The Chinese peoples’ experience of war during World War II, as it is known in the West, was one of suffering and stoicism in the face of dreadful conditions. China’s War of Resistance began in 1937 with the Japanese invasion and ended in 1945 after eight long years. Diana Lary, one of the foremost historians of the period, tells the tragic history of China’s war and its consequences from the perspective of those who went through it. Using archival evidence only recently made available, interviews with survivors, and extracts from literature, she creates a vivid and highly disturbing picture of the havoc created by the war, the destruction of towns and villages, the displacement of peoples, and the accompanying economic and social disintegration. Her focus is on families torn apart – men, women, and children left homeless and struck down by disease and famine. It is also a story of courage and survival. By 1945, the fabric of China’s society had been utterly transformed, and entirely new social categories had emerged. As the author suggests in a new interpretation of modern Chinese history, far from stemming the spread of communism from the USSR, which was the Japanese pretext for invasion, the horrors of the war and the damage it created nurtured the Chinese Communist Party and helped it to win power in 1949.

Diana Lary is Professor Emerita in the Department of History at the University of British Columbia. She has spent many years working on modern Chinese history, teaching the subject to thousands of students and writing or editing six books and numerous articles.
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*Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945*

Diana Lary

*University of British Columbia, Vancouver*
Dedication

For my beloved mother, M. M. E. Lainson, who died just as this book was finished.

And for my friend since childhood, Jenni Calder. We did Latin together at the Perse (Cambridge) and learnt the phrase for the Aeneid, ‘lacrimae rerum’, ‘the tears of things’. The tears are for the sadness and anguish war produces, and the waste it causes.
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Preface

This book was written to help explain the awful impact of the Resistance War (1937–45) on Chinese society. It is written in the hope that readers will come to see this war as one of the pivotal events in modern Chinese history and not just a murky prelude to the communist advent to power in 1949.

I grew up in the shadow of the two world wars. World War I was the overwhelming event in the lives of my grandmothers. Mabel Symmes mourned all her long life for her husband, killed on Easter Sunday 1917, along with almost 4,000 Canadians. Margaret Lainson kept two scrap-books filled with three-line death announcements from the Times of men from her small part of Suffolk who had been killed in the war. World War II was my parents’ war. It was close to us as children. The adults in our world talked about the war constantly. We lived with post-war shortages, and we understood the losses war had brought to a ‘victorious’ country. My mother, M. M. E. Lainson, taught us how painful and wasteful war was. The human costs to the West can be magnified many times for China. I have wanted to bring some understanding of the trauma and also of the heroism of the Resistance War.

In writing this book, I have relied on help from people beyond the field of Chinese history. One of the people who has helped me most, with her enthusiasm and her clear insight, is Martha Carroll of New York. She insisted on the importance of my topic, and she brought her wide-ranging knowledge to move me from my rather narrow academic world to a much broader one.

I thank my colleagues at the University of British Columbia who have helped me so much over the years of writing this book: Alison Bailey, Timothy Brook, Gu Xiong, Liu Jing, Steven Lee, Tsao Hsing-yuan, Alexander Woodside, and Eleanor Yuen.

Beryl Williams (Sussex) helped me with the European literature on the impact of World War II on Europe. My colleagues in a collaborative project on the Resistance War have been very helpful. My thanks go to Ezra Vogel (Harvard), Hans van de Ven (Cambridge), Stephen MacKinnon (Arizona State), Yang Tianshi (Beijing), and Yamada
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This project involved quite a lot of travel for research. For help and hospitality during my research travels, I want to thank the following people: in Beijing, Yang Tianshi, Bu Ping, Phil Calvert, Chantal Meagher, Ju Zhifen, Janet Lai, Qi Wenxin, Maggie and Andrew Watson, Endymion Wilkinson, and Zhuang Jianping; in Shanghai, Mary Boyd, James Mitchell, and Fei Lan; in Minnan, Li Minghuan, Wang Lianmao, and Ding Yulin; in Hong Kong, Hai Chi-yuet, David Jones, Gianni Mok, and Elizabeth Sinn; in Ottawa, Denise Chong and Roger Smith; and in Taipei, Chang Jui-te and Ch’en Yung-fa.

None of this travel would have been possible without a very generous research grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. I have used the following libraries and archives: Second Historical Archives (Nanjing), Guoshiguan and Dangshihui (Taipei); National Archives (London); National Archives (Ottawa); Siemens Archiv (Munchen); and Xiamen University Library.

Finally, my deepest love and thanks for the joy they have brought me go to three small people who I hope will never experience war: Mabel, Jack, and Misha, my grandchildren.