# Introduction: The Human Cost of War

## 残山剩水
A ravaged world

The Resistance War (*Banian kangRi zhanzheng*) (1937–45) was one of the greatest upheavals in Chinese history. It was a time of courage and sacrifice and a time of suffering and loss.[1] Virtually the entire country was engulfed by war. All of China's major cities were occupied, as were the eastern and northeastern regions and much of the southeast. The national government was forced to move inland. Almost every family and community was affected by war. Tens of millions of people took flight. Between 20 million and 30 million soldiers and civilians died during the war.

The war was the last of a long series of foreign invasions that started in the 1840s with the Opium Wars. The *leitmotif* of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was that the injuries and injustice of foreign invasion were finished, that China had come into her own after her long humiliation at the hands of the outside world and regained her rightful position in the world. China's encounter with imperialism started with Western aggression, but the Japanese invasion and occupation almost a century later were by far the greatest foreign assaults that China suffered in her modern history. The ultimate external assault on China came not from the West, but from an Asian country, part of the world that China had dominated so long herself.

In 1938, Mao Zedong made one of his most famous statements, in his essay 'Problems of War and Strategy', that 'political power comes out of the barrel of a gun [*qiangganzi limian chu zhengquan*].' This statement is generally associated with Mao's fight for the revolution, in the struggle between the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP, Gongchandang), but at the time that Mao wrote these lines, the

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[1] The Resistance War was incorporated into the larger conflict of World War II, which started in late 1939.

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enemy was Japan, and the struggle was against foreign invasion. The CCP grew strong during the war and at its end was ready to challenge the GMD for power. The violence and turmoil of the war were the forces that propelled the CCP to power – by the end of the Civil War (1946–49), it was indeed the gun that brought the CCP to political power.

The scale of the human suffering brought on by the war was overwhelming – and almost indescribable. Wars are violent, destructive, and unpredictable. They are difficult to write about in a sober, analytical way because war is not controlled or rational. Wars promote violence and destruction, heroism and sacrifice, and passionate acts, not cerebral ones. Wars do not lend themselves to lucid analysis; they are times of chaos and confusion. Their outcomes are seldom predictable or conclusive. Many historians avoid looking at war and leave it to professional soldiers to write about. This avoidance has been a salient characteristic of the treatment of the Resistance War in Western historical works on modern China, which often pass over it and the Civil War that followed it, stop in 1937, or start in 1949.

In China, the momentousness of the Resistance War is now well accepted. The war is covered in great detail in history, novels, films, and memoirs. There are many interpretations but one common view: The war was a critical turning point in China's modern history. It was clearly a political turning point. The CCP and its armies learned to wage war in the battles against the Japanese armies and won the support of a society fundamentally changed and reduced almost to despair by warfare. The war also changed the face of Chinese society and made it ripe for revolution.

### War and Society

Wars are the fracture lines of social history. We use the phrases 'pre-war', 'ante bellum', and 'post-war' in looking at European or American history as a recognition of the fundamental changes that wars produce in societies. Wars are often the death knell of an old social order, the grim handmaidens for the birth of new ones. This process does not happen in a planned or systematic way on a political or ideological blue print. The hallmark of war is chaos. War attacks the social fabric and brings loss of cohesion and fragmentation to systems and institutions that seemed solid and resistant to change in times of peace.

There are strong arguments in the opposite direction – that fundamental processes of social change may be interrupted but not changed in direction by war, that wars do not make fundamental changes in society,

that the base is so strong that it cannot be changed by war. This view is held by those who believe in an essential China that never changes, from time immemorial. Another, very different version of the argument against wars as critical agents of change is that change is a long-term, gradual process. The distinguished historian of China, Prasanjit Duara, wrote that, in modern China, 'wars were, like natural disasters, utterly devastating but temporary'.[2]

I disagree. I find it difficult to accept these arguments for China or for any of the other countries that went through World War II and lived with total war for many years. These societies were changed fundamentally and often horribly during the war. Societies such as the United States or Canada that sent their soldiers to war but were not themselves invaded had a less disruptive experience but still a transformative one.

### The Old Society

Before the war, parts of Chinese society were already going through rapid change. The collapse of the last dynasty, the Qing, the rise of the Republic (*Zhonghua minguo*), foreign incursions, industrial development, and the arrival of modern transport and communications had all begun to have major impacts on society, though at different speeds and levels in different parts of the country. Social change was rapid in the major eastern cities and the treaty ports and much slower elsewhere. A deep rural-urban divide was opening up. The traditional society was strongly entrenched in the countryside but in decline in the developed parts of China. There, the old social ideal of large families living together, four generations under one roof (*sishi tongtang*), was giving way to modern concepts of small families; in the countryside, where the vast majority of the population lived, social patterns – clan/lineage organisations, close connections to the ancestors, deference to elders, acceptance of arranged marriage and polygamy, and the subordinate status of women – had been only slightly touched by change. Deference to the gentry elite was dominant, though based now less on the traditional qualification of education than on economic power.

Did the beginnings of change mean that even in the rural areas the old society was doomed? There were enough assaults on the old order in the 1920s and 1930s from modern-minded intellectuals and political radicals to convince many people that this was so, that there was a systemic rural crisis that could be resolved only by a revolution that would end

[2] Prasanjit Duara, *Culture, Power and the State: Rural North China 1900–1942* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 249.
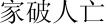
the old order. Revolutionaries believed that the old order was dying and were eager to speed it on its way. They were young people who themselves were breaking away from the oppression and paternalism of their own family elders. Their political revolution started with their revulsion for the old social order.

Some of these men went on to become the leaders of revolutionary China. In retrospect, it is easy to see a linear connection between their early activities and the CCP's rise to power in 1949. There was in fact no such smooth path. In the pre-war period, the CCP was in the deep wilderness, and its influence on the worlds they had abandoned was negligible. In the 1920s and 1930s, radical revolution failed. The CCP was driven out of its last bases in southern China and forced to flee on the Long March to a toehold in the Northwest. In 1937, the party's hope of ruling China was virtually nil.

Liberal reformers, within the GMD government and outside it, also failed to bring about radical social reform. The official blueprints for social change stayed as blueprints; few were ever implemented. The efforts of individual reformers, at places such as Ding xian (Hebei) and Zouping (Shandong), were worthy, but their success was local only. In the brief decade that the GMR ruled from Nanjing, there was not enough time or commitment to introduce real change.

China went into the war with Japan as a society still largely traditional, with signs of incipient change, few of them consolidated. The war forced change. The war brought fighting, bombing, and economic collapse and in the process turned the old society upside down and inside out. Some of the changes were sudden and extreme, so violent that they amounted to social deformation; others were more gradual but fundamental changes in basic social structures. The old order failed to provide answers to the Japanese invasion. It seemed ineffective and incompetent. As the war went on, there was a widespread revulsion against it, a sense of betrayal. Radical solutions began to seem possible, in a way could not have been imagined before the war.

### Social Deformations

家破人亡

The family is destroyed, the people lost

One of the largest elements of social deformation was the loss of young men in combat. This loss inevitably led to a rise in the numbers of unmarried women and childless widows and soon to a reduced birth rate. This is a universal effect of war. It is often followed, once a war is over, by a

compensatory baby boom; a period of many deaths is followed by a rise in the birth rate.

The death of soldiers also led to an enormous increase in the number of widows and orphans. In some parts of China, women came to out-number men. The widows had to learn to support themselves and to bring up their fatherless children on their own; the chances of a widow remarrying were low. A widow was only a marriage prospect for a very poor man; if she came with children and her husbands' parents, she was unmarriageable.

Many families and communities were deformed by another form of loss – the war-induced migration of many members. People were forced to flee away from fighting and bombing, and though many soon came home, others never did or did not return for decades after the war. When they did come back, it was to places and families they could scarcely recognise. In the meantime, they were lost to their families, in social, economic, and emotional ways.

The struggle to survive the upheavals of war changed the patterns of family relations and of the family economy. The grim demands of survival brought the intensification of the closest family bonds: parents and children. Parents struggled to keep their children alive, at the cost of ignoring less critical relatives – parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, and nieces. The elderly and infirm might even have to be abandoned when a family fled. The shrinking of the family brought about the creation of de facto nuclear families. This new pattern led to a leaner definition of family ties, which now centred on the fierce love of parents for their children. This attachment was even more intense when a widow was bringing up her children alone; the sole focus of her life was her children.

These deformations of society helped to create a society that, in many parts of China, was scarcely recognisable from the pre-war one. It also was radically changed in structure.

### Changes in Social Structure

The Resistance War is a black hole in systematic accounts of social change. The war was too chaotic, too fluid to allow for collection of data or for coherent analysis of what impact it was having on society. The war was followed by the Civil War and then a socialist revolution. It was impossible to do scientific survey work until after the end of the Mao era, from the 1980s on. However difficult it is to talk about a period of such chaos and confusion, some elements of change stand out very clearly.

The old elites suffered drastic losses in status. The inability of the old government and social elites to protect their nation or their localities could be put down to *force majeure* but also was seen as a sign of their incompetence and their lack of preparation for a conflict that in hindsight seemed inevitable. Their flight into the interior or their collaboration in the occupied areas undermined their legitimacy in the eyes of those they governed. After the war, there was no going back to their pre-war status.

Equally clear was the emergence of new social strata. The status of the military rose dramatically on both the GMD and the CCP sides. War demanded that the military be given the first call on human resources – and some of the brightest of young men went into the army. This process had been going on since the late Qing, with the end of the old examination system and the old path of elite recruitment; now it was intensified and permanently consolidated. The military, once despised, became the dominant political and social stratum. At the same time, the influence of intellectuals waned as the pace of war overtook the more leisurely world of ideas and as soldiers rather than men of education came to dominate the administrative elite. The old mandarinate, in which the civil and literary elite dominated, was gone.

War changed the gender balance in Chinese society. Many women had to learn to cope on their own and to step into roles that previously would have been performed by their fathers or husbands. Their forced independence started to change patterns of dependency and to give women opportunities to liberate themselves. At the same time, the huge numbers of men who went into the armies moved into an all-male world in which new standards of behaviour were inculcated – discipline, toughness, and sacrifice. Their lives changed completely, as did their futures. Soldiers who died might become heroes; the ones who survived had the consolations of medals, a permanent job, and the promise of veterans benefits, all at the cost, except for the officers, of loss of contact with their families.

In a time of great insecurity, the definition of wealth and prosperity changed from a preference for real property (i.e., houses, land, and vehicles) that was now insecure because it could be stolen or expropriated to small portable goods (i.e., gold and jewellery) and to invulnerable assets (i.e., foreign bank accounts and relatives abroad). The concepts of generating wealth and money making changed. The war-induced capacities to make do, to act swiftly, to see opportunities, and to haggle and bargain were more important than long-term financial planning or investment. Marginal people, previously despised when the society was stable, rose to the top of the economic pile and often stayed there. These people, who

appeared like malign rats in wartime China, are universal beneficiaries of war. They go by a variety of names, none of them flattering – profiteers, spivs, wide-boys, carpet-baggers, scroungers.

The dubious people nourished by the war were one of the new types of people. Another, more important type, for the immediate future, was the dedicated revolutionary, willing to sacrifice his own family and community for the cause of socialism. Most of the CCP leaders had already done this. In the war, many younger people joined them, putting patriotism and the revolution ahead of their families. This was a fundamental change in society and a deeply threatening one: Young people were abandoning their families and lives of privilege for a cause; they were doing so in the context of a war that demanded resistance, which the CCP increasingly came to lead.

### Grief

千辛万苦
Untold suffering

The greatest assault on a society in war is death and the grief that comes with it. The United States took decades, if not a century, to come to terms with the loss of 600,000 in its Civil War. After each world war, European countries were convulsed by grief. France after World War I was a nation in mourning, with over 4% of the population dead, mainly young men. The Soviet Union after World War II had to bear the loss of 26 million people.[3] The survivors wept for their dead, often for the rest of their lives. One of the most common and moving Soviet war memorials is of weeping women, widows, and mothers. The losses in China in the Resistance War, military and civilian, were on the same order as the Soviet Union's losses in World War II. China carried her own great burden of grief.

Grief had social and political implications. Personal loss and near despair detached people from their social moorings and precipitated some survivors into political radicalism – which meant, at the time, joining the CCP. Cao Richang, one of China's first psychologists, joined the party after his wife and two children were killed by the Japanese.[4]

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[3] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008); Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14–18, Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000); and Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: the Red Army, 1939–45* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

[4] Cao Richang later studied at Cambridge, where he met and married Selma Voss, a Dutch Jew who had survived the war in hiding in Holland. She followed him to China,

He was only one of a great legion of people whose lives were shattered by the war – and saw the revolution as a replacement for their lost family.

## Society and War

This book looks at the effects of the war on Chinese society – not at why the war happened or at how it was fought or who was to blame for it. The politics and the international relations of the war form only a back-drop here. This book sees the war through the eyes of the people who were on the receiving end of aggression, the Chinese in all their variety and their different circumstances, the people whose society was turned upside down. There are very few Japanese voices in the book. This is a deliberate omission. During the war, Chinese could only see Japanese as enemies. In the areas of China that were not occupied, their direct experience of Japan was as the recipient of bombs. In the occupied areas, the contacts often were experiences of fear or dread.

### *Organisation and Sources*

This book is organised by period, the divisions determined by military and political events. The periods are of unequal length. The first covers the traumatic first six months of the war (1937), the second a year of defeat and retreat (1938), the third the years of stagnation until the start of the Pacific War (1939–41), the fourth two and a half difficult years (1942–44), the fifth the disastrous last year of the war (1944–45), the sixth the immediate aftermath of the war (1945–46). Within each period I discuss the major social themes of the period, though many themes continue from one period to the next.

During the war, China was divided into several parts. I have focussed on a few different regions to reflect these divisions. Besides talking about the GMD government capital Chongqing and the CCP headquarters in Yan'an, I have drawn examples from the early-occupied Shandong Peninsula, from partially occupied southern Fujian (Minnan), and from Guangxi, occupied only at the end of the war. The two worst disasters of the war occurred in Henan; I discuss both the breaching of the Yellow River dike in 1938 and the Henan famine.

I have used a wide range of sources. There is no single source for the social impact of the war in China, as, for example, the materials in the

and they lived happily there with their two children. They were amongst the first people I met when I worked in China in 1964. During the Cultural Revolution, Selma committed suicide, and Cao died of illness.

Mass Observation Archive in Britain, the source for Angus Calder's
ground-breaking work, *The People's War*.[5] Very little social survey research
was done during the war, although China's few sociologists wrote about
the huge changes the war was bringing to society. There were no national
newspapers or magazines during the war, although there were some good
regional ones. I have used the invaluable collection of newspaper cuttings,
*Moci jianbao*, held at Xiamen University. Government propaganda are
a useful source. Other government records, Chinese and foreign, pro-
vide some data, although they are seldom concerned directly with social
issues. The memoirs of people who lived through the war are rich; they
have been coming out in streams in recent years, part of the huge revival
in biography in China. The accounts of Western journalists, missionaries,
and diplomats are important too. The *Materials on History and Literature*
(*wenshi ziliao*) published for every region of China from the 1980s on con-
tain invaluable accounts of the effect of the war in specific localities.

I have not used Japanese sources, which tend not to reflect the suf-
fering of occupied populations. With some exceptions, notably the sur-
vey materials collected by the research unit of the South Manchurian
Railway Company (Mantetsu), Japanese sources have little that is criti-
cal to say about the Chinese experiences of the war. Some sources even
present the war as a happy time for China. In a recent volume, *Art in
Wartime Japan*, the pictures set in China are triumphal; for instance,
Kanakogi Takeshino, 'Triumphal Entry in to Nanjing', and Yukai
Junkichi, 'Shadow: Flying above Suzhou', show happy Chinese welcom-
ing Japan's armies.[6]

Beyond hard historical sources, I have used fiction and poetry to show
the pain and sadness of the war. I share Michael Berry's conviction that
'inspired by pain and suffering, and built out of ruins and ashes, artistic
representations of atrocity collectively write their own story, from which
arises a new form of "historical narrative."'[7] Fiction and poetry provide
the most moving descriptions of how people coped with their trials. I have
included selections from contemporary fiction and from more recent fic-
tion inspired by the war. The amount of fiction published in the war was
limited. Publishing was difficult during the war. Censorships (GMD,
CCP, and Japanese) and the shortage of paper made it hard for writers to
get their works published. The restrictions of the Mao era continued the

[5] Angus Calder, *The Peoples' War* (New York: Pantheon, 1969).
[6] Hariu Ichiro, *Art in Wartime Japan, 1937–1945* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai, 2007),
pp. 21, 26.
[7] Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film*
(New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 3.

difficulty of publishing about the war, not then considered an acceptable topic. All this means that some of the most vivid stories of the war were not written or published until the last two decades, when writers finally could come to grips with the war. The same is true of film. In the last 20 years, major films about the war have been made, all providing vivid recreations of the wartime period. I list titles of some of the most important films. The work of artists, photographers, and cartoonists provides searing images of the war, and I have used contemporary illustrations, photographs, wood-block prints, cartoons, and paintings.

The voices of the great majority of the population are missing from written sources. Many of them were illiterate and have left no written records. Others lived under some degree or other of repression and were afraid to write things down. The oral memories of survivors of the war have been very important to me in writing this book. I was brought up in the shadow of World War II in a society where people talked constantly about the war, usually in glowing terms. Since I first went to China, I have heard many people talking about their experiences in the war with differing combinations of transcendence, loss, patriotism, and sadness. From these memories, I came to understand how much the war changed China. I have used oral interviews with people who lived through the period and with their children to give additional texture to the discussion of the war.

Throughout the text I have inserted *chengyu*, four-character phrases and quotations. Some of them come from classical literature and some from the oral tradition. They are very popular in Chinese and are used widely to sum up a situation or an attitude. They are sometimes called 'proverbs', but their use is so much more widespread and the repertoire is so much larger that I hesitate to use that translation. I have included Chinese characters for names and places. This is a return to the old practises of sinology made possible by modern word-processing capacities.

### Theoretical Approaches

This book has been informed by the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who devised the concept of 'social suffering' as a way of understanding the lives of people caught up in catastrophes, natural or human-made, that attack the fabric of their society and make their lives hard, if not intolerable. They experience the *miseres du monde* – the 'misfortunes of the world'.[8] Bourdieu's work is engaged and compassionate; it is

[8] Pierre Bourdieu, *La misere du monde* (Paris: Editions de seuil, 1993); translated by Priscilla Ferguson as, *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).