; Peter Harmsen, *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangzi*.

uniforms when they fell on Nanjing in December, again hoping to end the war. Chiang's generals knew that the city could not be defended but Chiang vacillated. He made an orderly retreat impossible when he refused a Japanese demand to surrender and finally commanded last-ditch resistance. The unplanned and panicked withdrawal abandoned the city to unplanned Japanese terrorism and revenge.[48]

Chiang is criticized for not having a coherent strategy, but recent work allows him more credit, finding that he had hoped that resistance would inspire Western support. He now took up his German advisors' plans for "trading space for time" and retreating to strategic points where Japan supply lines would be over-extended, destroying food and communications as he withdrew. The national government, now joined by the Communists in a United Front, made Wuhan its temporary capital from December 1937 until it left for Chongqing in October 1938. A Council of Generals, many of them Chiang's former rivals, formed a cohesive military command which Chiang supervised but did not control. The Council established authority by ordering a single bullet to the back of General Han Fuju's head for pulling out of Shandong in defiance of Chiang's order to resist.[49] Nationalist armies turned back the Japanese in the Xuzhou Campaign, culminating in Li Zongren's heartening victory at Tai'erzhuang, March–April 1938, but continued the scorched earth retreat. Chiang's decision to blow up the Yellow River dikes in June delayed the Japanese advance but the flooding caused at least 800,000 civilian deaths and environmental destruction beyond words. The Nationalists arrived in Chongqing defeated and triumphant.[50] Major troop movement stopped, but the Japanese air force, breaking earlier norms that limited them to military objectives, bombed civilians to create panic and demoralize resistance. The Flying Tigers, a nominally independent American volunteer group, Soviet, and Chinese pilots flew outclassed Soviet and American fighters against Japanese pilots who were better trained and more experienced in one of the great

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[48] Van de Ven, *China at War*, 93–99; Yang, "Chiang Kai-shek and the Battles of Shanghai and Nanjing," 154–58.

[49] Steven MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China, 18–20;* Jui-te Chang, "Nationalist Army Officers during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945," 1033–56.

[50] MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938*, 18–20; Jui-te Chang, "Nationalist Army Officers During the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945," 1033–56; Hattori Satoshi with Edward J. Drea, "Japanese Operations from July to December 1937"; Stephen MacKinnon, "The Defense of the Central Yangtze"; Ryōichi Tobe, "The Japanese Eleventh Army in Central China, 1938–1941"; Micah S. Muscolino, *Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond, 1938–1950*.

air battles of the war.[51]

From the start, the anti-imperialist and anti-communist Chiang Kai-shek solicited help from imperialist Britain, communist Soviet Union, and Germany. Franco David Macri found that the Western Allies waged a surprising proxy war against Japan even before 1937. Nationalist friends and propagandists portrayed the China War as part of an international war in which Madrid and "romantic" Wuhan were twin capitals and labelled Japan not merely as a lawless authoritarian aggressor but as fascist. The Nanjing government activated networks of missionaries and American-educated returned students, especially Chiang's wife, Soong Mei-ling, to appeal directly to the American public.[52] As the public in the United States cried "America First," Soviet military advisers, some of whom had been in Canton in the 1920s, came to replace German military advisors. Jay Taylor estimates that while America sent sympathy, Stalin sent (in current US equivalent) as much as three billion dollars' worth of airplanes, advisers, and cash loans.[53]

Neither China or Japan declared war. The Nationalist government was splintered, and Japanese did not want to kill the possibility of negotiations that would allow them free their armies to fight Russia. The emulous Wang Jingwei slipped out of Chongqing in 1938 to negotiate a peace deal that would save China both from Chiang's scorched earth resistance and from Mao Zedong. He answered Japan's equivocating promise, "Asia For Asians," but died in Tokyo in 1942 as a puppet because, unlike Chiang or Mao, he had no military power.[54]

3. The Indecisiveness of Battle, 1941–45

The declarations of war in December 1941 changed the military situation in China remarkably little but gained China great power status. Echoing McKinley's words of 1900, President Roosevelt confided to an aide that he would treat China "as if"

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[51] Alan Baumler, "Keep Calm and Carry On: Airmindedness and Mass Mobilization during the War of Resistance"; Edna Tow, "The Great Bombing of Chongqing and the Anti-Japanese War, 1937–1945"; Mitsuru Hagiwara, "The Japanese Air Campaigns in China, 1937–1945"; Daniel Ford, *Flying Tigers: Claire Chennault and the American Volunteer Group*.

[52] Akio Tsuchida, "China's 'Public Diplomacy' Toward the United States before Pearl Harbor," 56–88.

[53] Franco David Macri, *Clash of Empires in South China: The Allied Nations' Proxy War with Japan, 1935–1941*; Bernd Martin, "The Role of German Military Advisers on the Chinese Defense Efforts Against the Japanese, 1937–1938," 55–78; Zhang Baijia, "China's Quest for Foreign Military Aid"; Jay Taylor, *Generalissimo: Chiang Kai-Shek and the Struggle for Modern China*, 149.

[54] Akio Tsuchida, "Declaring War as an Issue in Chinese Wartime Diplomacy," 111–26.

it was a great power in the expectation that it would become one in fifty years or so. More urgently, Roosevelt and Stalin also needed Chiang to resist widely rumored offers of an accommodation that would free Japan to attack the Soviet Union. Roosevelt smiled and smiled but coolly calculated his own nation's interests; Chiang did not smile but he did the same. China was not so much forgotten as secondary or irrelevant.[55]

Roosevelt's first move was to send General Joseph Stilwell and twenty-five million dollars to Chongqing. The dollars were never accounted for and Stilwell's own first move, taking Chiang's best troops to recover Burma, was a disaster. The Japanese invasion to "liberate" Southeast Asia was so successful that some troops were ordered to prepare for an anticipated war with USSR in the north and for a campaign to end the war by taking Chongqing and Chengdu in the south.[56] Stilwell, the stubborn foot-solider, spurned a British offer to airlift him out, and marched to India with a little more than one-hundred of his Chinese troops. He emerged from the jungle with a high reputation at home because he was the rare figure to speak frankly—"we got our butts kicked." [57]

When Stilwell returned to Chongqing in June 1942, Chiang Kai-shek remarked "we have learned a valuable lesson," to which Stilwell replied, "Yes. The price for taking the offensive is always lower than for taking the defensive." Peng Dehuai and the Eighth Route Army in North China, however, in late 1940 had taken the offensive in more than a thousand large and small engagements in the Battle of the One Hundred Regiments and paid a high price—a Japanese extermination campaign that nearly destroyed the North China bases and created persisting division among Communist leaders. Chiang's defensive strategy may have been simply realistic, not a cultural reflex, but the ensuing dispute with Stilwell was also a political conflict over who was to call the shots and who was to pay the price. Washington did not heed warnings from Stilwell and Chiang that the Doolittle raids of April 1942 would invite retaliation. American B-25 bombers took off from carriers in the Pacific to strike Tokyo, inflicting little material damage. Hans van de Ven calls the raids "symbolic stunts" but concedes they were "part and parcel" of

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[55] Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*, 4–6, 8–10. For a discussion see Steven Levine, "Review" and Xia Yafeng, "Review." Maochun Yu, *The Dragon's War: Allied Operations and the Fate of China, 1937–1947*.

[56] C. A. Bayly and T. N. Harper, *Forgotten Armies: The Fall of British Asia, 1941–1945*; Hans van de Ven, "Stilwell in the Stocks: The Chinese Nationalists and the Allied Powers in the Second World War," 248.

[57] Asano Toyomi, "Japanese Operations in Yunnan and North Burma"; Zang Yunhu, "Chinese Operations in Yunnan and Central Burma"; Li Chen, "The Chinese Army in the First Burma Campaign."

modern warfare, while Tohmatsu Haruo judges them "a signal blow to Japanese military and civilian confidence after a string of Japanese victories." In America, headlines proclaimed the first victory since Pearl Harbor; in China, the Japanese Zhejiang-Jiangsu offensive in May to August 1942 razed airfields where bombers had crash-landed and killed more than 10,000 Chinese, some probably by germ warfare.[58]

The Ichigō offensive of April 1944 to early 1945 once again took Chiang by surprise and shook his regime. Chiang had warned Roosevelt that to announce that the Allies would invade Europe first would invite the Japanese to push for victory in China but was wholly unprepared when his prediction proved true. As American sea blockades tightened, the Japanese command aimed to open an overland supply route to connect Japanese bases in North China with those in Southeast Asia and to destroy the Chengdu air bases that threatened Japan. A decisive victory would increase Tokyo's negotiating power, free troops to defend the home islands, and create a refuge in China if the home islands fell.[59]

The campaign nearly succeeded. The central government did not have revenues to support regional armies, so in 1941 Chiang had instructed them to support themselves. They did so by creating army farms and factories, conscripting villagers by force, multiplying petty taxes, and smuggling. Some initially defended their territory effectively but needed reinforcements. Critics charged that Chiang withheld those reinforcements to fight the Communists after the war, but it is equally likely they did not have the resources to leave their home bases. There were disturbing reports that Chinese and Korean puppet troops under Japanese officers were defeating patriotic armies. The Pacific War now turned against Japan. Superfortress bombers took off from Chengdu in practice runs on enemy-occupied Wuhan that dropped 500 tons of incendiary bombs, then applied these lessons to the Japanese home islands. The Japanese forces poised to take Chengdu and Chongqing then redeployed to the lower Yangzi, terminating Ichigō. Before the entry of the Soviet Army into Manchuria in August 1945, the Japanese Army in China was starved and stymied but could claim that it had never been defeated.[60]

In the midst of Ichigō, in early fall of 1944, Roosevelt and his chief-of-staff

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[58] Lyman van Slyke, "The Battle of the Hundred Regiments"; Van de Ven, *China at War*, 142; Tohmatsu Haruo, "The Strategic Correlation Between the Sino-Japanese and Pacific Wars," 427.

[59] Van de Ven, *China At War*, 162, 172.

[60] Hara Takeshi, "The Ichigō Offensive," 392–402; Van de Ven, *China At War*, 180–89; Wang Qisheng, "Battle of Hunan," 412–15.

General George Marshall finally gave in to Chiang's demands to replace Stillwell. The Generalissimo won but lost this tug-of-war because the strategic balance had shifted from the China War, fought mainly by Chinese troops, to the Pacific War, fought and paid for mainly by Americans. American bombers now flew from Pacific island bases closer and closer to Japan. The Allies in the 1860s and 1900 had administered life-support to the Chinese they needed, and Roosevelt now recalculated the value of a government he no longer needed. Even holding down so many Japanese divisions no longer made China a crucial theater. Roosevelt now could supply China with vast military supplies but not with the means to fight decisive international political battles.[61]

Stilwell lost the tug-of-war but won in the first draft of history. Hans van de Ven blames wartime China Hands and Barbara Tuchman's 1970 biography for "Stilwell myth" and blames a "Western consensus" for the story that the Nationalists were an "incompetent, corrupt, and militarist regime that had been unable to mobilize Chinese society effectively against Japanese aggression" and that they lost, even "deserved to lose," to the more modern Communists partly because Chiang ignored American advice to reform his armies and go on the offensive. The Stilwell myth was rooted in an "Orientalist," even racist discourse that associated Western military strategies with "modernity, industrialization, honesty, manly vigour, and science, but saw Chinese military strategies in terms of "emasculation, backwardness . . . [and] deceit."[62]

This critique draws blood. Tuchman indeed accepted Stilwell's commitment to the offensive at face value (curiously, in a biography of a professional soldier, she scarcely touches on military doctrine at all) and one group of wartime journalists indeed saw Nationalist supporters as feudal.[63] Stilwell gets van de Ven's hackles up. He claims there was a "virtual taboo" on criticizing Stilwell among post-war academics, but John Fairbank, surely a post-war academic, wrote in his review of Tuchman's biography that "nothing could have been less appropriate" than Stilwell's "energetic determination" in the face of Chiang's "traditionalist theories" and that the idea of an American commanding Chinese armies was a "prescription full of poison." Van de Ven does explain that General Marshall and Stilwell had been traumatized by the ghastly defensive trench warfare during the Great War, but he slights the military value of offensive strategies, however costly, in creating

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[61] Tohmatsu Haruo, "The Strategic Correlation Between the Sino-Japanese and Pacific Wars"; Van de Ven, *China At War*, 172, 190.

[62] Van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–1945*, 10; Van de Ven, *China At War*, 190; Van de Ven, "The Sino-Japanese War in History," 448–52; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 1.

[63] Charles W. Hayford, "China By the Book," 302–5.

the public support that kept American industrial might in the war.[64] After showing that the strategic shift in 1944 reflected China's shrinking strategic value, van de Ven writes (with no reference) that Stilwell was not going to let a "mere Chinaman" stand in his way because of his "Orientalist disdain for most things Chinese." Yet Stilwell had an equal disdain for Roosevelt and Churchill and high regard for his own Chinese officers and troops. He praised Zuo Zongtang's campaigns during the Taiping Rebellion and in 1870s Xinjiang for combining "caution with daring" and "initiative with perseverance."[65]

The only winners from Ichigō were the Communists. The outbreak of war in 1937 had replaced Nationalist pressure on their base areas with more effective Japanese campaigns of terror and extermination, but then the Ichigō campaign swept Nationalist troops out of north China and shifted Japanese troops to the south. Mao's wartime communism was based on a Stalinist security apparatus, land reform, peasant nationalism, and an ideology that enabled him to survive criticism and learn from mistakes. In the summer of 1944 he ordered the party and the communist armies to double in size. Mao's key military skill, however, was in managing brilliant and contentious talents such as Zhu De, Peng Dehuai, and Lin Biao. Mao controlled the party that controlled the gun and could rely on a band of brothers who survived the Long March.[66]

4. Sudden Peace and Internationalized Civil War

Nationalist armies had lost every major wartime campaign but the Nationalist government now controlled the lion's share of population, wealth, and territory. Nationalist armies got weapons and support from the Americans, as well as from staunchly anti-communist surrendering Japanese. Even Stalin put his money on Chiang. The "Chinese Civil War was settled on Chinese battlefields, but not only there. Just as China had entrapped the United States and Japan in the 1930s, China tempted and entangled the emerging giants of the Cold War. Each backed a

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[64] Van de Ven, *China At War*, 194.

[65] Barbara W. Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911–45*, 161–62. John King Fairbank, "Joe Stilwell, All American, and His Mission to China," 50, 53; Taylor, *Generalissimo*, 1; Van de Ven, *China At War*, 164,165; Van de Ven, "The Sino-Japanese War," 449.

[66] Hara Takeshi, "The Ichigō Offensive," 402; Lanxin Xiang, *Mao's Generals: Chen Yi and the New Fourth Army*; Van de Ven, *China at War*, 133–49; Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937–1945*; Gregor Benton, *Mountain Fires: The Red Army's Three-Year War in South China, 1934–1938* and *New Fourth Army: Communist Resistance Along the Yangtze and the Huai, 1938–1941.*

Chinese faction that expected expensive support but could not be controlled. It was another internationalized civil war, even a global one."[67]

In early 1946, Chiang decided to roll the dice. After failed negotiations with the Communists to share power, Chiang sought a decisive confrontation by sending troops to Manchuria, perhaps against American advice but certainly on American airplanes. The Battle of Siping, a key railroad junction, lasted only five days (May 14–18, 1946) but nearly destroyed Lin Biao's Northeast Democratic United Army. General George Marshall, dispatched by President Truman to reconcile the irreconcilable Chinese parties and prevent Soviet expansion in Northeast Asia, urged a ceasefire. Chiang wrote later that if not for the June ceasefire, "Communist remnants in northern Manchuria would have been liquidated" and "a fundamental solution to the problem of Manchuria would have been at hand." Arthur Waldron, without exculpating Chiang, says that if he had not rashly entered Manchuria at Marshall's suggestion, Chiang would still have controlled a democratic south China, leaving Manchuria as the north part of a divided nation; alternatively, if he had entered Manchuria but rolled on when Marshall suggested that he stop, Chiang would have controlled all China.[68]

These "what ifs" also strike Harold Tanner as analytically doubtful or factually shaky. Chiang agreed to the ceasefire in Northeast China, Tanner holds, not because he wanted to humor or appease the Americans, but primarily because his intelligence services (wrongly) reported that Lin's main forces had been destroyed. In any case, Nationalist generals had failed twice to eliminate these forces, with no reason to assume they could correct their mistakes or overcome structural problems on a third try. Chiang's strategy of seizing territory rather than destroying the enemy had been effective against regionalists and Communist base areas in the 1920s and 1930s, but in 1946 his troops were demoralized by orders to take static defensive positions in key cities, leaving Communists free to establish control of the countryside and establish local production of arms and supplies. Lin's armies still moved by horse, donkey, and even camel, while Nationalists fought an American-style war. Nationalist generals used air bombardment and artillery effectively, but did not issue their troops bayonets, crucial in hand-to-hand combat,

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[67] Harold Miles Tanner, "Chinese Civil War, 1945–1949" is a selective, annotated bibliography.

[68] Sergei Radchenko, "Lost Chance for Peace: The 1945 CCP-Kuomintang Peace Talks Revisited"; Taylor, *Generalissimo,* 338. See, however, Charles W. Hayford, "The 'Final Triumph of Chiang Kai-Shek?' The Rush to Revisionism." Arthur Waldron, "China without Tears: If Chiang Kai-Shek Hadn't Gambled in 1945," 377–92. For another skeptical view, see Ernest R. May, "1947–48: When Marshall Kept the U. S. Out of War in China," 1010.

and had to bring weaponry long distances on American trucks that sunk axle-deep in the spring mud, leading to shortages of artillery, automatic weapons, ammunition, artillery pieces, and shells. Victor Cheng concludes that the "chance to defeat the CPC armies in mobile warfare virtually did not exist."[69]

Western scholars at first neglected the military basis of Mao's success. Some perhaps thought revolution seemed natural, others perhaps blamed Stalin's machinations and American perfidy. Neither explanation required the close examination of campaigns and battles. Steven I. Levine was among the first to suggest that Communist victory in Manchuria was precarious and did not grow organically from the moral appeal of social justice, peasant grievances, spontaneous nationalism, and class struggle, however real these grievances might have been.[70]

In early 1948, Mao himself expected the war to continue for at least three more years but his aggressive strategies ended the war. Christopher Lew follows Communist strategic development marked by trial and error and riven by tension between Mao and the generals in the field. Lin Biao was a canny guerilla strategist, but he now determined to shift to more-or-less conventional large-scale warfare. His Soviet-trained generals established military academies that turned out thousands of staff officers, creating what Harold Tanner calls an "army of learning." Then in the fall of 1948 Mao pushed Lin to seek a decisive campaign, a do-or-die strategy whose success gave Mao an aura of infallibility that made him unassailable for the rest of his life. The Liaoning-Shenyang Campaign lasted fifty-two-days, killing or capturing half a million Nationalist troops, more than in any other action in the war. Tanner offers example after example of vacillation and bad decisions by Nationalist commanders, especially the Generalissimo. Lin, in Hans van de Ven's words, "outmaneuvered and out-thought" a huge Nationalist force in massive set-piece battles of the Huai-Hai campaign in which Lin's commanders coordinated disciplined assaults with artillery strikes. Lin flinched but followed Mao's order to starve Changchun into a dead city. Chiang later called the loss of Changchun the "greatest defeat and greatest shame" of his life. He blamed the losses in North China on the disloyalty and corruption of generals who refused his orders to support each other and who even surrendered the capital without

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[69] Harold Miles Tanner, *The Battle for Manchuria and the Fate of China: Siping, 1946*, 102, 169, 216–19; Cheng, "Imagining China's Madrid in Manchuria: The Communist Military Strategy at the Onset of the Chinese Civil War, 1945–1946," 72–114; Cheng, "Modern War on an Ancient Battlefield," 38–64.

[70] Steven I. Levine, *Anvil of Victory: The Communist Revolution in Manchuria, 1945–1948*, esp. 126–38.

informing him. The still potent Nationalist armies to the south then collapsed.[71]

The Nationalists did not lose China simply because of corruption, injustice, or even economic mismanagement. Odd Arne Westad concludes that they alienated key constituencies by aggressive administrative and fiscal over-reach that exploited all classes for the benefit of the government without offering obvious benefits to other groups. The Communist strategy was to build political legitimacy by tailoring particular appeals to each social group, political faction, and geographical niche. Westad adds, however, that the Communists "could not alone control China's political agenda until they had taken power by military means."[72] The Nationalists lost China because they lost battles they could have won; the Communists won because they had leadership, organization, and ideology that allowed them to take risks and survive their mistakes. They mastered supply and logistics, intelligence and spycraft, battlefield initiative, and strategy—they mastered warfare. In the end, Mao travelled the road to power on an army vehicle.

When the Hurly-Burly's Done: What's the Story?

Round up the usual stories. Though no longer a "step-child," how does New Chinese Military History change them? It was easy to change Orientalist fables, but it requires persistent work to integrate military history into mainstream scholarship alongside gender, social, or economic history. Beginning the story even before the Great Military Divergence in the eighteenth century rather than with the Opium Wars makes it easier to see that the problem was to build what Stephen Halsey calls a "fiscal military state." Halsey "retells," as he puts it, "a familiar story in a different way," and this is a reasonable claim for the larger enterprise of New Chinese Military History.[73]

Does the "long wave of internationalized civil war" tell a story that is of some use, if only as a straw dog to ponder and discard? There is a pattern of situations that make up the wave. Following the Opium Wars China won the arms race with Japan but after the Battle of the Yalu in 1895 until 1951, when Chinese armies crossed the Yalu, China lost war after war. Each Japanese victory over China increased support for Japan's military and each defeat hamstrung the Chinese government's legitimacy and ability to exact the taxes and sacrifices to build a centralized military. China's leaders and negotiators were locked into a cycle of

[71] Lew, *The Third Chinese Revolutionary Civil War*, 104–10, 141–44; Harold Miles Tanner, *Where Chiang Kai-shek Lost China: The Liao-Shen Campaign, 1948*, 141; Van de Ven, *China At War*, 244–52.

[72] Odd Arne Westad, *Decisive Encounters: The Chinese Civil War, 1946–1950*, 7–13.

[73] Halsey, *Quest for Power*, 18.

poisoned choices: When they chose to resist, their best armies were destroyed; when they prudently appeased, they were overthrown, fired, exiled, or even beheaded. Chinese common people were in another pattern of dilemmas: Sanyuanli villagers, Taipings, Boxers, and revolutionary anti-imperialists demanded that governments protect them but their protests either weakened the government or provoked foreign punishment. Only a new military could break these patterns.

The usual stories frequently set out to explain the wrong problem because they reasoned backward from decisive battles to general explanations. Benjamin Elman urges that the "construction of China's backwardness" and Japan's successful modernization was an "artefact" of defeat in 1894–95. Historians and panicked Chinese public opinion at the time dismissed the substantial progress of the Self-Strengthening Movement. One does not have to hold Cixi up as a successful modernizer, much less a democratic reformer, to suggest that a major reason that she was much maligned was China's defeat in the War of 1900. Yuan Shikai takes blame as militarist for usurping power from the civilian Sun Yat-sen because is alleged to have fostered warlords, but it is hard to see what would have changed if civilians had retained power. National construction during the Nanjing decade and Chiang Kai-shek's strategies during the Sino-Japanese War are discredited by his defeat in the Civil War.[74]

In each case, the usual stories may well still be true but the reasons require fresh thinking. Asking "what if" tests the reasoning of *how* things happened before offering lists of explanations of *why* they did. Asking "what if?," Robert Cowley observes, can "eliminate what has been called the 'hindsight bias'," and he urges that the " 'road not taken' belongs on the map."[75] Might the Chinese navy have defeated Japan in 1895? Might Chiang have defeated Mao if he had not sacrificed prime troops in Shanghai or in Stilwell's Burma campaigns or if he had followed a prudent strategy after 1945? Yes, of course, but do not get carried away; a possible result is not the same as a probable one. Sometimes the "road not taken" leads to the same destination.

The military histories look less at China's alleged "backwardness," Ci Xi or Yuan Shikai's dictatorial character, or the Generalissimo's feudal military strategies, and more at particular situations—geography, to take one example. After the Opium Wars, the Great Qing Empire had to simultaneously defend the coasts and rivers, secure the mountainous south, and put down rebellion all over the place, especially in the territories added in the Ten Grand Campaigns. Those successful campaigns expanded frontiers until they were too distant to be controlled and

[74] Elman, "Naval Warfare," 326, 314.

[75] Cowley, *What If?*, xi.

created regionalized finances. Bureaucracy was spread thin and could not coordinate regionalized armies in battle without a new fiscal military state.

New types of warfare could only emerge from trial and error, that is, from risk, failure and death, which was only possible when leaders stayed in power long enough to fight another day and try another battleplan. Staying in power depended on followers who believed in the leader or were eager for rewards or just afraid. Li Hongzhang shrugged off the Empress Dowager's war edict in 1900 but his disloyalty to her was loyalty to the dynasty. It took some time to replace this centripetal dynastic allegiance from officials to public allegiance to a nation. Qing officials feared the emperor's wrath; Republican leaders came to fear the public's.

The witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* chant "when the hurly-burly's done, when the battle's lost *and* won," not "lost *or* won." These equivocators could just mean that one side wins and the other loses, but I prefer to think that it also means the winner loses and the loser wins. Macbeth murders his king and his best friend, Banquo. He wins and loses a crown, and dies bravely in vain, as Banquo's heirs go on to be kings. Hans van de Ven's *China At War* is a sweeping, sure-footed, and morally precise story of how the Sino-Japanese War unleashed the forces for a new nation and how Civil War decided control of that nation, but his subtitle—"Triumph and Tragedy"—shows that he goes beyond military history alone to tell the whole story and that the story is to be continued.

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