

# China's "Museopolitics": Evolving Exhibits on the War of Resistance against Japan

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## Introduction

On January 3, 2017, the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s Ministry of Education made an unprecedented pronouncement regarding the collective memory of the War of Resistance against Japan (*kangri zhanzheng*), a historical epoch of great significance for the legitimizing narrative of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Starting with textbooks printed in spring 2017, the pronouncement mandated, the starting date for the War of Resistance would be changed from July 7, 1937 to September 18, 1931, an extension of the war's timeline from eight to fourteen years.<sup>1</sup> From the 1980s onward, the Chinese scholarly community had been engaged in a fierce academic "date debate" over which was the proper timeline for the War of Resistance according to Marxist dialectics and historical materialism.<sup>2</sup> In order to back the pronouncement, an official CCP journal weighed in on both sides of the debate before concluding that the Party supported the fourteen-year timeline:

The Ministry of Education requires textbooks to all be changed to "the fourteen-year War of Resistance" by spring of 2017, and this is also an answer to long-standing appeals by domestic scholars and the common people.<sup>3</sup>

The CCP cited several key reasons for supporting the fourteen-year timeline: it conveyed a more holistic sense of the War of Resistance, respected the sacrifices of those Chinese that resisted between 1931 and 1937, and further highlighted the role of the War of Resistance in the global

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<sup>1</sup> The ending date of the war remained the same, with the Japanese emperor's unconditional surrender to the Allied forces on August 15, 1945. The PRC State Council had begun to discuss this shift in October 2016 and gave the Department of Education two months to compile a public pronouncement. "Jiaoyubu Fa Han: Zhongxiaoxue Jiaocai Banian Kangzhan Gaiwei Shisinin Kangzhan" [Letter from the Ministry of Education: Elementary and Middle School Education Materials War of Resistance against Japan Changed from Eight Years to Fourteen Years], Xinhua Net, 11 January 2017, retrieved from [xinhuanet.com/2017-01/11/c\\_1120284611.htm](http://xinhuanet.com/2017-01/11/c_1120284611.htm) on 7 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Cao Ziyang, "'Banian Kangzhan' yu 'Shisinin Kangzhan' Gainian Yunyong Zhi Sikao" [Reflections on the Conceptual Usage of the "Eight-year War of Resistance" and the "Fourteen-year War of Resistance"], *Dangshi yu Wenxian Yanjiu* [Research on Party History and Documents] 5 and 6 (2017), 47-52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

anti-fascist war without discrediting the Kuomintang (KMT).<sup>4</sup> The shift to a narrative of a fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan had already been accomplished in many museum exhibits nationwide, especially in Northeastern China. This showed the close relationship between Beijing's official narrative and PRC museums, as well as the relative impermanence of their exhibits to conform to sociopolitical vicissitudes.

## **History of Chinese Museums**

One of the primary means utilized by the CCP authorities to communicate the results of the “date debate” to the public has been through museum exhibitions on the War of Resistance against Japan, particularly in Northeastern China. In the past few decades, museum displays on the War of Resistance and other historical events has been a common way for the Party to promulgate its legitimacy. Museums have been vested such an important role in national life that since 1982, they are stipulated in successive versions of the PRC constitution as a type of “cultural undertaking” of the state to “serve the people and socialism.”<sup>5</sup> In 1994, the CCP made the connection between museums and national identity even more explicit in its publication of the Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education, the stated goal of which was to “cultivate patriotic sentiment among the youth.” This goal would be achieved with setting up or identifying “patriotic education bases,” encompassing “museums, memorial halls, buildings in memory of martyrs, sites of important battles in revolutionary wars, protected historic relics, and scenic sites.”<sup>6</sup> Museums on the War of Resistance against Japan are particularly prevalent among

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>5</sup> Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa (1982 Nian) [People's Republic of China Constitution (1982)], retrieved from [http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content\\_4421.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content_4421.htm) on 9 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCCP), “Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao de tongzhi” (Outline for the implementation of patriotic education), retrieved from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66685/4494186.html> on 6 September 2017. English translations from Wang Zheng, 104-105.

patriotic education bases. For instance, in 1995, when the first 100 sites were designated as “patriotic education bases,” a full twenty percent of these sites were to commemorate the War of Resistance.<sup>7</sup>

The CCP utilizes museums so heavily because they are a particularly effective way to preserve and display the collective memory of the nation-state. The notion of collective memory was first introduced by sociologist Maurice Halbwachs.<sup>8</sup> Briefly, collective memory is a socially based reconstruction of the past that, unlike history, prioritizes the needs of the present over the veracity of the past and is frequently utilized by governments to promote nationalist agendas.<sup>9</sup> As vehicles for displaying collective memory, public museums in particular often closely reflect the national narrative, as they depend on government funding for their existence. This is especially true in an authoritarian state like the PRC, where the government is able to control the contours of public discourse. In addition, museums represent potent “sites of memory,” where memory ceases to become part of everyday experience but instead persists in a more collectivized, physical form.<sup>10</sup> Locations of significant historical events are particularly powerful “sites of memory,” as collective memory is then built on a pre-existing landscape. Lastly, aside from a museum’s exhibits and the information promulgated within, a museum’s spatial and architectural layout also leave meaningful impressions on the visitor.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See Lewis A. Coser, ed., Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Cohen, *History and Popular Memory: The Power of Story in Moments of Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 210.

<sup>10</sup> Coined by Pierre Nora of the French Annales school, a “site of memory,” or “lieu de mémoire,” not only encompasses physical locations, but more broadly “any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the material heritage of any community.” Pierre Nora, “Preface to English Language Edition: From *Lieux de Mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*,” in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

The original mission of museums, both in China and elsewhere, is intricately connected to both modernity and the state.<sup>11</sup> When the museum was first introduced at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, it was largely in response to a perceived memory crisis in European society, serving as an effective “site of memory” that constructed a teleological, progress-oriented version of history for the pedagogical purposes of nation-building.<sup>12</sup> The antecedent to the museum had been private collections, curiosity cabinets displayed without much regard to ideological import.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the modern museum was explicit in its aims and meant to be consumed by a broad citizenry. While this initial “museum boom” from 1780 to 1900 was primarily focused in Europe, however, imperialism ensured that museums reflecting metropolitan interests were also opened in colonies or semi-colonies.<sup>14</sup>

In China, as in Europe, the antecedent to the modern museum was private collections belonging to both individuals and the state. Particularly dazzling was the Qing imperial collection that, similar to later collections in the Republic of China and the PRC, was assembled in an effort to enhance state legitimacy.<sup>15</sup> The idea of the modern public museum, however, was adopted from the West and viewed by late 19<sup>th</sup> century reformists such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao in the service of the similarly new idea of nationalism.<sup>16</sup> The earliest such

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<sup>11</sup> Susan M. Pearce stresses the connection of museums with modernity, particularly linear time and the idea of scientific progress. Susan M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects, and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 10-12.

<sup>13</sup> Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, ed., *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Javier Jimenez and Gail Lord, “A Global Perspective on Museum “Booms” and Growth Cycles” in Gail Lord, Guan Qiang, An Laishun, and Javier Jimenez, ed. *Museum Development in China: Understanding the Building Boom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 8.

<sup>15</sup> Much of the Qing imperial collection still exists, both in Beijing's National Museum and in Taipei's Palace Museum, and both regimes utilize their portions of the collection to claim legitimacy as the rightful Chinese state. Jeannette Shambaugh Elliot and David Shambaugh, *The Odyssey of China's Imperial Art Treasures* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), vii-viii.

<sup>16</sup> Denton, 16-17.

museums in China were natural history museums assembled by foreign missionaries, and the first “Chinese” museum, the Nantong Museum, was not opened until 1905.<sup>17</sup> Unlike latter museums with strictly teleological historical narratives, the Nantong Museum included buildings for objects pertaining to history, natural history, and the fine arts, as well as a zoo and a botanical garden.<sup>18</sup> After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the zenith of museum construction in the Republic of China was in the 1930s under the KMT, but this was cut short by the War of Resistance against Japan and the Civil War (1945-1949).<sup>19</sup> By the time the PRC was founded in 1949, there were only 25 museums on the mainland, a substantial drop from the 231 museums that had been established by 1936.<sup>20</sup> However, similar to the KMT, the CCP also prioritized museum construction as a patriotic endeavor, and in the early years of the PRC there was a heyday of museum building at both the local and provincial levels.<sup>21</sup> Today, there are over 5,000 museums in China, and the number keeps growing.<sup>22</sup>

## **Date Debate**

As reflected in Chinese museums and elsewhere, the “date debate” on the War of Resistance against Japan took shape over several decades. Prior to January 3, 2017, there had not been an officially stipulated starting date for the War of Resistance in the PRC, but the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of July 7, 1937 was widely assumed to serve this function not only for the

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<sup>17</sup> The Nantong Museum is considered “the first domestically conceived, managed, and developed museum in China.” The initial word for “museum” in Chinese was “bowuyuan,” roughly translated as “academy for the study of things.” Later, the word “bowuguan,” roughly meaning “hall for the study of things,” was more commonly used for “museum.” Lisa Claypool, “Zhang Jian and China’s First Museum,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* (Aug. 2005, Vol. 4 No. 63), 567-604.

<sup>18</sup> Denton, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Duan Yong, “A Brief History of Chinese Museums to 1949” in Lord, Guan, An, and Jimenez, ed., 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid* and “Mad about Museums: China is building thousands of new museums, but how will it fill them?” *The Economist*, 14 August 2018, retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2018/08/14/mad-about-museums> on 15 April 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Denton, 18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Guan Qiang, “Preface: The Chinese Museum Boom in Broad Strokes” in Lord, Guan, An, and Jimenez, ed., xiii.

purposes of Chinese scholarship, but also for school textbooks and popular usage.<sup>23</sup> To retain the importance of this date despite the timeline shift, the official narrative now regards it as the start of “national all-out war” (*quanguoxing kangzhan*) between China and Japan.<sup>24</sup> According to international scholarship, the events of July 7, 1937 were not particularly unusual in and of themselves; rather, their significance lies in the powder keg of latent aggression they ignited.<sup>25</sup> What exactly happened that fateful day in Wanping, a small fortress town to the southwest of Beijing, is still a mystery. The chain of events began, however, after Japanese troops from the Eighth Company under Colonel Mutaguchi Renya marched to their designated training grounds near Marco Polo Bridge on July 7.<sup>26</sup> Allegedly, the Eighth Company had heard gunshots from within Wanping and subsequently requested permission to enter the town to search for a missing private. The following morning, after having been refused, the Eighth Company and reinforcements began their military assault on the town, which they captured within a matter of hours. Such local skirmishes were not uncommon, and the local Chinese and Japanese troops had reached a compromise by July 11.<sup>27</sup> However, the national governments in Nanjing and Tokyo

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<sup>23</sup> Feng Mingming, ““Shisinian Kangzhan” Zhi Zai Tanta – Jiantan yu “Banian Kangzhan” de Lunzheng [Examining the “Fourteen-year War of Resistance” and the Debate with the “Eight-year War of Resistance”], *Jiu Yi Ba” Yanjiu* [September 18th Research] 17 (2018), 390-391.

<sup>24</sup> Cao, 47. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident is still regarded as the starting date of the War of Resistance against Japan in the Republic of China (ROC) on Taiwan. See Liu Yingfeng, “Kangzhan Shengli 70 Zhounian Heping Xishu Lishi” [Marking the 70th Anniversary of Victory Against Japan], *Taiwan Guanhua Zazhi*, July 2015, retrieved from <https://www.taiwan-panorama.com/en/Articles/Details?Guid=6e1a7132-a55b-43e3-955f-65051dfca4da&CatId=2> on 8 April 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 65-69.

<sup>26</sup> According to the Boxer Protocol of 1901, foreign countries had the right to station troops outside of their diplomatic missions in Beijing. Japan, which by the 1930s had a sizeable military presence across northern China, was one of the few countries that continued to take advantage of these stipulations after the Nationalist capital was established in the southern city of Nanjing in 1927. *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> The version of the events of July 7, 1937 in Chinese scholarship is more conspiratorial, claiming that the “disappearance” of the Japanese private was merely an excuse to instigate aggression, and that the Marco Polo Bridge Incident was “a long premeditated act of war.” He Li, *Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng Shi* [History of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2015), 64.



had become involved and the fires of war had been stoked, hence the subsequent significance of July 7, 1937 as the start of “national all-out war.”

While the official Chinese narrative still agrees with international scholarship that the Marco Polo Bridge Incident triggered “national all-out war,” it now views the Mukden Incident of September 18, 1931 as the starting date of both “partial war” (*jubu kangzhan*) and the War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>28</sup> According to both international and Chinese scholarship, the Mukden Incident was set off by the Kwantung Army stationed in the Northeast due to a variety of factors, including concern over the potential effect of growing Chinese nationalism in the region on Japanese commercial and political interests. On the evening of September 18, 1931, junior officers Ishiwara Kanji and Itagaki Seishirō and the garrison under their command in Shenyang (Mukden) exploded a bomb on the railway tracks outside of the city.<sup>29</sup> Claiming that the bomb was intentionally set off by Chinese nationalists to derail a Japanese train, the Kwantung Army utilized this incident as a pretext to invade Manchuria.<sup>30</sup> Largely due to Chiang Kai-shek’s policy of non-resistance, the Kwantung Army was able to establish control over the majority of Manchuria in a matter of months without much bloodshed. In March of 1932, it established the puppet-state of Manchukuo with Henry Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, as the head.

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<sup>28</sup> Cao, 47.

<sup>29</sup> The railway was part of the South Manchurian Railway (SMR), a behemoth Japanese-owned company that controlled a plethora of Japanese resources in the region. The Kwantung Army and the SMR were both created by the Japanese state in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05) in the Guandong Leased Territory on the Liaodong Peninsula. The Kwantung Army’s influence grew beyond just the defense of SMR assets to defend Japanese interests of Manchuria from both the growing threats of Chinese nationalism and, after 1917, of the Soviet Union. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, ed., *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 6-7.

<sup>30</sup> The Japanese civilian government had no knowledge of the ruse and was caught off guard by the Kwantung Army’s rapid invasion of southern Manchuria. Partially for this reason, the government cabinet under liberal prime minister Wakatsuki Reijiro quickly fell. Subsequent government cabinets all felt obliged to defend the occupation of Manchuria in the face of international criticism. Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4-5.

At the time, the CCP denounced Chiang's non-resistance policy as a "major disgrace," which is now utilized as historical evidence for the CCP's single-handed resistance against Japan in Manchuria.<sup>31</sup>

Decades before the Ministry of Education pronouncement, scholars began to suggest that the Mukden Incident might be a more appropriate starting date for the War of Resistance against Japan. In 1983 at the Northeastern Military Fourteen-Year History of Resistance to Japan Academic Seminar, Liaoning University history professor Zhang Deliang was the first to argue that the War of Resistance started on September 18, 1931, contending that the first shot of resistance fired by the Chinese was by the northern base of the 7th Brigade of the Northeastern Army.<sup>32</sup> A year later, Yan'an University professor He Ying suggested that September 18, 1931 changed the principle contradiction in Chinese society to that between China and Japan, noting that Mao Zedong's 1937 speech to the CCP National Congress mentioned this date as the beginning of the "era of resisting Japan" (*kangri shiqi*).<sup>33</sup> In 1986, Wang Weili and Gao Eryin of Northeastern Normal University argued that following an eight-year war timeline would merely give further credence to Chiang Kai-shek's non-resistance policy.<sup>34</sup> This policy refers to Chiang's decision to avoid all-out military conflict with Japan after the Mukden Incident in a bid

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<sup>31</sup> He, 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Zhang Haiyan, "Bo 'Qi Qi' Shibian Kangri Zhanzheng Qidian Lun – Cong Riben Shiliao Jielu Kangri Zhanzheng Qidian" [Refuting the Marco Polo Bridge Incident War of Resistance against Japan Starting Point Narrative – Exposing the Starting Point of the War of Resistance against Japan from Japanese Historical Artifacts], *Liaoning Guangbo Dianshi Daxue Xuebao* [Journal of Liaoning TV and Radio University] 134 (2015), 109-110.

<sup>33</sup> Cao, 48. The idea of the "principal contradiction" is an important theoretical contribution of Mao Zedong Thought to Marxist dialectics that forms a central component of the scholarly "date debate." See Mao Tse-tung, "On Contradiction," August 1937, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, retrieved from [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1\\_17.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_17.htm) on 7 April 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Weili and Gao Eryin, "Lun Kangri Zhanzheng de Kaiduan" [Discussion of the Start of the War of Resistance against Japan], *Dongbei Shida Xuebao* [Journal of Northeastern Normal University] 3 (1986), 46-54.

to bide time and gain backing from the international community, all while continuing his extermination campaigns against the CCP.<sup>35</sup>

After the mid-1980s, scholarly clamors for utilizing the fourteen-year War of Resistance narrative became more frequent from scholars not only from China's Northeast, but also from other provinces. In 1987 and 2006, Hebei scholar Liu Tinghua argued that the PRC could not simply judge history according to the view of the KMT.<sup>36</sup> Liu, Cheng Shuwei of Northeastern Normal University (2010), and Zhang Haiyan in conjunction with the September 18th History Museum and Northeastern University (2015) all posited that the principle contradiction in Chinese society had changed after September 18, 1931 and that it was subsequently marked by full-on colonialism.<sup>37</sup> In 1987, Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences scholar Wang Bingzhong contended that an eight-year war would negate the sacrifices both of Northeastern Chinese and others that resisted before 1937.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, in 2007 Liu Weiqin of Wuhan's Central University of Nationalities and Yang Jiaying of Wuhan University argued that if the Marco Polo Bridge Incident was considered the start of the war, then this would undermine both the heinous crimes committed by the Japanese military and the leading position of the CCP in the war.<sup>39</sup>

As clamors for the fourteen-year war narrative became more frequent, defenders of the conventional view about the eight-year timeline also appeared. In 1991, Wang Guilin, a historian

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<sup>35</sup> Huang Tzu-chin, "Embracing mainstream international society: Chiang Kai-shek's diplomatic strategy against Japan," *Chinese Studies in History* 49, no. 4 (2016), 199-217.

<sup>36</sup> Cao, 48-49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 49 and Zhang, 109-110.

<sup>38</sup> Cao, 49. In particular, Wang mentioned the examples of Inner Mongolia's Chahar and Suiyuan Provinces and Shanghai. The Inner Mongolia Campaign was part of the campaign by the Japanese Kwantung Army to secure the provinces of Suiyuan and Chahar and thus create a buffer state between Manchukuo and the Republic of China. On January 28, 1932, the Songhu Battle of Resistance erupted in Shanghai as a result of an attempt by the Japanese navy to exert dominance in the area.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

from Beijing Normal University, forcefully argued that before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the principal contradiction in Chinese society was not resistance against Japan, but rather was domestic class struggle.<sup>40</sup> Fifteen years later, in the aftermath of celebrations for the 60th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance against Japan, Peking University professor Zhang Zhenkun posited that if the proper starting point for the War of Resistance was the beginning of Japanese military aggression, then scholars might as well construct a “fifty-one year” timeline beginning with the 1894-95 First Sino-Japanese War.<sup>41</sup> In 2009, Cai Shuangquan of Renmin University and Chen Qigui of Qinghua University also argued that after the Mukden Incident, the crux of Chinese government policy did not rest on resisting Japan.<sup>42</sup> A month later, Zhang Baijia, a historian in the Office of Party History Research of the CCP Central Committee, pointed out that after the Mukden Incident, Chinese resistance was overall quite passive.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in 2010, Zeng Jingzhong of Peking University argued that after the Mukden Incident, there were only short bursts of uncoordinated resistance from the Chinese.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, in 2011, Zang Yunhu of Peking University posited that the partial resistance against Japan after the Mukden Incident was interrupted and only developed by degrees.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cao, 50. From 1927 onward, there was civil war between the Chinese Communists and the Nationalists. The CCP was forced out of the Jiangxi Soviet in southeastern China in 1934, which led to the legendary Long March and the establishment of the new CCP base in northwestern Yan'an in 1935. It was only after the Xi'an Incident in late 1936 that Chiang Kai-shek agreed to a stalemate and the formation of the Second United Front between the CCP and the Nationalists to jointly resist the Japanese.

<sup>41</sup> The First Sino-Japanese War was a particularly humiliating war for China (then the Qing Dynasty) because it showed that Japan, which had historically been considered culturally inferior to China, had been able to more successfully adopt western models of modernization. Many Chinese scholars consider this war to be the start of Japanese military designs on China. Zhang Zhenkun, “Kangri Zhanzheng: Banian Haishi Shisininian?” [The War of Resistance against Japan: Eight Years or Fourteen Years?], *Kangri Zhanzheng Yanjiu* [Research on the War of Resistance against Japan] 1 (2016), 184-191.

<sup>42</sup> Cao, 51.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang also argued that the “fourteen-year war” model was derived from the Japanese “fifteen-year war” model. *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>44</sup> Out of the 4 months and 18 days it took the Japanese to conquer the Northeast, less than 18 of those days consisted of active Chinese military resistance. *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

The scholars defending the eight-year war were affiliated with top universities and national research institutes in Beijing, whereas those defending the fourteen-year war were mostly affiliated with secondary universities in various provinces. Comparatively speaking, those defending the fourteen-year war depended more heavily on Maoist class-struggle notions as the basis of their arguments, whereas those defending the eight-year war based arguments more closely on historical facts. Arguments for the fourteen-year war largely appealed to emotion and patriotic sentiment, claiming that an eight-year war would favor the KMT policy of non-resistance and would trivialize the resistance of the Northeasterners and others before 1937. On the contrary, scholarly rebuttals that favored an eight-year war were more consistent with historical reality, contending that after the Mukden Incident, resistance to Japan was sporadic and regional, and that war should be between two countries, which was not the case with China and Japan until after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.<sup>46</sup>

Whatever the scholarly merit regarding each of the “date debate” positions, PRC authorities ultimately decided to change the starting date of the War of Resistance to the Mukden Incident of 1931 for political reasons. This had Xi Jinping’s personal endorsement, as shown by his speech for the 85th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance against Japan in 2015: “the Mukden Incident became the starting point of the Chinese people’s War of Resistance against Japan and raised the curtain on the global Anti-Fascist War.”<sup>47</sup> Several years later, the

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<sup>46</sup> China scholar Rana Mitter agrees, noting that most Chinese and Japanese people did not consider themselves at war between 1931 and 1937. Rana Mitter, *China’s Good War: How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 92.

<sup>47</sup> ““Pingyu” Jin Ren – Xi Jinping Tan Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng” [Plain Contemporary Language – Xi Jinping Discusses the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan], 18 September 2016, retrieved from [http://china.huangniu.com/article/2016-09/0451240\\_2.html](http://china.huangniu.com/article/2016-09/0451240_2.html) on 31 October 2017.

official pronouncement to add six years to the war timeline was due to several factors, including political pressure from the Northeast and potential legal issues.<sup>48</sup>

The War of Resistance is imperative to the CCP's legitimizing narrative since it represents the culmination of the Century of Humiliation, in which the CCP claims to have played a salvific role in rescuing the Chinese people from foreign imperialism.<sup>49</sup> However, after the rehabilitation of the KMT in the War of Resistance narrative, portraying the CCP as the mainstay of the war effort has become more challenging. As historical revisionism, elongating the War of Resistance to a fourteen-year war has served to highlight the CCP's predominant role because it provides a period of the war in which the CCP was allegedly resisting Japan while the KMT was not. The CCP's advocacy of resistance after 1931 and its alleged leadership of patriotic Chinese in fighting the Japanese invaders can thus be more effectively juxtaposed with Chiang Kai-shek's non-resistance policy, in effect foregrounding the CCP as the resistant China. In the same vein, by highlighting how early "China" began to fight against fascism in the opening salvos of World War II, Beijing can also strengthen the PRC's prestige internationally in promoting its current self as a responsible global actor.

### **Claim 1: "Museopolitics," or Museums of Impermanence**

Museums commemorating the War of Resistance provide an excellent example of how in the PRC, museums are not only closely aligned with the central government's official legitimizing narrative when they are first constructed, but are also highly chameleonic, shifting

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<sup>48</sup> Legally, it is easier to declare atrocities as war crimes if they occur within an officially recognized state of war. Mitter, *China's Good War*, 92-93.

<sup>49</sup> The Century of Humiliation (*bainian guochi*) dates from the start of the First Opium War in 1839 to the end of the War of Resistance against Japan in 1945 and represents a time frame in which imperialist powers took advantage of the weak Chinese state (first under the Qing, then under the Republic of China) to extract a variety of economic and political concessions through what are known as "unequal treaties."

in content over time to reflect whatever best suits the Party's contemporary sociopolitical purposes. Whereas this function is by no means unique to the PRC, what is noteworthy is the rapidity at which PRC museums are able to accomplish this. A museum is generally defined as an institution that is "inherently a place of permanence, of conserving perennial works [or objects] decade after decade, which leads visitors...to consider them as voiceless and static."<sup>50</sup>

According to the International Council of Museums, a museum is

a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.<sup>51</sup>

In both definitions, museums are presumed to be institutions of permanence, whether they are art museums like the Louvre or history museums like the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum.<sup>52</sup>

However, the tumultuous political developments of the PRC and the repeated ideological reorientations of CCP authorities have resulted in practices of legitimization and relegitimization both in museums and elsewhere. Hence, PRC museums have tended to reflect constant flux as their exhibits evolve over time. If museums are meant to underscore permanence, then PRC museums in actuality manifest a state of impermanence due to "museopolitics," or the manifestation of shifting political realities in the evolution of museum exhibits. In this way, PRC

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<sup>50</sup> Fabrice Larceneux, Florence Caro and Anne Krebs, "The Reaction of Visitors to Contemporary Art in a Classical Art Institution: A Louvre Museum Case Study," *International Journal of Arts Management* 18, no. 2 (winter 2016): 5.

<sup>51</sup> This is according to the 2007 definition of "museum." Karen Brown and Francois Mairesse, "The definition of the museum through its social role," *Curator* 61, no. 4 (2018): 526.

<sup>52</sup> Larceneux, 5. The Air and Space Museum, which is the most visited museum in the world, attempted to alter its predominant "myth of the innocent nation" narrative by displaying the Enola Gay, the aircraft which dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima, as part of a new exhibit titled "The Last Act." Subsequently, strong public outcry from veteran associations and other groups resulted in the exhibit being canceled. Roger D. Launius, "American Memory, Culture Wars, and the Challenge of Presenting Science and Technology in a National Museum," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 1 (winter 2007), 29-30.

museums can be compared to the PRC constitution – both entities continue to exude a facade of permanence, yet under the surface, both continue to be revamped on a regular basis.<sup>53</sup>

### **Literature Review for Claim 1: Field of Chinese Museum Studies**

Although there is a robust field of museum studies in the PRC, few studies on modern history museums track the evolution of exhibits and the Party narrative. Rather than question the dominant historical narrative, most analyses focus on how history museums can best portray it.<sup>54</sup> The 1994 Patriotic Education Campaign is often mentioned, as is the emphasis on inculcating patriotic sentiments amongst the youth. As one article notes, modern history museums should explain the importance of patriotism amidst China's struggle to oppose imperialism and feudalism, and "fully explain that it was only socialism that could save China, and only socialism that could enable the Chinese people to receive true freedom and liberation."<sup>55</sup> In a similar vein, another article states that in examining historical events and people in museums, an important component in patriotic education should be "to understand the Chinese people's glorious achievement of opposing foreign invasion and oppression under the leadership of the CCP."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The current Constitution of the People's Republic of China was adopted in 1982 and was the PRC's fourth constitution (having superseded the 1954, 1975, and 1978 constitutions). Subsequently, the 1982 constitution has been amended 5 times, in 1988, 1993, 1999, 2004, and 2018.

<sup>54</sup> For instance, see He Xiaolei, "Reform and Development of Museums in the Context of the Free Admission Policy," *Southeast Culture* 4 (2020), 139-144; Weng Huainan, "Xiandaihua Shiye Xia Zhongguo Bowuguan de Weilai Fazhan" [The Future of Chinese Museum Development on the Horizon of Modernization], *Zhongguo Wenhua Bao* [Newspaper of Chinese Culture], 11 August 2020; and Yu Qihe, "Reflection on the Interactive Relationship between Mass Communication and Museums: On the Public Education in Chinese Museums," *Museum Management* 3 (2020), 68-79.

<sup>55</sup> Lü Jun, "Lishi Bowuguan zai Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu zhong de Zuoyong" [The Utilization of History Museums in Patriotic Education] (*Zhongguo Bowuguan* [Chinese Museums], Jilin Daxue Kaoguxi (1997)), 85-89, 87.

<sup>56</sup> Shen Shenying, "Chuangxin Jinianguan Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Xingshi de Lujing Jiexi" [Renewing the Method of Analysis of the Form of Patriotic Education in Memorial Halls] in *Lieshi Yu Jinianguan Yanjiu No. 13* [Research on Martyrs and Memorial Halls] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2012), 159-160.



Outside of the PRC, only a handful of scholars have written about Chinese modern history museums, as most of the works on Chinese museums have centered around art museums such as the Palace Museum.<sup>57</sup> There have been several recently published volumes that examine the growing proliferation of all types of Chinese museums in the 21st century. Last year, the edited volume *Museum Development in China: Understanding the Building Boom* was published to explore the sociocultural factors behind the “museum boom” and the role it is playing in contemporary Chinese society. In 2011, Claire Jacobson made a detailed architectural study of recently opened Chinese museums.<sup>58</sup> However, while these are much needed overviews of recent trends in museology in the PRC, their focus is not on history museums or those containing a high degree of political sensitivity.

Although there have not been many comprehensive studies on modern history museums in the PRC, there are several excellent papers on individual history museums, monuments, and memorials. Wu Hung examines the monuments shown in Tiananmen Square throughout the 20th century and their symbolic significance for Chinese historical memory.<sup>59</sup> Rana Mitter primarily examines the War of Resistance against Japan Museum, located outside of Beijing, and notes the tension between the Mao Zedong “victor narrative” and the newer “victim narrative” emphasizing Japanese military atrocities.<sup>60</sup> Lastly, Chang-tai Hung has conducted an in-depth

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<sup>57</sup> Denton, 9-10.

<sup>58</sup> Claire Jacobson, *New Museums in China: Understanding the Building Boom* (Princeton Architectural Press: New York, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Hung includes museums in his definition of monuments. Thus, on the eve of the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, Hung named 6 monuments present in and around the square: the Museum of National and Revolutionary History, the Great Hall of the People, the Monument to the People’s Heroes, Mao’s Mausoleum, the giant portrait of Chairman Mao, and the temporary statue Goddess of Democracy. Wu Hung, “Tiananmen Square: A Political History of Monuments,” *Representations*, no. 35 (summer 1991), 84-117.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the “victor narrative” and “victim narrative,” which this study will develop further, see below. Rana Mitter, “Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987-1997,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (Mar. 2000), 279-293.

study on the top-level political negotiations involved in creating an acceptable narrative of the history of the Party to display in Beijing's Museum of the Chinese Revolution, also located on Tiananmen Square. To this end, the museum's permanent exhibit was revised multiple times under the direction of the CCP Propaganda Department before finally opening in 1961.<sup>61</sup> This study will build off of the work of these scholars by examining the evolution of museum exhibits in relation to historical memory and shifting sociopolitical realities.

The one English-language comprehensive study on modern Chinese history museums is Kirk Denton's *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China*. In this much-needed contribution to the fledgling field, Denton describes a variety of what he dubs "postsocialist" museums, including modern history museums and those on the War of Resistance against Japan. For the purposes of his study, there exist three "dynamic bursts" of museum development in PRC history: the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), the early post-Mao period (1980s), and the post-Tiananmen period.<sup>62</sup> This study will build off and contest Denton's work in several ways. First, it will examine museums that were opened before 1958 in the PRC. Second, it will add an additional "dynamic burst" of museum development to Denton's configuration. After the post-Tiananmen period, which lasts until the late 2000s, there is another surge in museum construction and development that will be referred to as the Xi Jinping period. In the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in both the rate at which new museums

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<sup>61</sup> In February 2003, this museum merged with the Historical Museum to form the new Chinese National Museum, which opened in 2007. The current "Road to Rejuvenation" exhibit encompasses the museum's original exhibit on the history of the Party, which started with the Opium War (1841-43) and ended with the socialist period after the founding of the PRC. Chang-tai Hung, "The Red Line: Creating a Museum of the Chinese Revolution," *The China Quarterly*, no. 184 (Dec. 2005), 914-933.

<sup>62</sup> Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 19. Overall, this fits with the more generalized Chinese "museum booms" as defined by Jimenez and Lord: 1905-1949 (starting with the opening of the Nantong Museum) and 1980 to present. Jimenez and Lord, 8-10.

have been constructed nationwide and the number of overall visitors.<sup>63</sup> Since Xi ascended to power as the CCP general secretary in November 2012 and as the PRC president in March 2013, he has promoted museums considerably, particularly in relation to Chinese “cultural confidence” (*wenhua zixin*).<sup>64</sup> Xi considers museums to be akin to “large schools,” and has specifically noted that:

museums are important buildings for protecting and inheriting human civilization. They are bridges connecting the past, present, and future, and have a special role in promoting the exchange of mutual learning among world civilizations.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, he has made a point of publicly visiting a number of museums since 2012, including multiple appearances at the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit in the National Museum of China and the National People’s Revolutionary Military Museum.<sup>66</sup>

In addition, this study will contest one of Denton’s central claims – that since the 1980s shift to a socialist market economy, “in contrast to China’s vibrant popular culture, museums and their exhibits have often appeared staid and stodgy.”<sup>67</sup> Admittedly, Denton is correct in pointing

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<sup>63</sup> From 2011 to 2019, Chinese museums increased by 200 a year for a total of 5,136. This represented a 230-fold increase in museums since 1949. Guan Qiang, “Preface: The Chinese Museum Boom in Broad Strokes” in Jimenez and Lord, xiii. It is estimated that Chinese museums now receive over 600 million visits per year. Liu Lianxiang, “Zhongguo Bowuguan: Zai Lushang” [Museums in China: Development and Expectations], *Confucius Institute Magazine* 3, 38 (2015), 12-19, retrieved from [confuciusmag.com/museums](http://confuciusmag.com/museums) on 15 April 2020.

<sup>64</sup> This is one of the “four confidences” promoted by Xi regarding CCP leadership. The first “three confidences” were promoted by Xi in January 2013: “confidence in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, confidence in the theory, and confidence in the current political system. The fourth, “cultural confidence,” was added at the end of 2014. Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 43.

<sup>65</sup> “Xuexi Ta – Yi ge Bowuguan Jiu Shi Yi suo Daxuexiao” [Learn about Him – A Museum Is a Large School], CCTV News, 18 May 2017, retrieved from <http://news.cctv.com/2017/05/18/ARTIBknlTrvL6oWP66xCJ6ew170518.shtml> on 15 April 2020.

<sup>66</sup> Xi’s visit to the “Road of Rejuvenation” exhibit was especially noteworthy, as it came mere weeks after he became the CCP general secretary in November 2012. See Chapter 4 for more details. He has made a point of visiting multiple museums of national import both in Beijing and in other cities – for instance, the Beijing Capital Museum, the Zunyi Conference Museum, and the Shenzhen “Reform and Opening Up” Exhibition. For a comprehensive list, see “Zhe Xie Nian, Xi Jinping Kanguo de Zhanlan, Shuoguo de Hua” [The Museums Xi Jinping Has Visited and His Remarks over These Past Years], *Zhong Qing Zai Xian*, retrieved from [http://news.cyol.com/content/2018-11/15/content\\_17786549.htm](http://news.cyol.com/content/2018-11/15/content_17786549.htm) on 15 April 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Denton, 26.

out that museums are intimately associated with the state cultural bureaucracy. Some indeed involve exhibits unchanged over time, such as certain exhibits in Chinese museums on the War of Resistance against Japan in Beijing and the “Emperor to Citizen” exhibit in the Puppet Emperor Palace in Changchun. However, despite being entangled in stodgy bureaucratic red tape, these museums also show a propensity to continually update their exhibits in following the ever-shifting contours of Chinese official memory. This includes the instance of updating museum exhibits to reflect the official shift from an eight-year to a fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan. While this is undoubtedly the result of extensive planning and negotiations behind the scenes, it shows a considerable degree of flexibility and the ability of the authorities to quickly create altered versions of modern history for public display.

### **Claim 2: The Rejuvenation Narrative, or “Phased Memory”**

Museums on the War of Resistance against Japan have reflected a historical shift from a “victor narrative” to a “victim narrative,” as expounded on below. While ample scholarship has examined this shift, however, it has not covered how the narrative has continued to evolve under Xi Jinping after he took power in 2012 since it is so close to the present. While continuing to stress the “victim narrative,” the CCP under Xi has more thoroughly stressed the heroic role of all patriotic Chinese in World War II as a way to legitimize the CCP not only domestically, but also in the eyes of the international community.<sup>68</sup> The Xi Jinping period has differed significantly from those of predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. Xi is widely considered the most powerful leader since Mao, consolidating his status with measures such as enshrining “Xi

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<sup>68</sup> By controlling the narrative of World War II, the PRC is able to create a unified narrative that it can then utilize to great effect in global affairs. Walter Hatch, “Bloody Memories: Affect and Effect in World War II Museums in China and Japan,” *Peace and Change* 39, 3 (2014), 366-394, 367.

Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” into the Chinese constitution and abolishing the two-term limit for PRC presidency.

Furthermore, Xi has paid far more attention to international affairs than either Hu or Jiang, and in doing so has replaced the former “victim narrative” of Chinese history with a narrative that in this study will be referred to as the “rejuvenation narrative.” This narrative projects a China that will return to its rightful historical role of leadership in global affairs and contains strong implications for China’s national identity.<sup>69</sup> CCP history is drastically rewritten so that the Party’s historical mission is not to abolish the past, but rather restore it. Instead of promoting a universal version of Marxism-Leninism, the CCP instead glorifies traditional Confucian culture and “socialism with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>70</sup> This new “rejuvenation narrative” is observable in multiple spheres of Chinese society, including Xi’s speeches, educational materials, public propaganda, and the shifting exhibits of the Chinese museums.

The extension of China’s War of Resistance against Japan from eight to fourteen years comprises an important component of the “rejuvenation narrative.” In promoting an extended timeline during which China fought against Japanese aggressors, the CCP further cements China’s vital role in World War II. This directly connects to the promotion of China’s “peaceful rise” and its return to a centralized role in world affairs today.<sup>71</sup> If China was a conscientious world leader in World War II, then surely it can be trusted with global responsibility now.

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<sup>69</sup> Rosemary Foot and Amy King, “China’s world view in the Xi Jinping Era: Where do Japan, Russia and the USA fit?”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Special Issue (2020), 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> Hugo de Burgh, “The Re-imagining of China under President Xi Jinping,” *China Media Research* 14, no. 1 (2018), 104-106.

<sup>71</sup> The idea of China’s “peaceful rise” was first promulgated by Jiang Zemin as a way to instill confidence in world leaders that as China became more powerful, it would bolster the current international order and not undermine it. Avery Goldstein, “China’s Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance,” *International Security* 45.1 (Summer 2020), 175.

Notably, the historical lines are blurred between China and the CCP in this narrative, as it is the CCP that is ostensibly presumed to have led anti-Japanese resistance both pre- and post-1937.

The development from victor to victim to rejuvenation narrative thus demonstrates that PRC collective memory has gone through phased memory, divided into segments and subject to frequent reconstruction. This adds to Maurice Halbwachs' view that "the past is a social construction mainly, if not wholly, shaped by the concerns of the present."<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, it provides an noteworthy addendum to Eric Hobsbawm's work on modern nationalist movements and how they heavily utilize innovated claims that purport to use elements of a historical past.<sup>73</sup> While this study does not take an equally presentist approach to that of Halbwachs and Hobsbawm, it does posit that portrayals of the past in the PRC are subject to regular reinterpretation based on the evolution of contemporary sociopolitical demands.

## **Literature Review for Claim 2: PRC Collective Memory**

In addition to contributing to the still sparse body of Chinese museum scholarship, this study will also augment the growing collection of scholarship that exists on CCP collective memory of the War of Resistance against Japan. To portray itself as the rightful leadership of China, the CCP has crafted several distinct narratives to legitimize Party rule in different periods. There has been ample research conducted on both the Mao era "victor narrative" and a post-Mao era "victim narrative" in the War of Resistance against Japan, notably in *China; Fragile Superpower* by Susan Shirk; *Never Forget National Humiliation* by Wang Zheng; *China's New*

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<sup>72</sup> Coser, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past: Some Questions," *Past and Present* 55 (1972), 3-17. Hobsbawm's more well-known work on collective memory is *The Invention of Tradition*, which problematizes the social function of the past in the present by introducing the idea of "invented traditions." Hobsbawm, *Invented Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

*Nationalism* by Peter Gries; *Strong Society, Smart State* by James Reilly; *China: The Pessoptimist Nation* by William Callahan; and *Forgotten Ally* by Rana Mitter.

During the Mao era, a “victor narrative” dominated the CCP portrayal of the War of Resistance against Japan to show that “without the Party-led defeat of the Japanese, there would be no new China.”<sup>74</sup> This narrative was largely based on Marxist class-struggle – the “enemy” was both the Japanese bourgeoisie and the Chinese bourgeoisie, which was epitomized by the KMT. Thus, portrayals of the heroic sacrifice made by Chinese Communists, but not the KMT and others, dominated the historical narrative in the Mao era. Not only was this important domestically, but also on the international stage as an important show of strength for a fledgling nation-state still contending for international recognition with the ROC on Taiwan. Furthermore, cooperation with Japan was part of Mao’s Cold War geopolitical strategy, particularly after the Sino-Soviet split at the end of the 1950s. After the 1972 Joint Communiqué reestablished diplomatic relations between the PRC and Japan, Japan also became a model of economic growth.<sup>75</sup>

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao, however, the “victor narrative” gradually shifted to a “victim narrative” in which Japanese atrocities in the War of Resistance against Japan were highlighted. During the beginning of the Deng era from 1976 to the mid-1980s, Sino-Japanese economic and diplomatic relations continually improved, and

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<sup>74</sup> As scholar Peter Gries notes, “China’s early postwar political elite had needed heroes, not victims; many Chinese today have different needs.” Peter Hays Gries, “Victors or Victims?” in *China’s New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 72-73.

<sup>75</sup> James Reilly, *Strong Society, Smart State: The Rise of Public Opinion in China’s Japan Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 57-60.

neither side seemed keen to dwell on the past.<sup>76</sup> The shift towards the “victim narrative” began in the early to mid-1980s with the 1982 “textbook controversy” and the 1985 protests following Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on August 15th.<sup>77</sup> In addition, the 12th CCP Congress in 1982 further influenced this shift by not only implementing Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening Up” economic agenda, but also by declaring the era of revolutionary Marxist class struggle to be at an end.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, in 1994, Jiang Zemin promulgated his Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education, which cemented the shift from victor to victim narrative. Recent events such as the marketization of the economy, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the Tiananmen Square Incident had made it clear that Marxist ideology was defunct. The CCP needed a new legitimizing narrative, which came in the form of patriotic education that centered on the Century of Humiliation and Chinese victimization therein. The crux of the Century of Humiliation was the War of Resistance against Japan, within which Japanese atrocities against Chinese civilians served as the epitome of victimization. Fostering public outrage against these foreign imperialist aggressors would serve to foment patriotism and bolster the CCP as the historic entity that rescued the Chinese people, not to mention redirect outrage that might

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<sup>76</sup> This is exemplified by a famous incident that occurred on Deng’s trip to Japan in December 1978. When the Japanese emperor expressed “the unfortunate events in a long history between the two countries,” Deng replied pragmatically that both countries should look towards the future instead of dwelling on the past. *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>77</sup> The 1982 Textbook Controversy began with misinformed reports from Tokyo newspapers claiming that Japan’s Ministry of Education had insisted that the phrase “*invasion of North China*” be changed to “*advance into North China*” in history textbooks, which subsequently prompted strong protests from the Chinese media and diplomats. In 1985, Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro decided to make a controversial visit to Tokyo’s Yasukuni Shrine on August 15, 1985 – the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. Yasukuni Shrine is controversial because as of 1978, it has contained the remnants of thirteen class-A war criminals and Tojo Hideki. *Ibid.*, 64-72.

<sup>78</sup> In the 12th Party Congress, one of the main concerns was the decline of Party ideology. A major reason for this decline was cited as the remaining influence of the Gang of Four’s doctrine of “continuing revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat,” as well as Hua Guofeng’s subsequent failure to repudiate this. Thus, the era of class struggle was declared to be at an end. Lowell Dittmer, “The 12th Congress of the Communist Party of China,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 93 (March 1983), 117-118.



otherwise have been directed at the CCP for its crimes against its own people.<sup>79</sup> Alongside this shift to the “victim narrative,” the KMT was no longer vilified, and efforts of patriotic KMT soldiers in the war effort were finally recognized in the PRC.<sup>80</sup>

## Chapter Summaries

As illustrated in this dissertation, museums that commemorate the War of Resistance against Japan, both in Northeastern China as elsewhere, provide an excellent example of the “museopolitics” and impermanence of exhibits in Chinese museums. They chart the evolution of CCP historical memory on the War of Resistance against Japan in three stages: the “victor narrative” of class struggle under Mao; the “victim narrative” of patriotic education under Deng, Jiang, and Hu; and the “rejuvenation narrative” under Xi. The close alignment of museum exhibits on the War of Resistance against Japan with the national narrative from Beijing over time demonstrates how short the CCP’s version of collective memory can be. Since the founding of the PRC, the exhibits in these museums have undergone multiple iterations to reflect these various narratives, culminating with adherence to the “fourteen-year” War of Resistance as part of the “rejuvenation narrative.” This is a telling example of the strong pull Beijing has on museums nationwide because even though the fourteen-year war narrative highlights the Northeastern struggle, museums in the Northeast did not adopt this language until directed from top-down.

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<sup>79</sup> See William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> This was largely an effort to promote reconciliation with the ROC on Taiwan. Reilly, 103.

In Chapter One, the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall (NMMH, *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan*) in Harbin serves as an excellent case study of Chinese “museopolitics.” As the earliest memorial hall to be opened by the CCP, the NMMH has been closely tied to the CCP legitimizing narrative since its 1948 establishment. Originally built to commemorate CCP martyrs from both the War of Resistance and the Civil War of 1945-49, the museum today still has a strong flavor of the Maoist “victor narrative.” However, the NMMH exhibits have also evolved over time to reflect shifting sociopolitical realities and the increasing emphasis on the “victim narrative” in the War of Resistance against Japan. This tension between the victor and victim narratives is manifested by the opening of two new exhibits in 2009: “Black Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs” and “The Exhibition of the Old Manchukuo Police Station and Its Crimes.”

Changchun’s Puppet Emperor Palace Museum (PEPM, *Weiman Huanggong Bowuguan*) in Chapter Two shows how in an effort to conform to the shifting official narrative, it has strayed away from its “site of memory” function. The original historical significance of the Puppet Emperor Palace was as the site of administration of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. However, both the PEPM permanent exhibit “From Emperor to Citizen,” on the life of Aisin Gioro Henry Puyi, and the more recently opened “Northeastern China, Trampled Underfoot by Cruel Oppression” exhibition hall concealed this “site of memory” function by divesting the PEPM with an officially designated symbolic meaning. Thus, the physical location has become less important to the PEPM as it has continuously sought to connect to a broader, national narrative.

Chapter Three highlights Shenyang’s September 18th History Museum (*Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan*, 918HM) and how it reimagined itself and its “historical position” over time. Even before the 918HM was completed and open to the public, it received the coveted accolade of

“Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Base” in 1997 and thus had a national stamp of approval from its genesis. Culminating in 2017, the 918HM has recently been utilized by Beijing to promote an elongated narrative of the War of Resistance against Japan. This has been reflected in the evolution of the museum’s self-perception over time, as its function as a “site of memory” to commemorate the Mukden Incident was actually eclipsed by the fourteen-year war narrative.

Lastly, Chapter Four ventures outside the Northeast to reflect on exhibits on the War of Resistance against Japan in the following museums: the Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall (SSMH); the War of Resistance against Japan Museum (WRJM); the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall (NMMH); and the National Museum of China (NMC). These exhibits demonstrate how Xi Jinping’s “rejuvenation narrative” and the fourteen-year war timeline have been nationalized. At each location, the museums’ “site of memory” function, which commemorates events occurring in 1937, has been weakened to accommodate the new nationalized narrative.

Methodologically, this study relies on a variety of source materials to examine each of the above museums, including yearbooks, historical and contemporary museum publications, physical museum exhibits, museum websites, and oral interviews, all in the Chinese language. Research in China involved travel to museums and libraries in Shanghai, Beijing, and Nanjing, as well as those in the Northeastern cities of Shenyang, Changchun, and Harbin. Museum yearbooks provide important insights into the behind-the-scenes agendas of the museum administration and how they plan museum exhibits. Contemporary publications, physical museum exhibits, and museum websites together comprise the narratives intentionally presented to the Chinese public, which is a key concern of this study. The websites of all the museums in this study are technologically sophisticated and include a wealth of valuable information on the

history of these museums and their exhibits. Lastly, oral interviews were conducted with several groups of Chinese – those from Northeastern China, those visiting or living in the Northeast, and museum docents. They provided important background information for the study concerning the Chinese public's impressions of the modern history of Manchuria and China's war with Japan as well as inside information on the process involved in creating museum exhibits.

## Chapter One: Quintessential “Museopolitics”

While still waging its Liaoshen Campaign against the Kuomintang (KMT) in the Chinese Civil War, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) opened the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall (NMMH) in the city of Harbin on October 10, 1948. As the oldest permanent memorial hall in the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the NMMH provides an excellent case study of the evolution of the national narrative and how PRC museums are influenced by “museopolitics” in the impermanence of their exhibits.<sup>81</sup> While the museum exhibits consciously include so-called “regional characteristics,” these have been consistently influenced by the national narrative over time.<sup>82</sup> This has been reflected through portrayals of both the War of Resistance against Japan and the Chinese Civil War, or War of Liberation in CCP terminology, praise for martyrs as either CCP revolutionaries or Chinese patriots, and adherence to Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. As the first of many memorial halls opened in the early Mao era to commemorate martyrs, the NMMH is also a prime example of the CCP’s development of the cult of the red martyr.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> The oldest museum in the PRC, Shenyang’s Liaoning Provincial Museum, is also in the Northeast and was opened on July 7, 1949, less than a year after the NMMH. Chuan Liancheng, “Heitudi de wenming chuankou – liaoningsheng bowuguan” [Civilized Window to the Black Earth – Liaoning Provincial Museum], *Wenwu Shijie* [World of Cultural Relics], 1 (2002), 47.

<sup>82</sup> An example of these so-called “regional characteristics” (*diyuxing*) would be the conscientious use of white and black in the updated exhibits in 1999 to represent the “white mountains and black water” (*baishan heishui*) of the Northeast. Liu Jialiang, Dong Xiaochun and Jia Liqing, “Heitu yinghun, chuangsuo shenghua: Dongbei lieshi jinianguan jiben chenlie gengxin” [The Martyrs’ Spirits of the Black Earth, Creating a Refined Model: The Renovation of the Essential Exhibits for the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall], *Zhongguo Bowuguan* [Chinese Museums] 1 (2009), 103.

<sup>83</sup> The earliest memorial hall to be planned was actually the Jin-Ji-Lu-Yu Martyrs’ Memorial Cemetery in Handan, Hebei Province, which was started in 1946. However, this was not completed until 1950. To attest to the importance of this cemetery, Mao Zedong himself paid a personal visit in November 1952. This and Nanjing’s Yuhuatai Cemetery, which opened in 1950 but was not completed until 1989, were considered the most important. Chang-tai Hung, “The Cult of the Red Martyr: Politics of Commemoration in China,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, 2 (2008): 286-287.

Although the NMMH is a memorial hall, it will be treated as a “museum-and-memorial-in-one” for the purposes of this study for several reasons. First, although the NMMH opened as a memorial hall, it fits the 2007 International Council of Museums (ICOM) definition of a museum as a

non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study, and enjoyment.<sup>84</sup>

From its opening in 1948, the NMMH has fit the above definition. Second, the NMMH has expanded over the years to include two additional exhibition halls, the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum and the CCP Heilongjiang History Memorial Hall, both of which are housed in a separate building and also qualify as museums under the above definition.<sup>85</sup> Third, according to the Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education, issued by the CCP Department of Propaganda in 1994, museums and memorial halls are both considered types of “patriotic education bases” and serve similar functions in Chinese society today in order to “cultivate patriotic sentiment among the youth.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Karen Brown and Francois Mairesse, “The definition of the museum through its social role,” *Curator* 61, no. 4 (2018): 526.

<sup>85</sup> Today, the Old Harbin Manchukuo Police Station Exhibition Hall (*Weimanzhouguo Harbin Jinchating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan*) is in the original memorial hall building and divided into two separate exhibits, which will be discussed later in this chapter. The Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum (*Dongbei Kanglian Bowuguan*) and the CCP Heilongjiang History Memorial Hall (*Zhonggong Heilongjiang Lishi Jinianguan*) are located in the building next door. Visitors there will first be directed down the stairs to the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum, then up the stairs to the CCP Heilongjiang History Memorial. The Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum was first opened on July 1, 1986 as the Heilongjiang Provincial Revolutionary Museum (*Heilongjiangsheng Geming Bowuguan*) but changed its name on February 3, 2009. The CCP Heilongjiang History Memorial Hall is the newest exhibition hall, opened on October 29, 2012. I will be focusing on the original memorial hall building, which is still referred to as the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall although it now specifically houses the Old Harbin Manchukuo Police Station Exhibition Hall. “Ben Guan Jieshao: Dongbei Kanglian Bowuguan” [Introduction to This Museum: The Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum], retrieved from [www.jn1948.cn](http://www.jn1948.cn) on 14 November 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC), “Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao de tongzhi” [Outline for the implementation of patriotic education], retrieved from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66685/4494186.html> on 6 September 2017.

The function of the NMMH under the Patriotic Education Campaign differs from the initial purposes of the memorial hall. Originally, the NMMH was built for the purpose of commemorating CCP revolutionary martyrs in the Northeast who died fighting in both the War of Resistance against Japan and the War of Liberation, thus blending the two struggles together into the narrative of the CCP's "liberation" (*jiefang*) of the Chinese people.<sup>87</sup> For this reason, the Maoist "victor narrative" and Marxist class struggle were a central component of the NMMH when it opened. As this memorial hall was open for the majority of the Mao era, with the exception of the Cultural Revolution, this chapter will focus on the "victor narrative" function of the NMMH, remnants of which still remain to this day. However, it will demonstrate how the "victor narrative" has evolved over time to accommodate new political realities, thus manifesting the impact of "museopolitics" on the NMMH's exhibits. After the Cultural Revolution, the NMMH reopened, but due to Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms and tumultuous events of the late 1980s and early 1990s, its exhibits evolved. This culminated in the War of Liberation exhibition hall being torn down altogether, leaving a significantly altered "victor narrative" on the War of Resistance that was also accompanied by a "victim narrative" highlighting Japanese military atrocities.

### **The Founding of the NMMH**

As the first permanent memorial hall opened by the CCP, nothing about the early NMMH was accidental, but was due to a combination of historical circumstances and purposeful CCP decision-making. It is noteworthy that the NMMH was opened in October 1948, even before the CCP had conquered Northeastern China. This demonstrates that the CCP was conscientious of

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<sup>87</sup> Wu Xiangdong, "Dongbei lieshi jinianguan dalou 70 nian de bianqian" [70 Years of Change in the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall Main Building], *Heilongjiang Dangan* [Heilongjiang Archives] (1999, Issue 4), 44-45, downloaded from [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net) on June 25, 2018, 44.

the power of historical narratives and the legitimacy they could procure through the venue of museums, which had been the case since the first CCP museum was established in the Jiangxi Soviet in 1933.<sup>88</sup> The building in which the CCP decided to house the NMMH predated it by several decades and boasted a contentious history, albeit one that would positively contribute to the narrative the CCP wished to tell.

What was to eventually become the NMMH building started off as a provincial library in Harbin. Russian emigres were responsible for the construction of many libraries in the city, and the Harbin Public Library (officially to be known as the “Library of the Northeast Special Administrative Region”) was no exception. Under the direction of warlord Zhang Zuolin and later his son, Zhang Xueliang, émigré architect Iulii Zhdanov constructed the library building in the European neo-classical style.<sup>89</sup> Unlike his father, Zhang Xueliang was amenable to working with the KMT and recognizing the authority of Chiang Kaishek’s Nanjing government, making the Northeastern region and, therefore, also the library in Harbin at least nominally part of the Republic of China. The Harbin Public Library was completed and opened to the public in the first half of 1931. However, in the aftermath of the Mukden Incident, the Kwantung Army took over Harbin in February 1932 and by May had converted the library into the Manchukuo Police Station. During the next 13 years, many Chinese resistance fighters belonging to the

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<sup>88</sup> The earliest plans enacted by the CCP to establish a revolutionary museum date from 1930. In 1933, the CCP’s Education Department decided to establish a “Central Museum of Revolution,” which included artifacts from CCP martyrs. However, after Chiang Kai-shek’s fifth encirclement campaign forced the CCP out of the Jiangxi Soviet in 1934, the museum was closed. Before the NMMH opened, there were several proposals to establish museums submitted to the CCP in the 1940s. Tracey L-D Lu, *Museums in China: Power, politics, and identities* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 114.

<sup>89</sup> After Zhang Zuolin was assassinated by the Japanese in the infamous Huanggutun Incident of June 4, 1928, construction of the library continued under the authority of Zhang Xueliang. Mark Gamsa, “Traces of Russian Libraries in China,” *Library History* 22 (2006), 206.



Northeastern United Resistance Army, which was organized by the CCP, were captured by the Manchukuo police and imprisoned, tortured, and executed there.<sup>90</sup>

After the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, the KMT and the CCP signed the “Double Ten” agreement and a subsequent ceasefire agreement in January 1946 to avoid civil war. However, both parties violated these agreements multiple times, which is evident in their actions in the Northeast. Strategically, Manchuria was important economically to both the CCP and KMT because of its rich natural resources, including coal, iron ore, and timber.<sup>91</sup> By the spring of 1946, the Soviet Union was supplying arms to the Communists in the Northeast, and the United States was shipping supplies and Nationalist troops to the region. With the KMT’s July 1946 general offensive targeting northern and northeast China, all-out war resumed between the CCP and the KMT.<sup>92</sup> Ultimately, then, as historian Hans van de Ven notes, “Manchuria became the rock on which the Marshall Mission foundered.”<sup>93</sup>

The Communist Government of Harbin was established in the midst of all-out war on April 28, 1946 after the departure of the Soviet Union from the city. Around this time, the CCP-controlled, “liberated” areas of the Northeast sent representatives to Harbin as part of the Northeastern Administrative Committee (NAC). Among other items on the NAC’s agenda was a commitment to establish a memorial for CCP martyrs in both the War of Resistance against

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<sup>90</sup> Wu, 44. The library’s books, however, did survive. After the end of the War of Resistance against Japan, the CCP used them to create the Library of the Northeast, along with some additional acquisitions including the library of puppet emperor Henry Puyi. After Shenyang was captured by the CCP in November 1948, the majority of the library’s contents were moved there and combined with books assembled in 1946 by the Nationalists in Shenyang to create what is now the Liaoning Provincial Library in 1950. Gamsa, 206.

<sup>91</sup> Anthony Coogan, “Northeast China and the Origins of the Anti-Japanese United Front,” *Modern China* 20, 3 (1994): 283.

<sup>92</sup> Suzanne Pepper, “The KMT-CCP Conflict 1945-1949” in Lloyd Eastman, Jerome Chen, et. al., *The Nationalist Era in China 1927-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 327.

<sup>93</sup> Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 231.

Japan and the War of Liberation. Harbin was a natural choice for the memorial site since it was the only major Northeastern city the CCP had maintained control of throughout the duration of the War of Liberation and a major political, economic, and cultural center.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, Harbin was historically significant to the CCP, as it was allegedly the first Chinese city to be influenced by Marxism-Leninism, largely due to Russian emigres.<sup>95</sup> By June of 1947, the NAC decided to utilize the former site of the Manchukuo Police Station for the memorial due to its powerful symbolic significance as the final resting place for so many Northeastern United Resistance Army members.<sup>96</sup>

The NAC's decision-making process for constructing and opening a memorial hall to CCP martyrs is particularly noteworthy when considering the timeline of the War of Liberation. In the spring of 1946, when the NAC decided to prioritize the establishment of such a memorial, the KMT had a strong military advantage both in the Northeast and elsewhere. In fact, the CCP's wartime capital of Yan'an had just been captured, and the outcome of the War of Liberation was extremely uncertain. The tide of the War of Liberation would not turn until late 1947, by which time the CCP had chosen a site replete with historical significance for the memorial hall. On October 10, 1948, the NMMH was finally opened to the public. Even at this time, the CCP had not quite conquered the Northeast, although it would do so following the decisive Liaoshen Campaign.<sup>97</sup> The opening of the memorial hall by the NMMH during this turbulent time

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<sup>94</sup> When the KMT launched its major Northeastern offensive in the summer of 1946, Harbin remained the only Northeastern city under CCP control. Pepper, 327.

<sup>95</sup> Li Xueying, "Zhou Enlai de shici Haerbin zhi xing" [Zhou Enlai's Ten Trips to Harbin], *Fendou* [Struggle] 5 (2018), 61.

<sup>96</sup> Wu, 44.

<sup>97</sup> As noted above, the memorial opened during the Liaoshen Campaign. After the People's Liberation Army (PLA) commander Lin Biao's successful military offensives across the Sungari River in 1947, Harbin was relatively secure. By the fall of 1948, Lin Biao was able to launch his eighth and final military offensive, and the remaining KMT strongholds in the Northeast at Jingzhou, Changchun, and Shenyang (Mukden), were captured by mid-November 1948. Pepper, 332-345.

demonstrates the CCP's commitment to take control of the narrative of the war years in order to lay a foundation for its sociopolitical legitimacy.

Soon after the NMMH was opened, a plethora of prominent national leaders and cultural luminaries visited the site, which shows the significant role granted to the NMMH and other war memorials by CCP leadership as part of the cultivation of the red martyr cult in the early Mao era.<sup>98</sup> Even before Mao Zedong's historic proclamation in Tiananmen Square of the founding of the PRC on October 1, 1949, the first group of national leaders had begun to visit the NMMH. High-ranking CCP officials that were active in Harbin during the Manchukuo era, such as Luo Ronghuan, Lin Feng, Zhou Baozhong, and Feng Zhongyun, all penned special inscriptions for the memorial's opening in 1948.<sup>99</sup> One of the best-known intellectuals in the 20th century PRC, Guo Moruo, visited the NMMH in May 1949 and inscribed a poem there in his famous calligraphy.<sup>100</sup> Other cultural luminaries, including Peking opera star Mei Lanfang and artist Tian Han, also composed poetry and wrote special inscriptions at the memorial hall in praise of the

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<sup>98</sup> Chang-tai Hung, "The Cult of the Red Martyr: Politics of Commemoration in China," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, 2 (2008), 281, 285.

<sup>99</sup> Zhou Baozhong is of particular importance because of his role as secretary of the CCP Manchurian District Committee's Military Commission, which was founded in 1932, and as an important leader in the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army. In August of 1945, Zhou Baozhong led the surviving members of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army, who had either gone into hiding or fled to the USSR after 1942, to accompany the Soviet Red Army in retaking the Northeast from the Japanese. Feng Zhongyun is also noteworthy for hosting the convening meeting of the CCP's Manchurian Regional Committee (Zhonggong Manzhousheng Wei) shortly after the Mukden Incident of 1931 (1958 booklet, 7). Li Songluan, "Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan" [Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall], *Heilongjiang Wenwu Congkan* [Heilongjiang Cultural Relics Collection] (1982, Issue 1), 111-112, downloaded from [www.cnki.net](http://www.cnki.net) on 16 June 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Relatively high-resolution photographic images of Guo Moruo's calligraphy at the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall began to circulate shortly after the end of the Cultural Revolution. See "Guo Moruo tongzhi canye dongbei lieshi jinianguan tishi shouji" [Handwritten Poetry of Comrade Guo Moruo While Paying Homage at the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall], *Xuexi yu Tansuo* [Study and Explore] (1979, Issue 1), retrieved on 16 June 2018. This is likely due to the high respect Guo Moruo continues to receive in the PRC (see above). Although he is often considered a controversial figure in the West, Guo was perhaps the most highly respected intellectual in the 20<sup>th</sup> century PRC, holding posts such as president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and director of the State Commission of Culture and Education. Qiu Jin, "Beyond Power and Knowledge: Defining Moments in Guo Moruo's Career," *Modern China Studies* (2010, 17.1), 127-168, p. 133.

revolutionary martyrs.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Liu Shaoqi, who would later serve as PRC chairman from 1959 to 1968, visited the NMMH on his way back from the Soviet Union in August 1949.<sup>102</sup>

The establishment of the NMMH in 1948 and its subsequent reception speaks volumes to the emphasis placed on this “site of memory” by the CCP. Figures of regional and national renown do not visit sites such as museums and memorials casually when acting in their official capacity. They do so to strengthen both their own reputations as patriots and to increase the prestige of places, in this case the NMMH, that contribute positively to the version of the national narrative they wish to promote.

### **The “Victor Narrative”: Pre-Cultural Revolution Exhibits (1949-1966)**

During the Mao era, the CCP “victor narrative” formed a crucial part of the Marxist class-struggle narrative.<sup>103</sup> In the Northeast as elsewhere, due to its desire to present an image of revolutionary strength, the CCP emphasized the heroic sacrifice of Communist martyrs and downplayed Japanese military atrocities in the region. According to this narrative, China’s decline was due more to the corruption of the Qing government and the KMT than the foreign imperialists.<sup>104</sup> The KMT, which represented the bourgeoisie, was depicted as the primary enemy

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<sup>101</sup> Wu, 44. Mei Lanfang was one of 20<sup>th</sup> century China’s most well-known Peking opera stars, opting almost exclusively to play female roles. Before his demise in the Cultural Revolution, Tian Han was a well-known artist and political activist from the New Culture Movement, and he is most well-known for composing the lyrics to “March of the Volunteers,” which later became the national anthem of the PRC.

<sup>102</sup> Before his fall from political grace during the Cultural Revolution, Liu was also among the top five most powerful men in China, both as a member of the five member Standing Committee and as Mao’s successor as Chairman of the PRC after the tragic Great Leap Forward. Some sources even consider Liu to have been the second most powerful man in China, ranking him even higher than Zhou Enlai. John K. Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution 1800-1985* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 281.

<sup>103</sup> For example, Mao states that “Ours will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation. We [the Chinese people] have stood up. Our revolution has won the sympathy and acclaim of the people of all countries.” Mao Zedong, “The Chinese People Have Stood Up!”, 21 September 1949, accessed from marxists.org on 23 September 2020.

<sup>104</sup> The War of Resistance against Japan was portrayed in Marxist terms, and the Japanese proletariats and peasants were also seen as victims of Japanese militarism. Wang Zheng, “National Humiliation, History Education,

from whom the CCP had ultimately “liberated” China. The exhibits of the NMMH at this time, as will be described below, reflected this “victor narrative” in its portrayal of the glorious deeds of revolutionary martyrs.

The commemoration of martyrs was a key component of Maoist political culture, particularly in the 1950s.<sup>105</sup> As a part of this, the narrative of the War of Resistance against Japan and the War of Liberation promulgated by the NMMH exhibits was strongly backed by CCP leadership. Regarding museums, exhibits for Mao era leaders were to serve a twofold purpose: they would establish a particular historical narrative and thereby project state power. Thus, according to a 1960 speech by Shanghai museologist Shen Zhiyi, Chinese museums would not just display artifacts to visitors, but would interpret them in line with Marxism-Leninism and historical materialism in order to foment revolution among the visitors.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, ideology trumped aesthetics in such displays, which included those in the NMMH.

As was the case before the founding of the PRC, visits by political dignitaries and after October 1, 1949 continued to demonstrate the CCP’s prioritization of the memorial. Although Mao Zedong never visited, the PRC premier, Zhou Enlai, stopped by in the afternoon of January 1, 1953, bringing with him a wreath of flowers for the martyrs.<sup>107</sup> Zhou’s primary reason for visiting Harbin was to participate in the final ceremony for the handover of the China Eastern

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and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52, 2008: 789.

<sup>105</sup> Hung, 281.

<sup>106</sup> Denise Ho, *Curating Revolution: Politics on Display in Mao’s China* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3-4.

<sup>107</sup> As the PRC’s first Premier (from 1949 to 1976) and one of the five members of the Politburo’s Standing Committee (along with Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Zhu De, and Chen Yun), Zhou Enlai had enormous political prestige and power. While Mao became the face of the Party, Zhou was an expert administrator and “provided much of the continuity and stability that the civilian state structure was to enjoy during its first, often turbulent, twenty-five years.” Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic*, Third Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 62-64.

Railway from the Soviet Union to the PRC.<sup>108</sup> On his second day in the city, he first visited the Soviet Red Army's memorial grave and the Red Army's memorial tower to pay his respects. After visiting, Zhou submitted his own recommendations for the memorial, encouraging the continued publication of information on the history of the revolution and the glorious deeds of the martyrs in order to educate the public. Furthermore, Zhou penned the calligraphic inscription "eternal glory to the revolutionary martyrs," which still hangs prominently in the memorial today.<sup>109</sup>

Zhou's inscription encapsulates the main focus of the NMMH exhibits during the Mao era. During the pre-Cultural Revolution years, the NMMH devoted equal attention to martyrs from the War of Resistance against Japan and the War of Liberation, opening one exhibit hall for each.<sup>110</sup> Because these exhibits no longer exist, their contents can only be learned from a 1958 NMMH publication. This publication demonstrates a central theme of these exhibits that identified not the Japanese, but rather Chiang Kai-shek as the main villain. This comprises a key part of the "victor narrative" because it projects an image of Marxist revolutionary strength against an internal enemy. Most historians agree that after the Mukden Incident, Chiang followed a policy of nonresistance vis-à-vis Japan, insisting that China would only be able to successfully resist Japan if it were unified under the KMT.<sup>111</sup> With multiple warlord regimes contending for

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<sup>108</sup> This was Zhou Enlai's sixth out of ten visits to Harbin, as recent sources have meticulously noted. Li Xueying, 61. The China Eastern Railway (*Zhongdong tielu*) represented many decades of imperialist activity in Manchuria, both by Tsarist Russia and Japan. Construction on the railway started under the jurisdiction of Tsarist Russia in August of 1897 and went into operation in July of 1903. After Russia was defeated by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, which was mostly fought in Manchuria, the Japanese took over the railroad. When the Soviet Red Army invaded Manchukuo in August of 1945, they retook control of the railroad, and gradually returned jurisdiction to the PRC.

<sup>109</sup> Wu, 44. The inscription in Chinese is "Geming xianlie yongchui buxiu," which invokes a sense of both eternal glory and never forgetting the martyrs' sacrifices.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>111</sup> van de Ven, 32.

dominance across China, as well as the growing strength of the CCP Jiangxi Soviet, it is understandable that Chiang would seek internal unity before dealing with an external enemy.<sup>112</sup> However, according to the CCP, Chiang's nonresistance policy until 1937 and his role in the Civil War after 1945 made him a traitor and the top enemy of the Party. In fact, on January 14, 1949, in response to a peace proposal offered by Chiang, Mao declared him to be the "most prominent of all war criminals."<sup>113</sup>

This harsh language condemning Chiang's policy of nonresistance is shown in *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan* (Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall, later referred to as *DLJ* (1958)), a booklet published in 1958 on the NMMH's contemporaneous exhibits. According to *DLJ* (1958), after the Mukden Incident Chiang "sold out the Northeast" (*chumai le dongbei*) with his nonresistance policy. In contrast, the CCP led the Northeastern people as early as 1923, persisting in resisting Japan especially after the Mukden Incident, when it ostensibly organized the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army (*Dongbei Kangri Lianjun*).<sup>114</sup> After fourteen years of harsh struggle, the CCP won the War of Resistance against Japan and liberated the Northeast in 1945 with its Eighth Route Army and New Fourth Army, in conjunction with the Soviet Red Army. However, "Chiang Kai-shek's reactionaries instigated the civil war, and in 1946 undertook a frenzied invasion of the Northeast."<sup>115</sup> After three years, during which the CCP undertook land reform, the Northeastern PLA finally succeeded in "liberating" (*jiefang*) the

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<sup>112</sup> Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 73-74.

<sup>113</sup> Yoshida Takashi, *The Making of the 'Rape of Nanking': History and Memory in Japan, China, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66.

<sup>114</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan* [Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall] (Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1958), 4.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Northeast.<sup>116</sup> In *DLJ* (1958), therefore, Chiang's repeated "betrayal" of the Northeast is juxtaposed with the CCP's loyalty to the Northeastern people and willingness to die in order to liberate them.<sup>117</sup>

According to *DLJ* (1958), the CCP was a revolutionary, unifying force for the Northeastern people during the fourteen years of the Northeastern struggle against Japan. Shortly after the Mukden Incident, the CCP Manchuria Provincial Party Committee (*Manzhouguo Weiyuanhui*, MPC) met in Harbin to condemn Chiang's nonresistance policy and continue the CCP's work of penetrating the countryside and conducting guerrilla warfare against Japan.<sup>118</sup> The authors, however, ensured that resistance against Japan was embedded within a class struggle narrative. For instance, they included a description of the CCP's leadership in establishing the Manchurian Worker's Union and its subsequent instigation of worker's anti-Japanese strikes in multiple factories in the Northeast.<sup>119</sup> Emphatically, the booklet asserted that the CCP was also responsible for leading patriotic Northeasterners into organizing the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army.<sup>120</sup> The historical reality, however, is somewhat different. After the Mukden Incident, although many individual members of the CCP did choose to join and even become officers and anti-Japanese volunteer armies, the MPC under the direction of the Comintern was initially hostile to such movements. Initially, the MPC attempted to shift the anti-Japanese struggle to a revolutionary one opposing the KMT regime, and only

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<sup>116</sup> Before the establishment of the PRC, land reform usually consisted of land redistribution to peasants and was not characterized by the collectivization and abolition of private property that would take place in the mid-to-late 1950s. Meisner, 40.

<sup>117</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan*, 7.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



shifted tactics in 1933 to join forces with the non-Communist volunteer armies in resisting Japan.<sup>121</sup>

In addition to the discussion of bold CCP actions during the fourteen years of struggle in the Northeast, *DLJ* (1958) also promoted the “victor narrative” in discussing a number of well-known male and female CCP martyrs such as Yang Jingyu, Li Zhaolin, Zhao Yiman, and Leng Yun and the “eight women who threw themselves in the river” (*banü toujiang*).<sup>122</sup> The fate of these eight women was rendered in particularly heroic language. In the fall of 1938, the Fifth Unit of the Anti-Japanese United Army prepared to cross the Mudan River in order to open up a new area for guerrilla warfare. Eight young women, led by Leng Yun, were the first to execute this order. But before crossing the river, the eight found themselves surrounded on all three sides by Japanese forces. After repulsing the enemy multiple times, these brave fighters unfortunately ran out of bullets. However, they determined they would rather die than become prisoners of war, and so entered the river and were engulfed by the surging current. “Their great revolutionary spirit,” comments the publication, “is a magnificent epic written for the history of our Anti-Japanese United Army.”<sup>123</sup> Although it would be possible to view these eight women as “victims,” it is their heroism that *DLJ* (1958) highlighted.

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<sup>121</sup> Coogan, 285-289.

<sup>122</sup> Following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army was reorganized into three Front Armies in the east, south, and north of Manchuria. Yang Jingyu, Zhou Baozhong, and Li Zhaolin were the commanders of these armies. Zhao Yiman, a famous female martyr, was a political commissar and an officer under the Second Regiment of the Third Front Army. These martyrs, along with Leng Yun and the “eight women who crossed the river,” remain prominently commemorated in NMMH exhibits today.

<sup>123</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan*, 41.



Figure 1: *DLJ* (1958) [pg. 40-41]

Tales of heroic struggle and sacrifice continued through the year 1940, when the *DLJ* (1958) narrative came to an abrupt halt. The last event mentioned prior to the end of the war in 1945 is a guerrilla attack on Zhaoyuan County in Daqing, Heilongjiang in September of 1940. About the operation, *DLJ* (1958) maintained a heroic narrative, describing in triumphant detail how the CCP unit was able to penetrate the Japanese enemy's defenses, execute those "traitorous lackeys" who had collaborated with Japan, and provide both material relief to the poor and ideological propaganda to the masses there.<sup>124</sup> Missing from the narrative is the fact that this was one of the very last guerrilla attacks of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army before its remaining members were forced to flee across the border into the Soviet Union. There would be little guerrilla activity in Manchukuo for the remaining five years of the war. As Japan ramped up its total war machine and increasingly relied on Manchukuo to fuel it, resistance became more and more difficult.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the Mao era "victory narrative" deviates substantially from the

<sup>124</sup> Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan, 42.

<sup>125</sup> The CCP's guerrilla fighters in southern Manchuria were not so lucky – most were wiped out by the Kwantung Army, which was Japan's strongest army at the time. Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japanese Imperialism, 1895-1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 228

historical reality as far as the Northeast is concerned, which would be more accurately depicted as the CCP's "failed" eight years of guerrilla warfare in Manchukuo.

Due to the presence of the "victory narrative" and that of Marxist class struggle, *DLJ* (1958) portrayed the CCP as bringing the Chinese people to victory in the war, and the role of KMT martyrs and other non-CCP Chinese patriots were not even acknowledged. The booklet played up the involvement of the PLA and the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army in accompanying the Soviet Union in its invasion of Manchuria:

The PLA (within which was the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army) accompanied the Red Army in advancing into the Northeast, rapidly annihilated the Japanese Kwantung Army, and liberated the Northeastern people from fourteen years of occupation. On August 14, the Japanese invaders proclaimed unconditional surrender, and the Chinese people obtained the ultimate victory in the War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>126</sup>

This was despite the fact that it was only the remnants of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army that returned to the Northeast under the leadership of Zhou Baozhong, joined by former members who had remained in hiding under the Manchukuo regime.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the PLA did not "accompany" the Red Army. For one thing, under the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between the Soviet Union and the KMT government signed shortly before Japan's surrender, such CCP-Soviet military collaboration could not take place. Additionally, the CCP armed forces did not adopt the name "PLA" until 1946.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan*, 46.

<sup>127</sup> Anonymous, personal interview by Emily Matson on December 6, 2017 (Shanghai).

<sup>128</sup> There is evidence that after invading Manchukuo, the Red Army did assist the CCP in establishing its position in the Northeast. Although Stalin publicly stated that the Soviet Union had no contact with the CCP in the Northeast after the Soviet occupation, privately he instructed the Red Army to assist PLA troops and engage in coordination with its forces. However, due to the KMT treaty, all of this had to be done covertly, and there is still much debate in scholarly circles over the political motivations of the Soviet Union in Manchuria after the Japanese surrender. Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

Reflecting the Sino-Soviet alliance during the initial years of the PRC, *DLJ (1958)* highlighted the role of the Soviet Red Army in invading Manchuria at the end of the War of Resistance. In its treatment of the events of 1945, entitled “A Great Friendship and the People’s Victory,” the booklet described how the Red Army “immediately declared war on Japan after it had defeated the German fascists.”<sup>129</sup> Although this is historically erroneous, it shows how the Soviet Union was lionized in the PRC in the 1950s to the point where its wartime support for China was much exaggerated. Even today, the Soviet Union’s role in dismantling Manchukuo is lionized at the NMMH. In contrast, as it was written after the Korean War and during the height of Sino-US enmity, *DLJ (1958)* failed to mention the contributions of other Allied powers in defeating Japan.<sup>130</sup> The close associations of the city of Harbin and the province of Heilongjiang with the Soviet Union were epitomized in an interaction I had with a middle-aged Chinese man while standing in the NMMH’s Victory Exhibition in summer 2017. As I examined an exhibit detailing the Red Army’s invasion of Manchukuo, he asked me if I was from the Soviet Union.

Thus, as reflected in the *DLJ (1958)*, in following the CCP’s class-struggle ideology and policy orientations, the NMMH exhibits in the 1950s displayed a “victor narrative” that glorified the CCP, demonized the KMT, and failed to mention any other non-CCP Chinese martyrs and patriots that fought against Japan. In conjunction, the Soviet Union was portrayed as a steadfast ally that played a crucial role in the War of Resistance against Japan in the ultimate defeat of Japan. The motivations to display this narrative of heroic martyrdom at the NMMH were for the

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<sup>129</sup> This is historically incorrect. The Nazis surrendered on May 7, 1945, but the Soviet Union did not declare war on Japan until August 8, 1945.

<sup>130</sup> This represents the reverse of what has been the case in the West. Because of the Cold War, the roles of the Soviet Union and China in defeating the Axis Powers in World War II have been all but forgotten. In contrast, in the 1958 NMMH booklet, also due to Cold War geopolitics, the roles of Great Britain and the United States in World War II have been all but forgotten. For more discussion on this topic, see Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2014), 10-11.

purposes of both domestic and international politics. Domestically, the CCP needed a strong legitimizing narrative, particularly since it was a fledgling nation-state that had just emerged from the War of Resistance, the War of Liberation, and the Korean War. Internationally, the CCP needed to “lean to one side,” as the Soviet Union was the mainstay of its support. Yet as the CCP’s sociopolitical needs shifted, the revised party narrative would necessarily impact museum exhibits like those at the NMMH.

### **From Class Struggle to Patriotism: The Post-Cultural Revolution Exhibits**

The fate of the NMMH exhibits during and in the immediate aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) reflected the typical impermanence of PRC historical memories on recent events, and hence a case of “museopolitics.” During the Cultural Revolution, there was a dearth of relevant historical exhibits at the NMMH. When the NMMH restored relevant historical exhibits, which was after the death of Mao in 1976 and before the 12th CCP Congress in 1982, its narrative began to tone down the class struggle theme.<sup>131</sup> In the twilight of the class struggle narrative, Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng attempted to imitate Mao Zedong Thought in continuing to push revolutionary rhetoric.<sup>132</sup> Consequently, the late 1970s and early 1980s NMMH exhibits bore similarities to those of the late 1950s, albeit with more limited offerings in the wake of the chaotic Cultural Revolution. Although there was still a prominent “victor narrative” present, there was less of an emphasis on class struggle due to the excesses of the

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<sup>131</sup> Considered to be one of the most influential CCP Congresses in history, the 12th CCP Congress not only officially implemented Deng Xiaoping’s “Reform and Opening Up” agenda, but also declared the era of Marxist revolutionary class struggle to be at an end. Lowell Dittmer, “The 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of China,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 93 (March 1983), 117-118.

<sup>132</sup> A weak leader, Hua Guofeng had been named as Mao Zedong’s rightful successor and was Chairman of the CCP from 1976 through 1981. He was mockingly referred to as a “whateverist” due to his infamous instructions that there should be no criticism on “whatever Chairman Mao instructed or approved,” and started to be eclipsed in political influence by Deng Xiaoping as early as 1978. Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 43, 59-65.

doctrine manifested in the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the NMMH exhibits no longer featured the role of the Soviet Red Army in ending the War of Resistance against Japan, as the Sino-Soviet split had severed the PRC's close association with the Soviet Union more than a decade earlier.

After the Cultural Revolution erupted in 1966, the NMMH was vilified as a counterrevolutionary, "black museum" and shut down completely, as was the case with the majority of museums and cultural heritage sites around the country.<sup>133</sup> The city of Harbin was greatly affected by the Cultural Revolution, as a revolutionary "power seizure" took place there in January 1967 by a mass movement similar to the Shanghai People's Commune in its attempt to establish a "proletarian dictatorship."<sup>134</sup> When the NMMH reopened in 1972, it was only able to operate in a limited capacity, with the sole temporary exhibits to educate visitors on class struggle. The NMMH permanent exhibits were not reopened to the public until the late 1970s after the denunciation of the "Gang of Four," and remained divided into two exhibition halls, one for commemorating the martyrs from the War of Resistance against Japan and the other for the War of Liberation. In April 1978, the War of Resistance exhibit was symbolically reopened on the day of the Qingming Festival, a Chinese holiday on which families visit the tombs of their ancestors to pay their respects.<sup>135</sup> The following year, the War of Liberation exhibit was

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<sup>133</sup> Mao Zedong's purpose in the Cultural Revolution was to completely reform the PRC's sociopolitical structure by eradicating any remnants of "bourgeois ideology" from the Party and returning revolutionary spirit to the people. In particular, he encouraged students known as "Red Guards" to rebel against established authority and eradicate the "four olds" in society: old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. After Mao headed a massive Red Guard rally in Beijing on August 8, 1966, the Red Guards began a nationwide rampage to destroy anything that reeked of the feudal past or the bourgeois present, including museums, old books, and works of art. This violent phase of the Cultural Revolution ended by 1969. Meisner, 312-322.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 330-331.

<sup>135</sup> Li, 112. The Qingming Festival falls on April 4, 5, or 6, depending on the year. This festival is also closely tied to the commemoration of martyrs. Several of my interviewees mentioned that when they were elementary school students, their teachers would organize excursions on this day to local memorials for students to pay their respects to locally commemorated heroes and martyrs. In 1949, even before the PRC was officially founded, the CCP made

reopened on July 1, 1979, the anniversary of the CCP.<sup>136</sup> A week later, the *Liberation Army Daily* (*Jiefangjun Bao*) made the event a national one, running a short feature to celebrate the reopening of the NMMH in its entirety, in which it scapegoated Lin Biao and the Gang of Four for the damage incurred by the museum during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>137</sup>

Again, the post-Cultural Revolution contents of the NMMH exhibits can be learned only from a booklet published in 1978, *DLJ* (1978), which showcased the War of Resistance against Japan exhibit and, as *DLJ* (1958), continued to reflect contemporaneous political realities of the PRC.<sup>138</sup> Once again, the past was used to serve the present—under Hua Guofeng the legacy of the martyrs of China’s war against Japan were called upon to facilitate “the new Long March to build a magnificent, strong country that exhibits socialism’s Four Modernizations.”<sup>139</sup> In comparison to the exhibits of the 1950s, the NMMH made a number of modifications in post-Cultural Revolution years.

Aside from mentioning briefly the CCP’s activity after 1921 in the Northeast to “oppose imperialism and feudalism,” *DLJ* (1978) made no other reference to class struggle. The booklet

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the decision to change the name of the Qingming Festival to “Martyrs Memorial Festival” (*Lieshi Jinian Jie*), thus solidifying the link between traditional ancestor worship and commemoration of martyrs. Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 104.

<sup>136</sup> Li, 112.

<sup>137</sup> The short newspaper announcement claimed that in 1979, the Civil War exhibit was able to display artifacts, photographs, and historical information related to 107 different martyrs. The announcement highlights 4 Civil War martyrs in particular: Zhu Rui, Lu Dongsheng, Dong Cunwei, and Yang Zirong. It also draws attention to the inclusion of patriotic overseas Chinese (*aiguo qiaobao*) and international soldiers in the exhibits. “Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan Quanbu Huifu Kaiguan” [The Entire Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall is Reopened], *Jiefangjun Bao* [*Liberation Army Daily*], 8 July 1979, 3.

<sup>138</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan: Kangri Zhanzheng Bufen Jianjie* [Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall: Summary of the War of Resistance against Japan Section] (Harbin, 1978).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* The “four modernizations” were first proposed by Zhou Enlai in 1975 as a call for the “modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, [and] science and technology.” Once Hua Guofeng was installed as chairman following Mao’s death, he adopted these “four modernizations” as well, which were included in the new state and Party constitutions. Meisner, 395-6, 428-9.

indeed continued to villainize the KMT for following a “traitorous policy of surrender,” referring to Chiang Kai-shek’s nonresistance policy after the Mukden Incident that was made in the context of China’s national struggle. This was in stark contrast to *DLJ* (1958), which contained multiple references to the CCP’s instigating of workers’ strikes in the Northeast prior to the War of Resistance against Japan. After the Cultural Revolution, as the dark specter of the Mao era in overapplying class-struggle still loomed large, Beijing began to downplay this doctrine even before the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the CCP in 1978, which showed in the NMMH exhibits.<sup>140</sup> A subtle yet significant sign was that whereas *DLJ* (1958) referred to all CCP martyrs as “comrades” (*tongzhi*, *DLJ* 1978) mentioned them as “martyrs” to raise their national significance while downplaying their communist identity.

Of especial note, *DLJ* (1978) stressed the notion that CCP martyrs made their sacrifices in a fourteen-year struggle against Japan, quoting from Mao Zedong’s famous 1945 speech, “On Coalition Government”: “The Chinese people’s War of Resistance has followed a tortuous course. It began as far back as 1931.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, the NMMH exhibits in 1978 probably made one of the first public statements about a fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan, years ahead of the heated “date debate” among scholars in the Northeast and elsewhere in China that began no earlier than 1983.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> This session was crucial in shifting the focus of the PRC away from class struggle and toward socialist modernization. “Communique of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China,” 29 December 1978, retrieved from [http://www.bjreview.com/Special\\_Reports/2018/40th\\_Anniversary\\_of\\_Reform\\_and\\_Opening\\_up/Timeline/201806/t20180626\\_800133641.html](http://www.bjreview.com/Special_Reports/2018/40th_Anniversary_of_Reform_and_Opening_up/Timeline/201806/t20180626_800133641.html) on 25 September 2020.

<sup>141</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan: Kangri Zhanzheng Bufen Jianjie*, 4. Translation from Mao Tse-tung, “On Coalition Government,” retrieved from [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org) on 11 October 2018.

<sup>142</sup> For instance, Yan’an University professor He Ying noted that in Mao’s 1937 speech to the CCP National Congress, he mentioned the Mukden Incident as the beginning of the “era of resisting Japan” (*kangri shiqi*). Cao Ziyang, ““Banian Kangzhan” yu “Shisinin Kangzhan” Gainian Yunyong Zhi Sikao” [Reflections on the Conceptual Usage of the “Eight-year War of Resistance” and the “Fourteen-year War of Resistance”], *Dangshi yu Wenxian Yanjiu* [Research on Party History and Documents] 5 and 6 (2017), 48.



In addition, in contrast to exhibits of the 1950s, the NMMH exhibits were more limited in scope due to the damage incurred in the Cultural Revolution. A feature further reflecting the backlash of the Cultural Revolution was that the NMMH followed the national mood at the time and highlighted Zhou Enlai and Zhu De, two top CCP leaders who died in 1976 and yet retained high respect in Chinese society.<sup>143</sup> *DLJ* (1978) devoted two pages to Zhou's calligraphy and 1953 visit to the museum. Although Zhu De has never visited the NMMH, he had written calligraphy in memory of Yang Jingyu and Zhao Yiman, which featured prominently on the pages dedicated to the well-known martyrs.<sup>144</sup>

The favoring of patriotism over Marxist class struggle in narratives on the War of Resistance against Japan was furthered after 1982, when the era of class struggle was declared to have ended.<sup>145</sup> In the 1980s, the salvific role of the CCP in ending the Century of Humiliation for all Chinese was juxtaposed in the NMMH with the hardships endured by the Chinese people during the War of Resistance against Japan. The year 1985 saw multiple commemoration conferences, publications of scholarly articles, and ceremonies throughout China that celebrated the 40th anniversary of both the War of Resistance against Japan and World War II (usually referred to as the "Anti-Fascist War," or *fan faxisi zhanzheng*, in China). As part of this effort, several curators from the NMMH published an article emphasizing the fourteen years of struggle endured by the Northeasterners under the aegis of CCP leadership and how this contributed to the overall War of Resistance.<sup>146</sup> As the era of class struggle had been declared over in 1982, the

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<sup>143</sup> The year 1976 saw the death of many in the original generation of CCP revolutionaries. Zhou Enlai, a figure who was not only revered but greatly beloved, died in January 1976. Zhu De, who had been revered as the commander of the Red Army, died in July 1976. Mao Zedong followed soon after in September 1976. Meisner, 405-407.

<sup>144</sup> *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan: Kangri Zhanzheng Bufen Jianjie*, 2-3, 7, 15.

<sup>145</sup> Dittmer, 117-118.

<sup>146</sup> Li Songluan, Wen Ye, and Zhao Ning, "Jiaqiang Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu, Cujin Liang ge Wenming Jianshe – Jinian Kangri Zhanzheng Shengli Sishi Zhou Nian" [Strengthening Patriotic Education and Advancing the Two Civilizational

article was able to stay away completely from Maoist revolutionary rhetoric. Rather, as patriotism was the new legitimizing narrative for the CCP, the article highlighted the importance of the NMMH and other museums in the effort to educate the youth in both patriotism and socialism: “the special function of museums and memorial halls for this [patriotic] education cannot be substituted by any other educational means.”<sup>147</sup>

The years 1985 and 1988 were particularly significant, as they represented the 40th anniversaries of the end of World War II and the founding of the NMMH, respectively. In the commemorations of these events, as well as in the establishment of the new Heilongjiang Provincial Revolutionary Museum (*Heilongjiangsheng Bowuguan*) in 1988 on the NMMH premises, the impermanent or “museopolitics” character of the NMMH was again on full display. As shown by the 1985 NMMH article, unlike in the 1970s exhibits, a mission of patriotic education was added to that of socialist education in NMMH exhibits by the end of the 1980s.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, departing from the Mao era narrative, the NMMH exhibits for the first time acknowledged the patriotic role of non-communist figures in the War of Resistance, such as Ma Zhanshan.<sup>149</sup>

By the late 1980s, although the standard historical narrative of the PRC still considered Chiang Kai-shek’s policy of nonresistance in the early 1930s as a “traitorous policy of surrender,” the role of non-CCP volunteer armies in the Northeast was finally acknowledged, such as the Red Spears Society (*hongqiang hui*), Big Swords Society (*dadao hui*), and bandits

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Constructions – Commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of the Victory in the War of Resistance against Japan], *Beifang Wenwu* [Northern Cultural Relics] (March 1985), 2-8.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

(shanlin).<sup>150</sup> But to the NMMH curators, Ma Zhanshan deserved special praise: “in particular, Ma Zhanshan’s initial waging of the Jiangqiao Battle of Resistance shocked both China and the world, and obtained the praise and support of people throughout the country and overseas compatriots.”<sup>151</sup> A military man from northern Heilongjiang, Ma was the best known member of the anti-Japanese resistance in Northeastern China for his efforts in delaying the Japanese for several days at the Nonni River near Qiqihaer in November 1931. Due to propaganda efforts by various nationalist groups in late 1931, Ma became the first Chinese resistance figure whose actions had a significant impact on Chinese and world public opinion. Although the CCP did not support Ma at this time and omitted or marginalized any reference to him in the PRC historical narrative of the Mao era, by the 1980s Ma emerged as an important figure under the banner of anti-Japanese patriotism, allegedly held solely by the CCP in the 1930s.<sup>152</sup>

Reflecting the NMMH’s new role in promoting patriotic education, in 1985 the curators announced an addition to the NMMH premises – the Heilongjiang Provincial Revolutionary Museum.<sup>153</sup> According to the 1985 article, there were two reasons why this museum could effectively further patriotic education and socialist education. First, the CCP’s leadership of fourteen years of anti-Japanese struggle in the Northeast was an excellent example of showing the spiritual strength of patriotic education. Second, museums were a particularly powerful

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. The Northeastern volunteer armies were formed in response to the Mukden Incident and included Chinese from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. However, unlike the claims of the NMMH curators, which is that all of these volunteer armies operated “under the command of the CCP,” both the international Communist movement and the CCP were initially hostile to the volunteer armies. Coogan, 285.

<sup>151</sup> Li, Wen, and Zhao, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Missing, however, from the 1980s narrative is the inconvenient fact that after Ma’s initial resistance to Japan, he defected to the Japanese in the winter of 1931-32 due to his dissatisfaction with the lack of support from the Nationalists. Later in spring of 1932, he once again took up the banner of resistance. Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth*, 7, 203-224.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 7. This museum is still open to the public, but changed its name in 2009 to the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army Museum (*Dongbei Kanglian Bowuguan*).

medium for promoting these goals through the exhibition of artifacts, photographs, and other information, thus acting as “three-dimensional textbooks.”<sup>154</sup> As their inclusion in the 1982 PRC constitution as a type of “cultural undertaking” of the state to “serve the people and socialism” shows, museums had become increasingly important mediums through which to promulgate the CCP’s legitimizing narrative by the 1980s.<sup>155</sup> An additional reason not noted by the 1985 article was that third, by focusing solely on the War of Resistance against Japan to the exclusion of the War of Liberation in its exhibits, the Heilongjiang Provincial Revolutionary Museum accomplished an important shift in the NMMH rhetoric. In the absence of class struggle rhetoric, by the 1980s emphasizing the War of Liberation narrative no longer behooved the CCP in its legitimizing narrative. Rather, highlighting the War of Resistance would promote a patriotism that included a broader swathe of Chinese citizens.

In 1988, a special NMMH publication to celebrate the memorial hall’s 40th anniversary also stressed patriotism, celebrating the NMMH efforts in promoting education for the masses in both “patriotic thought” (*aiguo zhuyi sixiang*) and the “revolutionary tradition” (*geming chuantong jiaoyu*). According to the booklet, in the past decade, the NMMH carried out this mass education through not only physical exhibits at the memorial hall, but also created a mobile exhibit that had toured 82 distinct locations within Heilongjiang Province and 16 different provinces.<sup>156</sup> Significantly, the National Cultural Relics Bureau and the Heilongjiang Provincial Party Committee highly commended the mobile exhibit, showing a strong linkage between the

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>155</sup> Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa (1982 Nian) [People’s Republic of China Constitution (1982)], retrieved from [http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content\\_4421.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content_4421.htm) on 9 April 2020.

<sup>156</sup> These phrases are highlighted many times not only in the preface, but also in other articles throughout the book.

Chen Lei, “Xu Yan” [Preface], in Li Songluan, Zhao Ning, Wen Ye, and Wang Weidong, ed., *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan Sishi Nian* [Forty Years of the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall] (Harbin: Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan, 1988), 1-3.

NMMH historical narrative and the broader national narrative.<sup>157</sup> The booklet also explicated the present function of historical memories in stressing the need for the NMMH to continue reforms in line with Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening Up" and in the spirit of the CCP's Thirteenth National Congress of 1987.<sup>158</sup>

The 1980s represented an epoch of renewed and expanded influence for the NMMH, as its exhibits had been reopened after the "ten years of calamity," or the Cultural Revolution, the devastation of which was squarely blamed on the "Gang of Four."<sup>159</sup> Aside from these ten years, as of 1988 the total number of visitors who came to the NMMH or saw the mobile exhibit was estimated to be 14.5 million.<sup>160</sup> In the commemoration ceremonies for the 40th anniversaries of the War of Resistance and the opening of the NMMH, as well as in the establishment of the Heilongjiang Provincial Revolutionary Museum, the main theme was patriotic education, not class struggle. To stress patriotic education, the NMMH gave greater attention to the War of Resistance against Japan than the War of Liberation as the first complete victory of the Chinese people over foreign imperialism since the Opium War of 1839.<sup>161</sup>

### Japanese Atrocities and the "Victim Narrative": The 2000s

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<sup>157</sup> Gan Zhigeng, Yu Tienan, and Sun Jichang, "Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan Shisinin Tiji" [Epigraph on the Forty Years of the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall] in Li, Zhao, Wen, and Wang, *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan Sishi Nian*, 3.

<sup>158</sup> Chen, 2-3.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. The author of this preface to the 1988 NMMH publication is Chen Lei, who was a prominent politician in Heilongjiang who served as the provincial governor from 1979-1985. Although he had strong revolutionary credentials, joining the CCP in 1936 and serving in the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army, he was still a victim of the Cultural Revolution, which explains the extremely critical tone he utilizes when discussing the Cultural Revolution's influence on the NMMH. "Chen Lei," retrieved from <https://baike.baidu.com/item/陈雷/17450> on 21 November 2018.

<sup>160</sup> Wen Ye, "Qianjin Zhong de Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan" [The Advancement of the Northeastern Martyrs' Memorial Hall] in Li, Zhao, Wen, and Wang, *Dongbei Lieshi Jinianguan Sishi Nian*, 11.

<sup>161</sup> Li, Wen, and Zhao, 8.

By the 2000s, as discussed below, patriotic education had completely eclipsed Marxist class struggle as a way to legitimize CCP rule in the PRC, in which a “victim narrative” superseded the “victor narrative” of the Mao years. In the “victim narrative,” the CCP presented itself as a salvific force that rescued all of China from the Century of Humiliation and that would continue to grow China into a rich, powerful country (*fuguo qiangbing*). This shift has resulted in the NMMH’s more specific exhibits on the War of Resistance against Japan and Japanese atrocities therein. Several new exhibits were opened in 2009 and have continued to this date. Two exhibitions separately titled “Black Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs” (*Heitu Yinghun*) and “The Exhibition of the Evil and Original Site of Harbin Puppet Manchukuo Police Office” (*Weiman Jingchating Jiuzhi ji Zuie Zhan*) demonstrate continued modification of the NMMH narrative in accordance with the changing sociopolitical context. In the NMMH complex, there is no longer a place for a permanent exhibit on the War of Liberation – the entire complex is now devoted to commemorating the martyrs from the War of Resistance against Japan. However, remnants of the “victor narrative” are still present and existent in an often uneasy tension with the “victim narrative” as shown in the discussion below.

Although patriotic education was a major theme in 1980s propaganda, it culminated in the mid-1990s, by which time the former legitimizing narrative based on Marxist revolutionary class struggle had become completely bankrupt. This was due to a variety of factors, including the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, and the continued marketization of the PRC’s once-collectivized economy.<sup>162</sup> Through patriotic education, the CCP

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<sup>162</sup> See William A. Callahan, *China: The Pessoptimist Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

was increasingly portrayed as ending China's Century of Humiliation under foreign imperialism, which culminated with the War of Resistance against Japan. To highlight this salvific role, the CCP narrative increasingly promoted a "victim narrative" borrowed from the KMT precedent, which highlighted Japanese military atrocities.<sup>163</sup>

In 1994, the CCP Department of Propaganda promulgated its "Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education." As with patriotic education initiatives in the 1980s, this outline emphasized the importance of cultivating patriotic sentiment among the youth, particularly through "patriotic education bases" (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*) such as museums and memorial halls, among which museums on the War of Resistance against Japan were particularly prevalent.<sup>164</sup> In 1995, when the first 100 sites were designated as "patriotic education bases," a full fifth were to commemorate the War of Resistance, including such sites as the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, the People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum, and the September 18th History Museum. The sites chosen in Heilongjiang Province reflected this national trend – out of four sites chosen, both the NMMH and Unit 731 commemorated the war with Japan, albeit with very different focuses.<sup>165</sup> The main purpose of the Unit 731 Museum is to condemn the Japanese biomedical experiments on civilians within the military research complex,

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<sup>163</sup> The discourse of national humiliation is hardly a CCP invention. It first emerged during the late Qing Dynasty and was a central theme in both pre-1949 and post-1949 KMT discourse. Wang Zheng, "National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China," 789.

<sup>164</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC), "Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao de tongzhi" [Outline for the implementation of patriotic education], retrieved from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66685/4494186.html> on 6 September 2017. English translations from Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation*, 104-105.

<sup>165</sup> The other two designated "patriotic education bases" from Heilongjiang Province in 1997 were the Aigun History Exhibit (along the Russia-China border marked by the Yalu River, this commemorates the 1858 Treaty of Aigun, an unequal treaty between Tsarist Russia and Qing China) and the Ironman Wang Jingxi Memorial (in the city of Daqing, which oversees the rich oil fields there).

fitting into a larger narrative of crimes against humanity in World War II.<sup>166</sup> In contrast, as the current *raison d'être* of the NMMH, the site has been designated to commemorate CCP martyrs during the fourteen years of struggle against Japan.

The evolving *raison d'être* of the NMMH demonstrates the impact of “museopolitics,” particularly in the most recent exhibits that opened to the public to commemorate the 60th anniversary of World War II in 2009. Gone now are the two separate exhibits to commemorate martyrs in the War of Resistance against Japan and the War of Liberation. Instead, the NMMH’s most recent “permanent” exhibits, “Black Earth and Spirits of the Martyrs” and “The Exhibition of the Evil and Original Site of Harbin Puppet Police Office,” solely focus on the War of Resistance against Japan. The Maoist “victor narrative” is still present, particularly in the “Black Earth and Spirits of the Martyrs” exhibit. However, the martyrs are no longer portrayed as CCP revolutionaries, but rather as patriotic Chinese. Furthermore, “The Exhibition of the Evil and Remains of Harbin Puppet Police Office” highlights Japanese atrocities and the “victim narrative” in a manner unprecedented in the NMMH. As is the case in other museums that commemorate the War of Resistance against Japan, such as the People’s War of Resistance against Japan Memorial Hall (see Chapter 4), the “victor narrative” and “victim narrative” are largely treated separately in the NMMH.<sup>167</sup>

According to NMMH curators, the main purposes of the new exhibits included displaying the “regional characteristics” of the Northeast; conveying a solemn, respectful atmosphere for

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<sup>166</sup> Other crimes against humanity in World War II that Unit 731 is grouped with in Chinese scholarship include the Nanjing Massacre and Auschwitz. Wang Jihua, ““Jingshen” Shi Jinianguan Zhanchen de Linghun” [Vitality is the Soul of Memorial Hall Exhibitions], in *Lieshi Yu Jinianguan Yanjiu No. 14* [Martyrs and Memorial Halls No. 14] (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, 2016), 113.

<sup>167</sup> Chinese museum scholar Kirk Denton observed this when he visited the NMMH in 2007 and observed the temporary exhibits set up while the newer permanent exhibits were being constructed. Kirk Denton, “Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5, 4 (October 1, 2007).



visitors; maintaining coherence between original historical architecture and new exhibits; and preserving the historical memory of the visitors, allowing them to understand the function of the Manchukuo police station and its crimes as well as maintain respect and reverence for the martyrs.<sup>168</sup> The focus of exhibits should be to emotionally provoke visitors to feel various sentiments from the perspectives of the martyrs, their heroic deeds, and their sacrifices – for instance, the sincerity of a mother’s love or the arduous conditions of suffering.<sup>169</sup> Historical objectivity did not figure into the major goals of the NMMH – “cold objectivity” was something that the curators explicitly stated the exhibits should avoid. Instead, the exhibits should be “evocatively anti-fascist, both appealing to and shocking visitors through various modes of display including historical artifacts, artwork, multimedia, etc.”<sup>170</sup> This language closely mirrors that of the 1994 “Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education,” which states that “patriotic education bases” should “make every effort to have an abundance of influencing power and power to move the feelings.”<sup>171</sup> The main purposes of the updated exhibits thus fall closely in line with top-down directives from Beijing.

In “Black Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs,” the brave, patriotic actions of the martyrs in the War of Resistance against Japan are highlighted. The central exhibition hall of the NMMH has an elegant black-and-white color scheme, chosen to convey uniformity with the building’s white exterior and to make the exhibit space seem more open. Furthermore, according to the

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<sup>168</sup> Liu, Dong, and Jia, 100-103.

<sup>169</sup> “The sincerity of a mother’s love” (*muqin de zhenzhi*) is probably a reference to Zhao Yiman. The display on Zhao Yiman’s life in the museum contains multiple references to her role as a mother as well as that of a revolutionary. This has been the case not only in the current exhibit, but in portrayals of her in the memorial hall since the 1950s (see above). *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>171</sup> The phrase in Chinese has stronger connotations than in English. In “liqiu fuyou xiyinli he ganranli,” “ganran” literally means “to infect.” Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC), “Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao de tongzhi,” Point 25.

museum curators, the color white symbolizes purity, a fitting demonstration of the pure patriotism of the martyrs. The juxtaposition of black and white also conveys the topographic landscape of the Northeast, representing its snow and mountains or, alternatively, its water and soil.<sup>172</sup> In my visit to the exhibit, I noted that this evokes the martyrs' rallying cry of "*huan wo he shan*," or "return our rivers and mountains," which is displayed in bold Chinese calligraphy at the start of the "Black Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs" exhibit. This rallying cry became popularized after the September 18<sup>th</sup> incident by patriotic Chinese demanding that their land be returned to them from the Japanese invaders.<sup>173</sup>

In contrast, the "The Exhibition of the Evil and Remains of Harbin Puppet Manchukuo Police Office" highlights Japanese military atrocities in Manchukuo and fits in the category of "dark tourism."<sup>174</sup> However, it is a far cry from the "Disneyfication of horror" observed at some sites on the more graphic end of the spectrum.<sup>175</sup> This exhibit fulfills the museum curators' goals of shocking and emotionally provoking the visitor. As the NMMH was established on the old site of the Harbin Manchukuo police station, the new exhibit was opened in the former Manchukuo Police Station's basement area, where the prisoner holding cells were located, as well as the

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<sup>172</sup> Liu, Dong, and Jia, 103.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>174</sup> Dark tourism is defined as "the act of travel to sites, attractions and exhibits associated with recent death, disaster or the seemingly macabre." Tang Yong, "Dark Touristic Perception: Motivation, Experience and Benefits Interpreted from the Visit to Seismic Memorial Sites in Sichuan Province," *Journal of Mountain Science* 11, 5 (2014), 1327.

<sup>175</sup> Denton, "Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity," 16-17. Denton coins "Disneyfication of horror" to describe the excessive utilization of grotesque imagery and special effects to produce emotional reactions such as outrage, horror, and disgust among museum visitors – a phenomenon that is particularly noticeable in museums and other forms of media commemorating the War of Resistance against Japan in the PRC today. This, of course, is not unique to the PRC, but is an international phenomenon that has become a trend in depictions of other historical narratives of atrocities as well, including commemorations of the Holocaust. Holocaust historian Amos Goldberg has coined a related term, "melancholy aesthetics," to critique fellow Holocaust scholar Saul Friedlander's heavy reliance on Jewish victims' eyewitness accounts of the horrors of the Shoah in the highly-acclaimed monograph *The Years of Extermination*. See Amos Goldberg, "Forum: On Saul Friedlander's *The Years of Extermination* – 2. The Victim's Voice and Melodramatic Aesthetics in History," *History and Theory* 48 (October 2009), 229.

torture and execution chambers. The atmosphere of the police station has been reimagined in vivid detail to give the visitor a sense of Japanese military atrocities and the appalling conditions under which the prisoners, many of whom were anti-Japanese guerrillas under the command of the CCP, suffered. The original windows, walls, and pillars of the basement are still in place, and in areas that do not correspond with the original site, realistic sculptures of characters working in various roles for the Manchukuo Police Station, such as an entrance guard taking a telephone call and a policeman reading a newspaper, have been intentionally positioned.<sup>176</sup> Parts of the basement have been converted into depictions of the old streets of Harbin – for instance, the first hotel in Harbin, an old movie theater, and a symbolic reproduction of an old brothel that was present during the Manchukuo era. Crimes of the Manchukuo regime highlighted in the exhibit include prostitution, opium addiction, and torture of CCP guerrilla fighters. The restored torture chamber in the basement is particularly gruesome.

One of the aims of “The Exhibition of the Evil and Remains of Harbin Puppet Police Office” was to communicate a greater “shock value” in promoting a reaction amongst the visitors, and nowhere was this “shock value” more clear than the restored torture chamber of Zhao Yiman.<sup>177</sup> One of the most well-known CCP female martyrs, Zhao looms large in the NMMH, particularly since she was martyred in the basement of the Manchukuo Police Station in 1936. After refusing to divulge any information to her Japanese inquisitors, even while subjected to the most brutal means of torture, Zhao was publicly executed on August 2, 1936 at the young age of 31.<sup>178</sup> In the torture chamber, many of the torture instruments have been restored,

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<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 103.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>178</sup> Sun Kuiwen, ed., “Mankong Rexue Wo Zhonghua – Ji Zhao Yiman” [Spilled Blood to Irrigate China – Remembering Zhao Yiman] in *Buxiu de Fengbei – Heilongjiangsheng Geming Lieshi Shiji Xuan* [Eternal Monuments – Record of the Deeds of Heilongjiang Province’s Revolutionary Martyrs] (Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2011), 4-8.

including including a red-hot iron, a copper kettle filled with pepper water on top of a torture rack in the shape of the Chinese character “大” (*dazixing hudeng*). On the rack sits a copper kettle filled with pepper water to pour on uncompliant prisoners, while in the corner shadows lurks a bloody nail cage (*daixue de dinglong*) that also serves as a cruel torture device. A life-size model of a prison guard stands before the torture rack with a ball and chain in hand. A flat iron is being heated by a fiery stove, and a series of other torture implements, including a variety of iron balls and chains, hang from the far wall. through a window in the back of the room is the “water dungeon” (*shuilao*), in which the visitor can observe that a torture sequence where the prisoner is forcibly submerged in cold water for prolonged periods (made worse if conducted during Harbin’s unforgiving winters) has just taken place. Next door is the execution chamber, with a simple gallows, with a placard explaining that here was where Zhao Yiman was martyred.<sup>179</sup>

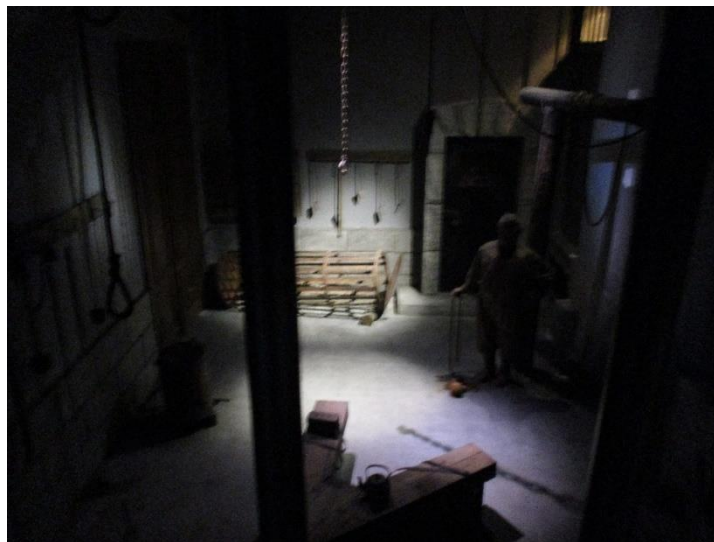


Figure 2: Photograph of the Restored Torture Chamber. Photo Credit: Author, Summer 2017

The 2009 exhibits in the NMMH show that in the context of “museopolitics,” evolution of these exhibits does not signify a complete repudiation of past modes of representation. “Black

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<sup>179</sup> Liu, Dong, and Jia, 103-105.

Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs” continues to portray the “victor narrative,” for instance, albeit with some alterations. The class struggle narrative has been erased, and the martyrs, now exclusively from the War of Resistance against Japan, are now depicted as patriots rather than revolutionaries. “The Exhibition of the Evil and Remains of Harbin Puppet Police Office,” in contrast, almost exclusively highlights the CCP “victim narrative” in conveying gruesome Japanese military atrocities committed against Northeastern Chinese by the Manchukuo regime.

## Conclusion

Judging from the evolution of its exhibits from the 1950s to present to conform to shifting sociopolitical conditions of the PRC, the NMMH effectively showcases “museopolitics.” Although it strives to lead visitors to consider its exhibits “voiceless and static” as part of a permanent institution, the NMMH is effectively a place of impermanence.<sup>180</sup> After the Manchukuo Police Station was first turned into a memorial hall by the CCP in 1948, its exhibits promulgated a “victor narrative,” celebrating the triumph of the CCP in waging class struggle to liberate the Northeast from the Japanese and the KMT alike. After the devastation wrought by the Cultural Revolution, however, class struggle was expunged from the national discourse of the PRC and hence from the museum’s narrative. Furthermore, by the 1980s, as the CCP’s legitimating discourse increasingly adopted nationalistic themes, elements of national humiliation began to seep into NMMH exhibits, leading to greater attention to the War of Resistance against Japan than the War of Liberation. Finally, as the CCP authorities’ “patriotic education” unfolded throughout the 1990s and after, the NMMH reset its exhibits completely in 2009, which have been maintained to this date. As the new exhibits attest, the NMMH is now

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<sup>180</sup> Fabrice Larceneux, Florence Caro and Anne Krebs, “The Reaction of Visitors to Contemporary Art in a Classical Art Institution: A Louvre Museum Case Study,” *International Journal of Arts Management* 18, no. 2 (winter 2016): 5.

promoting a “victim narrative” that emphasizes Japanese military atrocities and CCP martyrs as national martyrs in the War of Resistance against Japan. Even though aspects of the old “victor narrative” remain in portrayals of the martyrs, they are no longer CCP revolutionaries, but rather Chinese patriots. Thus, the transition to a broader narrative of patriotism in the face of foreign aggression has been completed since the 1990s. Currently, the NMMH exhibits serve to impress its visitors with a shaped historical memory. But, as the history of the NMMH shows, its exhibits have been chameleonic, and the historical memory thereby presented has been impermanent.

## Chapter Two: Beyond a “Site of Memory”

On April 3, 1932, Aisin Gioro “Henry” Puyi, China’s last emperor, was “restored” to the throne as the emperor of Manchukuo, the puppet state formed by the Japanese military after the Mukden Incident and subsequent invasion of China’s Northeast. Puyi’s residence was in a resplendent palace in the city of Changchun, renamed as Shinkyo or “new capital.” Changchun was a modern metropole built up by Japanese architects and urban planners.<sup>181</sup> This newly constructed imperial palace, dubbed the “Puppet Emperor Palace” (*Weiman Huanggong*) after 1945, was the center of Puyi’s activities during the fourteen years of Japanese occupation of the Northeast.<sup>182</sup> In post-World War II years, however, the site of the Puppet Emperor Palace fell into disrepair and disuse until it was declared a protected site by the CCP in the early 1960s.<sup>183</sup> This is in direct contrast to the NMMH discussed in Chapter 1, which in the postwar era served an important function for the CCP in commemorating martyrs.

The legacy of the Puppet Emperor Palace was complex for the CCP after 1945, as it contained no positive connotations to utilize for the purposes of Chinese patriotism and was thus not useful in promulgating the “victor narrative” that was so predominant during the Mao era. Furthermore, the Manchus were considered to be one of the PRC’s ethnic nationalities, but it was unclear what role the Puppet Emperor Palace could play in the promulgation of the CCP’s

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<sup>181</sup> Shinkyo was only used as the name for the city during the 13 years of the Manchukuo puppet state. The Chinese name for the city, which I will be using throughout this chapter, is Changchun.

<sup>182</sup> I use the term “Puppet Emperor Palace” because it most closely approximates the Chinese name, “*Weiman Huanggong*.” The character “wei” means “fake” or “counterfeit,” and was included in the name of the palace after the war. Similarly, in Chinese, Manchukuo is “*Wei Manzhouguo*,” or literally “fake Manchukuo.” This is to make clear that these entities were illegitimate, as they were established by the Japanese military invaders after the Mukden Incident.

<sup>183</sup> Zhang Lixian, “*Wei Huanggong Jianzhu Xiufu de Yuanze*” [Principles for the Restoration of the Puppet Emperor Palace Architecture], *Wei Huanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985 [Puppet Emperor Palace Exhibition Hall Yearbook 1985], 88.

ethnopolitics, particularly when Puyi was captured by the Soviet Red Army and subsequently treated as a war criminal in need of “reform” by the PRC.<sup>184</sup> This may explain why the site itself was not considered for utilization until the early 1960s when Puyi completed his “reform” and was freed from imprisonment. The site, however, remained closed due to the disruption of the Cultural Revolution. Not until 1984 did it open to the public as the Puppet Emperor Palace Museum (PEPM). However, even the revamping of the site in the 1980s was rife with controversy. Opponents to reopening the site gave two common objections. First, the Puppet Emperor Palace should not be given any special status because it was reviled by the Chinese people for its historical role in housing a puppet government shielded by Japanese militarism. Second, the architecture was simply too ordinary, and did not represent any kind of Chinese imperial style.<sup>185</sup>

In following history of the PEPM since 1984, this chapter will focus in particular on the PEPM’s function as a “site of memory” through the evolution of its exhibits. The first permanent exhibit, “From Emperor to Citizen,” is on the life of Puyi and demonstrated in many ways the Mao era “victor narrative” through extolling the role of the CCP in reforming Puyi’s feudal tendencies until he became a peace-loving citizen of the “new China.” Certainly the site of the Puppet Emperor Palace, as Puyi’s former residence, is important in this exhibit. However, since the better part of Puyi’s journey from “Emperor to Citizen” did not take place there or even within the timeframe of the War of Resistance against Japan, the ability of the PEPM exhibit is limited in functioning as a “site of memory” and not as effective as exhibits in the NMMH.

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<sup>184</sup> For more on ethnopolitics in the PRC, see Thomas S. Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>185</sup> Wang Dajun, “Lüeshu Weihuanggong Weixiu de Yiyi” [Outlining the Meaning Behind Restoring the Puppet Emperor Palace], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985 [Puppet Emperor Palace Exhibit Yearbook 1985], 94.



A “site of memory,” according to the French historian Pierre Nora’s broad definition, encompasses “any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element in any community.”<sup>186</sup> In his *Realms of Memory*, Nora intricately ties “sites of memory” to preserving the legacy of the nation-state – in his case, France. Although his overreliance on the nation-state as a frame of reference has been critiqued, I will continue to utilize Nora’s definition here as applicable to “sites of memory” in the PRC.<sup>187</sup> However, in a separate manner, I utilize Nora’s definition of a “site of memory” to specifically refer to *those conscientiously erected in physical locations connected to events of historical import*. Thus, whereas by Nora’s definition Mao Zedong’s “Little Red Book” or even Mao himself could serve as a “site of memory,” by my definition “sites of memory” are limited to physical locations of historical significance. Thus, in spite of the function assigned to the PEPM by PRC authorities, this chapter treats the PEPM as a “site of memory” in its actual historical significance, or its past use as the site of the administration of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. In other words, not only do the official exhibits of the PEPM not highlight this historical “site of memory” function, they also tend to conceal it by re-vesting the site with an officially designated symbolic meaning. Over time, many of the PEPM exhibits have conscientiously strayed away from the historical “site of memory” function; the physical location of the site has become less important in museum exhibits as they have become connected to a broader, national narrative with the ultimate purpose to underscore CCP national legitimacy.

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<sup>186</sup> Pierre Nora, “Preface to English Language Edition: From *Lieux de Mémoire* to *Realms of Memory*,” in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past (Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii.

<sup>187</sup> See, for instance, Hue-Tam Ho Tai, “Remembered Realms: Pierre Nora and French National Memory,” *The American Historical Review* 106, 3 (Jun. 2001), 906-922.

Since its opening in the mid-1980s, the PEPM would have been of limited value as a “site of memory” for the CCP’s narrative of patriotic education without a careful reconstruction of the site’s meaning. For this reason, the museum opened new permanent exhibits to follow the official “victim narrative,” including contents about Japanese military atrocities and the fourteen years of resistance in the Northeast. In 1997, the PEPM opened the new exhibit “Northeastern China, Trampled Underfoot by Cruel Oppression” for this purpose. However, it was only in 2006, after the establishment of a new permanent exhibition hall, “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast,” that the PEPM was finally designated as a “Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Base.” That is, the PEPM got this status a more than decade later than the NMMH and the September 18th History Museum. This was largely due to the PEPM’s problematic connection to the historical site of the Manchukuo regime, a page of Northeastern collaboration with Japanese imperialism. Only after re-toning the symbolic significance of the site by emphasizing the “victim narrative” did the PEPM become worthy of meriting this prestigious national title. Hence, like NMMH, the PEPM has also showcased “museopolitics.”

### **The Origins of the PEPM**

Although minimally damaged during World War II, both the city of Changchun and the Puppet Emperor Palace underwent extensive damage during the Chinese Civil War. After the Japanese surrender on August 15, 1945, the Soviet Red Army took over the city on August 19, and the KMT established a municipal government on November 8. At the KMT’s request, the Red Army withdrew from the city on April 14, 1946, and the KMT officially established control over the city on May 23.<sup>188</sup> During this time period, different sections of the Puppet Emperor

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<sup>188</sup> Yukiko Koga, “Memory, Postmemory, Inheritance: Postimperial Topography of Guilt in Changchun” in *Inheritance of Loss: China, Japan, and the Political Economy of Redemption after Empire* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 71-72.

Palace were utilized by the KMT as a secondary school and army barracks; unfortunately, all of the original wood framework from the site was utilized as firewood by the generals and other residents, and the site was further damaged due to a fire.<sup>189</sup> By July of 1946, the KMT had launched an offensive in Northern and Northeastern China, and much of the subsequent fighting in the civil war took place in the Northeast. The CCP laid siege to Changchun from May to October 1948, during which time, according to an estimation, 160,000 civilians starved to death.<sup>190</sup> By the time Changchun was “liberated” on October 19, 1948, the city’s basic infrastructure had been destroyed and there was no running water, electricity, or transportation system. Approximately 30 percent of the buildings in the city had been destroyed.<sup>191</sup>

After the CCP “liberated” Changchun, much of the Puppet Emperor Palace had already been destroyed. Initially, what had remained of the site did not fare much better under the CCP than under the KMT. It was utilized as an automobile factory’s technician school, with many buildings converted into classrooms and dormitories.<sup>192</sup> In 1954, for the first time the site was utilized as a museum, when the nearby Jilin Provincial Museum decided to open exhibits in the former Tongde Hall, Jiale Palace, and the Painting and Calligraphy Building of the Puppet Emperor Palace.<sup>193</sup> However, not until 1962 did the CCP Central Committee and the Jilin Provincial Committee decide that certain parts of the Puppet Emperor Palace site were historically valuable and should be protected. At the time the official plan was to open an exhibit

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<sup>189</sup> Zhang, 88.

<sup>190</sup> For more information on the devastating 5-month devastating siege of Changchun, see Andrew Jacobs, “China Is Wordless on Traumas of Communists’ Rise,” *New York Times*, 1 October 2009, retrieved from [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) on 17 May 2019.

<sup>191</sup> Koga, 72.

<sup>192</sup> Zhang, 88.

<sup>193</sup> “Weiman Huanggong” [The Puppet Emperor Palace], *Lishi Yangge* [Historical Developments], from *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan* [The Museum of the Imperial Palace of “Manchukuo”], retrieved from <http://www.wmhg.com.cn/web/cn/portal/132773149989314895.htm> on 9 March 2019.

detailing the site's use under the Manchukuo puppet regime, which did not materialize because of the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.<sup>194</sup>

In 1981, the Jilin Provincial Government designated the Puppet Emperor Palace as a Key Cultural Relics Protected Unit (*zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei*), and exhibits were finally opened to the public in 1984.<sup>195</sup> Initially, there were only two exhibits – “Historical Facts Regarding the Invasion of the Northeast by Japanese Militarism” (*Riben Diguo Zhuyi Qinlie Dongbei Shishi*) and “Exhibit on the Original Condition of the Personnel on Duty Building” (*Qinmin Lou Yuanzhuang Chenlie*).<sup>196</sup> These exhibits and the objectives of the PEPM, as demonstrated by the 1985 publication *Weimanhuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* (Puppet Emperor Palace Exhibition Yearbook, later referred to as *WMHG (1985)*), reflected aptly the sociopolitical concerns of the time and followed closely the official national narrative.

In the mid-1980s, although Deng Xiaoping's “Reform and Opening Up Program” was advancing, the specter of the Cultural Revolution still hung over much of Chinese society.<sup>197</sup> As shown in *WMHG (1985)*, the event of reopening the PEPM to the public meant to reflect the principles adopted by the Third Plenary Session of the Twelfth CCP Central Committee in October 1984, which included the continued elimination of the remnants of Cultural Revolution

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<sup>194</sup> Zhang, 88.

<sup>195</sup> “Jiuzhi Baohu” [Protection of the Old Site], *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan* [The Museum of the Imperial Palace of “Manchukuo”], retrieved from [www.wmhg.com.cn](http://www.wmhg.com.cn) on May 6, 2019. The Puppet Emperor Palace was not the only site to receive this landmark status – other structures of the Manchukuo era in Changchun were also put under protection at this time. The preservation of these structures is administered by the Bureau of Cultural Relics, and many now have accompanying plaques stating the purpose for which they are preserved along the following lines: “This building is granted landmark status in order to remind us of national humiliation (*guochi*).” Translation from Koga, 72-73.

<sup>196</sup> “Chenlie Zhanlan” [Exhibits and Displays], *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan* [The Museum of the Imperial Palace of “Manchukuo”], retrieved from [www.wmhg.com.cn](http://www.wmhg.com.cn) on May 6, 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Although the Shanghai-based political faction led by Mao's late wife Jiang Qing, the “Gang of Four,” was officially blamed for the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, there was also a strong, official critique of Mao's “personality cult” that emerged in the late 1970s. Importantly, “Mao Zedong Thought” was reinterpreted as the collective wisdom of Party leadership and not just the theoretical contributions of one man. Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic, Third Edition* (The Free Press: New York, 1999), 441-442.

Leftist influences and the renewed emphasis on attracting intellectuals to join the Party. In particular, to rectify damages done by the Cultural Revolution, the reopened PEPM was to recruit young and middle-aged scholars to the Party unit at the PEPM, which was considered crucial following the devastating anti-intellectualism of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>198</sup>

While still continuing the Mao era “victor narrative,” the PEPM exhibits in 1985 demonstrated a definite move away from the class struggle narrative towards one of patriotism. Per *WMHG* (1985), the 1984 Jilin Provincial Government’s 32<sup>nd</sup> Executive Meeting detailed several important goals, including restoring the Puppet Emperor Palace’s “core areas”; the promotion of socialist education among visitors; improving the museum’s exhibits by garnering addition information on museum studies and the history of Manchukuo from abroad (particularly from Japan); and, perhaps most importantly, to open a new, permanent exhibit, “From Emperor to Citizen” (*Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin*), which has since remained a key component of the museum to this day.<sup>199</sup> Regarding the museum grounds, the restoration was to be modest in scope, not even reaching a tenth of the original palace area. Nevertheless, the ground open to visitors included the “core areas” of the palace, most notably the Qinmin and Jixi Buildings. The Qinmin building served as Puyi’s office building during the Manchukuo era, while the Jixi Building was where his family and he resided.<sup>200</sup>

According to *WMHG* (1985), two new permanent exhibits were to be opened: “From Emperor to Citizen” and “Historical Facts Regarding the Invasion of the Northeast by Japanese

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<sup>198</sup> “Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Yijiubawu nian Gongzuo Yaodian” [1985 Puppet Emperor Palace Exhibition’s Work Essentials], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985, 8.

<sup>199</sup> “Jilin Provincial Government’s 32<sup>nd</sup> Executive Meeting” is my translation from the Chinese, “Sheng Zhengfu 1984 Nian 32 ci Changwu Huiyi.” *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>200</sup> The Jixi Building served as Puyi’s office building during the Manchukuo era, and the Qinmin Building was where he and his family resided. “Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan” [The Museum of the Imperial Palace of “Manchukuo”, *Lishi Yangde* [Historical Developments], from *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan*, retrieved from <http://www.wmhg.com.cn/web/cn/portal/136128687393206043.htm> on 28 February 2019.

Militarism” (*Riben Diguao Zhuyi Qinlüe Dongbei Shishi*). The former exhibit was meant to glorify the CCP in demonstrating how it transformed the life of Puyi (see below), and thus represented a continuation of the “victor narrative.” “Historical Facts Regarding the Invasion of the Northeast by Japanese Militarism” would complement the former by “presenting the facts from a different perspective.”<sup>201</sup> As this exhibit no longer exists today, its contents can only be learned through the indirect lens of *WMHG (1985)*.

Particularly noteworthy are observations made at the front of *WMHG (1985)* by Central Advisory Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CAC) member Hu Qiaomu on how to improve the contents of “Historical Facts Regarding the Invasion of the Northeast by Japanese Militarism.” As with visitations to the NMMH by notable CCP officials such as Zhou Enlai and Liu Shaoqi in the 1950s, Hu’s visit to the PEPM in 1985 showed an intimate connection between the museum and the official narrative of Beijing at the time. Hu was an influential, conservative member of the older generation of Marxist revolutionaries who was appointed by Deng to the newly created Central Advisory Committee of the CCP (CAC) in the early 1980s.<sup>202</sup> Hu’s comments on the PEPM exhibits showed the transition in the national narrative away from class struggle and towards patriotism, which were positioned at the very front of *WMHG (1985)* by PEPM curators as evidence of their close heeding of Beijing’s advice.

Some of Hu’s comments, as reported by museum curators, were intuitive, such as adding a brief summary below certain photographs of anti-Japanese martyrs on their lives and causes of

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<sup>201</sup> “‘Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin’ Zhanlan Dagang” [‘From Emperor to Citizen’ Exhibit Outline], Group Discussion recorded by Wang Shaozhong, *Weiman Huanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1986 [Puppet Emperor Palace Museum Yearbook 1986], 17.

<sup>202</sup> Hu Qiaomu’s appointment to the CAC was after his persecution during the Cultural Revolution and subsequent rehabilitation. He was associated with the “conservative” faction that warned against the societal dangers of economic modernization, particularly during the 1980s. Richard Baum, *Burying Mao: Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 1-15.

martyrdom, or printing a mimeograph of a revolutionary song, “The Chinese and Korean Peoples Unite,” with larger and clearer lyrics. More noteworthy was a directive of Hu’s for prioritizing the CCP’s patriotism, which was obviously to bolster the Party’s credibility but would actually compromise historical accuracy in certain cases. For instance, regarding a photographic caption that originally read “forcing Manchukuo students to learn Japanese,” Hu suggested a change to replace “Manchukuo students” (*Manzhouguo xuesheng*) with “Chinese students” (*Zhongguo xuesheng*). The identification of such students as “Chinese” is historically questionable because in the early 1930s the “Chinese government” under the KMT in Nanjing claimed jurisdiction over the Northeast but could not erase Manchukuo in practice. Strong anti-Japanese resistance indeed emerged in the south, but in Manchuria the Japanese Kwantung Army was largely able to force or elicit collaboration from the locals, particularly before 1937.<sup>203</sup> It would have been more accurate to describe the students as either “Manchukuo students” or, alternatively, “Manchurian students,” which would better reflect the constant state of flux of ethnic and national identities under the Manchukuo regime.<sup>204</sup> Erasing this ambiguity by changing “Manchukuo” to “Chinese” did not address Manchuria as a contested geographical imaginary that went far beyond either Chinese or Japanese national histories.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, as indicated by Hu’s interventions,

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<sup>203</sup> For more on the myth of Chinese resistance to the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and the role this myth has played in modern Chinese nationalism, see Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2000).

<sup>204</sup> An excellent historical example of this is Puyi’s cousin, Aisin Gioro Xianyu. Her actions as a Japanese spy for the during the war, for which she was tried and executed by the Chinese government, were largely motivated by her desire to see the Manchu dynasty restored to power. Xianyu’s personal identity as a Manchu, but also as a “Japanese national with Chinese blood,” as she maintained in her postwar trial, reveals how ambiguous and negotiable these ethnic and national identities could be. Shao Dan, “Princess, Traitor, Soldier, Spy: Aisin Gioro Xianyu and the Dilemma of Manchu Identity,” in *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire*, ed. Mariko Asano Tamanoi (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 84-87.

<sup>205</sup> As Mariko Tamanoi puts it, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> through mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Manchuria was a geographical site of “geopolitical imaginaries of various groups and individuals shaped by imperialism, colonialism, Pan-Asianism, postcoloniality, and the present globalization.” Mariko Asano Tamanoi, ed., *Crossed Histories: Manchuria in the Age of Empire* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 2, 13-15.

almost a decade before the promulgation of Jiang Zemin's Patriotic Education Campaign, the CCP was already on its way of shifting from the Maoist narrative of class struggle to a new legitimizing narrative based on China's Century of Humiliation and the subsequent salvation of the Chinese nation by the CCP. Hu's identification of the "Chinese" students in the photographic caption signified the intentional incorporation of the "citizens" of Manchukuo into a narrative of Chinese resistance against Japanese aggression.<sup>206</sup>

The PEPM's subsequent yearbooks, such as the 1986 edition of *Weimanhuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* (hereby referred to as *WMHG (1986)*), provide further evidence on how the CCP promoted a broader-scale patriotism in place of class struggle. In an article published in *WMHG (1986)*, PEPM researchers Li Maojie and Zhang Xuesheng highlighted the role played by patriots in the Northeastern Volunteer Armies to oppose the Kwantung Army's invasion of Manchuria. These patriotic soldiers, who opposed Chiang Kaishek's policy of nonresistance to Japan, were themselves members of the KMT who decided to valiantly resist the Japanese "fascist invaders" (*faxisi qinliezhe*) alongside the people of the Northeast. While Chiang's nonresistance policy was certainly not applauded in this narrative, neither he nor the KMT as a whole were vilified as "traitors" as they were during the Mao era.<sup>207</sup> According to Li and Zhang, by 1933 when the Kwantung Army invaded Rehe (one of the old four provinces of Manchuria divided into today's Hebei, Liaoning, and Inner Mongolia), many volunteer armies had formed to resist Japan, demonstrating Chinese people's determination to defy the militarily superior

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<sup>206</sup> "Hu Qiaomu Tongzhi Lai Guan Shicha Chenlie Zhanlan" [Comrade Hu Qiaomu Visits the Museum to Inspect the Exhibits], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985.

<sup>207</sup> See the section in Chapter 1 on the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall exhibits from 1948-1966 for examples of how Chiang Kaishek and the KMT were treated in the pre-Cultural Revolution, Mao era narrative of the 9-18 Incident in the Northeast.



Kwantung Army and fight to the death out of their patriotic spirit (*aiguo zhuyi jingshen*).<sup>208</sup> This was a clear shift from the Mao era narrative of class struggle, which almost exclusively highlighted the Chinese Communist Party's efforts in the struggle against Japan. Although the Li-Zhang article indeed stressed CCP's efforts as well, its focus was on patriotism of the Chinese people as a whole in resisting Japan, including KMT soldiers.

Indeed, according to Li and Zhang, it was a KMT general, Ma Zhanshan, who “fired the first bullet of Chinese resistance against the Japanese imperialist invaders in the 1930s” in a November 1931 skirmish at Nenjiang Bridge, which at the time was widely acclaimed in China.<sup>209</sup> This claim in *WMHG (1986)* is noteworthy not only for highlighting a KMT officer, but also for implicitly claiming a fourteen-year timeline for the War of Resistance against Japan, starting in 1931. Li and Zhang stressed that the Northeast had been on the frontline of fighting antifascism, a regional struggle that shifted with the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937 to the nationwide War of Resistance against Japan. Furthermore, they equated Ma Zhanshan's efforts, as well as those of the Northeastern Volunteer Armies as a whole, with the start of the global Anti-Fascist War (*fanfaxisi zhanzheng*, the Chinese term for World War II). These details on Ma are more in-depth than those mentioned by the NMMH, and show the PEPM's determined incorporation of KMT soldiers into a more inclusive national narrative of resistance.

Both *WMHG (1985)* and *WMHG (1986)* demonstrate a close alignment of new PEPM exhibits with the national narrative from Beijing in eschewing class struggle and focusing more on a broad-based patriotism. Promulgating a favorable national narrative took precedent over the

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<sup>208</sup> Li Maojie and Zhang Xuecheng, “Dongbei Lunxian Shisi Nian de Junshi Douzheng Gaishu” [Overview of the Military Struggle in the Fourteen Years of Northeastern Occupation], *Weiman Huanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1986, 101.

<sup>209</sup> Li Maojie and Zhang Xuecheng, 101.

utilization of the PEPM as a “site of memory.” This was also evident in plans for a different exhibit, “From Emperor to Citizen,” and its treatment of the life of Puyi.

### **“From Emperor to Citizen”**

The life of Aisin Gioro “Henry” Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, is easily one of the most tragic but compelling in modern Chinese history. Enthroned at the age of three only a few years before the collapse of the entire imperial system, Puyi spent his childhood hidden away in Beijing’s Forbidden City, completely unaware of the myriad of changes happening in Chinese society right on his doorstep. As a young man, he spent six years living in the Japanese consulate in Tianjin, and by the time the Mukden Incident occurred was already in place to be “restored” as emperor of Manchukuo by the Japanese military. On April 3, 1932, Puyi was installed in the modern metropole of Xinjing (Changchun) as “emperor” in the newly constructed imperial palace, where he remained until the end of World War II in 1945.<sup>210</sup> After the war, he was captured by the Soviet Union, where he spent five years as a POW, then underwent extensive re-education for nine years at the hands of the CCP as a war criminal. Finally, he was pardoned, served as the representative of the Manchu nationality in the People’s National Congress and Beijing, and died of natural causes in 1967 during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>211</sup>

As the editor of Puyi’s autobiography notes, “no other ousted ruler in Chinese history has exhibited the survival powers of Puyi.” Puyi’s riveting tale of survival and ultimate “reform” by the CCP is an integral part of the PEPM, told as part of the official PRC narrative.<sup>212</sup> Since its opening in 1986, the permanent exhibit “From Emperor to Citizen” has formed a crucial

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<sup>210</sup> On August 11, 1945, as the Kwantung Army conducted its retreat, Puyi secretly evacuated the Puppet Emperor Palace to flee south to the city of Tonghua. Zhang Wei, ed., *Jiedu Weiman Huanggong* [Deciphering the Puppet Emperor Palace] (Changchun: Jilin Daxue Chubanshe, 2010), 75-76.

<sup>211</sup> Paul Kramer, ed., *The Last Manchu: The Autobiography of Henry Pu Yi, Last Emperor of China* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, Inc., 2010), ix.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

component of the PEPM and has been a major component of the CCP's legitimizing narrative at the site. Although the Puppet Emperor Palace is an important "site of memory" for 13 years of Puyi's biography, the exhibit covers emphatically Puyi's activities outside of the purview of both Changchun and the War of Resistance against Japan. The exhibit itself is a chronological narrative detailing the trajectory of the life of Puyi. Roughly equal amounts of exhibition space are utilized to portray Puyi's stint as the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty; to his life in Tianjin; to his installment as the puppet emperor of Manchukuo; to his imprisonment and re-education after the war; to the end of his life in which he made his living as a gardener in the People's Republic of China. Thus, the physical location of the PEPM itself, although important, does not form the core of the narrative. It is the "reeducation" of Puyi, in which the CCP remolds him into a patriotic citizen, that is at the crux.

To remind visitors of the crux of the narrative, the following quote from Zhou Enlai was placed in the exhibit's entrance: "We transformed [the worldview of] the Last Emperor, which is a worldwide miracle." The PEPM's original plan, as discussed in *WMHG* (1985), was to place the quotation at the end of the third section of the exhibit, which detailed Puyi's transformation through 10 years of reeducation after the end of the War of Resistance against Japan. Then, because the quotation was so crucial to the central message of the exhibit as a whole, the PEPM planners decided to change its location to the exhibit entrance. As illustrated by the planning diagrams in *WMHG* (1985), the exhibit entrance would have the title, "From Emperor to Citizen," displayed in large, ornate characters. Below the title a series of colored photographs or paintings would be displayed that detailed Zhou Enlai and other members the CCP Central Committee's interactions with Puyi in 1959 when he was pardoned. Above the exhibit title, the

Zhou quotation would be imprinted with conspicuous block characters.<sup>213</sup> All these designs were implemented in 1986 when the exhibit was opened. Obviously, the desired effect of these arrangements was to make the visitor immediately aware of the fact that the exhibit was not about Puyi's stint in the Puppet Emperor Palace, but rather a glorious record of the CCP's miraculous success in transforming one of the worst war criminals into a patriotic and peace-loving citizen of the PRC.

In promoting the CCP's transformation of Puyi, the PEPM sought to encourage its visitors to love their country and the Party. *WMHG (1985)* referred to "socialist education" and "patriotic education" interchangeably as means to achieve such goals. While "patriotic education" would become increasingly prominent in the PRC in the 1990s, it was never promoted diametrically vis-à-vis "socialist education," a much older theme in the CCP discourse. The two just represented different aspects of political education in the PRC. In the PEPM exhibits, one of the central aims of "socialist education" was to have visitors view modern Chinese history as a whole through a Marxist-Leninist historical lens, emphasizing the profound societal change that occurred from the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>214</sup>

Thus, in planning the exhibit "From Emperor to Citizen" in 1985, the PEPM combined the socialist and patriotic themes of the CCP discourse while dividing Puyi's biological life into two political lives *before* and *after* his transformation through CCP reeducation. Accordingly, Puyi was born into a semi-colonial, feudal society, and was raised to be extremely selfish and

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<sup>213</sup> Ge Wanming, "'Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin' Zhanlan Zhuanghuang Sheji" [Design for the Mountings of the Exhibit 'From Emperor to Citizen'], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985, 76.

<sup>214</sup> Wang Shaoyong, "Tan 'Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin' Zhanlan Neirong de Zongti Sheji" [Discussing the Overall Design for the Content of the 'From Emperor to Citizen' Exhibit], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985, 59.

conceited.<sup>215</sup> In seeking the restoration of the Qing Dynasty, he “betrayed his country” to Japanese imperialism and, in collaborating with Japanese militarists, became the puppet emperor of Manchukuo, which brought unspeakable suffering to the Chinese people. This represented Puyi’s first and old life. Then, his second and new life began after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, and went through 10 years of imprisonment, manual labor, and ideological reeducation. In the process, Puyi was transformed from “a national-level criminal into a self-sustaining, ordinary citizen.”<sup>216</sup>

A contentious issue facing PEPM planners in 1985 was the historical significance of the Puppet Emperor Palace as a “site of memory.” To illustrate Puyi’s life in some detail, the “From Emperor to Citizen” exhibit was to use four sections to chronicle the subject, titled respectively “The Last Emperor,” “The Puppet Manchukuo Emperor,” “Ten Years of Reform,” and “The New Chinese Citizen.” The first section was about the period from 1840 to 1931, covering much of China’s century of humiliation and serving as a historical background for Puyi’s political career. What caused some contention among PEPM planners was which among the next three sections should be central to the exhibit. A large portion of *WMHG (1985)* was devoted to articles advocating for various sections. While most of the events treated in the “From Emperor to Citizen” exhibit were unconnected with the Puppet Emperor Palace, the exhibit designers were well aware that it was imperative to connect at least part of the exhibit’s narrative to the physical site of memory. The second section, “The Puppet Manchukuo Emperor,” was therefore critical,

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<sup>215</sup> According to Marxist dialectics, the contradiction between Puyi’s crimes as the puppet emperor of Manchukuo and his new identity after his transformation through reeducation by the CCP must be stressed in the exhibit’s historical narrative. Dialectics have been an important theoretical component of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought since Mao’s 1937 Yan’an essay “On Contradiction.”

<sup>216</sup> Wang Guiqin, “Tan ‘Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin’ Zhanlan “Xin Zhongguo Renmin” Bufen de Neirong Sheji” [Discussing the Design of the “New Chinese Citizen” Section of the ‘From Emperor to Citizen’ Exhibit], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1985, 74.

for it highlighted the physical site of the Puppet Emperor Palace as well as the fact that the majority of Puyi's crimes took place there.<sup>217</sup>



Figure 3: Puyi as the "Last Emperor" in Section 1 of "From Emperor to Citizen", taken by the author in July 2017

Yet the historical meaning of the palace as a “site of memory” must not overshadow the political significance of the exhibit. Understandably, the exhibit would highlight its third section, “Ten Years of Reform,” so as to underscore Puyi’s ideological transformation (*zhuanbian*) through intensive manual labor in Fushun, Shenyang, etc. that led to him confessing and repenting of his crimes and fundamentally shifting his worldview. Lastly, by displaying pronouncedly the fourth section, “The New Chinese Citizen,” the guiding role of CCP leaders like Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai would be highlighted for helping Puyi live out his final years in “domestic bliss” (*tianlun zhile*) as an ordinary gardener and peace-loving citizen of the New China.<sup>218</sup> Ultimately, as *WMHG* (1986) explained, the third section “Ten Years of Reform” was chosen as the exhibit’s focal point to best extol the CCP. However, in order to best link the

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<sup>217</sup> Wang Shaozhong, 61.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

exhibit “From Emperor to Citizen” to the site of the Puppet Emperor Palace, “Ten Years of Reform” needed to be closely linked to the preceding section “The Puppet Manchukuo Emperor.”<sup>219</sup>

Given the function of “museopolitics” in the PRC, the “From Emperor to Citizen” exhibit is a remarkable exception of relative permanency since its unveiling in 1986. By centering around its third section from the onset, the exhibit’s presentation of Puyi’s life anticipated the prolonged need of the CCP for a powerful narrative on the Party legitimacy, which was compatible with either “socialist education” or “patriotic education.” The exhibit frames Puyi’s rise to power not only under feudalism but also under national humiliation inflicted by foreign imperialism. Subsequently, it shows how Puyi was able to transform into a peaceful, patriotic citizen only under the aegis of the CCP. Unlike other exhibits explored thus far, the arc of redemption portrayed in this exhibit is symbolically embodied in the life of one individual. Puyi was not a martyr who died for his country, nor a patriotic hero of anti-Japanese resistance; rather, in the Chinese narrative he was a collaborator. Thus, the hero in the Puyi story is never Puyi himself but what his life experience symbolizes, which is the CCP miraculous achievement in reforming a living relic of the old age into a patriotic and dignified citizen of the New China. This, the exhibit is sure to make clear, is an astonishing transformation that could not have occurred under any other regime or ideology. After all, even in Russia, after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, what the Soviet communists did to former Tsar Nicholas II and his family was to kill them all. The exhibit’s 260-character concluding remarks are meant to irrefutably impress this upon its visitors, part of which reads: “Not only was [the Party] able to save China, but [it] also was able to complete the formidable process of reforming man’s spirit. Without the

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<sup>219</sup> “‘Cong Huangdi dao Gongmin’ Zhanlan Dagang,” 17.

CCP, there would be no new China.”<sup>220</sup> This message has been and will remain useful for the CCP to claim its right to rule in China.

### **Japanese Military Atrocities in the 1990s**

This is not to say that the relative permanency of the exhibit on Puyi has set the PEPM apart from its peers in the PRC. Particularly after the promulgation of the Patriotic Education Campaign in 1994 by the CCP Propaganda Department, the Century of Humiliation assumed centrality in the political education of the PRC. As its peer museums, the PEPM quickly dovetailed with the national trend in adapting and constructing new exhibits to incorporate the new “victim narrative.” This is despite the fact that neither was the PEPM a site of military atrocities like the NMMH, nor did most Chinese tourists come to the site for remembering the War of Resistance against Japan. More likely, they visited the site for “admiring the ornate culture of the Qing dynasty.”<sup>221</sup>

Judging from the 1996/97 PEPM yearbooks (hereby referred to as *WMHG (1996/7)*), it is clear that the museum added to its exhibits new contents on Japanese military atrocities. Specifically, the PEPM opened a new exhibit titled “Northeastern China, Trampled Underfoot by Cruel Oppression” (*Tieti Jianta Xia de Dongbei*; hereafter shortened as “Northeastern China”) in collaboration with the Propaganda Department and Cultural Commission of Dandong Municipality. Dandong is an old city on the Sino-North Korean border, historically referred to as Andong, where Puyi had resided briefly. It was probably for this reason that Dandong set up a regional patriotic education base of its own and also contributed to the PEPM by reviewing and

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<sup>220</sup> Wang Shaozhong, 63.

<sup>221</sup> Koga, 113-114.



commenting on its exhibit outline.<sup>222</sup> As the exhibit no longer exists in the PEPM today, its content can only be learned from *WMHG* (1996/7).

In general, the “Northeastern China” exhibit was similar to those opened in 1984 for highlighting the Northeastern struggle against Japanese aggression. The self-stated purpose of the exhibit was to show the historical veracity of the development of Japanese aggression and to sing praises of the Northeastern people’s resistance against the Japanese invaders under the CCP leadership. The “victor narrative” thus remained a prominent part of the exhibit. In addition, the exhibit used a 14-year timeline, starting with the Mukden Incident of 1931, to illustrate Chinese resistance under the Japanese “fascist colonial system” (*faxisi zhimin zhidu*).<sup>223</sup> According to *WMHG* (1996/7), the roots of Japanese militarism were to be traced back to the Meiji Restoration, culminating in the Mukden Incident. The exhibit did not treat the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937 as a major turning point of the Chinese resistance but rather a continuation of Japanese military aggression since 1931. Because of the largely regional focus of this exhibit, the Pacific War and US involvement therein was not mentioned at all, though Manchukuo’s role in the German-Italian-Japanese “anti-communist alliance” (*fangong lianmeng*) was mentioned to connect the regional history to the larger international context of World War II.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> It is not uncommon to have this type of collaboration between different Chinese museums. Another common collaborative activity between museums, often conducted on the regional level, is the museum guide competition (*jiangjieryuan bisai*). For instance, in 1995, museum guides from the Puppet Emperor Palace participated in a guide competition for the three Northeastern provinces hosted by Jilin Provincial Museum. To celebrate the 1997 return of Hong Kong from Britain to the PRC, the theme of the competition was “Love the Motherland, Love the Hometown” (*Ai Zuguo, Ai Jiaxiang*). Chen Hong, “Canjia Jiangjie Bisai de Jidian Qishi” [A Few lessons from Participating in the Museum Guide Competition], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1996/1997, 53.

<sup>223</sup> Interestingly, there is no exact end date to this “14 year” period mentioned in the exhibit outline, although the “unconditional surrender” of Japan at the end of WWII is mentioned in a photo caption. Wang Bin, et. al., “Tieti Jianta Xia de Dongbei Zhanlan Jihua” [Exhibit Plan for “Northeastern China, Trampled Underfoot by Cruel Oppression”], *Weihuanggong Chenlieguan Nianjian* 1996/1997, 142-147, 131.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-147.

Also similar to the previous exhibits, *WMHG (1996/7)* specified that the “Northeastern China” exhibit was to detail the heroic deeds of martyrs associated with the Anti-Japanese Volunteer Army and the Northeastern United Resistance Army. However, unlike its predecessors in the 1980s, the exhibit gave ample attention to Japanese military atrocities against both Chinese resisters and ordinary civilians. Of particular note, the exhibit devoted an entire section to “cruel massacres,” including biological experiments on civilians conducted by the infamous Unit 731 in Harbin. More than any other part of the exhibit, this drove home the unconscionable actions of the Japanese military against innocent Chinese civilians. To provoke visitors’ moral outrage, the exhibit used graphic photographic images to show the inhuman cruelty of the Japanese aggressors. For example, a group of photographs detailing the ways in which patriotic Chinese resistance fighters were executed, included relentless beating (*duda*), dog bites (*gouyao*), electrocution (*dianxing*), bayonet piercing (*cisha*), and death by guillotine (*zhasha*).<sup>225</sup>

After displaying such grotesque details of the atrocities committed by the Japanese military, the “Northeastern China” exhibit concluded with a section titled “Resistance with Blood and Iron against Japan” (*Diexue Kangri*). In stark juxtaposition to the “victim narrative,” this returned to the “victor narrative” in detailing heroic acts of Chinese resistance. Here, familiar names were present, such as the KMT patriot Ma Zhanshan (who defied Chiang Kaishek’s policy of nonresistance, still condemned here as the reason the Northeast was “lost”), Leng Yun and the “eight women who threw themselves in the river,” and Yang Jingyu among others.<sup>226</sup> Similar to the NMMH exhibits discussed in chapter 1, in the 1990s the PEPM rehabilitated KMT patriots in a broader narrative of Chinese nationalism. In meantime, the narratives of both

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-147.

museums on the War of Resistance against Japan showed tensions between the lingering “victor” theme and the newer “victim” one. Thus, by the mid-1990s, the PEPM had further diluted its historical significance as a “site of memory” by importing from elsewhere exhibit content on Japanese atrocities so as to follow closely the CCP’s “victim narrative” in “patriotic education.” In the years to come the PEPM would do better than its peers in this regard. After completing additional reforms to the museum’s exhibits, the PEPM would receive the prominent designation as a “nationwide model patriotic education base.”

### **Becoming a “Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Base”**

The 1994 CCP Department of Propaganda’s Patriotic Education Campaign highlighted the importance of “patriotic education bases” (*aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*) in cultivating patriotic sentiment among the nation’s citizens in general and the nation’s youth in particular.<sup>227</sup> Being designated as a “patriotic education base,” and particularly a “nationwide model patriotic education base” (*quanguo shifan aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*), became a status symbol for museums after the publication of the list of the first 100 such bases in 1995.<sup>228</sup> Although designated as an “outstanding patriotic education base” and a regional patriotic education base for Jilin in the mid-1990s, the PEPM did not receive the nationwide title until 2009, during the fourth round of such designations.<sup>229</sup> In this period the PEPM made consistent efforts in implementing “patriotic

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<sup>227</sup> Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CCCPC), “Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu shishi gangyao de tongzhi” [Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education], accessed from <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64186/66685/4494186.html> on 6 September, 2017

<sup>228</sup> For the full list, see “Zhongguo Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Jidi” [Chinese Patriotic Education Bases], retrieved from <https://baike.baidu.com/item/中国爱国主义教育基地> on 9 November 2018. The national designation of “model patriotic education base” (*shifan aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*) is a step up from the designation “patriotic education base.” There are many “patriotic education bases” on the regional level that have not received national recognition from the CCP Propaganda Department as a “model patriotic education base.”

<sup>229</sup> “Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu” [Patriotic Education], *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan* [The Museum of the Imperial Palace of “Manchukuo”], retrieved from [www.wmhg.com/cn](http://www.wmhg.com/cn) on 3 May 2019.

education,” but the coveted national title was not bestowed on it until a few years after the PEPM took a key step in designing an adjoining exhibition hall for the “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast” in 2005. Immediately, the new exhibition hall immensely augmented the PEPM’s function as a major museum in the PRC about the War of Resistance against Japan and Japanese crimes.

As seen in the previous section, in 1997 the PEPM added the new exhibit “Northeastern China” to carry out the CCP’s “patriotic education.” A few years earlier, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Mukden Incident, the PEPM already opened an exhibition “Never Forget September 18th,” which emphasized the Mukden Incident as its true starting point of Chinese resistance against Japan. Attesting to the national importance of the exhibit, CCP leader Jiang Zemin wrote a special inscription with the words “never forget September 18th” (*wu wang jiu yi ba*) to be displayed. Then, in 1999, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the PRC and to “advance the function of the PEPM as a patriotic education base,” the PEPM had Jiang’s inscription engraved on a commemorative stele (*jinianbei*) in large, bright gold print and placed the stele in front of the Jixi building.<sup>230</sup> The Jixi Building used to be Puyi and his empress’ sleeping quarters, and was one of the first restored buildings for public viewing in 1984 when the PEPM reopened. It is centrally located in the museum complex. Thus, the location of the commemorative stele in front of it would ensure the maximum number of viewers. Furthermore, the stele was unveiled in a special ceremony on September 18, 1999 and announced heavily in local newspapers.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> “Wo Guan Xingjian Jiang Zemin Tixie “Wu Wang Jiu Yi Ba” Zhanming Jinianbei” [Our Museum Constructs a Commemorative Stele for Jiang Zemin’s Inscription “Never Forget 9-18], *Weiman Huanggong Chenlieguan* 1998/99 *Nianjian* [Puppet Emperor Palace 1998/99 Yearbook], 254.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

In 2001, to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Mukden Incident, the PEPM produced a special “Never Forget September 18th” mobile exhibit, which largely replicated the 1991 exhibit. Since neither the 1991 exhibit nor the 2001 exhibit exist anymore, the 2001 yearbook of the PEPM (hereby referred to as *WMHG (2001)*) provides an appropriate outline to show how these exhibits conscientiously promoted “patriotic education”. According to the museum yearbook authors, commemoration of the Mukden Incident would serve two important the purposes: (1) to expose the realities of Japanese imperialism, particularly in light of the recent rise of right-wing groups in Japan, and (2) to remind China’s youth about national humiliation.<sup>232</sup>

According to *WMHG (2001)*, all people under of the Manchukuo were *Chinese (zhongguoren)*, thus reinforcing the claim that invasion of Manchuria represented a loss of Chinese territorial integrity. In their contribution to *WMHG (2001)*, Chen Chunping and Wang Bin, two PEPM staff members, consistently refer to those under Japanese occupation as either “Northeasterners” (*dongbei renmin*) or part of “the Chinese nation” (*zhonghua minzu*).<sup>233</sup> As Hu Qiaomu’s 1985 visit to the PEPM showed, in the mid-1980s there were still exhibit captions that utilized the term *Manzhouguo* (Manchukuo) to qualify the identity of the people under the Manchukuo regime.<sup>234</sup> However, by 2001, it appeared that the “Chineseness” of the subjects under Manchukuo had been thoroughly established. The victimization of these Chinese nationals became central in the regional discourse, and Japanese brutality, as reflected in the cruel experiments on human conducted by Unit 731, was highlighted.

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<sup>232</sup> Chen Chunping and Wang Bin, “Wu Wang Jiu Yi Ba Liudong Zhanlan Jihua” [Plan for the Mobile Exhibit ‘Never Forget 9-18’], *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan Nianjian 2000-2001*, 275.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> See the first section of the chapter for more information on this. “Hu Qiaomu Tongzhi Lai Guan Shicha Chenlie Zhanlan.”

Inevitably, the 2001 mobile exhibit also mentioned certain aspects of Puyi's life. However, as with the PEPM's "From Emperor to Citizen" exhibit, the reference was ultimately to show the salvific role of the CCP. Thus, the mobile "Never Forget September 18th" exhibit presented a seemingly unbroken continuity between the heroic actions of Northeastern martyrs and the overall actions of the CCP during the War of Resistance against Japan. After mentioning the martyrdom of those well-known KMT and CCP figures, the exhibit moved seamlessly into photographs of the Xi'an Incident, Chairman Mao's and Commander-in-Chief Zhu De's planning to combat Japan, and the Eighth Route Army's first (and last, although the exhibit downplays this inconvenient historical reality) major battle against the Japanese at Pingxingguan.<sup>235</sup> The Battle of Taierzhuang in April 1938, which was symbolic as the first major Chinese victory, albeit achieved by the KMT, over the Japanese Army, was highlighted as well.<sup>236</sup> Whereas marking an important shift in the PEPM narrative about the War of Resistance

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<sup>235</sup> The Xi'an Incident led to the establishment of the Second United Front between the CCP and the KMT to resist Japanese aggression. The Battle of Pingxingguan occurred after the formal conclusion of negotiations to form the Second United Front on September 22, 1937. In late September in the province of Shanxi, which is west of Beijing, two regiments of CCP general Lin Biao's 115<sup>th</sup> Division in conjunction with a division of Yan Xishan's Shanxi Army ambushed a supply column of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division of the Japanese Army. While Communist propaganda continues to celebrate the Battle of Pingxingguan as a major CCP success, this largely ignores Lin Biao's subsequent battle report, which cautioned that CCP forces were not yet ready for this type of positional warfare. The Battle of Pingxingguan was the CCP's largest offensive of the War of Resistance against Japan – after this, the CCP focused on small-scale guerrilla warfare and building base areas behind Japanese lines. Another inconvenient historical reality that museums on the War of Resistance against Japan fail to mention is the growing tension within the Second United Front, exemplified by the New Fourth Army Incident of January 1941 in which 10,000 Communist troops were killed. Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 143-149.

<sup>236</sup> After Shanghai and Nanjing fell to the Japanese in mid to late 1937, the Nationalists moved their capital city to Wuhan. By January 1938, the number of Nationalist troops in the Fifth War Zone (north China and Shandong) was increased from 80,000 to 300,000 in an attempt to prevent the Japanese military from advancing on Wuhan through the Tianjin-Nanjing railway junction in the Shandong city of Xuzhou. In the Battle of Taierzhuang, 60 kilometers northeast of Xuzhou, the Japanese forces suffered an estimated 10-20,000 casualties before being forced to retreat, and all in Wuhan celebrated. (The Puppet Emperor Palace Museum yearbook has a much higher estimate of the Japanese casualties – 30,000.) *Ibid.*, 101-103.

against Japan, this again just followed the general retuning of the PRC official narrative since the 1980s.<sup>237</sup>

In addition, as shown by *WMHG (2001)*, the PEPM denounced Japanese right-wing politics and Japan's failure to come to terms with its own past, showing that museums are intricately tied not only to matters of domestic importance, but even at times international politics. Denouncing the missteps of Japanese politicians in their failure to come to terms with the past has become a powerful part of the CCP's own legitimizing strategy, as it provides a convenient foil to direct the simmering discontent of Chinese civilians away from critiques of their own government. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's multiple visits to Yasukuni Shrine caused especial backlash.<sup>238</sup> He first visited on August 13, 2001 in preparation for the anniversary of the end of World War II, right before the publication of *WMHG (2001)*. Thus, the yearbook devoted multiple articles to the issue, arguing that the August 13th visit represented strong evidence of the enduring specter of Japanese militarism.<sup>239</sup>

The 70th anniversary of the Mukden Incident was directly connected to countering this supposed resurgence of Japanese militarism in *WMHG 2001*. In particular, in an article PEPM staffer Jia Qi directly connected the Japanese militarism associated with the Kwantung Army's

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<sup>237</sup> Chen Chunping and Wang Bing, 299.

<sup>238</sup> From 2001 to 2006, Japanese Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine caused considerable public backlash amongst the Chinese public. Susan Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 169. A Shinto shrine located in Tokyo, the Yasukuni Shrine was built in 1869 after the Meiji Restoration to house the *kami*, or spirits, of Japan's war dead. In 1959, the *kami* of over a thousand Class-B and Class-C World War II criminals that had been sentenced to death and executed by the military tribunals of the Allied Forces were enshrined in Yasukuni. However, the real controversy around Yasukuni started after 1978, when the *kami* of fourteen Class-A war criminals, including Tojo Hideki, were also enshrined there. Although the visits of Japanese prime ministers to Yasukuni had been a source of controversy in Sino-Japanese relations since the 1980s, Koizumi's visits were especially controversial.

<sup>239</sup> Jia Qi, "Ribei Junguo Zhuyi Yinhun Zhijin Bu San – Jinian 'Jiu Yi Ba' Shibian 70 Zhou Nian" [The Specter of Japanese Militarism Is Still Not Dispelled – Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the 9-18 Incident], *Weiman Huanggong Bowuyuan Nianjian 2000-2001*, 166.

1931 invasion to the rise of the Japanese political right-wing in the 1990s to early 2000s.<sup>240</sup> He angrily denounced the role played by US imperialism in post-war Japan in enabling the reckless release of former war criminals, reinstating the zaibatsu's monopoly capitalist class, and enabling the remilitarization of Japan in order to benefit US Cold War geopolitics, as evidenced by the Korean War and the Vietnam War.<sup>241</sup> The issues of history textbook revisions, official visits to Yasukuni Shrine, and the expansion of the Japanese military through the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were three of Jia Qi's major concerns regarding contemporary Japanese politics, and he warned that the domination of Japanese politics by Koizumi Junichiro and the LDP would not bode well for world peace.<sup>242</sup>

Regarding the problematic approval in 2001 by the Japanese Ministry of Education of the controversial "New History Textbook," Jia Qi highlighted several attempts to whitewash Japanese military atrocities – particularly the changing of the phrase "invade" (*qinlie*) to "enter" (*jinru*) with respect to the Japanese military invading China; the downplaying of or even denial

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<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>241</sup> Jia Qi, 162. This is referencing the so-called "reverse course." Promulgated by Douglas MacArthur and SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers), the 1946 postwar Japanese constitution was considered quite liberal, with the twin goals of demilitarization and democratization. However, several years later, within the shifting geopolitical context of the Cold War, SCAP embarked on a "reverse course" in which it sought to remilitarize Japan as a US ally in East Asia, surrounded as it was by communist regimes (the Soviet Union, the newly founded People's Republic of China, and Soviet-influenced North Korea). One of the controversial aspects of this "reverse course" is that many imprisoned war criminals were rehabilitated and returned to their former positions in business and government. This included Kishi Nobusuke, a Class-A war criminal indicted for his crimes under the puppet state of Manchukuo who became one of the founders of the LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) in 1955, was Prime Minister from 1957-1960, and oversaw the revision of the Anpo Treaty in 1960. Kishi is also the maternal grandfather of current Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. However, Kishi is not considered to be part of the LDP's historical "mainstream conservatism," which largely refers to factions founded by the heirs of Yoshida Shigeru. For more information on LDP political factions, see Christian J. Winkler, "The evolution of the conservative mainstream in Japan," *Japan Forum* 24 (1) 2012, 51-73.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-167. Article 9 of the 1946 Japanese Constitution states that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation." However, in the context of the Cold War, this was interpreted to mean "offensive war," and the 1954 creation of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) served as a loophole, as it was argued that armed forces for the purpose of Japan's self-defense were permissible. For the full text of the 1946 Constitution, which still remains in effect in Japan today, see "The Constitution of Japan," retrieved from [https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution\\_and\\_government\\_of\\_japan/constitution\\_e.html](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html) on 8 May 2019.



of the Nanjing Massacre; and the erasure of information on the infamous Unit 731 and its cruel experiments on human subjects for the purpose of developing tools for biological warfare. In particular, the establishment of Unit 731 was connected as a historical event to the September 18th Incident – Jia Qi explained that “Unit 731 was established by Japanese militarism not long after the September 18th Incident, and was the bacterial warfare research lab with the largest scope in World War II.”<sup>243</sup> Surprisingly, given Jia Qi’s resounding denouncement of US imperialism and its role in the continuation of Japanese militarism post-World War II, there was no mention of the US complicity in the pardoning of the Japanese leaders of Unit 731 after the war in exchange for research data.<sup>244</sup>

Yet despite all of these instances in dovetailing with the national narrative, the PEPM’s efforts still fell short of earning the designation as a “nationwide model patriotic education base.” This must have been frustrating to PEPM staff, as their peers in the Northeast, such as the NMMH, September 18th Museum (to be discussed in Chapter 3), and the Unit 731 Museum, had all received the elite status in the first round of competition in 1995.<sup>245</sup> As “sites of memory” directly connected to Japanese military atrocities and Chinese victimization, the latter three museums lent themselves more easily than the PEPM to promoting the redirected national “victim narrative”. As mentioned in chapter 1, the NMMH was opened on the former site of the Manchukuo police station, where many Northeastern United Resistance Army guerrilla fighters were detained, tortured, and executed. The September 18th Museum was opened on the former railroad site where the Japanese Kwantung Army surreptitiously set off a bomb and then used the incident to justify its subsequent invasion of the Northeast. Lastly, the Unit 731 Museum was

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<sup>243</sup> Jia Qi, 164.

<sup>244</sup> Of course, researchers at the Unit 731 Museum today are sure to highlight this complicity in their exhibits and publications.

<sup>245</sup> “Zhongguo Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Jidi.”

opened near the site of the original Unit 731, where biological experiments were conducted by Japanese army doctors on Chinese civilians.<sup>246</sup>

In contrast, the mismatch between the PEPM's historical site and its political function as an institution of implementing the CCP's national agenda, which in the 1990s was "patriotic education," hindered the PEPM's climbing of the PRC museological ladder. To advance, the PEPM had to reconstrue the connection between its site and villains that had collaborated with Japanese imperialism. Although the "From Emperor to Citizen" exhibit since the 1980s had made big strides in remolding this collaboration into part of the CCP's legitimization narrative, further departure from the Puyi-centered story line would be needed. Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the administrative superiority of the PEPM changed from Jilin Province to Changchun Municipality. Reincarnation of the PEPM quickened in the next few years. In 2005, the "From Emperor to Citizen" exhibit won an award for excellence at the National Museum Conference. Then in 2007, the same award was bestowed on the "Never Forget September 18th" by the Seventh National Museum Conference.<sup>247</sup>

However, what eventually consummated the PEPM's alienation from its historical site was the "Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast" opened in 2006. The new exhibit was housed in its own separate exhibition hall near the rest of the Puppet Emperor Palace, and its opening date was purposefully set for September 18, 2006 to correspond with the 75th anniversary of the Mukden Incident. According to the PEPM's introduction, the "Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast" was opened in order to conform to the objectives of the Patriotic Education Campaign, namely "to exhibit the historical facts of Japans' invasion

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<sup>246</sup> The Unit 731 Museum's location was moved in ; now, it is located on the site of the original Unit 731.

<sup>247</sup> "Jiuzhi Baohu"; "Chenlie Zhanlan." The administrative relationship of the PEPM changed in July 2000.

of Northeastern China and to establish a museum whose principal goal is to promote modern history education and patriotic education among the masses, particularly the youth.”<sup>248</sup> Thus, the “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast” highlighted the fourteen years of *victimization*, as well as the resistance of heroic Chinese martyrs. The history of Manchurian-Japanese *collaboration* symbolized by the Puppet Emperor Palace was sidelined if not totally forgotten. Three years later, the updated PEPM complex was awarded the coveted status of “nationwide model patriotic education base.”



Figure 4: Japanese Human Medical Experiment in Unit 731 as shown in the “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast,” Taken by the author in July 2017

As the last step to complete the regeneration of the PEPM, the “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast” had to deploy many artifacts and exhibition items that could supersede the original meaning of the museum’s location. The exhibit’s preface hall (*xuting*) was an apt representation of the overall tone. A larger-than-life relief sculpture (*fudiao*) of a middle-aged woman greeted visitors, worn and weary from the toll of war. Her face was inlaid

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<sup>248</sup> “Dongbei Lunxian Shi Chenlieguan” [Exhibit on the History of the Fall of the Northeast], Gaikuang [Brief Account], retrieved from [www.wmhg.com.cn](http://www.wmhg.com.cn) on 14 March 2019.

into a territorial outline of the three Northeastern provinces, emphasizing the importance of fighting for China's territorial integrity after the Japanese invasion. Following a similar motif to how Zhao Yiman was portrayed, the PEPM described this woman as "the representative of the Chinese mother: extremely devoted and indomitable, she appears to be recounting the history of that humiliating era for the Northeast to her descendants."<sup>249</sup> Further connecting the PEPM to the national rhetoric of national humiliation, the Chinese characters "never forget" (*wu wang*) were emblazoned in a large, red font in the upper righthand corner of the preface hall façade. Below, the translation of these words was inscribed in smaller, white font in 8 different foreign languages, and the numbers "9.18" are highlighted in large, white font. This shows that the "Never Forget September 18<sup>th</sup>" exhibit was intended not only for Chinese visitors, but also foreigners.<sup>250</sup> Drawing heavily on the former 1991 exhibit "Never Forget September 18th," this exhibition hall was conscientiously built to better promote the PEPM's function as a patriotic education base.<sup>251</sup> In fact, the primary exhibit inside the exhibition hall was "Never Forget September 18th – Historical Facts on the Japanese Invasion of China's Northeast." Shedding the PEPM of its local aura, this exhibit had many elements in common with the NMMH exhibit "Black Earth and Spirit of the Martyrs," such as its color scheme of black and white to evoke the mountains and snow, or rather the water and soil, of the Northeast.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Zhang Wei, 163.

<sup>250</sup> "Never forget" has been translated from the Chinese into the following languages (in order of appearance): English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Korean, and Japanese. This is similar to the presentation of information in the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall – towards the entrance of the hall, the words "遇难者 300000" (*yunanzhe 300000*), meaning "300,000 victims," are engraved. Below, the same words have been translated into Japanese, Korean, Russian, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Spanish, French, German, and English." *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>251</sup> "Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu."

<sup>252</sup> "Wu Wang "Jiu Yi Ba" Riben Qinlüe Zhongguo Dongbei Shishi Zhanlan" [Never Forget "September 18th" – Exhibition on the True History of the Japanese Invasion of China's Northeast], *Dongbei Lunxianshi Chenlieguan* [History of the Fall of the Northeast Exhibition], retrieved from [www.wmhg.com.cn](http://www.wmhg.com.cn) on 14 March 2019.

Today, the PEPM complex proudly boasts its various accolades to the public. According to a 2017 tourist information brochure distributed to visitors, these include the designations of “National First Batch AAAAA Tourist Attraction” (*Guojia Shoupi AAAAAji Lüyou Jingqu*), “National Key Cultural Relics Protection Unit (*Quanguo Zhongdian Wenwu Baohu Danwei*), and “Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Base.”<sup>253</sup> With these honorary designations, the PEPM is now a “national” museum that will expectedly continue to update its exhibition narrative and contents in accordance to the Beijing-centered political atmosphere of the PRC. As for the historical significance of the PEPM as a “site of memory,” it will lie dormant for an unforeseeable length of time.

## Conclusion

The function of the PEPM as a “site of memory” has notably decreased since the 1980s. The first notable departure was with the “From Emperor to Citizen” exhibit in 1983. This exhibit has served as a remarkable exception to the general evolution of exhibits according to the shifting dictates of sociopolitical needs, as the PEPM foresaw the benefit of utilizing the life of Puyi to extol the CCP. In contrast, the “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast” evolved from the earlier “September 18<sup>th</sup> Exhibit,” largely so that the PEPM could receive the national accolade of “Nationwide Patriotic Education Base.” Such a conversion was necessary because unlike other museums such as the NMMH, the PEPM did not have a strong connection as a “site of memory” to the victimization narrative prioritized by patriotic education, and thus had to make additional efforts to promulgate it.

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<sup>253</sup> “The Museum of the Imperial Palace of Manchukuo: Tourist Information” Brochure, retrieved on site on 18 November 2017.

Today, there are still substantial sections of the PEPM that are connected to its function as a “site of memory.” Large parts of Puyi’s former palace have been converted for visitors to view how the Puppet Emperor Palace was decorated and what life was like there between 1932-1945, discussion of which has been outside the purview of this chapter.<sup>254</sup> However, both “Exhibit on the History of the Occupation of the Northeast” and its predecessors, as well as “From Emperor to Citizen,” have covered content largely disconnected from the actual site. Due to the PEPM’s problematic history as a site of collaboration of “Chinese” with Japanese imperialists, the PEPM exhibits have had to rely on more content from outside the physical context of the site and the city of Changchun in order to conform to the national narrative of patriotic education. This has created an increasingly awkward juxtaposition between the PEPM’s function as a “site of memory” and its clear departure from this role to evolve alongside the national narrative, thus showing the limitations of its “museopolitics” function.

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<sup>254</sup> A former PEPM tour guide noted that Chinese tourists tended to congregate around Puyi’s former living quarters, noting that the exhibits on Anti-Japanese resistance were fairly empty by comparison. Such tourists, he noted, visited the PEPM “not for education but for leisure, which takes the form of admiring the ornate culture of the Qing Dynasty.” Koga, 115.

### Chapter Three: An Evolving “Historical Position”

Comparable to Pearl Harbor as a “day which will live in infamy” in American historical memory, the Mukden Incident is regarded as a disastrous day in modern Chinese history.<sup>255</sup> It is viewed in Chinese scholarship today as a historical breaking point, the beginning of the Japanese invasion and occupation of China that lasted fourteen years.<sup>256</sup> The September 18th History Museum (918HM) in Shenyang functions as a key “site of memory” to commemorate China’s day of infamy, and prides itself on being the only museum that completely reflects the history of the Mukden Incident.<sup>257</sup> It was built on the railroad site where the Japanese Kwantung Army, under the direction of masterminds Ishiwara Kanji and Itagaki Seishiro, surreptitiously set off a bomb as a pretext for the invasion. However, unlike the NMMH or the PEPM, it was not built until the 1990s, with construction commencing on September 18, 1991 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Mukden Incident.<sup>258</sup>

The 918HM was not completed until 1999, when it was finally opened to visitors. Yet by 1997, along with the NMMH and 98 other prominent museums from around the country, it was designated as a “Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Base.”<sup>259</sup> Unlike the NMMH or the

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<sup>255</sup> This is the oft-quoted line from President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s speech on December 8, 1941, a day after the surprise Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Franklin D. Roosevelt, *Speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt*, *New York Transcript* (1941), retrieved from <https://www.loc.gov/item/afccal000483/> on 29 May 2019.

<sup>256</sup> See Cao Ziyang, ““Banian Kangzhan” yu “Shisinin Kangzhan” Gainian Yunyong Zhi Sikao” [Reflections on the Conceptual Usage of the “Eight-year War of Resistance” and the “Fourteen-year War of Resistance”], *Dangshi yu Wenxian Yanjiu* [Research on Party History and Documents] 5 and 6 (2017), 47-52.

<sup>257</sup> “Shenyang “Jiu Yi Ba” Lishi Bowuguan Zhongwen Jianjie” [Chinese Introduction to Shenyang’s September 18th History Museum], retrieved from <http://www.918museum.org.cn/> on 13 August 2020.

<sup>258</sup> A special publication was also produced in Shenyang for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident. Wang Bingzhong, et al., ed., *Jinian “jiu-yi-ba” shibian 60 zhounian* [Remembering the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident] (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin Chubanshe, 1991).

<sup>259</sup> Zhang Ruiqiang, ed., *Jiang Jieci: Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Bowuguan Pian* [Explanatory Words: Volume on the 9-18 Historical Museum] (Harbin: Heilongjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2006), 2. The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs announced this publicly in 1997. “Zhongguo Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Jidi” [Chinese Patriotic Education Bases], retrieved from <https://baike.baidu.com/item/中国爱国主义教育基地> on 29 May 2019.

PEPM, then, the 918HM had a national stamp of approval from its genesis and has been utilized accordingly to promote a narrative of fourteen years of resistance against Japan. The culmination of the 918HM's utilization for this purpose was in 2017. After the PRC Ministry of Education officially designated the Mukden Incident as the starting date for the war, the 918HM hosted a symposium specifically to discuss the 2017 pronouncement.<sup>260</sup>

In the years leading up to 2017, the 918HM underwent a transformation in its self-perception. While intended from the beginning to convey the national narrative to the public, the museum reimagined itself over time, evolving from strongly reflecting a “site of memory” function to having this function eclipsed by a fourteen-year war narrative. In particular, this was the case after Xi Jinping began to emphasize a fourteen-year as opposed to an eight-year war in 2015. In a 2015 speech, Xi noted that “the Mukden Incident became the starting point of the Chinese people’s War of Resistance against Japan and revealed the prologue of the global Anti-Fascist War.”<sup>261</sup> This quote is now prominently displayed on the 918HM website.<sup>262</sup> This shift from eight to fourteen years is also reflected in the 918HM yearly notes, particularly after museum curators begin to incorporate the concept of the museum’s “historical position” (*lishi dingwei*) into how it was imagined and conveyed to the public.

### **The Origins of the 918HM**

In the early 1990s, the first component of the 918HM to be constructed was a “broken calendar stele” (*can libei*) that is now viewed as a hallmark not only of the museum itself, but

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<sup>260</sup> 2007 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2007), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 1 September 2020.

<sup>261</sup> “Xi Jinping Kangzhan Shiguan de “Ba Da Yao Yi”” [Eight Key Points on Xi Jinping’s Historical View of the War of Resistance], Xinhua Wang, retrieved from [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-08/14/c\\_128127946.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-08/14/c_128127946.htm) on 13 August 2020.

<sup>262</sup> “Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Bowuguan” [The 9-18 Historical Museum], retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 29 May 2019.



also of the Northeastern struggle against Japan as a whole. The location of the construction reflected the 918HM's important function as a "site of memory," serving the patriotic education that represented a monumental shift in CCP rhetoric in the 1990s. Throughout the decade, as the rest of the 918HM was constructed, its narrative closely aligned with Jiang Zemin's 1994 Patriotic Education Campaign, as was evidenced in its inclusion as one of the first hundred "National Model Patriotic Education Bases" in 1997.<sup>263</sup>

Construction on the 918HM began in 1991 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Mukden Incident. Originally, the 918HM was conceived of not as a museum, but as a "September 18th Memorial Garden," and the impetus for construction, along with the raising of a million RMB for the effort, was largely in response to a popular demand for this purpose.<sup>264</sup> After the famous "broken calendar stele" was constructed in 1991, however, the project was reoriented to include an accompanying museum, which was completed in 1999. The location was purposefully chosen to be on the southeastern side of the old site of the South Manchurian Railway (SMR) and Liutiaohu Road, where the Mukden Incident had taken place on September 18, 1931.<sup>265</sup> This undermines the contention of a prominent Chinese museum scholar that "unlike the Unit 731 Museum... [918HM's] symbolic power does not derive particularly from the historical site."<sup>266</sup> The 918HM functions as a powerful "site of memory" precisely because it was

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<sup>263</sup> "Zhongguo Aiguo Zhuyi Jiaoyu Jidi."

<sup>264</sup> He Zhongling, "Jiuyiba Canlibei Chuangzuo Ji" [Recollection of the Creation of the 9-18 Broken Calendar Stele], *Yishu Gongzuo* [Art Work], 4 (1991), 12.

<sup>265</sup> *Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan* [Shenyang September 18 History Museum, Shenyang World War II Allied Prisoners Site Exhibition, Shenyang Courtroom for Trials of Japanese War Criminals], September 18th History Museum Giftshop (July 2017), 0.

<sup>266</sup> Kirk A. Denton, "Horror and Atrocity: Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums," in Ching Kwan Lee and Guobin Yang, ed., *Re-envisioning the Chinese Revolution: The Politics and Poetics of Collective Memory in Reform China* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2007), 270.

erected in a physical location connected to events occurring on the historical site, namely the Mukden Incident.

Notably, the CCP authorities were not the first to utilize the physical location of the Mukden Incident as a site of memory. After the Mukden Incident, the Kwantung Army erected a wooden tablet at the site of the bomb explosion to mark it for posterity. In 1938, under the jurisdiction of Manchukuo, a more permanent, cement sculpture shaped like the tail of a bomb was installed at the site with the characters “site of explosion” engraved on it. Despite the imperialist significance of the artifact, the 918HM curators opted to retain the sculpture.<sup>267</sup> Today, it stands in the 918HM courtyard by the “broken calendar stele” as a relic of Japanese militarism, showing that the same “site of memory” can be utilized in powerful ways by different regimes for diametrically opposed narratives.

The “broken calendar stele” was designed by renowned Chinese sculptor He Zhongling in the style of an old desk calendar opened to the date “Friday, September 18, 1931.” According to He, the initial inspiration for the “broken calendar stele” came to him a decade earlier, around the 50th anniversary of the Mukden Incident. At the time He found two flat pieces of petrified wood in Liaoxi, the western part of Liaoning, which were lined with annual tree growth rings and had holes in the surface gnawed by insects. The wood gave him an impression of a recently unearthed historical record, well-worn by the natural elements. As the surface of the wood was flat enough for the inscription of characters, He inscribed in detail on one of the pieces the date and time of the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident, using both the Gregorian calendar and the Chinese lunar calendar. He initially named the calendar as “the broken calendar of national humiliation.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, 13.

<sup>268</sup> He, 12.

This explains why, in dovetailing nicely with the CCP's national narrative of patriotic education in the 1990s, He's design would be adopted by the 918HM from the very beginning to express its central trope of "national humiliation."

In 1984, when a special group was formed to design a sculpture to commemorate the Mukden Incident, He proposed the idea of a "broken calendar stele" based on his petrified wood model of 1981. In the "broken calendar stele," the gnawed holes in the sculpture would not be the work of insects. Rather, they would represent bullet holes from the Kwantung Army's attack on September 18, 1931. This would evoke an atmosphere of destruction and violence and seem to freeze time, thus transporting the visitor back to the events of the night of September 18, 1931. In addition, a configuration of bullets below the date on the right-hand side would bear an eerie resemblance to human skulls, which, the museum claims, is to "denounce the Japanese military's bloody crimes."<sup>269</sup> The sculpture thus both symbolizes the Japanese invasion of China and highlights Japanese military atrocities.



Figure 5: The "Broken Calendar Stele." Photo taken by the author in July 2017.

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<sup>269</sup> Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, 1.

In 1991, when the “broken calendar stele” was constructed, a written summary of the infamous events of the Mukden Incident was penned by famous calligrapher Yang Renkai and carved into the left-hand side of the calendar:

Close to 10 at night, the Japanese Army blew up the Liutiaohu Road section of the Southern Manchurian Railway. With the pretext of blaming the Chinese Army for the act, they attacked and occupied Dabeiyang. Under the order not to resist, our Northeastern officers and soldiers reluctantly retreated. As this national crisis descended, the people rose vigorously in resistance.

Although the inscription contains many historically accurate details, it also includes several problematic assumptions. First, the term “Japanese Army” is used instead of “Kwantung Army,” implicating Japan as a whole in the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident. For patriotic education, using a broad term such as “Japanese Army” is indeed more forceful. This, however, is overly simplistic and erases the historical distinctions between Japan’s various military bodies (of which the Kwantung Army was but one) and its civilian government. It is true that subsequently, the civilian officials of the Japanese government in Tokyo felt they had no choice but to tacitly approve the Kwantung Army’s occupation of Manchuria. However, the Kwantung Army initially acted without Tokyo’s authorization and knowledge.<sup>270</sup> This is not to say that such a practice of historical simplification is unique to China; rather, it is just one example of how history is reconstrued to serve contemporary sociopolitical purposes.

The second problematic assumption made by the inscription is that of the “reluctant retreat” of the Northeastern officers and soldiers. Although Chiang Kai-shek is not vilified as during the Mao era, or even mentioned directly, the “order not to resist” clearly alludes to his “Non-Resistance Policy.” Zhang Xueliang’s forces under the Northeastern Governmental Affairs

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<sup>270</sup> The Japanese civilian government in Tokyo was not informed about this military coup, and the then-liberal cabinet under Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijiro soon fell. Subsequent cabinets all took the position of defending the Japanese occupation against domestic and international critics. Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2000), 4.

Committee, which technically was under allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek's Nanjing government, are portrayed as reluctantly following orders. This ignores the fact that Chiang Kai-shek had little, if any, actual power in the Northeast at the time.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, as far as Zhang was concerned, not resisting was not so "reluctant." Firstly, Zhang was not even in the Northeast on September 18<sup>th</sup> – he was in Peiping, enjoying an opera performance by famous star Mei Lanfang, and was quick to withdraw his troops from the Northeast. Secondly, although there was indeed sporadic Chinese resistance in the Northeast to Japanese occupation, the Kwantung Army was able to secure collaboration relatively easily from a significant number of Chinese elites in the area within a few weeks of the invasion.<sup>272</sup>

In addition, the "broken calendar stele" also overstates national resistance. The phrasing "national crisis," to which "the people rose vigorously in resistance," is historically inaccurate, as the Mukden Incident was not perceived as a national crisis by most Chinese elites after it occurred. However, due to the journalism of patriots associated with the Northeastern National Salvation Society (NNSS) such as Zou Taofen and Du Zhongyuan, money was raised to support Ma Zhanshan and the Northeastern volunteer armies. Zou and Du condemned what they saw as Zhang Xueliang's cowardice in the newspaper *Shenghuo zhoukan* and juxtaposed this with Ma's bravery. Furthermore, a vocalized student movement arose to pressure the Nanjing government into taking back the Northeast. Together, these actions ensured that in the long run, a

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<sup>271</sup> As Mitter notes, even though Chiang and Zhang were in alliance after 1928, the direct influence exerted by Nanjing on the Northeast was small. Although the new KMT administrative body in the region, the Northeastern Governmental Affairs Committee, was supposedly under the jurisdiction of Nanjing, 12 of the 13 committee members were the same as those of its predecessor, the Northeastern Peace Protection Committee, which had only been under the jurisdiction of Zhang Xueliang. *Ibid.*, 51-53, 57-58.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-75. See also Louise Young, *Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 40-41.

“Manchurian myth” of decisive Northeastern resistance after the Mukden Incident arose.<sup>273</sup> As the “date debate” shows, after the 1980s this narrative became increasingly intertwined with the War of Resistance against Japan.

The “broken calendar stele” stood on its own until September 18, 1999 at 9 a.m., when a grand opening ceremony took place for the 918HM. Hosted by the deputy secretary of the CCP Shenyang Municipal Committee, this ceremony further cemented the importance of the 918HM as a “site of memory.” The date was significant for two reasons: first, 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the PRC; and second, it solidified the practice of an annual commemoration of the Mukden Incident at the 918HM.<sup>274</sup> This practice had first been initiated in August 1995 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Allied victory in World War II. Each year on September 18th at 10:20 p.m., the time when the Kwantung Army set off the railroad explosion in 1931, alarms would sound throughout the city for approximately three minutes, during which time all vehicles on designated streets would blare their horns for three minutes, and pedestrians would stop in place as a mark of respect.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Efforts at reconfiguring the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident as a national crisis were made by the NNSS (Northeastern National Salvation Society)’s propaganda activities, which centered around the figure of Ma Zhanshan in particular, and students who pressured the Nanjing government, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Mitter, 144-151, 225-228.

<sup>274</sup> The notes on the opening ceremony on the museum website mention that the year 1999 is not only significant because it is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the PRC, but also because it is the year in which Macau is returned to the PRC from Portugal. The return of Macau from Portugal, along with the return of Hong Kong from Great Britain two years prior, were both quite significant to the PRC. In large part, this is because Hong Kong, which was ceded to the British in 1842 in the Treaty of Nanking; and Macao, which became a colony of the Portuguese Empire in 1557 and was formally ceded to Portugal in 1887, represented two of the last vestiges of China’s “century of humiliation.” The return of Hong Kong, in particular, was a cause for an outpouring of patriotic fervor, which Meisner claims had not been seen since the end of the War of Resistance against Japan. Maurice Meisner, *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic, Third Edition* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 526-528.

<sup>275</sup> “Zhuangzhong Mingjing Yishi de Youlai” [Origin of the Ceremony of Tolling the Bell and Sounding the Alarm], Wu Wang JiuYiBa Zhuangzhong Mingjing Yishi [Never Forget September 18<sup>th</sup> Ceremony of Tolling the Bell and Sounding the Alarm], *The 918 Historical Museum*, retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 27 June 2019.

The 1999 opening ceremony established a national recognition of 918HM, shown by representatives from various other national museums on the War of Resistance against Japan. These museums, including the NMMH, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall (Nanjing), and the Museum on the War of Resistance against Japan (Beijing), were 918HM's peers as designated "Nationwide Model Patriotic Education Bases" in 1997. The congratulatory letter from the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall to the 918HM directly linked the two sites, noting that as the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident and the Nanjing Massacre were both historical massacres inflicted on China by Japanese militarist aggression, both museums were important patriotic education bases to commemorate the War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>276</sup> Furthermore, on that day the 918HM achieved international fame in receiving foreign diplomats from the North Korean, Russian, Japanese, and US consulates in Shenyang.<sup>277</sup>

On that day, the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee sent a special congratulatory letter to the 918HM. Jiang Zemin himself penned the name of the 918HM and it was inscribed on the outside façade of the museum. The Politburo's letter read:

We wish to congratulate you on the happy news that the 918 History Museum, upon which the nation's eyes are fixed, is now officially open to the public. In addition, we would like to express warm appreciation to the builders of the museum. We hope the museum will maximize its role as an important *patriotic education and national defense base* and that it will educate the people, *particularly the youth, to never forget national humiliation* in order to strive to realize *the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation*. We hope that all our museum comrades will not disgrace this historical mission, but will continually broaden the museum's function and strive to build the 918HM into a world-class museum. (emphases added)<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> The comparison of the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident to the Nanjing Massacre as "historical massacres" of Japanese militarism is quite far-fetched, to say the least. The Nanjing Massacre (which will be discussed more in Chapter 4) lasted roughly six weeks, and it is estimated that there were anywhere from 40,000 to 300,000 deaths. Daqing Yang, "The Nanjing Atrocity: Is Constructive Dialogue Possible?" in Daqing Yang, Jie Liu, Hiroshi Mitani, and Andrew Gordon, ed., *Toward a History Beyond Borders: Contentious Issues in Sino-Japanese Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 188-189.

<sup>277</sup> "Zhuangzhong Mingjing Yishi de Youlai" [Origin of the Ceremony of Tolling the Bell and Sounding the Alarm].

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

The letter demonstrated Beijing's high expectations for the museum. First, from its inception the 918HM was oriented not merely to commemorate an important event in the past, but more crucially to contribute to Beijing's Patriotic Education Campaign in the present. This put the 918HM in a different category than its regional peers such as the older NMMH and PEPM, the exhibits of which were initially set in different political epochs in the PRC and thus had to be reoriented several times to catch up with the CCP's changing narratives in subsequent decades. Second, the importance of the 918HM as a "national defense education base" (*guofang jiaoyu jidi*) further confirmed the emphasis on teaching history to China's youth. National defense education bases in particular were designated to provide free access to groups of elementary and middle school students in order to "strengthen national defense education" and "develop the spirit of patriotic education."<sup>279</sup> Lastly, the theme of "never forgetting national humiliation" is linked to the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" – thus, stressing the connection between historical education, legitimization of the CCP, and the national agenda moving forward.<sup>280</sup> This theme of rejuvenation was often part of CCP discourse, but would become a centralized theme in propaganda only later when Xi Jinping ascended to power.

In the 1990s, the function of the 918HM was closely intertwined with the national agenda and the Patriotic Education Campaign and served a powerful function as a "site of memory."

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<sup>279</sup> "National defense bases" are mentioned in the 2001 "National Defense Education Law," passed by the Ninth National People's Congress under the leadership of Jiang Zemin. This education law can be seen as furthering the purposes of the earlier 1994 Patriotic Education Campaign, also instigated by Jiang Zemin. "Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guofang Jiaoyu Fa" [PRC National Defense Education Law], 28 April 2001, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Zhongyang Renmin Zhengfu* [Central Government of the PRC], retrieved from [www.gov.cn](http://www.gov.cn) on 24 June 2019.

<sup>280</sup> For more on the importance of the phrase "never forget national humiliation" (*wu wang guochi*) and its connection to historical education, party politics, and national identity in China today, see Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation*, 2-13. Notably, three of the four photographs that Wang Zheng utilizes to demonstrate the visualization of the four characters "*wu wang guochi*" in various commemoration ceremonies and activities are from Northeastern China in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – two from Shenyang, and one from Changchun (4-5).



However, as the national agenda continued to evolve in the 2000s, the 918HM also reimagined its function and “historical position.” As was the case with the PEPM, certain aspects of the 918HM strayed from its “site of memory” function in order to more closely dovetail with the national narrative.

### **The “Historical Position” of the 918HM**

In his 2020 speech for the 75th anniversary of China’s victory in the War of Resistance against Japan and World War II, Xi Jinping noted that “seventy-five years ago, after fourteen years of indomitable and bloody fighting, the Chinese people defeated the vicious Japanese militarist invaders and achieved victory in the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan!” Xi was careful to note that it was after the Mukden Incident that “the Chinese people rose up in resistance between the white mountains and black waters.”<sup>281</sup> This characterization of the Mukden Incident was first introduced in Xi’s 2015 speech for the 70th anniversary of China’s victory, when he noted that “the Mukden Incident became the starting point of the Chinese people’s War of Resistance against Japan and revealed the prologue of the global Anti-Fascist War.” More than any other speech, this really solidified the place of the Mukden Incident in national rhetoric.<sup>282</sup>

Xi’s speeches and the accompanying shift of the national narrative from an eight to a 14-year War of Resistance against Japan were closely followed by the 918HM. In order to align with the national narrative, the 918HM curators shifted over time in how they imagined the

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<sup>281</sup> “Xi Jinping: Zai Jinian Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng ji Shijie Fan Faxisi Zhanzheng Shengli 75 Zhou Nian Zuotanhui shang de Jianghua” [Xi Jinping: Speech at the Symposium Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan and World War II], Xinhua Wang, retrieved from [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-09/03/c\\_1126449917.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-09/03/c_1126449917.htm) on 9 September 2020.

<sup>282</sup> “Xi Jinping Kangzhan Shiguan de “Ba Da Yao Yi”.”

museum's image and its "historical position." The 918HM, which had opened to commemorate the regional resistance of the Northeast, evolved over time to reflect a *national* resistance that spanned 14 years. The increasing importance of the annual commemoration ceremony, the internationalization of the museum, and internal discussions on what the museum should reflect to the public all show that the 918HM's self-perception was anything but static.

On September 18, 2000, the first annual ceremony to commemorate the Mukden Incident was held at the 918HM in front of the "broken calendar stele." At 10:19:32 PM, the "Alarm the World" bell (*Jing Shi Zhong*) in the 918HM courtyard was rung fourteen times. This bell had the characters "never forget national humiliation" inscribed on one side and a brief summary of the Mukden Incident inscribed on the other. The idea that the bell was to alarm the world suggested that the Mukden Incident should be remembered not only in China, but also by the international community. According to the 918HM, the bell was rung in 2000 "to symbolize the people of Shenyang enduring extreme hardship and difficulty over fourteen years of resistance."<sup>283</sup> The ceremony was limited to Shenyang and was principally of local significance. By 2004, however, this had changed.

In order to observe both the Mukden Incident and "National Defense Education Day," in 2004 over a thousand people participated in the commemoration ceremony. The atmosphere was festive, and even included a group of university students, workers' militia members, and PLA soldiers that sang patriotic war songs such as "On the Songhua River" and "March of the Volunteers." The "Alarm the World" bell was again rung fourteen times, but this time it was rung by multiple provincial level officials, including two in charge of National Defense

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<sup>283</sup> 2000 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2000), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 20 August 2020.

Education, showing that the significance of the ceremony had spread beyond the city of Shenyang to Liaoning Province as a whole. To add to the pomp and circumstance, on the 9<sup>th</sup> Road of 18<sup>th</sup> Street in Shenyang, cars halted and blared their horns to commemorate the Mukden Incident.<sup>284</sup>

By 2005, the commemoration ceremony was acquiring not only provincial, but also national significance, as it was broadcast not only by Shenyang TV and Liaoning TV but also by the national broadcasting network, CCTV. For the anniversary of the Mukden Incident, 918HM was opened for free to visitors, and it is estimated that 40,000 people took advantage of this to visit the museum.<sup>285</sup> This showed the increasing prioritization of patriotic education over revenue by the museum, which would continue in 2007, when the 918HM became the first permanently free museum in Shenyang.<sup>286</sup> As of 2008, alarm bells were sounded in commemoration of the Mukden Incident not only in Shenyang, but in 13 other cities in Liaoning Province as well,<sup>287</sup> a phenomenon that also continued in subsequent years.<sup>288</sup> Most recently, these commemoration ceremonies became national in scope – not only on television broadcasts, but also in practice. For example, to commemorate the 85th anniversary of the Mukden Incident in 2016, air raid sirens were sounded in cities across both the Northeast and the nation, including Changchun, Harbin, Nanjing, Xi'an, and Shenzhen.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> 2004 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2004), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 21 August 2020.

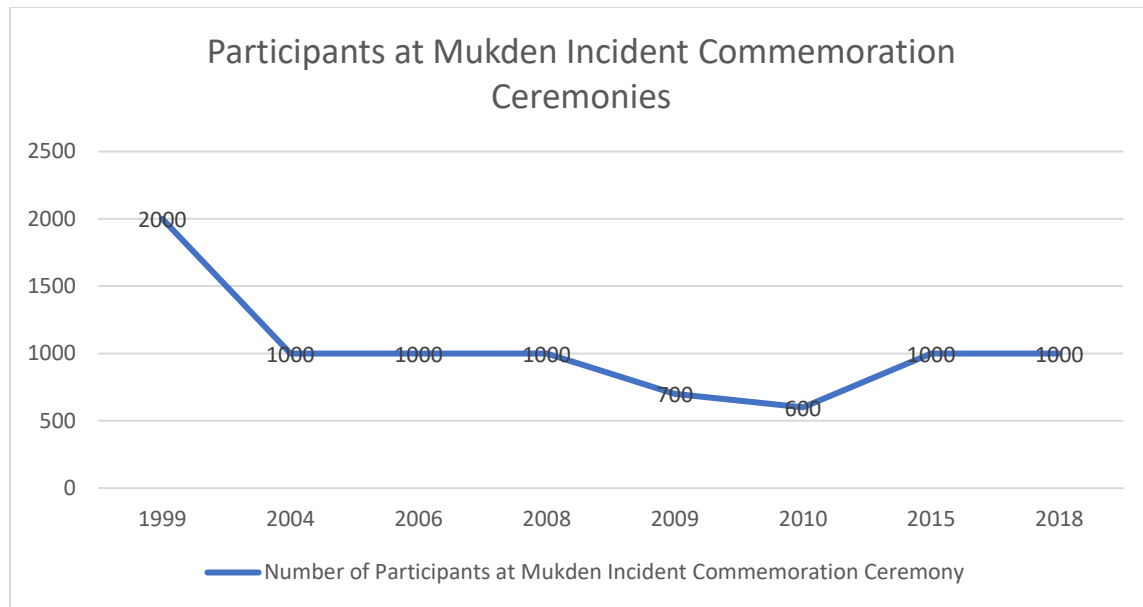
<sup>285</sup> The 918HM became permanently free for all visitors in 2007. 2005 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2005), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 21 August 2020.

<sup>286</sup> 2007 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>287</sup> 2008 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2008), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 26 August 2020.

<sup>288</sup> 2014 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2014), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 25 August 2020.

<sup>289</sup> “Zhongguo Gedi Jinian “Jiu Yi Ba Shibian” 85 Zhou Nian” [Places Around China Commemorate the 85<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Mukden Incident], retrieved from <https://www.dw.com/zh/中国各地纪念九一八事变 85 周年/a-19559869> on 26 August 2020.



Overall, the commemoration ceremonies were well-attended (see graph above); among the ceremonies for which attendance was recorded, attendance did not dip below 600 participants.<sup>290</sup> The 918HM perceived itself as part of a greater national effort of remembrance and revitalization, as shown by the slogans shouted in 2005, 2006, 2008, and 2009: “remember history well, do not forget the past, treasure the present, usher in the future, be vigilant in times of peace, sound the alarm, and unite and strive to revitalize China!”<sup>291</sup> The close connection of the museum with the national narrative was also demonstrated by the personnel in attendance. In 2014, for instance, Liu Yunshan, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, attended the ceremony and gave a speech; in 2016, Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the PRC and former member of the Politburo, did the same.<sup>292</sup>

<sup>290</sup> 1999 *Nian Da Shiji*, 2004 *Nian Da Shiji*, 2006 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2006), 2008 *Nian Da Shiji*, 2009 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2009), 2010 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2010), 2015 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2015), and 2018 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2018), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 25 August 2020.

<sup>291</sup> 2005 *Nian Da Shiji*, 2006 *Nian Da Shiji*, 2008 *Nian Da Shiji*, and 2009 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>292</sup> 2014 *Nian Da Shiji* and 2016 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2016), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 25 August 2020.

One notable year that showed how the 918HM perceived itself in relation to the national narrative was in 2005, the 60th anniversary of victory in the War of Resistance against Japan. Firstly, the museum hosted a large-scale documentary, “For Victory,” filmed jointly by CCTV and the Central News Film Production, on April 11, which demonstrated the connection the 918HM had to the national narrative of the War of Resistance. Secondly, several KMT officials from Taiwan visited the 918HM this year, thus reflecting the growing importance of the museum in cross-strait relations.<sup>293</sup> This was only amplified in 2012, when the honorary chairman of the KMT, Wu Boxiong, along with a 19-member KMT delegation, together visited the 918HM.<sup>294</sup> Thirdly, a significant contingent of Japanese personnel was present at the ceremony, showing the increasing connection to Sino-Japanese relations that the museum had. The president and 29 members of the Japanese Invasion of China Historical Society carved a commemorative stele to place in the 918HM courtyard, which read, “Anti-Hegemony, Anti-War, and Anti-Aggression: The Peace-Loving and Anti-War Japanese People Built This Stele to Commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the End of Japan’s War of Aggression.”<sup>295</sup> Of even greater significance for Sino-Japanese relations was the year 2011, when the Japanese ambassador to China visited the 918HM in his official capacity.<sup>296</sup>

The 918HM not only became an important symbol of Sino-Japanese relations, but also Sino-American relations. On March 15, 2007 an outline for the Shenyang WWII Allied Prisoners Site Exhibition (APSE), which was to be a sister museum under the same administration as the

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<sup>293</sup> 2005 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>294</sup> 2012 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2012), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 25 August 2020.

<sup>295</sup> 2005 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>296</sup> 2011 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2011), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 24 August 2020.

918HM, was first drawn up.<sup>297</sup> The peculiar function of this museum was to connect the War of Resistance with the greater Asia-Pacific War. Its site used to be an Allied POW camp, which between 1942 and 1945 held a total of over two thousand nationals of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, Holland, and France. Thus, similar to the 918HM, the APSE functioned as an important “site of memory” built in a physical location connected to an event of historical import. As the best-preserved of the 18 POW prisons across Japanese occupied territories in World War II, the site increasingly gained prominent recognition over time as a protected locale.<sup>298</sup> In 2004, the city of Shenyang recognized the site as an “immovable cultural relic” (*buke yidong wenwu*); in 2008, Liaoning Province named it a “protected cultural relics unit” (*wenwu baohu danwei*); and in 2013, it was recognized on the national level as a “protected cultural relics unit.”<sup>299</sup>

The APSE was an important addition to the 918HM because of the relations it fostered between China and other Allied countries, particularly the United States. This was evident as early as 2007, when a delegation of ex-POWs that had been imprisoned at the APSE, organized by the American Society for the History of Aggression in Washington, visited Shenyang. The delegation spent a total of five days in Shenyang, from May 20 through May 24, and engaged in a range of activities while there, including a special symposium for the return visit of WWII Allied veterans to Shenyang. These ex-POWs were also able to visit the APSE site several times, both donating old wartime artifacts and offering valuable advice on how to arrange the exhibition hall.<sup>300</sup> As the 2013 opening date for the APSE drew closer, 918HM staff continued to engage in

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<sup>297</sup> 2007 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>298</sup> Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, 22.

<sup>299</sup> “Shenyang Erzhan Mengjun Zhanfuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan” [Exhibition Hall at the Old Site of the Shenyang World War II Allied POW Camp], retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 13 June 2019.

<sup>300</sup> 2007 *Nian Da Shiji*.

bilateral exchanges with American personnel. For instance, in 2011, the president of the American Shenyang Prisoners of War Association visited the 918HM and observed the progress being made on the restoration of the APSE site.<sup>301</sup> In 2012, Hollywood screenwriter Richard Anderson also visited the APSE to collect information for his upcoming film on the camp.<sup>302</sup> Lastly, in May of 2013, the five-member US Consul General in Shenyang visited the APSE before it was subsequently opened to the outside world.<sup>303</sup>

According to an APSE docent, the APSE is important as a “site of memory” because not only did it have POWs from more countries than any other Japanese POW camp, but it also testified that “the countries represented by the POWs imprisoned here, together with China, were finally able to achieve victory in World War II.”<sup>304</sup> At the APSE itself, however, it is not Chinese generals who are highlighted, but rather Chinese civilians. A prominent placard in the APSE details the aid given in secret by Chinese civilians to the Allied POWs, even when they themselves were suffering:

Devastated by the Japanese colonial rule and incapable of feeding themselves, the Chinese workers often secretly gave food to the starving POWs, helping them acquire goods needed, and provide information of [sic] the outside, etc. The selfless help from the Chinese workers lent human warmth to the Allied POWs and gave them the courage and tenacity to face the [sic] difficulties, forging a profound friendship between the two sides.<sup>305</sup>

This means to exemplify the high moral quality of the Chinese in acting for the greater global good when they themselves were suffering under excruciatingly painful conditions.

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<sup>301</sup> 2011 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>302</sup> 2012 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>303</sup> 2013 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2013), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 1 September 2020.

<sup>304</sup> Anonymous, personal interview by Emily Matson on November 19, 2017 (Shenyang, APSE).

<sup>305</sup> This placard is in three languages – Chinese, English, and Japanese. The quote above is from the English version originally printed on the placard. Wall text for *Zhongguo Gongyou dui Mengjun Zhanfu de Bangzhu* [Aid of Chinese Workers to the Allied POWs], Permanent Exhibit (observed in July 2017), Shenyang Erzhan Mengjun Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan [Shenyang WWII Allied Prisoners Site Exhibition], Shenyang, China.

Both as an international symbol of World War II and a domestic symbol of the War of Resistance against Japan, then, the 918HM was increasingly mindful of the image that it projected to the public. This was particularly the case after 2007, when the largest inspection and renovation of the museum since 1999 was undertaken.<sup>306</sup> In the spring of 2010, the deputy director of the Liaoning Provincial Department of Culture visited the museum. He lauded the 918HM for being the largest patriotic education base in the Liaoshen area (Liaoning Province with its capital of Shenyang) and for attracting approximately 700,000 to 800,000 visitors per year, but advised that the museum should be continuously enriched to make it a truly international rather than solely domestic museum. Also in the spring, the museum held a special mobilization meeting to discuss its image in particular, and more than 50 members of the museum's leadership team discussed "Strengthening Management, Standardizing Services, and Shaping a New Image of the Cultural Museum."<sup>307</sup>

One key element of the image projected by the 918HM was as an important research center for the War of Resistance against Japan in the Northeast. The museum's Liaohai Forum Patriotic Lectures started in 2010 and were subsequently held in the 918HM library. The name of the lectures demonstrates that the ultimate goal of relaying the content was to encourage the promulgation of patriotic education among the lecturers and audience members. The lectures relayed various aspects of the War of Resistance in the Northeast, starting with three lectures in 2010 on the APSE, Zhang Xueliang, and a more comprehensive "History of the Japanese Invasion of China and Anti-Japanese Cultural Relics."<sup>308</sup> The following year, the lecture given

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<sup>306</sup> 2007 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>307</sup> 2010 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2010), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 21 August 2020.

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*



was on the Northeastern Volunteer Army, and even included a photograph of revolutionary martyr Yang Jingyu before his death.<sup>309</sup> In 2012, there were a total of six prominent lectures held in the 918HM library. In 2013, another special lecture was given on the APSE before it opened to the public: “Exploring the Shenyang World War II Allied POW Camp.” The “Shenyang World War II Allied POW Camp Site 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary International Academic Exchange Conference” was subsequently held at the end of July.<sup>310</sup>

The 918HM really began to shift its image to a museum projecting a fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan around the time the Liaohai Forum Patriotic Lectures started. The year 2011 was a significant marker of this, as it included substantial commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the Mukden Incident. The Mukden Incident Eightieth Anniversary International Symposium was held in the museum conference hall at the end of October. Notably, in the international symposium, the 918HM described the Mukden Incident as “a new stage of Japan’s war of aggression against China in the 1930s and the prelude to World War II.”<sup>311</sup> A year later, in 2012, the 918HM collaborated with the Pingjing Memorial Hall to create a temporary exhibit titled, “The Prologue to World War II and the Start of the War of Resistance – Exhibit on the History of the Mukden Incident.”<sup>312</sup> This language was similar to that utilized by Xi Jinping in 2015 for the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II and pointed to a fourteen-year War of Resistance starting with the Mukden Incident.

Further linguistic similarities can be found in a temporary photo exhibition opened on June 28, 2011 to commemorate the ninetieth anniversary of the founding of the CCP. The

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<sup>309</sup> 2011 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>310</sup> 2013 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>311</sup> 2011 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>312</sup> 2012 *Nian Da Shiji*.

temporary photo exhibition was divided into two parts: first, the CCP during the *local* resistance (*jubu kangzhan*); and second, the CCP during the *national* resistance (*quanmian kangzhan*).<sup>313</sup> This distinction between local (1931-1937) and national (1937-1945) resistance ensured that both the Mukden Incident and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident were highlighted as important turning points in the War of Resistance. Today, this distinction continues to be utilized in museum exhibits on the War of Resistance against Japan, both in the Northeast and elsewhere.

By 2011, the 918HM had begun to receive significant accolades on the national level to add to its 1995 designation as a National Model Patriotic Education base. First, in May it won the national “Top Ten Exhibition Excellence Award” (*shi da chenlie zhanlan jingpin jiang*). Second, in June at the National Red Tourism Working Conference in Beijing, it received the honorary title of “National Red Tourism Work Advanced Group,” the only red tourism attraction in Shenyang to have received such an award.<sup>314</sup> Museum curators were well aware of the increasing prestige of the museum and sought to tailor its content accordingly, which can be seen in the 2012 commemoration ceremony.

The year 2012 marked the year in which Xi Jinping was named General Secretary of the Communist Party and was the year when he publicly ascended to power. Accordingly, the content of the 2012 Mukden Incident commemoration ceremony hinted at a shift in rhetoric regarding the War of Resistance against Japan. Speaking to the crowd of a thousand that attended the event, Deng Xiaren highlighted the “rejuvenation of the Chinese people” and the “maintenance of territorial integrity.” In addition, he referred to the war as the “fourteen-year War of Resistance,” hinting at a broader national shift in rhetoric to encompass the Northeastern

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<sup>313</sup> 2011 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid*.

struggle. Not only did the 918HM appear to be shifting its rhetoric about the war years, but it was also increasingly weighing in on international affairs. Deng directly connected Japanese militarism in the past with Japanese aggression in the present, specifically concerning the ongoing dispute over the Diaoyu Islands:

At present, Sino-Japanese relations are facing a grim situation because of the Diaoyu Islands issue. Regarding the Diaoyu Islands Issue, China's position is consistent and clear. Japan's action of "purchasing the islands" by any means is illegal and ineffective, and we firmly oppose it. The Chinese government and people are unswervingly committed to safeguarding complete territorial sovereignty and will make no concessions.<sup>315</sup>

Thus, the 918HM perceived itself as a mouthpiece for the national government's contemporary patriotic rhetoric, not only hinting at an elongated war timeline but also inserting itself into sensitive topics surrounding Sino-Japanese relations.

What really cemented the 918HM's commitment to promulgating a fourteen-year war timeline as part of its historical position, however, was a 2015 speech made by Xi Jinping to commemorate the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II and the War of Resistance against Japan. Xi waxed eloquent about the continued rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, noting that China was finally returned to "great power status" after World War II. He noted how beneficial the Chinese struggle against Japan was to the international war effort and to defeating fascism worldwide. Then, he made an important clarification on the War of Resistance against Japan that shifted how the war was perceived domestically. "The Mukden Incident became the starting point of the Chinese people's War of Resistance against Japan," Xi noted, "and revealed the prologue of the global Anti-Fascist War."<sup>316</sup> In case anyone had missed the point, during the 25th collective study session of the CCP Central Committee Political Bureau, he also promoted an elongated war narrative: "we should not just research the history of the eight years of resistance

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<sup>315</sup> 2012 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>316</sup> "Xi Jinping Kangzhan Shiguan de "Ba Da Yao Yi"."

in the aftermath of the Lugou [Marco Polo] Bridge Incident, but we should also pay attention to researching the fourteen years of resistance in the aftermath of the Mukden Incident. We must have a thorough, unified research of fourteen years.”<sup>317</sup>

Following Xi’s speech, the 918HM sprang into action to update its image accordingly. The curators planned to renovate the museum’s permanent exhibit, and a special outline was created in 2015 to solidify the “historical position” (*lishi dingwei*) of the museum. In a special discussion meeting, the curators acknowledged that the museum had fallen behind in terms of its dimensions, characteristic qualities, and the direction of its exhibit. They highlighted several key points in discussing the future of the exhibit – namely, that the museum must more closely reflect the history of the Mukden Incident; it *must emphasize that the Mukden Incident was the beginning of the War of Resistance against Japan and of World War II*; it must highlight to a greater extent the CCP’s leading role in China’s fourteen years of resistance; and it must utilize the most recently uncovered archival material in the exhibit.<sup>318</sup> Thus, even before the 2017 Ministry of Education announcement, the 918HM had perceived the shift in national rhetoric and acted accordingly.

Several years later, when the Ministry of Education did announce that the War of Resistance against Japan would now refer to a fourteen-year war, the 918HM continued to update its historical position to align with the national narrative. In January 2017, a special symposium was convened in the museum library to review the “Fourteen Year War of Resistance against Japan Edit into the Compilation of Elementary and Middle School Teaching

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<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>318</sup> “Shenyang 918 Lishi Bowuguan Jiben Chenlie Dagang Zhuanjia Lunzhenghui Juxing” [Experts Hold Feasibility Meeting to Discuss the Shenyang 918 History Museum’s Permanent Exhibit Outline], 10 December 2015, retrieved from 918museum.org.cn on 26 August 2020.

Materials.”<sup>319</sup> It enlisted both scholars from the Northeast and leaders from middle and elementary schools to discuss the implications of the date change, as well as its contemporary and historical significance. Educators agreed that the date change would instill in students stronger patriotic education, as well as the remembrance of history and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The museum director herself, Fan Li, gave a keynote speech to highlight how significant the date change was for both educational and historical circles. She reiterated material from Xi’s 2015 speech, highlighting the Mukden Incident as both the true starting point of the war and a prologue to World War II. Furthermore, Fan noted that this date change highlighted that the CCP provided the mainstay in the war and that China was the main eastern battlefield in World War II. As a conveyor of these messages, the 918HM should continue to increase in both societal influence and international position moving forward.<sup>320</sup>

Further highlighting the importance in determining the “historical position” of the 918HM, in February the museum held a special Work Deployment Conference to discuss new objectives for the site. Song Zhenhong, director of the Shenyang Cultural Relics Bureau, made a concluding speech for the conference in which she mentioned that one of the main goals for the 918HM was to “find sufficient historical evidence for the historical positioning of the Mukden Incident.” This was to be accomplished by the entirety of the 918HM museum complex, which included the Shenyang WWII Allied Prisoners Site Exhibition and the Shenyang Courtroom for the Trials of Japanese War Criminals. Various measures, including more extensive cooperation

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<sup>319</sup> 2017 *Nian Da Shiji* (Chronology of Important Events in 2017), retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 26 August 2020.

<sup>320</sup> ““Shisi Nian Kangzhan Ru Bian Zhong Xiaoxue Jiaocai” Zuotanhui zai Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Bowuguan Juxing” [“Fourteen Year War of Resistance against Japan Edit into the Compilation of Middle and Elementary School Educational Materials” Conference Is Held at the 918 History Museum], 18 January 2017, retrieved from [https://www.sohu.com/a/124672957\\_349320](https://www.sohu.com/a/124672957_349320) on 31 August 2020.

between domestic and international museums, were to be undertaken to increase the soft power of the War of Resistance against Japan museums and “invigorate the national spirit.”<sup>321</sup>

Lastly, in response to the 2017 Ministry of Education announcement, the 918HM also opened a new temporary exhibit to promote the date change: “White Mountain and Black Water Engraved on the Spirit of the Martyrs: Exhibition on the History of the Fourteen Years of Northeastern Military and Popular Resistance against Japan.”<sup>322</sup> The National Cultural Relics Division (*Guojia Wenwuju*) specifically recommended this exhibit to the 918HM in order to commemorate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the PLA and the 80th anniversary of the eruption of the full-scale War of Resistance. Many of the 120 artifacts within the exhibit were shown to the public for the first time.<sup>323</sup> This demonstrated how closely connected the museum was with Beijing regarding the date change, and how seriously it regarded this as part of the 918HM’s “historical position.”

Since the early 2000s, then, the 918HM was consistently reimagining its own “historical position” in order to best dovetail the changing meaning of the Mukden Incident in the national narrative. This culminated in 2017 with the “Fourteen Year War of Resistance against Japan Edit into the Compilation of Elementary and Middle School Teaching Materials.” Not only has this “historical position” been evidenced through exhibits such as the temporary “White Mountain and Black Water Engraved on the Spirit of the Martyrs” exhibit, but also through the museum’s permanent exhibits.

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<sup>321</sup> 2017 *Nian Da Shiji*.

<sup>322</sup> “Baishan Heishui” literally translates to “white mountain, black water,” but also refers to Changbai Mountain and the Heilongjiang River. This in turn is used to symbolize Northeastern China as a whole.

<sup>323</sup> ““Baishan Heishui Zhu Yinghun – Dongbei Junmin 14 Nian Kangzhan Shishi Zhan” Zai Shenyang Jiu Yi Ba Bowuguan Kaizhan” [White Mountain and Black Water Engraved on the Spirit of the Martyrs – Exhibition on the History of the 14 Years of Northeastern Military and Popular Resistance against Japan], retrieved from [http://news.cnr.cn/native/city/20170918/t20170918\\_523953804.shtml](http://news.cnr.cn/native/city/20170918/t20170918_523953804.shtml) on 1 September 2020.

## The Permanent Exhibit of the 918HM

Similar to the temporary exhibit opened in 2017, the 918HM permanent exhibit also contains a strong emphasis on a fourteen-year War of Resistance that follows closely in line with the national narrative. Since 1999, the Municipal CCP Committee of Shenyang and the municipal government renovated and expanded the museum twice, updating the exhibits in the process.<sup>324</sup> The 918HM permanent exhibit as seen in 2017 thus reflected the more recent iteration of the national narrative and not merely the Patriotic Education Campaign from the 1990s. It served to unite the regional narrative of fourteen years of Northeastern struggle with the national narrative of a fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan.

According to the original 1991 plan for the 918HM, the main exhibition hall was to be titled “Exhibit of the Great Wall of Flesh and Blood” (*Xuerou Changcheng Guan*), contain three floors, and require an overall investment of 30 billion RMB.<sup>325</sup> The name of the exhibition hall itself manifested the strong connection of the 918HM to the national narrative on the War of Resistance against Japan in the 1990s. It paraphrased a line from the PRC national anthem, Tian Han’s “March of the Volunteers,” evoking the rallying cry, “to use our flesh and blood to build a new Great Wall.” This song was originally released by Tian Han in 1935 on the brink of war with Japan, and its adoption by the PRC as the national anthem suggests the centrality of the War of Resistance to Chinese national identity.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> ““Jiu Yi Ba” Lishi Bowuguan” [918 History Museum], 20 September 2016, retrieved from <http://www.71.cn/2016/0920/910581.shtml> on 31 August 2020.

<sup>325</sup> He, 12.

<sup>326</sup> Tian Han’s “March of the Volunteers” has a unique historical trajectory. The music was originally composed by Nie Er, and was originally the theme song of the anti-Japanese resistance propaganda film *Sons and Daughters in a Time of Storm*, released in 1935. In 1949, “March of the Volunteers” was chosen to be the national anthem of the newly established PRC. Although it was dropped during the Cultural Revolution as the national anthem in favor of “The East is Red,” the original music was restored – albeit with new lyrics – in 1978. The old lyrics by Tian Han were not restored until 1982, which evidenced the shifting focus of the national narrative to emphasize external threats

and the more recent rejuvenation narrative. Behind the larger-than-life “broken calendar stele” is a courtyard that contains various objects, including the Kwantung Army’s bomb stele and the “Alarm the World” bell. To the left of the museum entrance, the name of the museum is in broad, calligraphic strokes, inscribed in 1999 in the handwriting of Jiang Zemin. To the right are two massive reliefs in bronze. The first, titled “National Disaster,” shows Chinese victims of war carved into the relief and reflects the increased national focus on the victimization of the Chinese people.<sup>327</sup> The second, titled “Struggling Vigorously,” reflects the victor narrative and was divided into four parts – one, the Northeastern Volunteer Army resisting Japan; two, patriotic scholars involved in the anti-Japanese resistance; three, “one hundred million soldiers and people building a new Great Wall with their own flesh and blood”; and four, the Chinese people’s victory in the War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>328</sup> In particular, the “Struggling Vigorously” relief shows how the national narrative was inscribed onto the regional narrative. On the regional level, it portrays the Northeastern Volunteer Army, patriotically struggling against the Kwantung Army. However, it also visually evokes the title of the exhibit hall, embodying a human “Great Wall of flesh and blood” and thus invoking the greater national struggle through the direct embodiment of the national anthem.<sup>329</sup>

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to Chinese national sovereignty. Tim F. Liao, Gehui Zhang, and Libin Zhang, “The Changing Fate of the Chinese National Anthem” in Mikyoung Kim and Barry Schwartz, ed., *Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past: Essays in Collective Memory* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010).

<sup>327</sup> As will be apparent in Chapter 4, the national narrative on the War of Resistance against Japan highlights victimization far more than victory, and tends to highlight Japanese military atrocities above all else.

<sup>328</sup> In the description of the “Rising Vigorously” (Fen Qi) relief in the museum booklet, the description in quotations is utilized, which is taken directly from Tian Han’s “March of the Volunteers.” Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, 1.

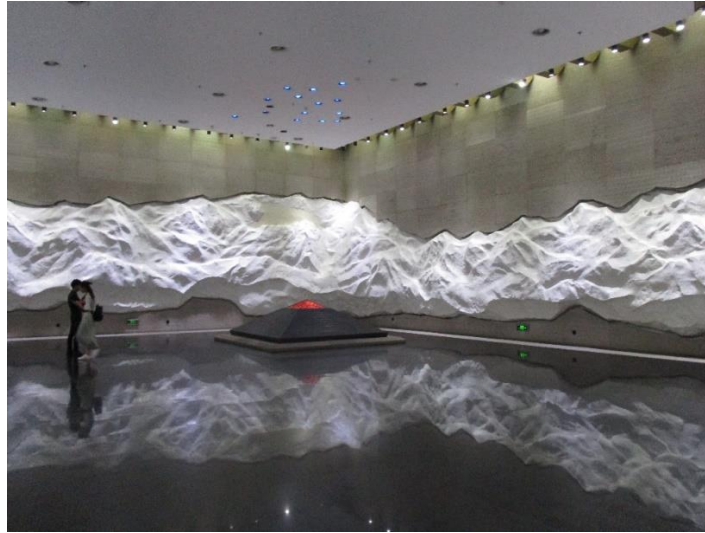
<sup>329</sup> I disagree with Denton here, who sees this relief as “perhaps recalling Mao’s phrase about the people being a blank slate.” Denton, 272.



Inside the entrance room of the exhibition hall, the architectural design itself attests to the seamless merging of regional resistance with the national narrative. The color scheme is the same as in the NEMMH – a striking juxtaposition between black and white. The purpose is also to represent the Northeast’s topographical landscape – here, the black floor represented the Northeast’s rivers, and the continuous white reliefs etched into the walls represent the mountains. The black marble floor has a high reflective index, and the images of the white mountain reliefs can be seen reflected in the depths of the black marble as if in a body of water. This architecturally superb contrast between “mountains” and “water” effectively merges the regional and the national; although the white mountains and black river (*baishan heishui*) were normally utilized to represent the Northeast, mountains and rivers can also symbolize China as a whole. Thus, the four-character phrase “*huan wo he shan*,” or “return my mountains and rivers,” was utilized as an anti-Japanese rallying cry during the war. Utilizing physical topography to represent the Chinese nation is a common museum trope as well. For instance, the first comprehensive exhibit at the Memorial Hall of the People’s War of Resistance against Japan in Beijing (to be discussed further in Chapter 4) opens with an introductory text set between two large images, one of the Yellow River and the other of a mountain scene.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Denton, 255-256, 272.



*Figure 6: Regional Characteristics of the Entrance Room, Photo taken by the author in July 2017*

Similar to the overall color scheme, a four-foot tall pyramid near the center of the exhibition room also serves to unite the regional and national narratives. The top of the pyramid glows with an electric “eternal flame” of sorts that, along with fourteen blue lights to represent fourteen years of resistance on the ceiling, is powered by electric lighting and represents “the indomitable fighting spirit of the Northeastern people and the eternal glory of the nation’s heroic martyrs.”<sup>331</sup> The fourteen years are primarily ascribed to the people of China’s Northeast. However, it is also unclear where the regional ends and the national begins, since this regional struggle is portrayed as directly spreading into a national struggle. The four sides of the pyramid are etched with text in Chinese, English, Russian, and Japanese, suggesting that although the museum’s primary audience is domestic, it also expects international visitors. The English version of the text reads as follows:

September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931 is a day which remains forever in the memory of the Chinese people. On that day, the Japanese aggressors outrageously provoked the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident. During the fourteen years afterward, the Japanese aggressors committed all kinds of crimes in the aggressive war, plunging millions upon millions of people into misery and suffering, frenziedly plundering enormous material wealth and wantonly trampling on the dignity of the Chinese nation. From that

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<sup>331</sup>“Xu Ting” [Entrance Hall], *Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Chenlie* [Exhibits on the History of September 18<sup>th</sup>], *Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Bowuguan* [September 18<sup>th</sup> History Museum], retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 13 July 2019.

day on, for fourteen years, the Chinese people's resistance against the Japanese aggressors, *like a prairie fire*, spread all over China. Countless Chinese people shed their blood and laid down their lives, resisting the Japanese aggressors so heroically that the resistance *shocked the whole world*. The Chinese people will never forget September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931, the day of humiliation for the Chinese nation...<sup>332</sup>

Interestingly, the Chinese version of the text differs in a few key ways from the English, showing the different intentions of the respective versions. When translated into English, it reads as follows:

This is a day that will forever be *inscribed in the hearts* of the Chinese people. On this day, the Japanese invaders outrageously provoked the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident. During the fourteen years afterward, the Japanese aggressors committed all kinds of war crimes, plunging millions upon millions of people into misery and suffering, frenziedly plundering enormous material wealth and wantonly trampling on the dignity of the Chinese nation. From that day on, for fourteen years, *the raging fire* of the Chinese people's resistance against the Japanese invaders spread all over China. Countless Chinese people shed their blood and lay down their lives, *composing a moving ballad of resistance against Japan*. September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1931 is a national day of humiliation for the Chinese people, a day that the Chinese people will never forget...<sup>333</sup>

The English version is meant to impress upon international visitors that they, too, should care about the Mukden Incident and subsequent Chinese resistance – thus, the language that the resistance to the Japanese aggressors “shocked the whole world.” This is part of a larger effort to connect the War of Resistance against Japan to World War II in the eyes of the international community in the 21st century. Although “shocked the whole world” is hyperbolic, it does remind visitors that the international community indeed took notice of the Mukden Incident. News of the Kwantung Army's actions sparked a decent amount of global concern, as this marked the breaking down of the international security system established by the 1921-22 Washington Conference.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> “Xu Ting” [Entrance Hall], Permanent Exhibit, September 18<sup>th</sup> Historical Museum, Shenyang, People's Republic of China.

<sup>333</sup> Zhang Ruiqiang, 5-6.

<sup>334</sup> American public opinions (as well as those of the British public, for instance) on how to respond to the crisis varied greatly, though – from a call for continued isolationism to a passionate plea for increased involvement. This culminated in the United States sending a representative to the League Council and participating in the Lytton Commission of 1932. This culminated in the Lytton report, which declared that Manchukuo was not a sovereign state and was in reality controlled by the Japanese. Justus D. Doenecke, *When the Wicked Rise: American Opinion-Makers and the Manchurian Crisis of 1931-1933* (Associated University Presses, Inc.: Cranbury, NJ, 1984), 19-30.

The Chinese version of the text is more forceful in some regards than the English text, again reflecting a different intended audience. September 18, 1931 is not a day that merely “remains forever in the memory of the Chinese people,” but is more forcefully “inscribed in the hearts of the Chinese people” (*ningke zai zhongguo renmin xinzhong*). Furthermore, the analogy of Chinese resistance being “like a prairie fire” (*liaoyuan*) is used in English but not in Chinese due to its Maoist associations of class struggle and the Cultural Revolution – instead, the phrase used is “the raging fire” (*liehuo*). Lastly, the penultimate sentence is more poetic in Chinese, with the sacrifice of the Chinese people “composing a ballad of resistance against Japan that moved heaven and earth” (*puxie chu gantiantongdi de kangri zhi ge*). This metaphor of a ballad of sacrifice calls to mind the Chinese national anthem and the name of the exhibition hall, “The Great Wall of Flesh and Blood.”

In the text on the pyramid, as well as elsewhere in the entrance hall exhibit, the number fourteen is heavily emphasized to make clear to visitors that there were fourteen years of resistance against Japan. On the pyramid itself, the phrase “fourteen years” is etched twice in each narrative. Furthermore, there are fourteen blue lights on the ceiling of the exhibition hall. Upon descending the stairs to the main permanent exhibit, the visitor will also come across a bed of smooth stones, on which are distributed fourteen blue lights to once again represent the fourteen years of resistance. Although these fourteen years of resistance can be applied to regional resistance, they are also meant to form a powerful part of the national narrative that now views the Mukden Incident as the starting point of the War of Resistance against Japan.

Whereas the initial section of the 918HM permanent exhibit emphasizes fourteen years of resistance, the final section begins with a direct warning against the resurgence of Japanese militarism, a warning which is repeated across many Northeastern museums on the War of

Resistance against Japan. Japanese militarism, the museum notes, is a threat against Sino-Japanese friendship, and unfortunately the right-wing forces in Japan are growing stronger, as evidenced by textbook controversies and visits by Japanese prime ministers to the Yasukuni Shrine.<sup>335</sup> To provide a contrast to this, banners created by groups of Japanese tourists to celebrate Sino-Japanese friendship and commemorate the September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident are displayed behind glass cases. In addition, a photo of Japanese prime minister Hashimoto Ryutaro's historic visit to the 918HM on September 6, 1997 is highlighted, showing that international dignitaries viewed the site as diplomatically valuable.<sup>336</sup> Nearby, four blown-up photos of the first four PRC leaders (Mao, Deng, Jiang, and Hu) with various Japanese dignitaries also impress upon the visitor both the importance of Sino-Japanese friendship and the utmost efforts made by the CCP to promote this friendship (as opposed to the dangerous Japanese right-wing revisionists). This portrays the CCP as historically magnanimous in looking past Japanese war crimes to foster positive relations with Japan today.

Further contributing to this overall altruistic impression of China, with which the CCP is invariably interchanged, is a stele at the very end of the final exhibition section, the "Stele to Thank Chinese Foster Parents" (Zhongguo Yangfumu Bei). This life-sized, copper stele contains a unique message promoting Sino-Japanese friendship that is not replicated at other museums in the region. It portrays a Chinese couple walking behind and supporting a small child who is gazing up adoringly up at the mother. Upon reading the placard below the stele, the visitor

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<sup>335</sup> "Jingyi Riben Junguo Zhuyi Fuhuo" [Warning against the Resurgence of Japanese Militarism], Permanent Exhibit (observed in July 2017), 9-18 History Museum, Shenyang, China. This resurgence of Japanese militarism and its threat to world peace is also of great concern to the PEPM, which also discusses issues such as visits of Japanese prime ministers to Yasukuni Shrine and the textbook controversies. For a summary of these issues, see Chapter 2.

<sup>336</sup> Interestingly, Hashimoto Ryutaro was a prime minister for the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). His most well-known successors, Koizumi Junichiro and Abe Shinzo, have been both thoroughly indicted by the Chinese media for their visits to Yasukuni Shrine and support of other controversial policies related to how World War II is commemorated in Japan.

discovers that the parents are Chinese, and that the child is a Japanese orphan. It is estimated that around 5,000 Chinese couples in Northeastern China adopted Japanese orphans after the war who were left behind.<sup>337</sup> After Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1972, the Japanese government began to allow for the repatriation of Japanese orphans.<sup>338</sup> A group of 1,450 such repatriates funded, built, and donated the stele for their adoptive parents.<sup>339</sup> They purposefully constructed the stele at the site of the September 18th Incident and held the ceremony to celebrate the stele's completion on August 20, 1999 inside the 918HM itself.<sup>340</sup>

It was the Japanese orphans, then, who actually initiated the commemoration of their Chinese adoptive parents out of gratitude. Their decision to place the stele inside the 918HM means that the monument encapsulates not only the suffering of the Japanese orphans, but also that of their adopted parents and the Chinese people of the Northeast under Japanese imperialism.<sup>341</sup> This fits in well with the overall narrative of the 918HM in portraying the Chinese people in a positive light – not only did they bravely resist the Japanese during the 14

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<sup>337</sup> The Japanese parents of these orphans were what Mariko Asano Tamanoi refers to as “Japanese agrarian settlers” – like their Chinese counterparts, they were near the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. During the Mao era, Tamanoi notes that the CCP instructed Chinese citizens to view these colonists as fellow victims of Japanese imperialism. Mariko Asano Tamanoi, *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 5-6.

<sup>338</sup> Repatriation lasted from the mid-1970s through 1990s and had three obvious peaks: 1975, 1987, and 1995. Between 1972-2003, a total of 20,136 Japanese orphans had been repatriated from Manchuria to Japan. *Ibid.*, 93, 96. For more details and statistics on the interactions of Japanese orphans in Manchuria with the Japanese state and Japanese society post-1972, see Tamanoi, “Memory Map 3: Orphans’ Memories” in *Memory Maps: The State and Manchuria in Postwar Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2008), 84-114.

<sup>339</sup> Shenyang Jiuyiba Lishi Bowuguan, Shenyang Erzhan Mengzhan Fuying Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, Shenyang Shenpan Riben Zhanfan Fating Jiuzhi Chenlieguan, 5.

<sup>340</sup> August 20<sup>th</sup> is a significant date because it is when the Soviet Red Army occupies both Harbin and Shenyang, 11 days after the USSR declared war on Japan. Around this date, many small Japanese children would have been orphaned as their parents fled the approach of the Red Army. Tamanoi, 113.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

years of occupation, but they also self-sacrificially took in and raised the children of their enemies.<sup>342</sup>

The 918HM depiction of the Chinese adoptive parents is encapsulated well in a three-minute propaganda video found on the website, in which a museum docent lectures.

Accompanied by wistful background music, the docent speaks passionately, with tears in her eyes, about the kindness of the Chinese foster parents towards the abandoned Japanese orphans. She paints a picture of the monument unveiling ceremony of August 20, 1999, in which the representative Japanese orphans knelt in front of the monument, weeping profusely with gratitude.<sup>343</sup> In addition, she recounts several of the orphans' memories of their childhoods and the selflessness of their foster families – for instance, Kimura Yoshihiko recalled that during the “three years of hardship,” his foster parents and their daughter opted to only eat sorghum rice, saving the scarce amount of white rice for him.<sup>344</sup> While this testimony (and others like it) are real and undoubtedly reflect the compassion of countless foster parents towards their adopted children, the docent goes a step further and claims that the experience of this man is a miniature of sorts, exemplifying the experiences of all 5,000 Japanese orphans.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Although I agree with Kirk Denton's analysis that the monument's portrayal of the Chinese people is unabashedly positive, I do not agree that it goes so far as to suggest “presumably superior Chinese moral standards.” Denton, 277.

<sup>343</sup> Another cause of the weeping is that many of these orphans, who were themselves reaching old age, were unable to reconnect with their foster parents, most of whom had already passed away.

<sup>344</sup> The “three years of hardship” is a euphemism used in China for the Great Leap Forward – in particular, the three years of endemic famine from 1959-1961. The causes of the famine were multifaceted and include natural disasters, declining harvests, and Khrushchev's abrupt recall of Soviet experts (many of whom were in the Northeast). However, the political atmosphere surrounding the Great Leap Forward also played a huge role in the onset of the famine, which is why it is still a largely taboo topic in China today. Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic, Third Edition* (The Free Press: New York, 1999), 234-239.

<sup>345</sup> Li Shaodan, “Ganxie Zhongguo Yangfumu Bei” [Stele to Thank Chinese Foster Parents], Xuanchuan Jiaoyu: Wangluo Jiaoyu [Propaganda Education: Online Education], Uploaded 27 April 2016, retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on 19 June 2019.

The 918HM permanent exhibit thus shows continuity with and divergence from the original exhibit first unveiled at the 1999 Opening Ceremony for the museum. Certain events of local significance, such as the aforementioned stele to commemorate Chinese foster parents, mean that the museum retains its regional flavor. However, the narrative of fourteen years of resistance overall blends both regional and national resistance into one, and serves to promote the 2017 Ministry of Education pronouncement that the national War of Resistance lasted for fourteen years.

## **Conclusion**

From its inception, the 918HM was thus conceived of as a national museum. As one of the original Model National Patriotic Education Bases even before its opening ceremony, the 918HM dovetailed with the national narrative at every step in its rhetoric and exhibits. Over time, the museum's self-perception and "historical position" were not static, but shifted. Originally, the 918HM was a national museum portraying a regional, fourteen-year struggle as part of the eight-year War of Resistance against Japan. However, as the national rhetoric began to shift to a fourteen-year war under Xi Jinping, the 918HM increasingly perceived itself as a nationally significant symbol of the war's beginning and marketed itself accordingly. Thus, together with its often-modified exhibits, the evolving self-imagination of the 918HM makes it not only a typical example of "museopolitics" that repeatedly revises its presentation of the past but also, thereby, an illustrative case of continually "repositioning" itself in the political life of the PRC.



## Chapter Four: The Nationalization of a Regional Narrative

The recalibration of the Mukden Incident as the proper starting point of the War of Resistance against Japan did not just occur at museums in the Northeast. On the contrary, as part of Xi Jinping's "rejuvenation narrative," the regional Northeastern narrative of the War of Resistance became nationalized. In imitation of the 918HM, museums outside the Northeast similarly highlighted the Mukden Incident and fourteen years of resistance. This served to weaken these museums' functions as "sites of memory" while promoting a national, elongated timeline of the war. Not only did promulgating the fourteen-year war narrative nationwide subsequently bolster the CCP's domestic credibility, but the accompanying internationalization of the war also depicted a China that was returning to its rightful historical role of leadership in global affairs.

This chapter will thus examine four prominent museums outside of the Northeast that commemorate the War of Resistance against Japan and recently altered their exhibits to accommodate the nationalized narrative of a fourteen-year war. As case studies, the four museums are geographically widespread, but as "sites of memory" primarily memorialize events that occurred in 1937, the year that full-scale war broke out between China (under the leadership of the KMT in Nanjing) and Japan. The Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall is unique in that it is a double "site of memory," commemorating both the 1932 Battle of Songhu and the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, the latter being the first truly large-scale battle between the Japanese military and the KMT's National Revolutionary Army.<sup>346</sup> Next, the War of Resistance against Japan Museum, located to the southwest of Beijing, as a "site of memory" commemorates the Marco Polo Bridge

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<sup>346</sup> Peter Harmsen, *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishers, 2013), 9.

Incident of July 7, 1937 and its aftermath. Third, the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall highlights the six weeks of military atrocities inflicted on Chinese civilians of the Nationalist capital by the Japanese army in the wake of the Battle of Shanghai, from December 1937 to January 1938. Lastly, the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit at the National Museum of China in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square is an important bellwether for the CCP’s official narrative on the War of Resistance against Japan, although it does not serve as a “site of memory” for events in the war in the same manner as the other museums.

### **The Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall as a Double “Site of Memory”**

The Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall for the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (SSMH) has achieved a double “site of memory” function in its commemoration of two events in the War of Resistance against Japan that took place in Shanghai: the 1932 Songhu Battle of Resistance and the 1937 Battle of Shanghai. The SSMH reflects the nationalization of the fourteen-year war narrative in its exhibits, and clearly highlights the Mukden Incident as the war’s starting point. However, unlike the other museums in this chapter, the museum does not dwell on the international implications of the War of Resistance, even though Shanghai is a centrally located and internationally prominent city. This is likely because the SSMH is located on the northern outskirts of the city and receives few international visitors, and is thus mostly curated to cater to a domestic audience.

The SSMH is a recent museum, opened to the public on January 28, 2000 to commemorate the anniversary of the Songhu Battle of Resistance.<sup>347</sup> This battle erupted on January 28, 1932 between the Japanese navy and KMT battalions and lasted until early March.

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<sup>347</sup> “Shanghai Songhu Kangzhan Jinianguan” [Shanghai Battle of Songhu Memorial Hall], *Jinianguan Jieshao* [Introduction to the Memorial Hall], retrieved from 813china.com on 19 March 2020.

Specifically, the KMT 19th Route Army defied Chiang Kaishek's non-resistance orders to fight against the Japanese, and thus these men are celebrated as patriots in China today. As the Songhu Battle of Resistance broke out only months after the Mukden Incident, the SSMH groups the two events together. This is despite the fact that the two events happened under considerably different circumstances.<sup>348</sup> Whereas the Mukden Incident was the result of a ploy by the Japanese Kwantung Army in Shenyang, the Songhu Battle of Resistance mainly involved the Japanese Navy. The Japanese Navy's attempt to exert dominance in the Shanghai area and the unanticipated resistance of the Chinese Nationalist Army in the Zhabei District served as catalysts for the January 28th Incident, which resulted in the Japanese Navy's brutal attack.<sup>349</sup> Although small in comparison to the 1937 Battle of Shanghai, the Songhu Battle of Resistance is considered to be one of the first civilian exposures to strategic aerial bombardment.<sup>350</sup>

In addition to the 1932 Songhu Battle of Resistance, the 1937 Battle of Shanghai is also commemorated in the SSMH. The impact of the Battle of Shanghai in many regards overshadowed that of the Songhu Battle of Resistance. First, it represented the first major military confrontation between the KMT and Japanese military forces, leading the historian Hans van de Ven to argue that it was truly a battle ensuring "what began as a conflict between the Nationalists and the Japanese became a war between China and Japan."<sup>351</sup> Second, although overshadowed later by the horrors of the Nanjing Massacre, it was by that time the largest East Asian international military conflict since the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the

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<sup>348</sup> Japan's military was highly factionalized at this point in time and hardly carried out unified attacks.

<sup>349</sup> Christian Hernot, "Beyond Glory: Civilians, Combatants, and Society during the Battle of Shanghai," *War and Society* 31.2 (August 2012), 106-35, 106-107.

<sup>350</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *Stilwell and the American Experience of China, 1911-1945* (New York: Random House, 1970), 168. Tuchman describes this as the first "terror bombing" and explains that it had a significant impact on the foreigners residing in Shanghai, who were appalled.

<sup>351</sup> Hans van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2018), 91.

century.<sup>352</sup> The Battle of Shanghai dwarfed the Songhu Battle of Resistance in terms of total casualties; the Songhu Battle saw around 13,000 total deaths, whereas the Battle of Shanghai totaled around 187,000 dead from the Nationalist Army alone, excluding civilians. Third, the Battle of Shanghai foreshadowed the urban warfare that would characterize so much of World War II and was the first military conflict that would indiscriminately utilize aerial bombardment and other arms of mass destruction without concern for civilian life.<sup>353</sup>

The SSMH highlights the Battle of Shanghai more than the January 28th Incident in its exhibits, which is understandable given the battle's widespread, destructive impact. However, considerable exhibit space and website space is also devoted to the January 28th Incident as part of the nationalization of the Northeastern fourteen-year war timeline. Inside the SSMH, the exhibits are arranged chronologically, starting with "The Eruption of China's War of Resistance against Japan." The first major event marking the "eruption" is the Mukden Incident, which is highlighted in both the museum exhibit and by docents giving tours to visitors.<sup>354</sup> Furthermore, the January 28th Incident is purposefully linked to the Mukden Incident in a fusion of the regional with the national narrative. On the website, for example, the introduction to the January 28th Incident reads, "After the Mukden Incident, the Japanese Kwantung Army concocted a conspiracy to cover up the puppet government of Manchukuo," directly linking the two events in space and time.<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II 1937-1945* (New York: Rana Mitter, 2013), 106-108.

<sup>353</sup> This included around 30,000 of Chiang's troops that had been specially trained under Nazi military advisors. However, this number does not include the civilian deaths, which would put the death toll much higher. *Ibid.*, 106-107.

<sup>354</sup> When I visited the SSMH in October 2017, the docent giving the tour made sure to point out to visitors that "the Mukden Incident was the starting point of the War of Resistance against Japan."

<sup>355</sup> "Yi Er Ba Jianjie" [Brief Introduction to the January 28th Incident], Kangzhan Lishi [History of the War of Resistance], retrieved from 813china.com on 16 September 2020.

The portrayal of the Battle of Shanghai, meanwhile, contributes to nationalizing Xi's "rejuvenation narrative." This is particularly the case with the "Special Exhibition of Japanese Atrocities in Shanghai," which reinforces the importance of the Battle of Shanghai and serves to combine the heroic victor narrative with the victim narrative, creating the uneasy tension that is so noteworthy in museums on the War of Resistance against Japan. After the 2015 renovation of the SSMH, this exhibit has urged visitors to "never forget national humiliation" and to strive for the "rejuvenation of the Chinese people" under the leadership of the Party and Xi Jinping.<sup>356</sup> The museum website takes a similar tone, claiming that learning the historical truth of the August 13th Incident and the Battle of Shanghai would inspire Chinese people to "remember history, remember the martyrs, cherish peace, and create the future in order to realize the great revival of the Chinese nation and strive for the Chinese dream."<sup>357</sup>

Also commemorating the Battle of Shanghai, the "Bloody Songhu" exhibit nationalizes the rejuvenation narrative in its portrayal of the sacrifices of KMT soldiers, which makes it seem like they *won* the battle rather than be ignominiously defeated.<sup>358</sup> This is similar to the portrayal of the KMT in Shanghai's newest war museum, the Sihang Warehouse Museum, which commemorates the brave final stand of roughly 800 KMT soldiers before Japanese troops completely conquered the city.<sup>359</sup> The rehabilitation of the KMT's wartime efforts is an

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<sup>356</sup> "Rijun zai Shanghai de Baoxing Wenwu Tupian Tezhan" [Special Exhibition of Japanese Atrocities in Shanghai], Tebie Zhanlan [Special Exhibitions], retrieved from 813china.com on 24 March 2020.

<sup>357</sup> "Shanghai Songhu Kangzhan Jinianguan."

<sup>358</sup> "Xuewo Songhu: Songhu Huizhan Zhuti Zhan" [Bloody Songhu: Themed Exhibition on the Battle of Songhu], retrieved from 831china.com on 24 March 2020.

<sup>359</sup> The Sihang Warehouse Museum opened on August 13, 2015 to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of Shanghai. The number 800 has been contested by scholars.

important part of the CCP's new narrative on the War of Resistance against Japan for creating a broader base for Chinese patriotism and improving cross-strait relations.<sup>360</sup>

The inclusion of both the Battle of Shanghai and the January 28th Incident in the SSMH are critical to nationalize the new War of Resistance narrative, which highlights the alleged CCP role of leading the nation-wide war against Japan. The Battle of Shanghai is utilized to remind Chinese viewers to remember history in order to realize the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The inclusion of the January 28th Incident, on the other hand, reminds visitors that the Battle of Shanghai only erupted after many years of Chinese resistance and points to the Mukden Incident and the Northeastern fourteen-year war narrative. In both cases, the heroics of patriotic KMT soldiers are lauded and linked more closely with the CCP than the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek, ultimately serving to bolster CCP wartime credibility.

### **The War of Resistance against Japan Museum and the New War Timeline**

As its name suggests, the War of Resistance against Japan Museum (WRJM) is a museum dedicated to memorializing the entire war. However, as a "site of memory" it reflects the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the eight-year war narrative. Indeed, the museum is located on the southwestern outskirts of Beijing in what was formerly the town of Wanping, close to Marco Polo Bridge.<sup>361</sup> To further demonstrate the importance of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident to the WRJM's *raison d'être*, the museum was initially opened on the symbolic date of July 7, 1987 to commemorate the event's 50th anniversary; its subsequent renovation was completed ten

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<sup>360</sup> Qiang Zhang and Robert Weatherly, "Owning up to the past: the KMT's role in the war against Japan and the impact on CCP legitimacy," *The Pacific Review* 26, 3 (2013), 223.

<sup>361</sup> Contrary to Rana Mitter's claim, the WRJM was not built in an inaccessible location in order to ensure that its memory could not be subverted by popular memory. On the contrary, it was due to the powerful "site of memory" function. Rana Mitter, "Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987-1997," *The China Quarterly*, no. 161 (Mar. 2000), 281-282.

years later on July 7, 1997 for the 60th anniversary.<sup>362</sup> Over time, however, the WRJM has nationalized the Northeastern War of Resistance against Japan narrative. In a similar fashion to the Puppet Emperor Palace Museum, this has meant that it has shifted away from its function as a “site of memory” to accommodate the fourteen-year war narrative.

From its inaugural opening, the WRJM was directly supervised by the CCP Central Committee and Beijing Municipality.<sup>363</sup> Its renovations were successively directed by Deng Xiaoping, then supreme leader; his protégé, Jiang Zemin; and Hu Qiaomu, which leaves no doubt that the WRJM represents the official narrative from the top echelons of the Party.<sup>364</sup> This fits with the increased emphasis placed on museums in the 1980s, as exemplified by their mention in the 1982 constitution as a type of “cultural undertaking” of the state to “serve the people and socialism.”<sup>365</sup>



*Figure 1: Entrance to the WRJM that features Chinese soldiers and civilians at attention. Photographed by the author in July 2017.*

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<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 282. An additional renovation took place in the summer of 2005 to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II. Denton, “Heroic Resistance and Victims of Atrocity: Negotiating the Memory of Japanese Imperialism in Chinese Museums,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 5, 4 (October 1, 2007), 8.

<sup>363</sup> Denton, 8.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 281. Hu Qiaomu, the visiting secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), was also involved in overseeing other museums to ensure that their exhibits were ideologically correct. See Chapter 2 for more details on his 1985 visit to the Puppet Emperor Palace Museum.

<sup>365</sup> *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Xianfa (1982 Nian)* [People’s Republic of China Constitution (1982)], retrieved from [http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content\\_4421.htm](http://www.npc.gov.cn/wxzl/wxzl/2000-12/06/content_4421.htm) on 9 April 2020.

The nationalization of the Northeastern fourteen-year war narrative is evident in the WRJM's most recent permanent exhibits. The entrance to the museum features a larger-than-life sculpture of four groups of Chinese, representing the CCP, KMT, militias, and civilians, standing at attention ready to defend the motherland. Nearby, a chronological narration of the war years highlights the most important events of the war by stenciling them in red on a white marble wall. The narration starts in 1931 with the Mukden Incident and the following accompanying explanation: "In Fengtian (Shenyang), the Japanese Army instigated the September 18th Incident and launched an invasive war, and the Chinese people's *partial* [*jubu*] War of Resistance against Japan began."<sup>366</sup> This is the exact same language that was utilized by the 918HM to describe the Mukden Incident as far back as 2011, demonstrating that the WRJM has been part of the nationalization of regional war rhetoric.<sup>367</sup> The language describing the Marco Polo Bridge Incident is also similar: "At the Marco Polo Bridge, to the southwest of Beiping, Japan instigated the July 7th Incident, the Chinese defensive troops rose up in resistance, and the *entire country's* [*quanguo*] War of Resistance began."<sup>368</sup> Juxtaposed with the phrase "entire country" for the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the utilization of the word "partial" for the Mukden Incident serves two purposes – it ensures that the Mukden Incident is highlighted as the starting point of the War of Resistance against Japan, while simultaneously maintaining the historical status of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.

After chronicling Mukden Incident, the WRJM lists other key events between 1931 and 1937 in the Northeast as well. This nationalizes the regional Northeastern narrative in order to

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<sup>366</sup> "Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng Da Shiji" [Chronicle of Major Events in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japan], Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum, August 2017.

<sup>367</sup> "2011 Notes" [2011 Nian Da Shiji], retrieved from [918museum.org.cn](http://918museum.org.cn) on 24 August 2020.

<sup>368</sup> "Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng Da Shiji."



equate the CCP with “China,” representing yet another way in which the Party “remains invested in a representation of the modern past that makes the rise of the party inevitable and justifies its continued place in power.”<sup>369</sup> For instance, the events listed in 1931 following the Mukden Incident are the CCP Central Committee’s promulgation of the “Resolution Concerning the Japanese Imperialists’ Occupation of Manchuria by Force,” and Ma Zhanshan’s Jiangqiao Battle of Resistance.<sup>370</sup> In case the message were not clear, further text explains that from this point on, the CCP attacked the Japanese invaders. The CCP is shown to have resisted Japan for the full fourteen years of war, strengthening the Party’s legitimizing narrative. Other Chinese who resisted Japan are subsequently grouped with the “China” represented by the CCP – for instance, even though Ma Zhanshan was not a member of the CCP, his resistance of Japan in 1931 groups him with the CCP and not with the KMT, which had decided to pursue the policy of nonresistance.<sup>371</sup>

After the chronological timeline embossed in red, the WRJM also features a stand-alone exhibit on the Mukden Incident highlighting its important wartime role not only as the beginning of the War of Resistance against Japan, but also as the prelude to World War II. As part of Xi’s “rejuvenation narrative,” this serves to increase the standing of China not only domestically, but also internationally. The language utilized by the 918HM and the WRJM is practically identical, further demonstrating the nationalization of a regional narrative. The 918HM website, as

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<sup>369</sup> Denton, 9.

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.* The Jiangqiao Battle of Resistance was a battle between Kwantung Army and Chinese resisters following the Mukden Incident in the Northeast that occurred at Nenjiang Bridge across the Nen River near Jiangqiao. This involved Ma Zhanshan, who disobeyed the KMT orders of nonresistance and became a national hero in the aftermath of the battle.

<sup>371</sup> After the initial Battle of Jiangqiao, Ma Zhanshan actually opted to collaborate with the Kwantung Army before defecting once again in April of 1932. This inconvenient truth is not mentioned in any museums where he is depicted as a patriotic hero. Rana Mitter, *The Manchurian Myth: Nationalism, Resistance, and Collaboration in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 46.

discussed in Chapter 3, quotes Xi Jinping's words in identifying the Mukden Incident as "the prelude to the global Anti-Fascist War."<sup>372</sup> Similarly, the introduction to the Mukden Incident exhibit in the WRJM remarks that "the September 18th Incident opened the prelude [sic] to the World Anti-Fascist War."<sup>373</sup> This is noteworthy in highlighting the national connection in formulating historical language for museums in the Northeast and in Beijing.

In addition, the Mukden Incident exhibit utilizes exaggerated language to describe the domestic response to the Japanese occupation: "the brutal invasion launched by Japanese militarists aroused courageous resistance among all Chinese people."<sup>374</sup> This nationalizes what was a regional struggle by making it relevant to all of China, furthering the misconception that there was indeed a national crisis following the Mukden Incident. The exhibit displays photocopies of documents that show subsequent calls for resistance to Japanese aggression. However, this section is misleadingly titled, "CPC Called for Armed Resistance against Japanese Aggression, Evoking National Salvation Campaigns." In effect, this blurs the line between the CCP and other patriotic Chinese, in the Northeast and elsewhere in China, before the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. In reality, although the leftist National Salvation Movement did include many CCP members and share certain viewpoints, such as opposition to the KMT's "non-resistance policy" to Japan, the two groups cannot be conflated.<sup>375</sup>

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<sup>372</sup> "Jiu Yi Ba Lishi Bowuguan" [The 9-18 Historical Museum], retrieved from [www.918museum.org.cn](http://www.918museum.org.cn) on May 29, 2019.

<sup>373</sup> This is the English translation used. "Di Er Danyuan: Riben Fadong Jiu Yi Ba Shibian Zhongguo Xingqi Kangri Jiuwang Yundong" [Section Two: Japan Launched the Mukden Incident, Kindling Anti-Japanese and National Salvation Movements across China], Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum, July 2017.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> As a general term, the National Salvation Movement refers to a wide range of organizations that took action, often political, in response to Japanese aggression in China in the 1930s. When used more specifically, it refers to organizations that formed in the wake of the December 9th Incident in 1935. This was a movement led by Chinese students in Beijing to protest continued Japanese aggression in northern China. For more on the National Salvation Movement, see Parks M. Coble, "The National Salvation Movement and Social Networks in Republican

Going beyond its function as a “site of memory,” the WRJM also highlights the overall role of CCP leadership in the Northeastern struggle against Japan between 1931 and 1937. All resistance to the puppet-state of Manchukuo during this time, particularly the Northeast Anti-Japanese United Army, is credited to be under the aegis of CCP leadership, further equating Chinese resistance with CCP resistance.<sup>376</sup> The placard describing the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army is also chronologically vague, claiming the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Army “strongly supported the War of Resistance against Japan nationwide,” presumably meaning after 1937.<sup>377</sup>

As a “site of memory,” however, the WRJM is still sure to draw attention to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and its aftermath. July 7, 1937 is depicted as an important stand-alone date as well as an escalation of the Japanese aggression initiated by the Mukden Incident. Unlike the Mukden Incident, however, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident is characterized as “starting the nationwide War of Resistance against Japan.”<sup>378</sup> Again, this language mirrors that utilized at the 918HM. The CCP is construed as the responsible party for forming the Second United Front with the KMT, a powerful narrative that depicts the CCP as the ultimate leader of all Chinese resistance.<sup>379</sup>

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Shanghai” in Nara Dillon and Jean C. Oi, ed., *Middlemen, Social Networks, and State-building in Republican Shanghai* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>376</sup> This is despite the fact that the international communist movement was originally hostile to the volunteer armies that composed the origin of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army. Anthony Coogan, “Northeast China and the Origins of the Anti-Japanese United Front,” *Modern China* 20, 3 (1994), 285.

<sup>377</sup> “Di San Danyuan: Zhongguo Gongchandang Lingdao Xia de Dongbei Kangri Lianjun” [Section 3: The Northeastern Anti-Japanese United Army under the Leadership of the CCP], Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan Museum, July 2017.

<sup>378</sup> “Di Er Bu Fen: Quan Minzu Kangzhan” [Chapter Two: The Nationwide War of Resistance], Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan Museum, July 2017.

<sup>379</sup> The Second United Front was formed after the Xi’an Incident of December 1936 and was largely due to the efforts of warlords Zhang Xueliang and Yang Hucheng. After the kidnapping of Chiang Kaishek by Zhang and Yang’s forces, the CCP leaned towards Chiang’s elimination. It only changed approaches and advocated for a united front

The Marco Polo Bridge Incident, as with the Mukden Incident, is also subject to the process of internationalization by the museum curators. If the Mukden Incident was the prologue to the Anti-Fascist War, then the Marco Polo Bridge Incident “opened the world’s first large-scale anti-fascist battlefield.”<sup>380</sup> This highlights the integral role that China, often utilized interchangeably with the CCP, played not only domestically, but also in World War II as a responsible global power – a narrative that has strong implications for the PRC’s foreign relations today. In the past, the role China played in World War II has not been recognized by the West, and the CCP currently seeks to remedy this historical oversight.<sup>381</sup> The WRJM connects China’s role in World War II not just to the past, but also to the present, demonstrating that the function of this museum is just as much about 21st century political concerns as it is about history:

The Chinese people suffered huge national sacrifices for the victory of the Anti-Fascist War and made great historical contributions toward maintaining world peace...China will firmly take the path of peaceful development, adhere to its independent foreign policy of peace, and promote the great spirit of the war of resistance against Japanese aggression. Moreover, China is willing to make arduous efforts to realize its two “century goals,” realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and promoting the lofty cause of peace and development of mankind.<sup>382</sup>

Here, noble Chinese efforts in the War of Resistance against Japan are utilized to justify the CCP’s foreign policy under Xi Jinping as well as his domestic policy of promoting the “Chinese dream.”<sup>383</sup>

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with the KMT after strict orders arrived from Stalin and Moscow to negotiate a peaceful settlement. van de Ven, 61-64.

<sup>380</sup> “Di Er Bu Fen: Quan Minzu Kangzhan.”

<sup>381</sup> “Put simply,” notes Rana Mitter, “that history disappeared down a hole created by the early Cold War, from which it has only recently reappeared.” Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 10.

<sup>382</sup> “Jieshu Yu” [Conclusion], Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan Museum, July 2017.

<sup>383</sup> The concluding remarks include rhetoric that is very typical for Xi Jinping, such as the “Chinese dream” and the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” As previously noted, the rhetoric of “rejuvenation” began under Jiang Zemin and was further amplified under first Hu Jintao and then Xi Jinping. Wang Zheng, *Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics and Foreign Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 129-131.

Also in service to the CCP's contemporary political agenda, the WRJM acknowledges the strong role played by the KMT in the war after 1937. This rather unprecedented lionization of KMT efforts under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek is in stark contrast to the Mao-era narrative that vilified the KMT war efforts, or rather the lack thereof. In the WRJM, in contrast, the KMT is noted to have "prioritized national benefits first" (as opposed to self-interest), and KMT troops are portrayed as having "*tenaciously* resisted Japanese invaders in the four decisive battles in the front battlefields."<sup>384</sup> The WRJM's Hall of Martyrs balances Nationalist and Communist defenses against the Japanese, equivalating the roles of the CCP and the KMT in the war.<sup>385</sup> In the rehabilitation of the KMT, the CCP's new narrative of legitimization is accommodated, promoting a broad Chinese patriotism that goes beyond socioeconomic class or Party affiliation. Furthermore, this is in service of seeking improved cross-strait relations with the KMT on Taiwan. A temporary exhibition present at the WRJM in the summer of 2017 demonstrates this. Titled "Exhibition of the History of Taiwan Compatriots' Resistance against Japanese Aggression," the exhibit makes a not-so-subtle nod to China's "One China" policy, introducing itself as "One Family Cross-Straits: Taiwan is an Inseparable Part of China's Territory."<sup>386</sup>

The WRJM has strayed from its original "site of memory" function in order to accommodate the nationalized narrative of the fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan,

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<sup>384</sup> "Di Si Dan Yuan: Gong Yu Waiwu – Fensui Rijun Suzhan Sujue Tumou" [Section Four: The Nation United Together Against External Aggression, Shattering the Japanese Army's Plot for a Quick Invasion], Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum, August 2017.

<sup>385</sup> Furthermore, in the Hall of Martyrs, the names of the martyrs on the stone tablets featured around the room are ordered according to time of death, with no distinction being made according to which Chinese army they served. Mitter, "Behind the Scenes at the Museum," 286-287.

<sup>386</sup> "Liang'an Yi Jia; Taiwan Shi Zhongguo Lingtu Bu Ke Fenge de Yi Bu Fen" [One Family Cross-Straits: Taiwan Is an Inseparable Part of China's Territory], Temporary Exhibit, Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum, July 2017.

highlighting the Mukden Incident and its aftermath. However, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident still comprises an important part of the war narrative and is portrayed as the starting point of *total* resistance against Japan, whereas the Mukden Incident is the starting point of *partial* resistance. Importantly, this language adopted by the WRJM was earlier utilized in exhibits at the 918HM, demonstrating a shift from regional to national. Linguistically, this maneuver accomplishes several objectives for the war narrative in granting both dates a proper place in the new teleological history of the war. First, the gravity of the aftermath of July 7, 1937 is maintained while simultaneously making clear the symbolic importance of September 18, 1931. Second, the exhibit underlines the CCP's critical role in resisting Japan before 1937, bolstering its claim to represent the Chinese people in wartime. Third, this grants the CCP double legitimacy in the global Anti-Fascist War, as it can claim that the China battlefield witnessed both the prologue and the first major battlefield of World War II.

### **The Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall's Shift from Victimhood to Victory**

While the aforementioned museums contain exhibits that portray Japanese military atrocities in the War of Resistance, the Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invaders (NMMH)'s entire function as a "site of memory" is to commemorate the inhumane Nanjing Massacre. However, even the NMMH has been affected by the nationalization of the Northeastern fourteen-year war narrative. The Mukden Incident is prominently portrayed in the museum's permanent exhibit as the beginning of the War of Resistance. Further effects of Xi's "rejuvenation narrative" include a new Victory Hall, which was opened in 2015 to commemorate China's resounding victory over Japan in 1945. This hall has none of the gloomy, downcast atmosphere of the main museum, but rather is triumphal in nature and serves the purpose of internationalizing China's war efforts.

The NMMH's overarching focus is on the horrors of the Nanjing Massacre committed by the Japanese military against innocent Chinese civilians in the six weeks following December 9, 1937. In this way, the NMMH serves a function similar to the Unit 731 Museum – both were conscientiously erected in historically significant locations where egregious Japanese war crimes occurred. Unit 731 Museum is at the site of the Japanese military's cruel experimentation on human subjects for the purposes of biological warfare; the NMMH represents the wanton slaughter of an estimated 300,000 non-combatants in brutal and inhumane ways.<sup>387</sup> After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, although the Nanjing Massacre remained a topic of considerable interest to locals, the CCP did not draw attention to the event as a Japanese war crime. Rather, the Nanjing Massacre was used as a propaganda subject first to attack the United States during the Korean War and the KMT government on Taiwan during the 1960s.<sup>388</sup> However, starting in the 1980s, when the NMMH was built, its symbolic import has increased at the national level to represent the barbarity of Japanese military atrocities in the War of Resistance against Japan.<sup>389</sup> As part of the greater shift to patriotic education in the 1980s that emphasized the Century of Humiliation and deemphasized class struggle, the NMMH understandably focused on the fateful events of December 1937 to January 1938.

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<sup>387</sup> Another commonly used name for this event is the "Rape of Nanking" due to the rape of what is estimated to be on the scale of tens of thousands of women. The number "300,000" is on the high end of the various estimates of the death toll and is the official Chinese government figure. However, most scholars concur that the total number of Chinese victims was on the scale of hundreds of thousands. Sun Zhaiwei, "Causes of the Nanking Massacre" in *Nanking, 1937: Memory and Healing*, ed. Fei Fei Li, Robert Sabella and David Liu (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 36-37.

<sup>388</sup> There were American officials and missionaries that stayed in the city during the Nanjing Massacre; the CCP claimed that these Americans did nothing to resist the Japanese slaughter of Chinese civilians. In reality, however, Americans such as Minnie Vautrin saved thousands of Chinese lives. The Nationalist army abandoned their capital city days before the massacre. Joshua A. Fogel, ed., *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2000), 24-26.

<sup>389</sup> Joshua Fogel notes that the Nanjing Massacre has become an ideal symbol of Chinese suffering at Japanese hands during the War of Resistance against Japan because whereas war crimes such as human experimentation of Unit 731 and the utilization of "comfort women" for the Japanese military occurred more slowly over a prolonged period of time, the Nanjing Massacre's duration was shorter and more intense. *Ibid.*, 58.

The NMMH was first opened on the symbolically significant date of August 15, 1985 to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II. Designed by renowned architect Qi Kang, it was purposefully built on top of the “Mass Grave of Ten Thousand Corpses,” a site excavated in the early 1980s. This ensured the NMMH’s powerful function as a “site of memory” moving forward. In all, the NMMH has undergone four phases of construction and expansion completed in 1985, 1997, 2007, and 2017, respectively. Only the first two phases were planned by Qi; the third and fourth were added later according to the evolving sociopolitical conditions in the 2000s. According to Qi, the motif of Phase One was to reflect disaster and grief, with a somber tone of commemoration for the victims.<sup>390</sup> It included the “graveyard grounds” and the main historical exhibit on the Nanjing Massacre.

Phase Two was completed on December 10, 1997 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, and included a new L-shaped entranceway and several larger-than-life sculptures titled “A Disaster to Jinling.” Importantly, it dynamically shifted the Nanjing Massacre from a historical tragedy frozen in the past to a current struggle for remembrance in the CCP’s current political climate. Whereas the architectural layout of Phase One was meant to evoke grief, Phase Two was meant to evoke righteous indignation and connect past history with a present determination to achieve national greatness. As Qi Kang notes in his memoir:

Upon entering the exhibition, visitors’ hearts pounded with indignation, and it seemed to them that the hall was resonant with the wails and shrieks of the aggrieved spirits of the dead. All of this depicts the contemporary circumstances, and of that part of history written in blood and tears. The perpetual truth of history will always remind us that national disaster can only awaken us to exert

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<sup>390</sup> At the same time as he built the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, Qi Kang was also designing the Monument for the Yuhuatai Martyrs’ Mausoleum, also in Nanjing. However, in his recollections of the design process, Qi acknowledged that he had very different ideas in mind for the two sites, although “the gist of life and death should be embodied in both.” The Yuhuatai Martyrs’ Mausoleum was built “to commemorate those revolutionary martyrs who died a heroic death for [the] Chinese people’s liberation and for aspiring to the communist ideal,” while the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall focused on tragedy, disaster, and death. Qi Kang, *Qi Kang Jianzhu Sheji Zuopin Xilie 2: Qinhua Rijun Nanjing Datusha Yunan Tongbao Jinianguan* [Qi Kang’s Works of Construction and Design, Series 2: The Memorial Hall of the Victims in the Nanjing Massacre by the Japanese Invaders] (Shenyang: Liaoning Kexue Jishu Chubanshe, 1999), 7-8.



ourselves and that the prosperity and strength of our motherland is the only safeguard of our country's dignity.<sup>391</sup>

Qi's description of Phase Two of the exhibit manifests the strong connection between past and present, between remembering past injustice and the formation of current national identity to propel the country forward. Such connection was officially manifested by the NMMH's role in the CCP's patriotic education: since 1996, it has become mandatory for Chinese schoolchildren to visit the museum.<sup>392</sup> In addition, the NMMH made a conscientious effort to become a broad, inclusive patriotic endeavor for all Chinese not only in the PRC but also in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan.<sup>393</sup> In 1997, as Phase Two of the NMMH was constructed, it was financed not only through subsidies from the Nanjing municipality, but also from "Hong Kong compatriots."<sup>394</sup>



*Figure 2: Part of the "Graveyard Grounds" in the NMMH. Photograph taken by the author on November 3, 2017.*

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<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>392</sup> Fogel, 36.

<sup>393</sup> In 1993, Hong Kong was still governed by the British, and Macau by the Portuguese. Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, and Macau in 1999 under the "one country two systems" policy. This connection of War of Resistance exhibits to a broad, inclusive patriotic endeavor is not unique to the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall, but can be observed at various museums commemorating the War of Resistance against Japan around the PRC. A temporary exhibit in the People's War of Resistance against Japan Museum outside of Beijing, for instance, was dedicated to the resistance efforts of "Taiwanese compatriots" during the war.

<sup>394</sup> Qi, 9.

Opened ten years after Phase Two on an equally symbolically important date – December 13, 2007, the 70th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre, Phase Three of the NMMH exhibit was distinctive from the two earlier phases designed by Qi Kang and added a certain air of grandeur to the previous sentiments of solemn commemoration and fierce indignation. Whereas the former Memorial Hall was barely visible from the street, Phase Three added an additional 20,000 square meters to the previous space and included a reflecting pool with sculptures of victims and an expanded memorial hall that included both a dark “contemplation room” and a ceremonial courtyard to be utilized for significant events, such as the annual commemoration of the Nanjing Massacre that is now held there on December 10th.<sup>395</sup>

Despite the powerful “site of memory” function of the NMMH, the museum has also been subject to the nationalization of the fourteen-year war narrative. This is evidenced by the main permanent exhibit, which has been recently renovated. The historical backdrop to the Nanjing Massacre mentions three key instances of Japanese aggression:

Japanese militarists staged the Mukden Incident and seized Northeast China in 1931. In 1937, Japan instigated the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and launched an all-round war of aggression against China. About a month later, the August 13<sup>th</sup> Incident marked the start of a massive attack on Shanghai by the Japanese army. After seizing Shanghai, the Japanese army invaded Nanjing, then capital of China.<sup>396</sup>

The inclusion of the Mukden Incident, Marco Polo Bridge Incident, and August 13th Incident signifies the prioritization given to these three events by the museum planners as important components of the War of Resistance against Japan. The reason for mentioning the Marco Polo

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<sup>395</sup> Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014), 147.

<sup>396</sup> The preface is trilingual and includes Chinese, English, and Japanese. In the Chinese version, the “Mukden Incident” reads the “September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident,” which gives more specificity regarding the date. “Lunxian Qian de Xingshi” [Situation before Falling into Enemy Hands], “Renlei de Haojie – Qinhua Rijun Nanjing Datusha Shishi Zhan” [A Human Calamity – Exhibition on the Historical Facts of the Invading Japanese Army’s Nanjing Massacre], *Xuni Zhanlan* [Virtual Exhibits], retrieved from <http://m.19371213.net:8080/njdts/> on 24 September 2019.

Bridge Incident and the August 13th Incident is straightforward, as they are easily placed on a historical trajectory that ends with the Nanjing Massacre. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident precipitated the Japanese military's rapid campaign southward in 1937, towards Shanghai and Nanjing. Only a month later, the August 13th Incident initiated the Battle of Shanghai, a bloody and prolonged battle that lasted three months and demoralized Japanese troops immediately before they marched on Nanjing.<sup>397</sup>

The Mukden Incident, on the other hand, is disproportionately highlighted when considering the subject matter, demonstrating the new national prioritization of this date. It is a less obvious choice to include in the historical trajectory leading to the Nanjing Massacre as it preceded the latter by six years, involved a rather different set of historical circumstances, and occurred in the far-off Northeast. Nevertheless, in the exhibition room detailing the lead-up to the Nanjing Massacre, the Mukden Incident is highlighted on two separate wall placards – both in the preface and “The Situation in Nanjing before Its Fall.” The Marco Polo Bridge Incident is also included on both placards, but the August 13th Incident surprisingly is not mentioned in the preface. This shows that even though the Battle of Shanghai is much more relevant to the Nanjing Massacre from a historical perspective of geographical space, chronological time, and direct impact, the NMMH still chooses to showcase the central government's rewriting of the history of the War of Resistance against Japan that has increasingly prioritized the starting date of September 18, 1931.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> By most accounts, the Japanese military had expected an easy victory in Shanghai and were angered by the devastating losses their army suffered over the duration of over 3 months of intense fighting. Many scholars reference this as an important factor leading up to the Nanjing Massacre; in their march from Shanghai to Nanjing, many Japanese soldiers were frustrated and hungry for revenge. See, for instance, Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 126-127.

<sup>398</sup> “Lunxian Qian de Xingshi” [Situation before Falling into Enemy Hands] and “Qian Yan” [Preface], *Xuni Zhanlan* [Virtual Exhibits], retrieved from <http://m.19371213.net:8080/njds/> on 24 September 2019.

Even though the NMMH highlights Chinese victimhood, accounts of Chinese heroism and bravery have become an important part of the contemporary narrative. This is especially the case in the recently constructed Victory Exhibition Hall (VEH), which also depicts the nationalization of the Northeastern regional war narrative. Furthermore, it demonstrates the far-reaching effects of Xi's "rejuvenation narrative" and the accompanying drive for the internationalization of the War of Resistance against Japan. The VEH opened on December 10, 2015 to commemorate the 78th anniversary of the Nanjing Massacre and the 70th anniversary of victory in World War II, and represents the most recent addition to the NMMH complex.<sup>399</sup> It provides a comprehensive trajectory of the War of Resistance against Japan that centers on the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire on September 2, 1945. In this way, its function can be compared to that of the Puppet Emperor Palace Museum's Exhibition Hall on the Occupation of the Northeast, which was opened in 2006 (see Chapter 2). Both of these exhibition halls have served to nationalize a fourteen-year war narrative that largely overrides the museums' respective functions as "sites of memory."

In contrast with the previous exhibitions of the NMMH, the environment of which was solemn and mournful, the VEH was designed to simultaneously inspire in visitors a sense of "the joy of victory" and the "realization of peace."<sup>400</sup> At the entrance, the viewer is confronted with the "Three Must Prevails" text in multiple languages: "Righteousness will prevail, peace will prevail, and the people will prevail."<sup>401</sup> Upon entering the building, a huge digital screen looms

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<sup>399</sup> "Guan Shi Shiji" [History of the Museum's Achievements], retrieved from 19371213.com.cn/about/history on 17 September 2020.

<sup>400</sup> "Nanjing Datusha Jinianguan Xinguan Kaishi Biaoda Shengli Xiyue le!" [The Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall's New Exhibit Has Started to Convey the Joy of Victory!], 22 September 2017, retrieved from [https://military.china.com/jctp/11172988/20170922/31499980\\_all.html](https://military.china.com/jctp/11172988/20170922/31499980_all.html) on 25 September 2019.

<sup>401</sup> Interestingly, the text here is included in Chinese, English, Korean, and Russian, but not in Japanese. Throughout the rest of the exhibit, some of the information is bilingual (Chinese and English), but it is clear that the target audience is domestic.

before visitors as they step onto an escalator that will lead them down to the main exhibit. With fireworks exploding in the background, the Chinese text reads “September 3rd: The Commemoration Date to Celebrate the Victories of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan and the World Anti-Fascist War.” Pictures of soldiers and civilians celebrating that day from various locations within China and across the worlds are included – Harbin, Chongqing, Tianjin, Yan’an, Taiwan, Paris, London, New York, etc.<sup>402</sup> Along with photocopies of several old Chinese newspaper clippings announcing Japan’s unconditional surrender, this grand entryway sets a jubilatory tone full of pomp and circumstance for the exhibit as a whole. In addition, it firmly places the Chinese victory against Japan within an international context.



*Figure 3: View from the Escalator in the Victory Exhibition Hall. The display highlights the date of Japanese surrender and celebrations around the world. From left to right, one can see photos from Japan, Taipei, Berlin, Moscow, New York, Shandong, and Yan’an. Screenshot taken from museum website on March 25, 2020.*

As is the case with the 918HM and the affiliated Allied Prisoners Site Exhibition in Shenyang, the VEH highlights the critical role that China played on the global stage in the Anti-Fascist War, an important consideration for China’s international reputation today. Similar to the 918HM, the identity of “China” is intentionally left vague, leaving viewer to equate “China”

<sup>402</sup> Entrance Hall, Shengli Zhanlanguan [Victory Exhibition Hall], *Xuni Zhanlan* [Virtual Exhibits], retrieved from <http://m.19371213.net:8080/sgbs/> on 25 September 2019.

with the CCP during World War II. This rewriting of history is made clear with four quotes highlighted at the beginning of the exhibit that praise the efforts of the Chinese people in the war against Japan. Each quote is attributed to one Allied leader – Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong, implying that Mao represented “China” during the war.<sup>403</sup> This completely erases the historical fact that Chiang Kai-shek and the Nanjing government of the Republic of China represented “China” in the international arena during World War II.<sup>404</sup>

Towards the beginning of the exhibit, the importance of the Mukden Incident and the years preceding the Marco Polo Bridge Incident is made clear. After the triumphal tone of the entrance, the exhibit continues down a hall that is organized like a timeline. Here, year markers from 1931 to 1945 are embossed in gold and inlaid in the floor in chronological order, while relevant events are listed in red on the adjoining walls. Each year takes up the same amount of physical space, despite the relative dearth of events pre-1937 in comparison with 1937 onward. For example, the only events listed for 1932 are the January 28th Incident and the formation of the puppet state of Manchukuo. Other events of note include the 1934 formation of the Northeastern Revolutionary Army, the 1935 Huabei Incident, the 1936 formation of the Northeastern Anti-Japanese Alliance, and the 1936 Xi'an Incident.<sup>405</sup> The message is clear – the

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<sup>403</sup> Mao's highlighted quotation is a little different in tone from the rest as it highlights the international element of China's struggle against Japan: "Our enemies are global enemies, China's war of resistance is a global resistance." *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> Chiang met personally with Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin in the Cairo Conference of November 22-26, 1943 to determine the Allied strategy in the war against Japan and, assuming Japan's defeat, to plan for postwar Asia. He was held in high esteem by Roosevelt, who considered him to be one of the "Big Four" wartime leaders (alongside the US, Britain, and the USSR), although Churchill disagreed with and deeply resented Chiang's support of Indian nationalism. R.A.C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History, Revised Edition* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2001), 127-128.

<sup>405</sup> In CCP historiography, the CCP is given much of the credit for bringing about a peaceful solution to the 1936 Xi'an Incident and precipitating the formation of the Second United Front, in which the CCP and the KMT formed a temporary ceasefire to focus on resisting Japan.

years 1931-1937 matter, and the extended war timeline has been nationalized to demonstrate the leadership of the CCP in resisting Japan long before the KMT abandoned its non-resistance policy.

The international importance of the fourteen years of Chinese resistance is reiterated repeatedly in the exhibition hall. The VEH portrays the crimes committed by fascist regimes in tandem, grouping Japanese militarism with Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy and Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany.<sup>406</sup> Three dates are highlighted: September 18, 1931; July 7, 1937; and September 1, 1939, purposefully linking the War of Resistance against Japan with Hitler's invasion of Poland and the start of World War II in Europe.<sup>407</sup> Although aid from international allies to China is acknowledged, another crucial part of the narrative is that China was able to defeat Japan largely on its own. As an exhibit placard states unabashedly, "China resisted and pinned down the overwhelming majority of the forces of the Japanese army, navy and air force for a long time."<sup>408</sup> This is a similar viewpoint to that of certain Chinese scholars such as PLA Military Institute historian Luo Huanzhang, who claims that China's role in defeating Japan far eclipsed that of the United States.<sup>409</sup> China's essential contributions to the Anti-Fascist War in defeating Japan are further compounded by the nationalization of the fourteen-year timeline, demonstrating that China fought Japan for a full decade longer than the United States did.

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<sup>406</sup> As the name "Anti-Fascist War" (Fan Faxisi Zhanzheng) makes clear, Chinese scholars consider Japanese militarism to be just as fascist as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This is rather different from scholarship in the West, which sometimes groups "Japanese militarism" or "Japanism" as its own entity. For an excellent manuscript on the similarities of fascist movements in Italy and Japan and a compelling argument as to the fascist nature of Japanese militarism, see Reto Hoffman, *The Fascist Effect: Japan and Italy, 1915-1952* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2015).

<sup>407</sup> "Qinlüezhe de Zui'e" [The Crimes of the Invaders], Victory Exhibition Hall, November 2017.

<sup>408</sup> "Zhongguo dui Shijie Fan Faxisi Zhanzheng de Gongxian he Guoji Liliang Yuanhua Kangzhan" [China's Contributions to the Global Anti-Fascist War and the International Community's Aid to China], Victory Exhibition Hall, November 2017.

<sup>409</sup> Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 76.

China's role in World War II, acting as a responsible global actor in resisting fascism for 14 years, is firmly linked to contemporary geopolitics. The end of the VEH concludes with the following message:

China...later became a Member of the UN Security Council. After its founding, adhering to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, the People's Republic of China participated with a positive attitude in international affairs and UN peacekeeping operations, becoming an active promoter of establishing peaceful, stable, just and reasonable international political and economic order and a major force to safeguard world peace and order.<sup>410</sup>

The "China" of World War II is conflated with the People's Republic of China and the CCP as a responsible world power. There is no mention of the fact that the KMT represented "China" on the world stage during World War II, nor that it was the Republic of China that was a Permanent Member of the Security Council from 1945 until 1971.

The NMMH thus demonstrates not only the nationalization of the fourteen-year war narrative, but also how this contributes to the CCP's efforts to further internationalize its war efforts. As the NMMH permanent exhibit shows, this ends up disproportionately highlighting the Mukden Incident despite its tenuous connection with the Nanjing Massacre. Furthermore, the VEH manifests that shifting the war's starting date to September 18, 1931 makes a stronger case for China's international contributions to the Anti-Fascist War, adding six more years to China's struggle against the Japanese variety of fascism. Since "China" is equated with the CCP in this narrative, this new timeline further bolsters the "rejuvenation narrative," strengthening the CCP's claim to be a reliable global partner in addition to legitimizing its continued domestic rule.

### **The "Road to Rejuvenation" as the Bellwether for the Current National Narrative**

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<sup>410</sup> "Zhongguo Jiji Weihe Shijie Heping Zhixu" [China Actively Safeguards World Peace and Order], Victory Exhibition Hall, November 2017.



When the current national narrative on “national rejuvenation” is featured in the museums discussed above, the bellwether is the National Museum of China (NMC)’s “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit. This exhibit serves as Beijing’s official narrative on Chinese modern history and the role of the War of Resistance against Japan therein. The inclusion of the fourteen-year war narrative and “national rejuvenation” in the NMC is crucial to the subsequent nationalization of these themes across the country.

Located at the eastern end of Tiananmen Square in the very heart of Beijing, the National Museum of China was first opened to the public in its current form in March 2011 after nearly a decade of renovation.<sup>411</sup> It is an amalgamation of what were formerly two separate museums, the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and the Museum of Chinese History.<sup>412</sup> The historical trajectories of the museum’s predecessors, particularly evident in the case of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution, represent ongoing efforts by the top echelons of CCP leadership to promulgate an official Party history to the public.

The CCP first formulated the idea of building a museum to commemorate its history as early as the Jiangxi Soviet period (1931-1934), at a time when its very survival was in question.<sup>413</sup> Due to political vicissitudes, however, the CCP was unable to start planning in earnest for this sort of museum until after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, after which a Preparatory Committee of the Museum of the Revolution was established.<sup>414</sup> In 1958, the CCP

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<sup>411</sup> Edward Vickers, “Transcending Victimhood: Japan in the public historical museums of Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China,” *China Perspectives* (2013/4), 17-28.

<sup>412</sup> The Museum of the Chinese Revolution was housed in the northern wing of the building complex, and the Museum of Chinese History in the southern wing. Chang-tai Hung, “The Red Line: Creating a Museum of the Chinese Revolution,” *The China Quarterly* (No. 184, Dec. 2005), 921.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 915-917.

<sup>414</sup> As shown in Chapter 1, the CCP had already opened the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall in 1948 in the Northeast, which it had gained military control over earlier than Beijing. *Ibid.*, 915-917.

Politburo decided at a meeting in Beidaihe that ten buildings, including the Museum of the Chinese Revolution and the Great Hall of the People, would be constructed by October 1, 1959 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the PRC. The CCP Propaganda Department was heavily involved in the creation of the Museum of the Chinese Revolution's exhibits, which opened to the public on another day rife with symbolism – July 1, 1961, the fortieth anniversary of the CCP.<sup>415</sup>

In particular, the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit reflects the CCP's attempts over the past few decades to rework its historical narrative in light of massive sociopolitical upheavals since 1989. The exhibit was first staged in 2007, was again shown in 2009 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the PRC, and was opened as a permanent exhibit on March 1, 2011.<sup>416</sup> Thus, the national rejuvenation narrative was promoted by the NMC earlier than museums elsewhere, including the 918HM. This demonstrates that the fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan initiative originated in Beijing and was only subsequently deployed in the Northeast, which demonstrates a process of subsequent localization of a national theme.

Recent reception of the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit in the top echelons of the Party also attests to connections between the CCP and this official narrative. The current leader of the CCP, Xi Jinping, has already visited the National Museum of China three times in his official capacity after his election to the post of general secretary of the CCP. Xi's visit to the “The Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit with the 18th Politburo Standing Committee, which was well publicized

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<sup>415</sup> The Museum of the Chinese Revolution's exhibits were originally supposed to open to the public in 1959. However, due to disagreement from some top Party officials over the content of the preliminary exhibits (only open to those in the top echelons of the Party), the opening was delayed until a consensus could be reached that the exhibit was sufficiently representative of the “Red Line” and Mao Zedong Thought. *Ibid.*, 920-929.

<sup>416</sup> “Road to Rejuvenation to Reopen at National Museum of China,” retrieved from <http://www.hnmuseum.com/en/aboutus/road-rejuvenation-reopen-national-museum-china> on 21 September 2020.

by the press, came less than two weeks after he took office, demonstrating the extent to which he prioritized the museum and its portrayal of China's modern history.<sup>417</sup> In the past few years, Xi has made two additional visits to the museum in his official capacity, most recently leading the 19th Politburo Standing Committee in a visit on November 13, 2018 to a special exhibit commemorating the 40th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms.<sup>418</sup>

The "Road to Rejuvenation" exhibit builds on the Museum of the Revolution's older permanent exhibit established during the Mao years to display the Party's history, with a few key differences. Originally, the exhibit reflected revolutionary history as divided into three historical periods based on Mao's influential 1940 essay "On Democracy" – the Old Democratic Revolution (1840-1919), the New Democratic Revolution (1919-1949), and the socialist period (post-1949).<sup>419</sup> The "Road to Rejuvenation" exhibit is organized similarly, relating the story of China's descent into a semi-colonial, semi-feudal status during the Century of Humiliation, its salvation under the aegis of CCP leadership, and its eventual return to its former greatness after 1949. However, unlike during the Mao era, when the Marxist narrative of class struggle dominated historiography, the "Road to Rejuvenation" exhibit emphasizes that it was Chinese of all socioeconomic classes that resisted China's humiliating semi-colonial status in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fervently sought national salvation.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>417</sup> "Zhe Xie Nian, Xi Jinping Zong Shuji Qu Guo de Bowuguan" [The Museums Secretary Xi Jinping Has Visited During These Years], National Museum of China, 18 May 2017, retrieved from [http://www.chnmuseum.cn/zx/gbxw/201705/t20170518\\_1882.shtml](http://www.chnmuseum.cn/zx/gbxw/201705/t20170518_1882.shtml) on 16 September 2019.

<sup>418</sup> Xi's other visit to the museum was for diplomatic purposes – he accompanied visiting Saudi Arabian King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to the special exhibit "The Road to Arabia – Exhibit of Unearthed Saudi Historical Relics" [Alabo Zhi Lu – Shate Chutu Wenwu Zhan] on March 16, 2017. *Ibid.* "Xi Jinping Cangan Qingzhu Gaige Kaifang 40 Nian Daxing Zhanlan" [Xi Jinping Visits a Large-Scale Exhibit Celebrating 40 Years of Reform and Opening Up], National Museum of China, 13 November 2018, retrieved from [http://www.chnmuseum.cn/zx/gbxw/201811/t20181113\\_2154.shtml](http://www.chnmuseum.cn/zx/gbxw/201811/t20181113_2154.shtml) on 16 September 2019.

<sup>419</sup> Chang, 926-927.

<sup>420</sup> The twin evils of foreign imperialism and domestic feudalism are cited in China's humiliating degradation to semi-colonial status. "Introduction to the National Museum of China."

It is the entirety of the Chinese nation, then, not just the proletariat, that is on the “road to rejuvenation,” irrespective of socioeconomic class. The theme of “rejuvenation” itself represents a vision for China’s past, present, and future under CCP leadership first utilized by Jiang Zemin and further elaborated by both Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping.<sup>421</sup> Alongside this inclusive nationalist narrative, though, the “Road to Rejuvenation” is still sure to reiterate that this effort was led by the CCP. In fact, the exhibit equates the CCP with the modern phase of the Chinese nation at multiple junctures, a nation that is anachronistically traced back hundreds of years, creating a narrative in which “China” during the high Qing period is followed by the decline of the Qing after the Opium Wars.<sup>422</sup> The CCP is ultimately portrayed here as the only legitimate leadership for China during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, largely because it has been and remains the only party capable of rejuvenating the Chinese nation.<sup>423</sup>

As a further testament to the localization of a national narrative, a number of museums in the Northeast and elsewhere have subsequently erected temporary displays of the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit. For instance, the Liaoning Provincial Museum, which is the oldest museum in “new China,” has displayed the “Road to Rejuvenation” in a central location on the museum’s first floor since May 28, 2017.<sup>424</sup> Examining the exhibit, which is an abridged version

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<sup>421</sup> The application of the term “rejuvenation” (*fuxing*) to the Chinese nation replaced the former catchphrase utilized by Deng Xiaoping of “invigoration” (*zhenxing*). Wang, 129-131. Certain nationalist historians within the PRC, however, actually trace the roots of this term back to Mao Zedong and even Sun Yatsen. Yan Xuetong, “The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 10.26 (2001), 33-39, 34.

<sup>422</sup> The idea of a “Chinese nation” was not actually discussed by Qing intellectuals until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it began to be utilized by reformers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. Interestingly, the CCP interpretation of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese history is similar in many respects to John K. Fairbank and the “Harvard school,” which largely interpret Chinese modernization and development as a reaction to Western imperialism. See John K. Fairbank, *The Great Chinese Revolution: 1800-1985* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987), 7-8.

<sup>423</sup> “Introduction to the National Museum of China,” National Museum of China.

<sup>424</sup> “Fuxing Zhi Lu” [Road to Rejuvenation], Chenlie Zhanlan [Exhibitions], Linshi Tezhan [Special Temporary Exhibits], Liaoningsheng Bowuguan [Liaoning Provincial Museum], retrieved from <http://www.lnmuseum.com.cn/news/index.asp?ChannelID=631> on 17 September 2019.

of the Beijing edition, sheds light on how the national version of the War of Resistance against Japan has been subsequently adopted by the rest of the country.

In the Liaoning Provincial Museum, the War of Resistance against Japan is depicted within a teleological narrative set between the failed 1911 Xinhai Revolution and the successful 1949 revolution that created New China. The theme of national rejuvenation looms large with a prominent quote from Xi Jinping displayed at the exhibit's entrance: "Realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history."<sup>425</sup> This quote, which is from Xi's 2012 visit to the National Museum, firmly situates all of modern Chinese history as inevitably leading to Xi's regime. It sets the stage for a narrative that directly connects the legacies of imperial China and Republican China with the PRC and the rise of the Communist Party.<sup>426</sup>

Further localization of the national narrative is found in the descriptions of "partial" versus "all-out" resistance within the War of Resistance against Japan. "Partial" Chinese resistance is used to describe the aftermath of the Mukden Incident in 1931, whereas "all-out" resistance is reserved for the fall-out after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937. This terminology, which originated in the NMC, was subsequently utilized in museums such as the 918HM and the WRJM. In addition, the exhibit portrays "fourteen years of bloody struggle" and a war that culminates in the first Chinese victory against the forces of foreign imperialism.<sup>427</sup> While heroic deeds of individual KMT soldiers are lauded, the KMT's pre-1937 "non-

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<sup>425</sup> "Fuxing Zhi Lu Linshi Tezhan" [Road to Rejuvenation Special Temporary Exhibit] (observed in July 2017), Liaoningsheng Bowuguan [Liaoning Provincial Museum].

<sup>426</sup> As Elizabeth Economy notes, this is a stark contrast from the reality of Chinese history, which is "marked by revolutions, political and social upheaval, and discontinuities in leadership and political ideologies." Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>427</sup> "Di San Danyuan: Quan Minzu Kangzhan de Zhongliu Dizhu" [Section 3: The Tower of Strength in the People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression], "Fuxing Zhilu Linshi Tezhan," Liaoningsheng Bowuguan.

resistance” policy toward Japan is condemned, and the CCP is still regarded as the cornerstone of nationwide resistance against Japan.

The CCP’s role in the War of Resistance against Japan is inflated not only through the portrayal of the war as a fourteen-year struggle, but also by portraying China’s victory over Japan as a CCP victory, not a KMT victory. In fact, the Japanese surrender to KMT forces in August 1945 is not even mentioned. Instead, what is highlighted is the convening of the Seventh National People’s Congress in Yan’an from May 23 to June 11, 1945 and how the CCP, which had by then well surpassed a million members, had achieved “unprecedented solidarity and unity” under Mao Zedong Thought. The Seventh National People’s Congress is portrayed here as achieving two victories simultaneously – that of the War of Resistance against Japan and that of the New Democratic Revolution.<sup>428</sup> The significance of the CCP’s victory is underscored by highlighting Japanese military atrocities – in particular those of the Nanjing Massacre, Unit 731, and the “Three Alls” campaign.<sup>429</sup> In contrast, the Chinese Civil War is barely mentioned.<sup>430</sup>

The subsequent adoption of the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit by locales such as the Liaoning Provincial Museum demonstrates the nationalization of a regional narrative that has come full circle – a regional narrative became nationalized even in the region where it originated. The “rejuvenation narrative” and the fourteen-year war narrative were initially connected with the NMC, and it was only after Xi Jinping’s initial visit to the “Road to Rejuvenation” exhibit that they began to be promulgated nationally. Thus, the “Road to Rejuvenation” narrative

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<sup>428</sup> “Kangri Zhanzheng Qude Weida Shengli” [The Great Victory in the War of Resistance against Japan], “Fuxing Zhilu Linshi Tezhan,” Liaoningsheng Bowuguan [Liaoning Provincial Museum].

<sup>429</sup> The “Three Alls” Policy (*sanguang zhengce*), or “burn all, kill all, and loot all,” refers to a cruel policy adopted by the Japanese military in Northern China towards local peasants in retaliation for the CCP-led Hundred Regiments offensive of January 1940.

<sup>430</sup> “Di Si Danyuan – Wei Xin Zhongguo er Douzheng” [Part 4 – The Struggle for a New China], “Fuxing Zhilu Linshi Tezhan,” Liaoningsheng Bowuguan [Liaoning Provincial Museum].

continues to serve as an important bellwether for the official narrative on Chinese history that is closely monitored nationwide.

## **Conclusion**

All located outside of the Northeast, the four museums discussed in this chapter nevertheless have recently shifted their exhibits to accommodate the national narrative of the fourteen-year War of Resistance against Japan. Importantly, the nationalization of this regional narrative did not originate from the Northeast, but from Beijing, as demonstrated by the NMC's "Road to Rejuvenation" exhibit and Xi Jinping's 2015 speech on the War of Resistance against Japan. Only subsequently did museums in Northeastern China and elsewhere reflect this updated version of the War of Resistance against Japan. As shown with the cases of the SSMH, NMMH, and WRJM, this served to weaken these museums' functions as "sites of memory" in the process of nationalizing a regional narrative, thus effectively showcasing "museopolitics" by shifting their displays to reflect content far outside the purview of their local experiences.

## Conclusion

The War of Resistance against Japan has been subject to a great deal of historical revisionism in order to bolster Chinese nationalism and fulfill particular political objectives in the PRC. During the Mao era, the war was downplayed and only used selectively to portray class struggle against the KMT. By the 1980s, however, domestic politics had shifted and, as China scholar Rana Mitter shows in *China's Good War*, there were new impetuses to emphasize the War of Resistance. Acknowledging the wartime contributions of the KMT was suddenly considered to be politically expedient due to a revived interest in peaceful reunification with Taiwan. Furthermore, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the narrative of Marxist class struggle was largely discredited, leading to a “profound feeling of ideological malaise.” A narrative in which a united Chinese nation stood up to a foreign aggressor was an expedient, ethically powerful way to subsequently fill that ideological gap.<sup>431</sup>

Most recently, the 2017 Ministry of Education proclamation to extend the War of Resistance from eight years to fourteen years also shows a prioritization of political expedience over historical veracity. As of 2015, when Xi's speech first signaled a new official view of the War of Resistance, the once-lively “date debate” has been shut down.<sup>432</sup> This is despite the fact that the scholars defending an eight-year war had more sound historical reasons than those clamoring for a fourteen-year war. For one, Chinese resistance to Japan was sporadic between 1931 and 1937. In the immediate aftermath of the Mukden Incident, out of the 4 months and 18

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<sup>431</sup> Rana Mitter, *China's Good War: How World War II Is Shaping a New Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 57-58.

<sup>432</sup> ““Pingyu” Jin Ren – Xi Jinping Tan Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng” [Plain Contemporary Language – Xi Jinping Discusses the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan], 18 September 2016, retrieved from [http://china.huangjiu.com/article/2016-09/0451240\\_2.html](http://china.huangjiu.com/article/2016-09/0451240_2.html) on 31 October 2017.



days it took the Japanese to conquer the Northeast, less than 18 of those days consisted of active Chinese military resistance.<sup>433</sup> Furthermore, in the period from 1931 to 1937, whereas the first 3 years saw sporadic resistance, the latter 3 years hardly saw any concerted military action.<sup>434</sup> Utilizing Marxist terminology, the principal contradiction in society was class struggle and the civil war between the KMT and the CCP, not the conflict between China and Japan.<sup>435</sup> Lastly, most Chinese people did not consider themselves to be at war between 1931 and 1937, despite the promulgation of a “Manchurian myth” by certain Chinese nationalists.<sup>436</sup>

Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the War of Resistance has become even more closely intertwined with the CCP’s legitimizing narrative than under Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao, and Jiang Zemin. Winning the war is portrayed as the CCP’s crowning historical achievement, and invoking it in the PRC today is as much about Xi’s “rejuvenation narrative” as it is about truly commemorating the past. As Xi proudly proclaimed in 2020 to end his speech for the 75th anniversary of China’s victory in the War of Resistance against Japan,

The entire party, the entire army, the people of all ethnic groups, and all Chinese people at home and abroad must unite more closely, carry forward the great spirit of the War of Resistance, and bravely march forward towards the glorious shore of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.<sup>437</sup>

Other components of Xi’s speech also attest to how the War of Resistance against Japan is conceived of and promoted for public consumption in the PRC today. Xi minces no words in portraying the War of Resistance as a fourteen-year struggle – for instance, he starts off his

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<sup>433</sup> Cao Ziyang, ““Banian Kangzhan” yu “Shisinian Kangzhan” Gainian Yunyong Zhi Sikao” [Reflections on the Conceptual Usage of the “Eight-year War of Resistance” and the “Fourteen-year War of Resistance”], *Dangshi yu Wenxian Yanjiu* [Research on Party History and Documents] 5 and 6 (2017), 51.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>436</sup> Mitter, 92.

<sup>437</sup> “Xi Jinping: Zai Jinian Zhongguo Renmin Kangri Zhanzheng ji Shijie Fan Faxisi Zhanzheng Shengli 75 Zhou Nian Zuotanhui shang de Jianghua” [Xi Jinping: Speech at the Symposium Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japan and World War II], Xinhua Wang, retrieved from [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-09/03/c\\_1126449917.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2020-09/03/c_1126449917.htm) on 8 October 2020.

speech celebrating that “today, 75 years ago, the Chinese people defeated the vicious Japanese militarist invaders...after 14 years of indomitable and bloody fighting!” Later, he reminds listeners that it was after the Mukden Incident that “the Chinese people rose up in resistance between the white mountains and black waters, which became the starting point of the War of Resistance against Japan and at the same time opened the prelude to the World Anti-Fascist War.” The speech is meant to unify all Chinese in a narrative of patriotic resistance; thus, Xi emphasizes that saving the nation was the will of “all Chinese parties, nationalities, classes, strata, groups, and overseas Chinese.”<sup>438</sup>

Also noteworthy is how Xi appeals to China’s position on the world stage in his speech. He notes that China’s victory in the war “has reestablished China’s status as a major country in the world. The Chinese people have won the respect of the peace-loving people of the world, and the Chinese nation has won a lofty national reputation!”<sup>439</sup> This shows how China is increasingly utilizing its new collective memory of the War of Resistance to “create a morally weighted narrative about China’s role in the global order.”<sup>440</sup> This is to show that China’s increasing presence on the world stage should not be feared, but rather embraced as a responsible and conscientious actor.

Today, China’s museums on the War of Resistance showcase “museopolitics” in promoting a fourteen-year war timeline to bolster patriotism and promote a strong, capable China. Thus, Xi states that “the victory of the Chinese people’s War of Resistance against Japan was a great victory for the national spirit with patriotism at its core.”<sup>441</sup> Museums are a core

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<sup>438</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>440</sup> Mitter, 4.

<sup>441</sup> Xi, 2020.

component of patriotic education in the PRC, as stipulated both in the 1982 Constitution and the 1994 Outline for the Implementation of Patriotic Education. Funded by the government, they establish how the CCP's legitimizing narrative is conveyed to the public and show a remarkable ability to adapt to ever-changing sociopolitical vicissitudes. Even before 2017, museums on the War of Resistance were shifting their exhibits to prioritize the Mukden Incident and a fourteen-year timeline. Thus, museums that showcase "museopolitics" in the PRC not only reflect shifting national narratives, but also act as harbingers of them.

Scholarly studies on museums of the War of Resistance against Japan in China have largely focused on the three so-called "major" national museums: the War of Resistance against Japan Museum, the September 18th History Museum, and the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall.<sup>442</sup> However, equally important to consider are the lesser-known museums to the War of Resistance against Japan because they show how far-reaching the national narrative truly is. Thus, this study has focused not only on the so-called "major" museums, but also on those that are less well-known: the Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall, the Puppet Emperor Palace Museum, and the Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall. Taken together, the six museums examined have shown how the fourteen-year war narrative has been nationalized both in the Northeast and beyond.

Each museum examined in this study promotes a different component of the "museopolitics" claim as related to the War of Resistance against Japan and the fourteen-year timeline. The Northeastern Martyrs Memorial Hall, as the oldest memorial hall in the PRC, is truly the quintessential example of "museopolitics" The Puppet Emperor Palace Museum

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<sup>442</sup> Mitter, 111. Kirk Denton, *Exhibiting the Past: Historical Memory and the Politics of Museums in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014), 133-152.

showcases the important function of a “site of memory” and how “museopolitics” tend to downplay that function in service to a national narrative. The September 18th History Museum demonstrates how a museum’s self-perception can shift over time in conformance with the national narrative. Lastly, the Shanghai Songhu Memorial Hall, War of Resistance against Japan Museum, and Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall demonstrate how the fourteen-year war narrative was nationalized and grafted onto preexisting museum narratives.

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