



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Exemplifying national unity and victory in local state museums: Chongqing and the new paradigm of official World War II memory in China**

Chang, V.K.L.

### **Citation**

Chang, V. K. L. (2022). Exemplifying national unity and victory in local state museums: Chongqing and the new paradigm of official World War II memory in China. *Journal Of Contemporary China*, 31(138), 977-992. doi:10.1080/10670564.2022.2031004

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3256898>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



# Exemplifying National Unity and Victory in Local State Museums: Chongqing and the New Paradigm of World War II Memory in China

Vincent K. L. Chang

To cite this article: Vincent K. L. Chang (2022): Exemplifying National Unity and Victory in Local State Museums: Chongqing and the New Paradigm of World War II Memory in China, Journal of Contemporary China, DOI: [10.1080/10670564.2022.2031004](https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2031004)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2031004>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 30 Jan 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 96



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# Exemplifying National Unity and Victory in Local State Museums: Chongqing and the New Paradigm of World War II Memory in China

Vincent K. L. Chang

Leiden University, The Netherlands

## ABSTRACT

The literature on World War II memory in China is skewed toward the history of the occupation and victimization of the eastern provinces. This study shifts the focus to the southwestern city of Chongqing, which served as China's temporary wartime capital and the seat of the CCP–GMD united front. Comparing distinctive thematic narratives of four state museums, this research shows that Chongqing is not an outlier in China's memory scape, as is often presumed. Rather, it finds that these narratives draw selectively and purposefully from local experiences to instantiate and reaffirm the evolving central line. Chongqing's story of unified resistance and joint triumph exemplifies the more inclusive and empowering new norm of war remembrance under Xi Jinping, which stresses national unity as the key to Chinese 'greatness'.

## Introduction

Two broadly opposing views on the role of the Chinese party-state can be distinguished in the literature on historical memory. The first holds that the production of historical narratives in China is a tightly controlled, top-down, monolithic affair that allows for little variation at the local level. Proponents of this view, such as Walter Hatch, see an authoritarian regime that speaks 'with one clear voice': '[because] the Chinese party-state dominates domestic discourse, its war museums are able to present a coherent, common narrative about China's past'.<sup>1</sup> Others draw on similar notions of a Beijing-dictated nationwide uniformity, although this is sometimes nuanced.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, most agree that under Xi Jinping the grip of the party-state on historical memory has tightened and that there is a trend of increasingly centralized control in the domains of cultural heritage management and history education.<sup>3</sup> The other view, drawing support from the broader literature on museology, maintains that the emphasis on state-centered perspectives and official narratives is disproportionate and

**CONTACT** Vincent K. L. Chang  [v.k.chang@hum.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:v.k.chang@hum.leidenuniv.nl)  Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

<sup>1</sup>Walter Hatch, 'Bloody memories: affect and effect of World War II museums in China and Japan', *Peace & Change* 39(3), (2014), p. 389.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g. Parks M. Coble, 'China's "new remembering" of the anti-Japanese war of resistance, 1937–1945', *China Quarterly* 190, (2007), p. 403; Edward Vickers, 'Transcending victimhood: Japan in the public historical museums of Taiwan and the People's Republic of China', *China Perspectives* 4, (2013), p. 19; Matteo Dian, *Contested Memories in Chinese and Japanese Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, MA: Chandos, 2017), p. 137; Fengqi Qian and Guo-Qiang Liu, 'Remembrance of the Nanjing Massacre in the globalised era: the memory of victimisation, emotions and the rise of China', *China Report* 55(2), (2019), p. 84.

<sup>3</sup>See, e.g. Kirk Denton, 'The Jianchuan Museum: the politics of war memory in a private Chinese museum', in *Remembering Asia's World War Two*, ed. Mark Frost, Daniel Schumacher, and Edward Vickers (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 98; and Vincent K. L. Chang, 'Recalling victory, recounting greatness: Second World War remembrance in Xi Jinping's China', *The China Quarterly*, 248, (2021), p. 1160.

that it obscures the increasing cultural and social diversity in China, the agency of non-state actors, and the impact of bottom-up forces. Writing specifically on World War II (WWII), Diana Lary argues that war memory on the subnational level is more varied than on the central level, and 'less subject to political manipulation', because of significant regional differences in war experiences.<sup>4</sup> Expanding on this, Rana Mitter sees a 'normalization' of war history in China, as 'monocausal' narratives are making way for representations that acknowledge the 'complex and often contradictory set of processes between various Chinese actors' during the war.<sup>5</sup> Recently, Mitter has argued that Chongqing, the Chinese Nationalists' temporary capital and center of national resistance from 1937 to 1945, is engaged in an 'unstated competition' with Beijing.<sup>6</sup> The existence of 'unorthodoxies' in local commemoration, this second group of authors suggest, shows that collective memory cannot be dictated from the top down.

However, little empirical evidence has been put forward for either side of this debate. Few scholars have endeavored to investigate local war memory beyond the well-known sites of national trauma in Nanjing and other places that were under Japanese occupation during the war. Studies that have ventured into China's formerly unoccupied regions are limited in both number and scope. For example, although Mitter's recent work on war memory in China contains new insights into local memory, his analysis of Chongqing focuses almost exclusively on the Chinese Nationalists. Kirk Denton, on the other hand, contributes significantly to the field with a much-needed analysis of a cluster of private museums in Sichuan and Chongqing, but leaves out some important pieces of the puzzle by not comparing them to local state museums.

This article contributes to the debate through a focused analysis of official war representation in Chongqing. It asks how WWII history is represented in four major thematic local state museums, respectively commemorating Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres, Guomindang (GMD) compatriots, American allies, and the city itself, and compares these local representations with the evolving central line. By providing an inclusive and structured analysis of official war representation in the single locality of China's former wartime capital, this study redresses several deficits in the abovementioned works. Despite variations reflecting the distinct thematic focuses of these four sites, it finds that in respect to key categories of discourse these narratives conform closely to the new national norm under Xi Jinping, which emphasizes the unity, victory, and greatness of the Chinese people.

## Interpretative Paradigms of WWII Memory

To assess what 'unorthodoxies' may exist at the local level one needs to first define the 'orthodoxy' of the center. The scholarship on historical memory in China distinguishes two basic paradigms of official WWII remembrance in mainland China. The first, referred to here as the 'revolutionary heroism' paradigm, defined public discourse on the mainland during the Maoist era. Drawing from Leninist-Marxist orthodoxy, this paradigm framed WWII as part of the wider struggle between global revolutionary and reactionary forces, and the CCP as heroically guiding the Chinese people in defeating a clique of Japanese militarists and their reactionary GMD collaborators.<sup>7</sup> In this classic class-struggle view, the Chinese war experience is reduced to a 'side conflict' of the principal struggle and portrayed as a 'way-station on the path to CCP dominance in 1949'.<sup>8</sup> The war thus had little discursive value of its own, and its memory was suppressed as the wartime coalition between the

<sup>4</sup>Diana Lary, 'War and remembering: memories of China at War', in *Beyond Suffering: Recounting War in Modern China*, ed. James Flath and Norman Smith (Vancouver: UBC Press), p. 269.

<sup>5</sup>Rana Mitter, 'Changed by war: the changing historiography of wartime China and new interpretations of modern Chinese history', *Chinese Historical Review* 17(1), (2010), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup>Rana Mitter, *China's Good War: How World War II is Shaping a New Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2020), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup>Yinan He, 'Remembering and forgetting the war: elite mythmaking, mass reaction, and Sino-Japanese relations, 1950–2006', *History & Memory* 19(2), (2007), p. 49; Zheng Wang, 'National humiliation, history education, and the politics of historical memory: patriotic education campaign in China', *International Studies Quarterly* 52, (2008), p. 790; and Xiaokui Wang, 'Historical shifts in remembering China's "Nanjing Massacre"', *Chinese Studies in History* 50(4), (2017), p. 328.

<sup>8</sup>Mitter, 'Changed by war', p. 86. See also Sarah C. M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia, 1911–1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 5.

CCP and GMD did not fit the 'class-struggle' narrative and the Chinese leadership sought to improve relations with Tokyo in the face of a common Soviet threat. However, when this threat subsided and the revolutionary rhetoric lost credibility after Mao's disastrous domestic campaigns, Beijing cured itself of its initial 'benevolent amnesia' vis-à-vis Japan's wartime conduct.<sup>9</sup> The resultant paradigm, emerging from the late 1980s, reframed the legacy of WWII along nationalistic and patriotic lines instead of party-ideological lines, thus shifting the focus from the CCP's revolutionary fervor to the collective suffering of the Chinese people at the hands of Japanese aggression.<sup>10</sup> Drawing on a narrative of national humiliation and victimhood, China's 'new remembering' inspired a fervent 'numbers game' aimed at quantifying Japanese atrocities and an equally dedicated 'apology diplomacy' aimed at extracting concessions from Tokyo.<sup>11</sup>

Recent scholarship has identified an emerging third paradigm. The new discourse, introduced under Hu Jintao in the early 2000s and intensified under Xi, reflects a break with the victimhood trope of the Deng/Jiang years and a shift to a more assertive and aspiring nationalist discourse emphasizing China's 'great victory'. Remixing elements of the earlier two paradigms into a powerful new retelling, it portrays the Chinese people, united and inspired by the CCP, as morally righteous, strong, and victorious in a just war against evil, warmongering forces.<sup>12</sup> The result of this change, as reflected in recent speeches, revised history textbooks and updated museum narratives, is a multilayered narrative.<sup>13</sup> To Chinese audiences, in order to promote national cohesion and unification, emphasis is laid on patriotic loyalty and 'spiritual' mobilization of the Chinese people as the key to ultimate victory, in a reading that is far more inclusive than that of the earlier paradigms.<sup>14</sup> To international audiences, an image is presented of China as an important co-founder and stakeholder of the post-war global order and of the Chinese people as 'paragons of moral strength and champions of justice'.<sup>15</sup> The central notion underpinning both layers is that it was the CCP that inspired, achieved, and sustained a united front of national resistance despite the military superiority of the aggressor, limited foreign support, and defeatism among GMD factions. This allowed China not only to achieve its first victory against foreign imperialist aggression but, by pinning down much of Japan's fighting force, also to 'greatly contribute' to the victory of the global anti-fascist coalition. The new emphasis on triumph and greatness was confirmed during a CCP Politburo meeting in July 2015, when Xi urged deeper reflection on three key elements: the 'great significance' of the Chinese people's war, its 'important place' in the global fight against fascism, and the 'central role' of the CCP as the 'key' to ultimate victory.<sup>16</sup> The decision to extend the war's time frame from eight to fourteen years, incorporated in the recently revised and standardized editions of Chinese history textbooks, also resulted from Xi's dictum to adopt a 'correct view' on history, which emphasizes the CCP's role in mobilizing nationwide resistance from the earliest stages on.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup>James Reilly, 'Remember history, not hatred: collective remembrance of China's war of resistance to Japan', *Modern Asian Studies* 45(2), (2011), p. 469.

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g. Arthur Waldron, 'China's new remembering of World War II: the case of Zhang Zizhong', *Modern Asian Studies* 30(4), (1996): p. 950; and Peter H. Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 79.

<sup>11</sup>Gries, *China's New Nationalism*, pp. 80, 89; Coble, 'China's "new remembering"', p. 394.

<sup>12</sup>Vickers, 'Transcending victimhood', p. 28; Denton, 'Jianchuan Museum', p. 75; Mitter, *China's Good War*, p. 6; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1166.

<sup>13</sup>Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1168.

<sup>14</sup>Chunyu Zhang and Benjamin R. Bates, 'Victory and peace: the use of metaphors in Chinese President Xi Jinping's V-Day speech', *China Media Research* 13(2), (2017), p. 39; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1159.

<sup>15</sup>Edward Vickers, 'Remembering and forgetting war and occupation in the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan', in *Remembering the Second World War*, ed. Patrick Finney (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 55; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1166.

<sup>16</sup>习近平: 让历史说话用史实发言 深入开展中国人民抗日战争研究' [Xi Jinping: let historical facts speak, deepen the research on the Chinese people's war of resistance to Japan], *Xinhuanet*, July 31, 2015, accessed December 1, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/31/c\\_1116107416.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-07/31/c_1116107416.htm).

<sup>17</sup>In July 2017, the PRC's Ministry of Education oversaw the issuance of a new standardized history textbook for middle schools nationwide, which, contrary to earlier editions, treats 'the 14-year war of resistance' as an integrated unit. See 中国历史八年级上册 [Chinese History, Grade 8, Vol. 1] (Beijing: People's Education Press, 2017), pp. 85–108; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1157.

In addition to the critique offered at the outset of this article, a review of the literature identifies two basic shortcomings. First, the field as a whole has been slow to catch up with recent developments on the central level: despite obvious shifts in commemorative practices under Xi, recent scholarly work is still preoccupied with the Nanjing Massacre as the quintessential event of China's war remembrance.<sup>18</sup> The fact that partially outdated and incomplete paradigms continue to shape the debate complicates the task of comparing central and local war remembrances. Second, there has been no attempt to define and assess the key discursive components of these paradigms, despite the literature on collective memory and identity providing useful tools for such a task. This further complicates the drawing of meaningful comparisons.

### Three Discursive Dimensions

To analyze, classify, and compare distinct sets of WWII narratives, this study adopts from the literature on identity politics and (ontological) security a basic framework that distinguishes three dimensions along which political actors, including states, articulate their self-images, achievements, and aspirations: temporality, spatiality, and ethicality.<sup>19</sup> Temporality refers to the conceptualization of time, as reflected in historical periodization, temporal gaps, and cognitive connections between the past and the present. Spatiality involves the construction of absolute and relative space, and hence the delineation not only of geographical locations but also of historical actors included in (or omitted from) memory as well as their mutual relationships; this typically includes the juxtaposition of an idealized 'Self' with a discursive 'Other'. The ethical dimension focuses on the articulation of morality and human agency, and hence the representation of historical causes, conduct, and morals or 'lessons'. The literature suggests that mnemonic discourse is inherently unstable and infused with contradictions because 'actors choose to accentuate certain referents while suppressing others' in its construction.<sup>20</sup> These contradictions are likely to increase if multiple actors are involved in memory production, whereas they may decrease in the case of centrally controlled narratives. Drawing from the literature reviewed in the previous section, Table 1 presents a schematization of these dimensions for each of the three paradigms. This schema will serve as a reference for comparing local WWII narratives in later sections.

### Restoring the Past, Building the Future

Before turning to local narratives, this section provides some historical background on Chongqing's war experience. This is pertinent in view of Diana Lary's claim that local war memories vary because of different historical experiences. It is also necessary, because the literature has long neglected Chongqing's wartime past, while the few available studies have focused almost exclusively on the Nationalists.<sup>21</sup> To do justice to Chongqing's wartime history, however, it is essential to also acknowledge the Communists' presence in the city and recognize its unique historical role as the locus of the GMD–CCP united front.

The National government began relocating parts of its administration to Chongqing in November 1937.<sup>22</sup> Chiang Kai-shek initially remained close to the front, moving to Chongqing in December 1938 after the surrender of Wuhan. At this same time, Zhou Enlai arrived in the war capital

<sup>18</sup>See, e.g. Wang, 'Historical shifts'; Qian and Liu, 'Remembrance'; William A. Callahan, 'Cultivating power: gardens in the global politics of diplomacy, war, and peace', *International Political Sociology* 11(4), (2017), pp. 360–379; and Dian, *Contested Memories*.

<sup>19</sup>Lena Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 41–48.

<sup>20</sup>Lindsay Black, 'Japan's aspirations for regional leadership: is the goose finally cooked?', *Japanese Studies* 37(2), (2017), p. 156.

<sup>21</sup>See, e.g. Ying-kit Chan, 'A wartime stampede: renewing a social contract after the great tunnel disaster of Chongqing', *International Journal of Asian Studies* 14(1), (2017), pp. 47–75; Vincent K. L. Chang and Yong Zhou, 'Redefining wartime Chongqing: international capital of a global power in the making, 1938–46', *Modern Asian Studies* 51(3), (2017), pp. 577–621; and Mitter, *China's Good War*, pp. 169–192.

<sup>22</sup>Chang and Zhou, 'Redefining wartime Chongqing', p. 583.

<sup>23</sup>Yong Zhou, Vincent K. L. Chang, and Xiaohui Gong, 'Recalling the war in China: the Dahoufang project in Chongqing and the restoration of a legacy', *Frontiers of History in China* 9(4), (2014), p. 612.

**Table 1.** Discursive dimensions of the three paradigms of China's WWII remembrance

	Revolutionary heroism	National victimhood	National greatness
Temporality			
Contemporary context	Maoist era (1950–76)	Deng/Jiang eras (1978–2002)	Hu/Xi eras (2005–present)
Periodization of WWII	8-year war (1937–45), nested in civil war (1927–49)	8-year war (1937–45)	14-year war (1931–45)
Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First united front (1924–27)</li> <li>• Second united front (1937–46)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-war socialist campaigns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-war socialist campaigns</li> </ul>
Spatiality			
Locality	China (CCP regions)	China (occupied regions)	China (all regions) Burma, India
'Self'	Chinese revolutionary classes led by CCP	Chinese nation and state	Chinese people united by CCP
'Other'	Reactionary class, imperialists, militarists (domestic & Japanese)	Japan (nation-state)	Unjust external forces (fascist; imperialist)
Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD areas</li> <li>• Asia/world</li> <li>• Allies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unoccupied areas</li> <li>• Asia/world</li> <li>• Allies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest of Asia/world</li> <li>• Allies</li> </ul>
Ethicality			
Cause	Revolutionary vs reactionary Heroes vs traitors	Aggression vs resistance Perpetrators vs victims	Just vs unjust Good vs evil (anti-fascist vs fascist; anti-imperialist vs imperialist; peace-loving vs warmongering)
Moral/'lesson'	CCP led Chinese people to stand up against imperialism and feudalism	Weak Chinese nation invaded, occupied, and victimized by Japanese militarism	CCP allowed Chinese nation to unite, be strong and win victory, contributing to global peace
Diplomacy & cooperation	International socialist/Maoist revolutionary movement	Low-profile diplomacy, except for 'apology diplomacy' (Japan)	Assertive diplomacy ('wolf warrior diplomacy')
Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD–CCP alliance</li> <li>• Domestic collaboration, appeasement</li> <li>• GMD contribution</li> <li>• Allies' contributions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD–CCP frictions</li> <li>• Domestic collaboration, appeasement</li> <li>• Allies' contributions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD–CCP frictions</li> <li>• Domestic collaboration, appeasement</li> <li>• Allies' contributions</li> </ul>

as the CCP's chief representative and liaison under the united front. Apart from liaison work with Chiang's government, Zhou and his team used their presence in the GMD-controlled areas for covert party and intelligence work. In January 1939, they set up the CCP Southern Bureau (南方局) for this purpose.<sup>23</sup>

In the spring of 1939, the Japanese military launched a massive, multi-year bombing campaign known in China as the 'Great Bombing' of Chongqing (重庆大轰炸). After the first raids in May, which killed some 4,000 citizens and wounded many thousands more, the city was separated from Sichuan province and elevated to a special municipality directly under central control (直辖市).<sup>24</sup> Following even more destructive raids the next year, Chongqing was designated 'auxiliary' capital (陪都 *peidu*).<sup>25</sup> In the ensuing months, as the global war unfolded, several Allied powers moved their diplomatic and military missions to China's provisional capital. In Western media, Chongqing became known as one of the four major Allied capitals, on a par with London, Moscow, and Washington.

After Japan's surrender, Mao accepted Chiang's invitation for talks about China's postwar reconstruction. At a historic banquet in Chongqing on V-J Day (September 3), the two leaders exchanged toasts to celebrate China's hard-won victory. But neither their half-hearted negotiations nor the

<sup>24</sup>潘洵 [Pan Xun], 抗日战争时期重庆大轰炸研究 [The Great Bombing of Chongqing during the Chinese War of Resistance against Japan] (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2013), p. 118.

<sup>25</sup>Zhou et al., 'Recalling the war', p. 612.

<sup>26</sup>Chang and Zhou, 'Redefining wartime Chongqing', p. 584.



subsequent mediation efforts by US special envoy George Marshall would prevent the resumption of civil war. Before returning to the Nanjing in May 1946, Chiang declared Chongqing a 'permanent' auxiliary capital in recognition of the city's heroic wartime role.<sup>26</sup>

In late 1949, days before Chiang's flight to Taiwan, Chongqing again briefly served as the temporary seat of the (skeleton) GMD government. As Chiang evacuated the city for the second time, he ordered the killing of the political dissidents, mostly Communists, kept at the former premises of the Sino-American Co-operative Organization (SACO), a joint training and intelligence-sharing unit established in 1942 by the US Naval Group and Chiang's secret service, the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics (国民政府军事委员会调查统计局).<sup>27</sup>

After the takeover, Chongqing became the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army's Southwest Military Command under Deng Xiaoping. The city was reincorporated into Sichuan province and turned into a military-industrial base of Mao's Third Front strategy. In line with the collective 'amnesia' that characterized official war remembrance in the Mao era, Chongqing's wartime history was erased from public memory. Several generations grew up without ever learning about the 'Great Bombing' of their city.<sup>28</sup>

This began to change in the 1980s, when Deng's 'new remembering' opened up space for Chinese war victims and veterans to confront their long-suppressed trauma. The memory of the 'Great Bombing' was among the first to be rehabilitated in Chongqing. In July 1987, on the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the war, the municipal government constructed a monument at the former site of an air raid shelter where 2,500 citizens had been killed on a single day in 1941. Memorial services take place there every year on June 5, when alarms are sounded across the city. In 2004, survivors of the bombings founded a civil litigation group, which spent more than a decade unsuccessfully seeking reparations from the Japanese government.<sup>29</sup>

Another factor driving the rehabilitation of Chongqing's wartime past has been the municipality's ambition to become the leading metropolis in West China. In its rivalry with nearby Chengdu—the provincial capital of Sichuan from which Chongqing re-separated in 1997—for regional primacy, reviving the wartime past has become an important element of city marketing and tourism strategies. In 2008, blessed with Beijing's approval, the municipality embarked on a multi-tiered project to restore and recount the wartime legacy of China's unoccupied 'great rear area' (大后方) surrounding Chongqing. Extensive new research programs were launched on the Great Bombing and the united front.<sup>30</sup>

## WWII Representations in Chongqing's State Museums

This section examines WWII exhibition narratives displayed in four major history museums in Chongqing. These sites were selected for three reasons. First, in terms of size, visitor numbers, and status these museums all belong to the top segment of the municipality's 395 protected heritage sites associated with wartime history.<sup>31</sup> Second, thematically they offer a broad representation of Chongqing's war history, each with its own distinct focus. Third, and most importantly, while these sites have been mentioned variously in the literature, they have hitherto not been examined in detail or compared with central-level WWII representations.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), p. 79.

<sup>28</sup>Zhou et al., 'Recalling the war', p. 613; and Pan, *Kangri zhanzheng*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup>Scholars to testify for victims of Japanese aggression', *China Daily*, April 18, 2014, accessed December 1, 2020, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-04/18/content\\_17446293.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2014-04/18/content_17446293.htm).

<sup>30</sup>Zhou et al., 'Recalling the war', pp. 615–619; and Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, p. 250.

<sup>31</sup>Zhou et al., 'Recalling the war', p. 620.

<sup>32</sup>Some recent studies have analyzed the 'red' historical sites in Chongqing that feature in this study, but they focus on revolutionary history, rather than WWII; see, e.g. Denton, *Exhibiting the Past*, pp. 78–84; and Frank N. Pieke, 'Party spirit: producing a Communist civil religion in contemporary China', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 24(4), (2018), pp. 717–719.



Field research at these museums was conducted in October 2018 and September 2019, after multiple earlier visits since 2008. While the selected sites include both nationally and locally administered facilities, in practice supervision takes place primarily at the local level. Broadly speaking, the Chongqing Municipal Culture Bureau is responsible for administrative supervision, whereas the CCP's municipal propaganda department oversees the exhibited contents.<sup>33</sup> Exhibitions are normally developed by the museum's design department in consultation with the research department. The design plan and narratives are then submitted to the CCP's municipal propaganda department for authorization; in the case of national-level museums, it may forward these to the central level.<sup>34</sup> For specific parts of the exhibits dealing with the People's Liberation Army or with incumbent CCP leaders, prior authorization is sought from the Central Military Affairs Committee and the CCP General Office, respectively.<sup>35</sup> To accentuate the trajectory of local memory production and facilitate comparison with the three central paradigms, the sites are discussed in the order of their founding.

### ***Honoring Heroes: Hongyan Museum***

The Chongqing Hongyan Revolutionary History Museum (重庆红岩革命历史博物馆), or Hongyan Museum, is affiliated to the Chongqing Culture and Tourism Development Commission and operates several 'red tourism' sites across the city. Its two main facilities, discussed below, are the Hongyan Revolutionary Memorial Hall (红岩革命纪念馆) and the Chongqing Geleshan Revolutionary Memorial Hall (重庆歌乐山革命纪念馆). The combined sites of the Hongyan Museum received 11.5 million visitors in 2019, surpassed only in the national statistics by the Palace Museum in Beijing's Forbidden City.<sup>36</sup> Because of the close similarities in key discursive respects, the two Hongyan sites have been incorporated in a single integrated column in Table 2.

The Geleshan Revolutionary Memorial Hall is located at the foot of the Gele Mountain west of the city center at the former site of SACO. In 1954, the municipal government established a martyrs' cemetery there to commemorate the Communist revolutionaries that had been detained, tortured, and in some cases executed in two nearby GMD-operated prisons during and after the war. In 1963, the 'Exhibition Hall on Crimes by US Imperialism and Chiang Kai-shek' (重庆'中美合作所'美蒋罪行展览馆) was built there. In 1985, it was renamed the Chongqing Gele Mountain Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery Management Site (重庆歌乐山烈士陵园管理处). In 2008, the main exhibition moved into a massive new edifice, called the Exhibition Hall of the Soul of Hongyan (红岩魂陈列馆). This hall, together with the adjacent commemorative square and the two prisons, has been designated a national-level protected heritage site, key national patriotic and educational base, and 4A national tourism attraction.<sup>37</sup> The sites recount the history of Chinese revolutionary heroes and their struggles in Chongqing from 1937 to 1949. The increasingly central place of WWII in this revolutionary history is underscored by the commemorations that take place here on major war anniversaries, organized in collaboration with local WWII research and heritage institutions.<sup>38</sup>

The main exhibition focuses on wartime Communist martyrs, such as the New Fourth Army commander Ye Ting (叶挺), who was imprisoned there following the South Anhui incident (and who died in an airplane incident after his release in April 1946) and the political prisoners killed by the GMD secret police on the eve of Chongqing's 'liberation' in late 1949. In addition to these and other revolutionary martyrs, the exhibition also honors some 'progressive'

<sup>33</sup>Interview with staff member, Three Gorges Museum, Chongqing, October 17, 2018.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with staff member, Hongyan Memorial Hall, Chongqing, April 17, 2019.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>重庆红岩革命历史博物馆去年接待游客1150万人次 接待量居全国博物馆第二位 ['Chongqing Hongyan Revolutionary History Museum received 11.5 million tourists last year, ranking second among museums in the country'], *Xinhuanet*, May 24, 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, [http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/2020-05/24/c\\_1126025226.htm](http://www.cq.xinhuanet.com/2020-05/24/c_1126025226.htm).

<sup>37</sup>Fieldnotes, Chongqing, October 18, 2018.

<sup>38</sup>抗战胜利日 他们齐聚红岩公墓缅怀革命英烈! ['On V-J Day, they gathered in Hongyan Cemetery to cherish the memory of revolutionary heroes'], *Hualongwang*, September 3, 2020, accessed December 1, 2020, [http://cq.cqnews.net/html/2020-09/03/content\\_51066009.html](http://cq.cqnews.net/html/2020-09/03/content_51066009.html).

**Table 2.** Discursive dimensions of WWII representations in Chongqing's state museums

	Hongyan	Huangshan	Stilwell	Three Gorges
Temporality				
Site history (creation; recent renovations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1950s, 2007</li> <li>• 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1991</li> <li>• 2015–19</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1991</li> <li>• 2014, 2018</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2005</li> <li>• 2014, 2018</li> </ul>
Thematic periodization	1931–49 (previously 1939–49)	1938–46 (1931–37 briefly referenced)	1941–45	1931–46 (previously 1938–46)
Contemporary references	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'New era'</li> <li>• 'National Rejuvenation'</li> <li>• Xi Jinping as core leader</li> <li>• Socialism with Chinese characteristics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits of Taiwanese dignitaries and foreign visitors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visits of U.S. (foreign) dignitaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'New era'</li> <li>• 'National Rejuvenation'</li> </ul>
Gap	Maoist era	Maoist era	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1931–40</li> <li>• Maoist era</li> </ul>	Maoist era
Spatiality				
Locality	Chongqing	Chongqing, Huangshan area	Chongqing	Chongqing
'Self'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese revolutionaries and patriots (united by CCP)</li> <li>• Hongyan 'spirit'</li> </ul>	Chongqing as 'city of victory' with Chiang Kai-shek as 'chief decision-maker'	Chinese people united by CCP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chinese people united by CCP</li> <li>• Chongqing as 'city of victory'</li> </ul>
'Other'	Depraved traitors; 'anti-Communist diehards'	Foreign aggressor (Japan)	Foreign aggressor (Japan); fascist forces	Foreign aggressor (Japan); foreign imperialism
Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USSR</li> <li>• Comintern advisers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupied regions</li> <li>• USSR</li> <li>• Allies other than U.S. &amp; U.K.</li> <li>• Japanese state/empire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupied regions</li> <li>• USSR</li> <li>• Allies other than U.S. &amp; U.K.</li> <li>• Japanese state/empire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupied regions</li> <li>• USSR</li> <li>• Japanese state/empire</li> </ul>
Ethicality				
Cause	Loyalty vs betrayal; progressive vs reactionary forces	Resistance against foreign invasion	Resistance against global fascism	Just war against imperialist aggression and global fascism
Moral/'lesson'	Thanks to its farsightedness and resolve, the CCP succeeded in uniting all China's patriotic forces to resist foreign aggression, resulting in the victory of peace, justice, and democracy. The Chinese people must embrace the Hongyan spirit and unite closely under CCP leadership to achieve national rejuvenation.	As the wartime capital, seat of the Southern Bureau and the united front, and regional Allied headquarters, Chongqing made major sacrifices and contributions to the victory of WWII.	The universal friendship between the American and Chinese peoples laid the basis for victory and strong relations between the US and the CCP (PRC).	As the wartime capital, seat of the Southern Bureau and the united front, and regional Allied headquarters, Chongqing made major contributions to victory, justice, and peace. The Chinese people must draw inspiration from this heroic experience and unite closely under CCP leadership to achieve national rejuvenation.
Diplomacy & cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zhou Enlai's diplomacy and international propaganda</li> <li>• International (anti-fascist) united front work in CQ</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-Strait relations</li> <li>• China–U.S. relations</li> <li>• China–U.K. relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD–CCP relations</li> <li>• China–U.S. relations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China's interallied relations: elevation of national prestige</li> <li>• Construction of post-war order</li> </ul>

*(Continued)*

Table 2. (Continued).

	Hongyan	Huangshan	Stilwell	Three Gorges
Gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CCP failures or betrayal</li> <li>• Soviet role in creation of united front</li> <li>• Soviet support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GMD failures</li> <li>• GMD–CCP frictions</li> <li>• Victimization in occupied regions</li> <li>• Chinese Collaboration</li> <li>• USSR support</li> <li>• Atom bombs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US isolationism</li> <li>• ‘Europe First’ strategy</li> <li>• China–U.S. tensions</li> <li>• Failure of first Burma campaign</li> <li>• Frictions between Stilwell and Chennault</li> <li>• Failure of GMD–CCP coalition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local problems and mismanagement</li> <li>• GMD–CCP frictions</li> <li>• Victimization in occupied regions</li> <li>• Chinese collaboration</li> <li>• USSR support</li> <li>• Atom bombs</li> </ul>

Nationalists. Among them are Yang Hucheng (杨虎城) and Zhang Xueliang (张学良), the two generals who masterminded the 1936 Xi’an Incident that forced Chiang Kai-shek into accepting an alliance with the Communists. They are portrayed as ‘eternal heroes’, and their sculptures on the spacious commemoration square outside the hall enjoy the same prominence as those of their Communist peers. The vista is reminiscent of the China Heroes Statute Square at Jianchuan Museum, indicating that the latter site is not as ‘unusual’ as Denton suggests.<sup>39</sup> The official restoration of GMD figures follows the shift initiated under Hu Jintao, who in his 2005 V-J Day remembrance speech placed four high-ranking Nationalist generals on an equal footing with four CCP martyrs.<sup>40</sup>

The exhibition narrative reflects the evolving central line, including the most recent shifts (see Table 2). On the one hand, it has manifest roots in Mao-era revolutionary discourse, as it juxtaposes heroism with betrayal and progressive forces with reactionary forces. On the other hand, the contrast is not framed on party-ideological lines, but rather around dedication to the ideals of national salvation and patriotism promoted by the paradigm of ‘national greatness’. Although the narrative thus cultivates an out-group of ‘anti-Communist diehard’ reactionaries, they are contrasted with an in-group that includes Nationalist ‘heroes’ like Yang and Zhang, who have become part of the Chinese ‘Self’ on account of their patriotic deeds. And while wartime collaboration within CCP ranks is clearly off limits as a topic of enquiry, the exhibit does have a moral lesson to teach to today’s Communist cadres in stating that ‘greed, pleasure-seeking, corruption, and depravity are the basic motivations for betrayal’.

The other major site operated by the Hongyan Museum is located at the western end of Chongqing’s central district, at the former location of a small village called Hongyan (红岩村) or ‘Red Crag’. It was there that the Eighth Route Army established their Chongqing office and the CCP Southern Bureau held its inaugural meeting. Between 1939 and 1946, Zhou Enlai was regularly based there, although he also had a residence downtown and would periodically return to Yan’an for extended stays. Zhou’s wife Deng Yingchao, who served as the head of the Bureau’s ‘Women’s Group’, was based at Hongyan for much of the war. Other senior CCP leaders based there semi-permanently included Bo Gu (博古), Kai Feng (凯丰), Wu Kejian (吴克坚), Ye Jianying (叶剑英), and Dong Biwu (董必武). During the negotiations of August 1945, Mao preferred the remote surroundings of Hongyan as his temporary base ahead of the city residence offered to him by the Nationalists.

In 1955, the Chongqing municipal government decided to build a memorial hall at Hongyan, which was completed three years later. Four decades later, a large, red granite memorial hall was added, which houses permanent and temporary exhibitions and a lecture theatre. The Hongyan Revolutionary Memorial Hall is a first-class national museum, a 4A national tourism attraction, and

<sup>39</sup>Denton, ‘Jianchuan Museum’, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup>Hu Jintao, ‘Speech on war victory commemoration’, *China Internet Information Center*, September 3, 2005, accessed December 1, 2020, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/Sep/140771.htm>.

<sup>41</sup>Pieke, ‘Party spirit’, pp. 717, 719.

ranked among the top ten 'red tourism' sites nationwide. It is also an important party education and training base, receiving over 10,000 local cadres (and many national officials) annually for training purposes.<sup>41</sup>

The main exhibition, entitled 'Eternal Red Crag' (千秋红岩), recounts the wartime history of the Southern Bureau in Chongqing. First created in 2003, its current incarnation dates from 2018, when a new opening section covering the years 1931–38 (in line with Xi's revisions) and English summary translations were added.<sup>42</sup> The revamped exhibition opened its doors on V-J Day with considerable media attention. The narrative depicts Hongyan as the central bulwark of the united front in China's great rear area. The legacy of the Southern Bureau, as presented here, boils down to two critical achievements. First and foremost is the CCP's successful policy of uniting and mobilizing the Chinese people of all social strata for the cause of patriotic resistance, paving the way for final victory. Despite subversion and betrayal by defeatist, 'diehard anti-Communist forces', the CCP successfully advocated, established, and sustained a nationwide united front with the GMD and several smaller democratic parties that today form part of the multi-party consultative structure underpinning the CCP's de facto one-party rule.<sup>43</sup> This leads into the second key achievement: laying the 'solid political foundation' for postwar 'multi-party cooperation' and for a 'political consultation system under the leadership of the CCP'. The resolve and moral fortitude underpinning the party's farsighted, inclusive policy are the essence of the 'Hongyan spirit', the narrative concludes, which sits alongside what it calls the 'Long March spirit' and the 'Yan'an spirit' as one of the great Chinese revolutionary 'spirits'. The final panel of the exhibition reminds visitors that the Hongyan spirit is an indispensable guide for the party and the people today in their continued 'struggle' for national rejuvenation and final victory.

Reflecting recent developments on the central level, the narrative at Hongyan (like that at Gele Mountain) has thus evolved from the crude, binary rhetoric of the Mao era to a more nuanced and inclusive discourse that presents national unity as historical achievement and present-day norm. Although the New Fourth Army Incident and other 'repressive' acts on the part of the GMD are mentioned, the narrative stresses the CCP's successful efforts to resolve these disputes with the support of the democratic parties and save the united front from collapse. The main seat of agency is the combined Chinese people, led 'spiritually' by the CCP in the great cause of rescuing the nation. In spatial terms, the focus is exclusively on China's rear area and Chongqing, with hardly any mention of the front or China's occupied regions, but the main actors and their roles are essentially the same as in central representations. Although Zhou's foreign 'friends' feature extensively in the exhibition, they do so not as representatives of Allied states engaged in a global conflict, but as high-minded individuals inspired by the just cause of *China's* war. The role of the Soviet Union and China's other wartime allies in, for example, pushing the united front, aiding China's resistance, and defeating Japan, are glossed over, just as they are on the central level.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Honoring Compatriots: Huangshan Museum***

The War of Resistance Historical Sites Museum of Chongqing (重庆抗战遗址博物馆) is located on the main ridge of the Huangshan hills on the south bank of the Yangtze, facing Chongqing's central peninsula. This secluded place, accessible only via steep flights of stone steps, served as China's de facto command center for six momentous years. Although Chiang possessed several other residences in the bomb-torn capital, he preferred the reclusive natural surroundings of his 'Cloud Peak Mansion' (云岫楼) at Huangshan—known among foreign contemporaries as the 'Eagle's Nest'—for handling official business and directing the war effort. His military chief of staff, He Yingqin (何应钦),

<sup>42</sup>Interview with staff member, Hongyan Memorial Hall, Chongqing, April 17, 2019.

<sup>43</sup>A separate exhibition hall in Chongqing, also part of the Hongyan Museum, is dedicated to these parties. See Pieke, 'Party spirit', p. 718.

<sup>44</sup>Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1159.

occupied a residence nearby, as did Kong Xiangxi (孔祥熙), Chiang's powerful brother-in-law who served as the country's finance minister and vice premier. U.S. General George Marshall stayed in Huangshan for extended periods. Other foreign military leaders who attended Allied conferences there included General Joseph Stilwell, Commander of the U.S. forces in China, Burma, and India, and Royal Navy Admiral Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command. Several foreign embassies moved their chancelleries to the surrounding hills during the war. Indian Nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru once spent several hours with Chiang in the Huangshan air-raid shelter as Japanese bombers raided the city.<sup>45</sup>

In 1991, the Huangshan villas were transferred to the Chongqing Municipal Culture Bureau. Following their restoration later that year, the site was opened to the public as the Chongqing Huangshan Auxiliary Capital War of Resistance Historical Vestiges Exhibition Hall (重庆黄山陪都抗战遗迹陈列馆). In 2005, the site was transferred to the district-level government and given its current name. The words 'auxiliary capital' (陪都) were dropped to avoid government connotations.<sup>46</sup> The site has been designated national heritage and serves as a patriotic education and social practice base, a PRC–Taiwan exchange base, and a demonstration base for the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation. GMD Honorary Chairman Lien Chan (連戰) stopped by at Huangshan during his groundbreaking visit to the mainland in 2008, and GMD Chairman Wu Po-hsiung (吳伯雄) visited a year later. Pictures of these visits are displayed prominently in the reception hall. In recent years, the site has periodically been (partially) closed for renovation, and restoration work was still ongoing in September 2019.

Most of the buildings have been restored to their original appearance and currently house photographic exhibitions featuring their former occupants. Accordingly, exhibitions in the main residences recount the wartime stories of Chiang Kai-shek, his wife Song Meiling, and Sun Yat-sen's widow (and Meiling's sister), Song Qingling, and cover the Chongqing bombings and wartime China–U.S. relations. The narrative is unpretentious and subdued, avoiding grand interpretations to instead extol the natural scenery, architecture, and local history. A basic storyline nonetheless emerges from the exhibitions, including the most recent additions. It goes something like this: after Japan invaded China, China's wartime national leader Chiang Kai-shek moved the capital to Chongqing, which became the central site of GMD–CCP cooperation; from Chongqing, Chiang oversaw the political, military, and diplomatic affairs of the country and coordinated with the Allies, notably the U.S.; after final victory was obtained, the Nationalist government moved back to Nanjing.

The remarkable aspect of the exhibition is that it deals so extensively and exclusively, and on the whole positively, with Chiang and with his wife Song Meiling, who is credited with major wartime contributions both in domestic politics and in the diplomatic sphere. Particularly noteworthy is the assessment on the concluding text panel next to a giant picture of a defiant-looking Chiang calling for national resistance in July 1937:

Chiang Kai-shek is a figure worth knowing, understanding, and studying in the history of China's War of Resistance against Japan. For nearly eight years, from December 8, 1938 to April 30, 1946, Chiang Kai-shek headed the government administration in Chongqing. This period was the most important phase of his life, as well as the most important juncture in Chinese history. As the chief decision-maker in Chinese politics at that time, his involvement in politics, military affairs, and diplomacy had a major impact on the direction and trajectory of China's War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that a state museum on the mainland contains such a confirmation of the Nationalists' wartime role underscores the recent shifts that have taken place in China's memory scape. It also qualifies Denton's claim that the Jianchuan Museum is unique in China for its dedication to GMD war

<sup>45</sup>Fieldnotes, Chongqing, October 15, 2018; September 21, 2019.

<sup>46</sup>Interview with staff member, Huangshan Museum, Chongqing, September 21, 2019.

<sup>47</sup>The original on-site English translation has been modified for clarity.

<sup>48</sup>Interview with staff member, Huangshan Museum, Chongqing, September 21, 2019.

efforts. The reason that it is not, is because of recent shifts on the central level. This is clear from the fact that the text on this panel at Huangshan was extensively discussed and eventually sanctioned in 2015 by relevant authorities on both the municipal *and* the national levels.<sup>48</sup> Despite its one-sided focus, justified by the particular history of the location and partially offset by obligatory references to the united front (see Table 2), the exhibition nonetheless fits in well with the central trend of emphasizing inclusiveness, patriotism, and cross-Straits affinity.

### ***Honoring Foreign Friends: Stilwell Museum***

The Chongqing Stilwell Museum (重庆史迪威博物馆) is a small museum situated in a national-level protected residence on the northwestern slope of Chongqing's promontory overlooking the Jialing River. The Western-style villa was built in 1940 for Song Ziwen (宋子文), another brother-in-law of Chiang Kai-shek, who served as China's foreign minister from 1942 to 1945. As Song spent long stints in Washington lobbying for U.S. aid and seeking the appointment (and later the removal) of a U.S. military representative in China, the Nationalist government used the villa to house prominent visitors, including two of President Roosevelt's personal emissaries.<sup>49</sup> In March 1942, when Stilwell arrived in Chongqing to serve as Chiang's chief of staff, the Nationalist government assigned the residence to him and staffed it with 29 servants whose duties were, according to one observer, 'as much to watch Stilwell as to care for him'.<sup>50</sup> Although Stilwell was frequently away from Chongqing, the house served as his main base in Asia until he was dismissed in October 1944 after falling out with Chiang.

In October 1991, the Chongqing People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (重庆市人民对外友好协会) teamed up with the China International Friends Research Society (中国国际友人研究会) in Beijing to organize a symposium marking the 45th anniversary of Stilwell's death. The latter organization was an affiliate of the China Three 'S' Society (中国三S研究会), set up by the CCP in 1984 under the auspices of Deng Yingchao for the purpose of improving China's image in the Western media. Its name referred to three prominent American journalists and CCP sympathizers, known in China as the 'Three S's': Agnes Smedley, Edgar Snow, and Anna-Louise Strong. Simultaneously with the symposium, an exhibition was launched at Stilwell's former residence in Chongqing, which was renovated for the purpose. In October 2000, it was upgraded to a museum and renamed.<sup>51</sup> Two years later, major renovations were undertaken. Further renovations have taken place periodically ever since, including in 2014 and again in 2018.

In the garden of the compound is a bust of Stilwell overlooking the Jialing River. Next to it stands an engraved stone monument displaying the text of a friendly letter from President Roosevelt to the people of Chongqing, which Vice President Henry Wallace delivered to Chiang during his visit to China in 1944. The villa has been refurbished to its original state and exhibits some personal effects of the general, including army uniforms, supplies, and manuscripts. The rooms on the second floor were redecorated to house an exhibition of historical photography. Similar to the Jianchuan Museum, this includes numerous pictures of the 'Flying Tigers', the legendary U.S. aviators who risked their lives to defend China, and their interactions with Chinese colleagues and 'friends'.<sup>52</sup> Since 2018, all narrative texts and photo captions of the exhibition are displayed in both Chinese and English.

True to its founding mission, the exhibition commemorates and celebrates Stilwell as a paragon of the friendship between China and the United States. Not only did the American general fight shoulder-to-shoulder with the Chinese against the common enemy, the narrative expounds, but he also had a critical hand in Washington's friendly engagement with the CCP and (initial) support for

<sup>49</sup>Joseph W. Stilwell, *The Stilwell Papers*, ed. Theodore White (New York: Da Capo, 1991), p. 112.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Fieldnotes, Chongqing, October 17, 2018.

<sup>52</sup>Denton, 'Jianchuan Museum', p. 89.



a coalition government in postwar China. An important segment of the exhibition accordingly deals with the establishment of the U.S. Army Observation Group at the CCP's base in Yan'an. The narrative portrays Stilwell as instrumental in the formation of the group, nicknamed the Dixie Mission, and hence in shaping a historic event that not only helped 'quicken the pace of winning the war' but also marked 'the beginning of official contact and cooperation between the CCP and the U.S. government'. From there, the exhibition proceeds seamlessly into the concluding section, which records the visits to the museum by incumbent and retired U.S. officials, including Henry Kissinger and several former ambassadors to China.

The narrative is straightforward but highly selective in temporal, spatial, and ethical terms, ignoring elements that do not support the theme of Sino-U.S. friendship or the Chinese patriotic ideal. Hence, quite similarly to the Jianchuan Museum, the exhibition downplays the tactical and personal disagreements between Stilwell and Chiang, focusing only on their political differences concerning the CCP; extols the success of Stilwell's second Burma campaign (1943–45), while glossing over the failure of his first Burma expedition (1942); and, in depicting the heroism of the Flying Tigers, remains silent about the animosity between Stilwell and their commander, General Claire L. Chennault.<sup>53</sup> In sum, the narrative depicts the Sino-U.S. alliance not as the complex, multi-faceted and troublesome ad hoc association that it was, but as the natural manifestation of a universal bond between two peoples instilled with shared notions of morality, justice, and peace. In these and other core discursive respects, the stylized narrative is consistent with those presented today in standardized Chinese history textbooks and in museums in Beijing.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Honoring the Wartime Capital: Three Gorges Museum***

The Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum (重庆中国三峡博物馆) is a large arch-shaped museum located in the city's central district on the grounds where the Nationalist government's main building (国民政府大楼) once stood. Built in 2005, it is the successor of the Chongqing Museum (founded 1951) and is still known by that name locally. The museum covers the natural and urban history of the greater Chongqing region, with permanent exhibitions on the Three Gorges area, ancient Bayu culture, modern city development, and Chongqing's wartime past. It also contains a small exhibition of the Chinese collections of the eminent Dutch sinologist, writer, and diplomat Robert van Gulik, who spent several years in wartime Chongqing. Covering an area of 45,000 square meters, it is one of the largest museums in the country, attracting around 2 million visitors annually. It has been designated a first-class national museum, a 4A national tourism attraction, and a national education, research, and practice base for primary and secondary school students (全国中小学研学实践教育基地).

The permanent exhibition on the city's wartime history, named 'The Resistance Years' (抗战岁月), dates back to 2005. It was given a major overhaul in 2014, on the eve of the 70th anniversary of V-J Day. According to a senior staff officer, the makeover was inspired by evolving historiographical insights on the mainland and visitors' feedback. The latter included suggestions both from the general public and from overseas academics, including Taiwanese scholars who suggested that less emphasis be placed on partisan divisions, and more on the Chinese people as a whole, so as not to exclude Taiwanese Chinese from the narrative.<sup>55</sup> To what extent this is a reliable account is difficult to say, but it does accord neatly with the new trend under Xi Jinping. The same is true for the smaller makeover that took place in 2018, when a new opening section was added to deal with the early war years (1931–45) and several text panels, notably in the concluding section, were updated to reflect Xi's latest WWII commemoration speeches.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>54</sup>Chang, 'Recalling victory'. See also note 17.

<sup>55</sup>Interview with staff member, Three Gorges Museum, Chongqing, October 17, 2018.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



Through photographs, historical documents, and artefacts, the exhibition narrates the history of the war experience in West China in six thematic and roughly chronological chapters: (1) The Resistance Movement in Chongqing; (2) The Wartime Capital; (3) Stage of the United Front; (4) Fortress in the Far East; (5) City of Perseverance; and (6) City of Victory. The basic storyline is familiar: from the earliest beginnings of the conflict, the CCP organized local resistance and advocated a national united front; this unified resistance ultimately led to China's first and most brilliant victory against imperialist aggression; and the city of Chongqing, having survived ferocious aerial attacks, made pivotal contributions to victory and world peace because of its brilliant role as China's wartime capital, important 'political stage' of the united front, and regional Allied hub.

The exhibition essentially provides a synopsis of the other war exhibitions in the city, centering the narrative around the midpoint between the CCP-slanted revolutionary rhetoric of Geleshan and the GMD-centered perspective at Huangshan (see Table 2). Drawing on local events and actors but coloring neatly inside the central lines, it provides a highly stylized and essentialized China-centric narrative that emphasizes the unity, victory, and greatness of the Chinese people. An example of convergence with the central line is in the way that the narrative deals with victimization. The exhibition showcases a massive diorama of the June 1941 suffocation disaster, depicting the agony of hundreds of citizens trampled in the air raid shelter. Similar to representations of victimhood in the War of Resistance museum in Beijing, however, these horrors are confined to a single dark chapter in an otherwise empowering and triumphant narrative that celebrates the timeless glory of the 'City of Victory'.<sup>57</sup> Despite the ostensibly local focus, there is no room for genuine exploration of the impact on local society of, say, the sudden arrival of the central government and the influx of millions of refugees in Chongqing, or the (in)efficacy of wartime emergency and city management.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the city is memorialized as a pivotal site for the Chinese people, united across partisan affiliations, to claim, celebrate, and recall victory against foreign aggression.

## Conclusion

The analysis shows that, despite notable thematic differences, official WWII narratives in Chongqing's state museums are convergent in respect to key discursive elements and adhere closely to the evolving central line in each of the three dimensions examined here. In terms of temporality, each of the five exhibitions has recently been revised to reflect Beijing's new periodization of the war and to connect with Xi's latest political slogans. In terms of spatiality, while the focus of these exhibitions is confined to the wider Chongqing area, with scant references to China's occupied regions, the depiction of key historical actors—including representations of the 'Self' and 'Other', as well as notable absentees—nevertheless align faithfully with the centrally produced WWII discourse as reflected in official speeches, history textbooks, and Beijing's museums. In terms of ethicality, the narratives unmistakably follow the central trend of presenting national unity and patriotic loyalty as the key to China's victory and the Chinese people's greatness. Chongqing has thus become a prime embodiment of the new paradigm, much like Nanjing represented (and continues to represent) the national victimization line. Having been the center stage of China's wartime united front and undefeated bulwark of Chinese resistance, Chongqing is ideally positioned to take on this role.

But if Chongqing has become a 'prototype' of WWII commemoration in the new era, the question arises of why scholars have labeled it as 'unorthodox' and 'in competition' with Beijing's line. The answer is twofold. First, on the central level, the field has been slow to recognize the disposal under Xi of the victimhood trope and the embrace of a triumphalist narrative in its stead. The fact that scholars have recently questioned if it is still fitting for the Chinese leadership, given its growing

<sup>57</sup>Fieldnotes, Beijing, October 25, 2018; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1164.

<sup>58</sup>See, e.g. Chan, 'A wartime stampede'.

<sup>59</sup>E.g. Rosemary Foot, 'Remembering the past to secure the present: Versailles legacies in a resurgent China', *International Affairs* 95(1), (2019), p. 157; and Qian and Liu, 'Remembrance', p. 83.

stature and ambition, to espouse a passive and powerless victimhood discourse, illustrates this omission.<sup>59</sup> This is not to suggest that the 'national humiliation' and 'victimhood' tropes have lost their significance in the Chinese memory scape, but rather that they are no longer central to the increasingly self-assertive and aspirational national metanarrative. As discussed elsewhere, Chinese leaders have recently stopped emphasizing victimhood in official speeches, and even the Nanjing Massacre Memorial—the memory site most strongly associated with Chinese war trauma—was given a vast new exhibition hall in 2015 to commemorate China's 'great victory' over fascism.<sup>60</sup> This discursive shift from victimhood to victory emanating from the top down may be one factor explaining the official ambivalence over the commemoration of 'comfort women' in formerly occupied eastern China.<sup>61</sup>

Second, on the local level, China's unoccupied rear area has not received the careful attention that it deserves. To suggest that war memory in Chongqing represents a Nationalist-centered story that gives 'relatively less emphasis to the activities of the CCP', as Mitter writes (and then to juxtapose this with a supposed ideal-type CCP account), is an injustice to the varied and subtle mix of narratives presented in Chongqing's museums and ignores the fact that Zhou's former residence at central Hongyan attracts many times the number of visitors of that of Chiang's former headquarters at reclusive Huangshan.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the notion expressed by Denton that war memories at these two places are fundamentally at odds with one another, or that the war efforts of the GMD and the CCP are presented simply as complementary, does not capture the key point underpinning the narratives in Chongqing and Beijing: that the CCP's role in preserving the national united front was the key to China's ultimate triumph.<sup>63</sup> Without this farsightedness and moral steadfastness of the CCP, the contribution of any other party to China's war effort, no matter how great, would have been in vain.

This does not mean that there are no noteworthy differences among state narratives in Chongqing or between the local and the central levels. It is true that the atmosphere at Huangshan is very different from that at Geleshan and at museums in the eastern part of the country. But a significant finding of this research is that in all key dimensions these variations remain well within the centrally drawn bounds. An important question, then, is the extent of the limitations on thematic specialization and fragmentation. Are memory actors free to focus in on any aspect they see fit, as long as they avoid blacklisted topics, or is a degree of proportionality and contextualization required? The latter seems likely, given the ubiquitous references to the united front at all these sites, including Huangshan. Other hints include the dropping of the term *peidu* from the museum's name in 2005 and deliberations about the concluding text panel. Also instructive in this context was the refusal of the CCP's local propaganda department in 2014 to attend a public airing of a documentary produced by a state-owned local television network that heavily featured GMD, but not CCP, wartime accomplishments.<sup>64</sup> Clearly, there are additional limitations in place, but how these are drawn, to what extent they are formalized, and how they are negotiated between different administrative levels are questions for future research.

This research contributes significantly to the debate outlined at the beginning of this article. Lary is correct in stating that local differences in war experiences produce distinct memory needs and bottom-up impulses. An analysis of Chongqing's museums, however, shows that these bottom-up forces merely fill the discursive space provided by Beijing and that 'grassroots pressures' are not a crucial factor in driving the main narrative.<sup>65</sup> These findings, combined with recent developments under Xi toward recentralizing control over textbook narratives and historical research, support the

<sup>60</sup>Qian and Liu, 'Remembrance', p. 95; and Frost et al., *Remembering Asia's World War Two*, p. 15. See also Vickers, 'Transcending victimhood'; and Chang, 'Recalling victory', p. 1167.

<sup>61</sup>Edward Vickers, 'Commemorating "comfort women" beyond Korea: the Chinese case', in Frost et al., *Remembering Asia's World War Two*, p. 196.

<sup>62</sup>Mitter, *China's Good War*, p. 181.

<sup>63</sup>Denton, 'Jianchuan Museum', pp. 78, 85.

<sup>64</sup>This documentary, named 沧浪万里长 [Long waves], was premiered in Chongqing on October 30, 2014.

<sup>65</sup>Vickers, 'Commemorating "comfort women"', p. 199.

'instrumentalist' view of collective memory, which holds that historical narratives are shaped by the center to serve present political needs. At the same time, this subordination of historical memory to prevailing agendas—in China's case not those of social groups but exclusively those of the party-state—does not mean that Chinese war remembrance is a monolithic affair that permits no variation in what is being 'remembered' on the local level. As long as alignment with key aspects of the central narrative is secured, there is a considerable amount of space for local input and differences in emphasis. This includes differences between different cities under Japanese occupation, such as Shanghai and Nanjing, but applies equally to distinct regions with notably different wartime experiences.

This study has shown that in their exhibitions on the war, Chongqing's museums draw extensively and sometimes exclusively on local history and the city's role as a national and international center of resistance. Ultimately, however, they do so merely to add substance and color to the highly stylized and essentialized, dominant central narrative, and to which they are kept carefully up-to-date with the latest developments. Nor is there evidence to suggest a different approach in private museums. The findings support Denton's conclusion that private museums in China do not represent 'alternative' memory; if anything, this research shows that the extent to which the Jianchuan Museum 'chips away at the edges of official state narratives' is smaller than Denton suggests. Far from being created 'in opposition' or 'at right angles' to the central line, WWII memory in Chongqing is undergoing a major revival precisely because its inclusive and empowering spirit epitomizes the new national norm. In Xi Jinping's China, 'Chongqing' is the new 'Nanjing'.

## Acknowledgments

The author thanks the History College of Southwest University for supporting the field research in Chongqing and for hosting a conference on World War II commemoration with the LeidenAsiaCentre in September 2019. He is indebted to his (former) colleagues in Chongqing and Leiden and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

**Vincent K. L. Chang** is a lecturer of the history and international relations of modern China and international relations at Leiden University and a senior fellow of the Leiden Asia Centre. His research is concerned with China's regional and global interactions at times of power shifts and conflicts, and the associated contestations over norms and narratives. He is the author of several books and articles on World War II and the post-war period, historical memory, and EU–China relations.