Research Note

Behind the Scenes at the Museum: Nationalism, History and Memory in the Beijing War of Resistance Museum, 1987–1997*

Rana Mitter

At Wanping, around 50 kilometres from the centre of Beijing, the shots that began the eight-year war between China and Japan were fired in 1937. On the site there now stands the Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan (the museum's own translation of its title, *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan*). Inside, a wide array of materials is displayed, but among the most prominent are the waxwork diorama reconstructions of Japanese atrocities against the Chinese. One such display shows a Japanese scientist in a white coat, intent on carrying out a gruesome bacteriological warfare experiment, plunging his scalpel into the living, trussed-up body of a Chinese peasant resistance fighter. But just in case this is not enough to drive the message home, the museum designers have added a refinement: a motor inside the waxwork of the peasant, which makes his body twitch jerkily as if in response to the scalpel, an unending series of little movements until the switch is turned off at closing time.

This tableau is part of a much wider phenomenon emergent in the People's Republic of China (PRC) since the mid-1980s: the reassessment of the War of Resistance in official and popular political discourse, or the "new remembering of World War II," as Arthur Waldron has put it, evident in historiography, popular culture and education.[1] This article seeks to explore the ways in which the War of Resistance Museum (as it will be abbreviated from now on) has played a part in the shaping of official memory which in turn legitimizes the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a post-Marxist world.[2]

The use of past events to illustrate points about contemporary politics is a longstanding tradition in China, the controversy over Wu Han's play *Hai Rui Dismissed From Office* in 1965 being one of the best-known examples during the PRC period. The appropriation of the past can occur at several levels, as Vera Schwarcz shows in her discussion of the reclamation of the May Fourth Movement in 1989; she describes the process as an "onion" of memory, whose layers include the government

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1. Arthur Waldron, "China's new remembering of World War II: the case of Zhang Zizhong," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 30, No.4, (1996), pp. 869–899.

2. On the delegitimation of communism, see X.L. Ding, *The Decline of Communism in China: Legitimacy Crisis, 1977–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

interpretation of the movement as CCP-led and inspired, and the unofficial version, which allowed intellectuals to recall cultural figures prominent in 1919 but now suppressed in official memory.[3] Yet in their versions of the May Fourth Movement, both groups were making points about politics in the 1980s rather than the 1910s. The reconfiguration of the War of Resistance into Chinese public memory also says as much about the politics of the 1980s and 1990s as it does about the events of the 1930s and 1940s. It addresses perceived problems both at the domestic and the international level in China.

Domestically, the discrediting of communism as a doctrine able to save China (the perennial concern since the late Qing), along with the centrifugal economic power of the south and coastal zones that left less developed areas resentful of richer provinces, has caused an ideological gap that Beijing fears could lead to social and political fissure.[4] Unfortunately, the store of political capital that is available to the CCP leadership from their own legacy of rule has nearly run dry. The greatest icon of all, Mao Zedong, has become a contested, problematic figure, who no longer has the symbolic power that he did in the early PRC period.[5] Deng Xiaoping's pragmatism was hardly a replacement for Mao's charisma, and the other personalities of the period have even less to recommend them. Events are not much better. Yan'an, the touchstone of the PRC project for so long, now embodies ideas of collective activity that the leadership would for the most part prefer to downplay, and the Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward are the objects of condemnation. Yet these events cover nearly half of the Mao period. Thus in looking for a theme to inspire a new unity, the leadership was forced to turn to the cataclysmic event of the century, the War of Resistance to Japan (1937–45), even though it took place before their rise to power.

Internationally, the PRC also wished to use the past to illustrate the present. Among its key concerns in the international arena are the renewal of the U.S.–Japan Security Alliance, the issue of reunification with Taiwan, and China's up-and-down relationship with the United States. These concerns are reflected in the emphases and interpretations of the War of Resistance put forward in the new official narrative. This narrative, which emerged in particular after the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1985, most notably involves much stronger rhetoric against Japan, and a downgrading of the fierce attacks on the Nationalists and Chiang Kai-shek that were commonplace in the Mao era.

3. Vera Schwarcz, "Strangers no more: personal memory in the interstices of public commemoration," in Rubie S. Watson (ed.), *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 1994), p. 49.

4. For a recent example, see Edward Friedman, "Reconstructing China's national identity: a southern alternative to Mao-era anti-imperialist nationalism," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (1994), pp. 67–91. For another perspective, see John Fitzgerald, " 'Reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated': the history of the death of China," in David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade and Regionalism* (London: Routledge, 1994).

5. On the changing meaning of Mao, see Geremie Barmé, *Shades of Mao: The Posthumous Cult of the Great Leader* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

(As will be suggested below, this was part of a complex Sino-Japanese relationship that emerged in the late 1970s.) Among the first manifestations of it were the exhibition on the life of the Nationalist general Zhang Zizhong held in Beijing, and the establishment of the Rape of Nanjing Memorial in Nanjing.[6]

These new interpretations are strongly visible in the War of Resistance Museum, one of the showpieces of the new historical narrative. It provides a fascinating microcosm of the way in which some threads of China's treatment of its wartime experience have changed very radically in the last decade and a half, and others have remained constant, while being brought into the new framework. This article examines several aspects of the project which the museum embodies; these include the museum's contents, its attendance and audience, and its significance within a wider context of nationalism and political education.

Monumentality, Nationalism and Ideological Investment

The War of Resistance Museum is in a compound over 30,000 square metres in size, in the Beijing suburb of Wanping. Its construction was authorized by top-level figures, including Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Qiaomu (the latter an ideologue frequently associated with anti-reformist politics). It first opened in 1987, with a new phase of building begun in 1997, and in its first decade it received over seven million visitors. The museum is arranged in four main sections: the Main Hall, containing a chronological display of the Japanese invasion of China from 1931 to 1945; the Hall of Japanese Military Atrocities, which relies on statistical and descriptive displays; the Hall of the People's War, which illustrates the guerrilla war led by the CCP; and finally, the Hall of Martyrs of the War of Resistance, which is a monument, rather than a display.

The concept of the museum is a relatively recent addition to the Chinese institutional repertoire, although an imperial art collection has existed for centuries.[7] Yet, as Tamara Hamlish shows, the conversion of the Forbidden City into a National Palace Museum was an integral part of the attempt by Republican governments to instil ideas of citizenship among the Chinese people, the establishment of a state museum being seen as an integral part of Western public culture.[8] Unlike the Republic, the PRC had the luxury of stability, which enabled it to set up more museums with which it could reinforce its own interpretation of the past. Yet museums were by no means unproblematic as instruments of political education; for example, the Museum of Revolutionary History in Tiananmen Square remained closed for much of the 1960s and 1970s, and the reopening of museums was one indication that the values of the Cultural Revolution had finally been laid to rest. In some cases, the location of

6. Waldron, "China's new remembering," p. 950.

7. Tamara Hamlish, "Preserving the palace: museums and the making of nationalism(s) in twentieth-century China," *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1995), p. 20.

8. *Ibid.* p. 22.

museums in out-of-the-way places can prevent them becoming sites where official memory can be subverted by an alternative popular memory, a phenomenon observed at other sites, including Tiananmen Square.[9] The War of Resistance Museum in Wanping is on such a site that is simultaneously resonant (because of its association with the outbreak of the war) yet inaccessible. Another example is the September 18th Incident Memorial in Shenyang, which is located on the site where the Japanese exploded a bomb on a railway line in 1931 and triggered the Manchurian crisis; while the site is obviously resonant, it is also well outside the centre of the city. The timings of the openings of museums could add to their symbolism too; the first and second phases of the War of Resistance Museum were opened in 1987 and 1997, the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the Lugouqiao Incident.[10]

Monumentality and the inculcation of nationalism and citizenship are closely connected. In China, one of the first acts of the PRC government was to reconstitute the architecture of Tiananmen Square to reflect the dominance of the Communist Party. The debates over this question took place at the highest levels, as the style of the new buildings, particularly the Memorial to the People's Heroes, had to reflect both the new rulers' concerns and their continuity within the Chinese historical tradition.[11] Tiananmen, however, was a pre-existing site which had to be manipulated to serve a new interpretation. Many other post-1949 monuments, in contrast, could be placed in sites which had no social memory attached to them, or else had a memory that could be more easily manipulated. Wanping, the village near Lugouqiao, was one such site, and its development was indicative of the historical concerns of the late 1980s.

In some senses, the War of Resistance Museum is similar in its approach, for example, to the Imperial War Museum in London in its interpretation of the Second World War. To understand how much the interpretative paradigms have changed between the 1960s and the 1980s, however, one need only visit the Military Museum in western Beijing, which dates from the former period. It depicts the struggle between the Communists and the Nationalists as the fundamental narrative running through China in the 20th century, and its treatment of the Japanese presence makes them effectively secondary players to the seemingly much more crucial story of Communist virtue and Nationalist evil. The Military Museum, whose portraits of Marx and Stalin in the front lobby betray it as a product of the early PRC, reflected a political model that shifted radically in the mid-1980s.

However, the Japanese–Chinese conflict of the war years was never

9. Rubie S. Watson, "Palaces, museums, and squares: Chinese national spaces," *Museum Anthropology*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (1995), pp. 7–19. Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square: a political history of monuments," *Representations*, No. 35 (1991), pp. 84–117.

10. *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: jianjie* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: Introduction*) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan, 1997), p. 3. Descriptions in this article which cite the museum's own publications are supplemented by my own research in the museum in September 1997.

11. Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square," p. 85.

absent even from early PRC interpretations of the War of Resistance. In the 1950s, for instance, a War Crimes Museum was set up at Fushun in the north-east, an institution for political education which combined graphic descriptions of Japanese atrocities in the region with an account of the political "re-education" of Japanese prisoners-of-war after 1945 (although the Japanese prisoners were "re-educated" along with soldiers from the Nationalist forces, implying some equivalence between the two groups from the CCP's point of view).[12] There was never any period when the war against Japan did not make some significant impact on popular memory. However, the self-legitimation of the People's Republic (as with many other states) has rested upon defining fundamental fissures, and the most important fissure for decades was less that between China and Japan than that between the Communists and the Nationalists, with the latter becoming almost a codeword for any politically dissident tendency (as in the campaign against Hu Feng in 1955). It is only in the context of this previous understanding of the war that the shift of interpretation marked by the War of Resistance Museum can be understood. In attempting to heal the Communist–Nationalist fissure for the reasons discussed, the official narrative has had to change emphases very sharply, stressing the international conflict more and the domestic one less. However, while this change has gone some way towards creating national reconciliation, there are still other fissures that are only being acknowledged slowly, most notably the wartime division between unoccupied and occupied China, which raises the question of collaboration. There is a section of the museum which does display artifacts from the collaborationist Nanjing government of Wang Jingwei, including flags, banknotes and identity cards. Although the language is unequivocally condemnatory, the fact that the question of collaboration has been raised at all in such a context is a public manifestation of the emergent, more nuanced view of the wartime period. It is also notable that in 1990, the museum put on an exhibition on the topic of Beiping during the war, a period when it was occupied by the Japanese.[13]

The establishment of the War of Resistance Museum is just part of a wide-ranging trend in historiographical revision in China, of museums, academic and popular texts, and even films and television programmes.[14] The museum aims to redefine China's wartime experience in part by placing the war more firmly within the events of the Second World War as a whole, part of a set of changes that Arif Dirlik has noted as evident

12. Liu Jiachang and Tie Han, *Ri, wei, Jiang zhanfan gaizao jilu* (*Records of the Re-education of Japanese, Puppet, and Pro-Chiang Kaishek War Criminals*) (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenyi chubanshe, 1993). Author's visit to War Crimes Museum, September 1997.

13. Zhang Chengjun, "Chongfen fahui jinianguan de aiguozhuyi jiaoyu zhendi zuoyong" ("Fulfilling and giving full rein to the Memorial's position and role in patriotic education"), in *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: wencong* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: Essays*), Vol. 1 (1990), p. 198.

14. For a concise summary of recently published primary sources and academic monographs from the PRC on the War of Resistance, see Hans van de Ven, "The military in the Republic," *The China Quarterly*, No. 150 (June 1997), n. 46, pp. 367–68.

in Chinese perceptions of Sino-Japanese history during this period.[15] "The War of Resistance was an important constituent part of the world anti-fascist war," notes the museum's guidebook, and to stress this wider context, the museum has set up links with many countries, including Japan, North and South Korea, the United States, Russia, and "Chinese Taipei," one of the accepted terms for the Taiwan government, using history as a lever for contemporary political engagement.[16] There is a wall-chart in the museum, with lights emphasizing "China's contribution to the world anti-fascist war."[17] Also of relevance to China's current desire to portray itself as leader of a wider transnational Chinese community is the display which "sets up an illuminated globe to reflect the various situations of Overseas Chinese all over the world during the period of the War of Resistance … their hearts all linked to the swelling patriotic sentiment of their homeland."[18] The Nationalist government even attracts praise, with a display stating that it "did in the political, economic, cultural and foreign relations fields carry out some effective policies relating to resistance to Japan and the establishment of reforms."[19] (The revisionist view of the Nationalist government's contribution to China's development could be also be seen, for example, in the 1997 exhibition "Modern China, 1840–1997" held at the Museum of Revolutionary History in Tiananmen Square, where significant space was given to engineering and scientific projects carried out under the aegis of Chiang Kai-shek's administration.)

The 1986 film *The Battle of Taierzhuang* (*Taierzhuang zhan*), which portrayed the Nationalist troops in a heroic and positive light, was one of the early indications of a policy of thaw towards Taiwan, and shortly afterwards General Zhang Zizhong's life was the subject of a six-part television series.[20] As the experience of the noted director Zhang Yimou and the makers of *River Elegy* (*Heshang*) has shown, a rapid change in the political climate can lead to films and television series being withdrawn and condemned; however, to close down such a massive undertaking as the War of Resistance Museum would involve such a large effort that it would make a much more definitive statement about the boundaries of permitted politics than the suppression of broadcast or cinematic material.

When mention is made of a resurgence in Chinese nationalism which is reflected in the museum, it is necessary to remember the complex

15. Arif Dirlik, " 'Past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide to the future'; or, what is a text? The politics of history in Chinese–Japanese relations," in Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian (eds.), *Japan in the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 71.

16. *Taiwan wenti yu Zhongguo de tongyi* (*The Taiwan Question and Reunification of China*) (Beijing: Guowuyuan xinwen bangongshe, 1993), p. 23. *Jianjie*, p. 7.

17. *Jianjie*, p. 10.

18. *Ibid.* p. 9.

19. *Ibid.* p. 9.

20. Geremie Barmé, "History for the masses," in Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Using the Past to Serve the Present* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), p. 278. Waldron, "China's new remembering," p. 974.

nature of that nationalism.[21] One of the most interesting recent developments has been the exploration of "Chinese transnationalism" and "cultural China" as an issue in itself, rather than a sideshow to research on nationalism based on phenomena delimited by Chinese sovereign territory.[22] It is notable that the scope within which the museum defines nationalism runs in two directions. Naturally, the topic of the War of Resistance reinforces the territorially based concept that the Chinese living in China have in the past (and by implication in the present) had a responsibility to protect that territory from outside attack, with their own identity becoming in part a function of having done so. Yet the attention paid to the contribution of Overseas Chinese in the past (and once again, by implication, in the present) to protecting the Chinese nation (*minzu*) gives that concept of the nation an implication that goes beyond territorial boundaries.

The complexity of the relationship between China and Japan also makes the museum, and the historical revision of which it is a part, more than merely an instrument of domestic political propaganda; in Arif Dirlik's words, "the issue of history on either side is bound up with the two countries' efforts to define their places in the contemporary world as well as their relationship to one another."[23] The War of Resistance Museum has a role in educating the international community; like the Museum of the Nanjing Massacre, it also aims to educate Japanese visitors. In addition to the display hall dedicated exclusively to illustrating Japanese war crimes in China, the last panel in the museum shows a quotation from the Zhou–Tanaka communiqué of 1972 on the simultaneous importance of reconciliation between the two nations and the remembering of their wartime history. It is worth noting, however, that the museum condemns the Japanese military, rather than Japan as a whole. Although this distinction is often lost in the general tone of the exhibits, it allows sufficient leeway for the Chinese authorities to portray the museum's purpose as internationalist.[24]

Finally, it should not be assumed that the realignment of the fissures in recent Chinese historiography has resulted in the abandonment of the primacy of the Communist Party's role. The Hall of the People's War, the third section of the War of Resistance Museum, strongly emphasizes the role of the CCP. The guidebook notes: "Independent, autonomous guerrilla warfare was one aspect of the People's War, and was a concrete example of troops under CCP leadership opening up the People's War

21. There is a massive literature on Chinese nationalism, and it continues to grow year by year, if not month by month. An excellent starting point is Jonathan Unger (ed.), *Chinese Nationalism* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996).

22. Two stimulating works on these two concepts respectively are Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini (eds.), *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Chinese Transnationalism* (London: Routledge, 1997), and Tu Wei-ming (ed.), *The Living Tree: The Changing Meaning of Being Chinese* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

23. Dirlik, " 'Past experience,' " p. 50.

24. This distinction also allowed the then Japanese prime minister, Murayama Tomiichi, to attend the opening of a new section of the museum in 1995 to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the war.

under the conditions of the Anti-Japanese national United Front." It further notes that the close relations between the people and the CCP were the "basic guarantee of victory in the People's War."[25]

Techniques of Exposition and Display

The museum uses a combination of display techniques to serve its agenda. First, as one would expect, artifacts are displayed, although their interest tends more to be by association than intrinsic (such as a water bottle used by members of the Eighth Route Army, or a razor and blanket used by Fu Zuoyi, chairman of the Suiyuan provincial government). Photographs of events and personalities of the War of Resistance are also used throughout the galleries.

Architecture both inside and outside is also designed for effect. One of the most obvious examples is in the arrangement of the Hall of Martyrs. There are four large relief sculptures on the walls. Two are general scenes of "generals, patriotic soldiers and the wider people and masses" during the war. The other two, however, depict specific events. One shows a fêted event in the CCP historiography of the war, the "Five Heroes of Langyashan ('Wolf's Tooth Mountain') Incident" of September 1941, where five soldiers from a unit in the Jin-Cha-Ji base area on guerrilla manoeuvres in Yi county, Hebei, were said to have held down 2,000 Japanese soldiers. The guide goes on: "Finally, because their bullets had run out and they had been cut off from all help, they collectively sacrificed themselves and jumped off a cliff, showing an exalted revolutionary spirit, courage, and ardour."[26] Two were reported to have survived the experience, but three "sacrificed" themselves.

The relief opposite portrays a piece of Nationalist heroism, the defence of the county town of Haibaoshan in Shanghai by a garrison of the 98th division of the 18th Army under Yao Ziqing in August 1937. Around 2,000 Japanese troops are described as firing on the town in aircraft and from boats, but the defenders are said to have stood by the principle "while there is still one breath in us, we'll struggle to the end." Yao and the garrison "bravely laid down their lives," but not before dispatching 800 Japanese.[27]

Although it is never explicitly stated, the reliefs mark a radical departure from pre-1985 PRC interpretations of the war. Not only is the Nationalist element reintroduced, it is at least in this case presented with equal prominence (even down to the descriptive detail of how many Japanese each group opposed). One Nationalist defence and one Communist one are balanced against one another as segments of a wider national struggle. This balance is also reflected in the martyrs' name tablets. The

25. *Jianjie*, pp. 13–14.
26. *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: jiangjieci* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: Explanation*) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan, 1997), p. 34.
27. *Ibid.* p. 34.

296 names on them are taken from "high level commanders of the [CCP] Eighth Route Army and New Fourth Army troops, Nationalist troops … and Northeast United Army, who sacrificed themselves during the War of Resistance," and their names are listed only in the "order of the time of their sacrifice during the War of Resistance," with no differentiation according to which army they served with.[28]

These scenes recall in intent and design the relief sculptures on the Memorial to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, the scenes for which were selected by the historian Fan Wenlan in the early 1950s to bring to mind the CCP's ultimate victory over the Nationalists, with the ten scenes depicting major events in Chinese history from 1840 to 1949. Wu Hung notes that the figures depicted on the Tiananmen monument are "a single idealized archetype, which was then repeated and multiplied," with the "almost surreal" result that "a single actor seems to appear both synchronically and diachronically 170 times in ten acts of a lengthy drama."[29] This description could be transferred wholesale to the wall reliefs in the Hall of Martyrs at the War of Resistance Museum, whose strength also derives from "the figures' collective anonymity."[30]

The Hall of Martyrs at the War of Resistance Museum, rather like many of the early Republican monuments, is a hybrid of styles. The room is round, and on the walls are hung tablets containing the names of over 1,000 officers killed during the war, bringing to mind the traditional use of tablets to commemorate ancestors. But the centrepiece of the room is a Western-derived construct, a statue of an Unknown Martyr. This is a large bronze statue of a soldier lying dead on the ground, curled around a rifle which is pointed (rather unnaturally) straight up in the air. The statue is set on a semi-circular, slanted platform in the middle of the Hall, with a tinted skylight above which allows a dim light to fall upon it. The idea of a memorial to a generic, unknown soldier to commemorate the war dead as a group emerged in Europe, and in the aftermath of the First World War, Unknown Soldiers were buried in London and Paris, followed by other countries which had fought on the Allied side.[31] Even Soviet memorials, as at Mamayev Hill in Volgograd, use the same tropes. The designers of the War of Resistance Museum have imported much of this iconography wholesale in their Hall of Martyrs, a necessity, as there is "no Chinese cenotaph: the empty tomb that symbolically contains all the war dead."[32] While it is not an empty tomb, the statue of the Unknown Martyr, together with the stone-carved martyrs' tablets, have been introduced to fill this role.

The most notable feature of the museum, and of many of the museums which have emerged in China since the mid-1980s, is the use of three-

28. *Ibid.* p. 34.
29. Wu Hung, "Tiananmen Square," pp. 99–100.
30. *Ibid.* p. 94.
31. Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 27–28.
32. Waldron, "China's new remembering," p. 965.

dimensional illustrative dioramas to bring events to life. The guide to the War of Resistance Museum emphasizes that the displays

> all use dioramas, models and real items combined together. In the front half … are placed models and artifacts, using trompe-l'oeil, cleverly taking models, artifacts and tableaux and making them into one, so that the eye cannot distinguish between what is a painting and what is a model, as if you were placing yourself on the battlefield at the time [of the event itself] … [The displays] all use lifelike three-dimensional models to catch your eye. What is even more amazing is that when the son-et-lumière control room behind the diorama begins working, it is as if the whole picture becomes activated. The … clouds in the sky move, the smoke … floats, flames shoot forth, bombs fly down from the sky and explode on the ground, and gunfire and yelling fill your ears.[33]

The Museum guide explains the use of dioramas in the following terms:

> Dioramas are a new display method. The memorial's diorama halls were pioneered in China, and all of the construction of the dioramas, setting up of the displays, and manufacturing were carried out in China. It exemplifies the level of development of our construction projects and museums.[34]

Technological progress is associated with national progress. This is not a new connection, as examinations of the debates of the late Qing or May Fourth period show, and it remains strong here, particularly pointed in the context of an institution commemorating events which might have destroyed Chinese nationhood in the terms in which the museum's narrative understands it. The diorama of Japanese bacteriological warfare atrocities described at the beginning is one example of the use of this display technique. Another is the reconstruction of the battle of Taierzhuang (1938), one of the few Chinese victories in the early days of the War of Resistance. The backdrop is a large, full-colour painted mural of hand-to-hand combat with bayonets between Chinese and Japanese troops, all of whom are liberally coated with blood. The sky is dark, with menacing clouds (a common theme in dioramas here and elsewhere which portray scenes from the war against Japan), and wrecked buildings and carts are visible. In front of the mural, rubble is strewn around. Right at the front is a road-sign with the characters "Taierzhuang" inscribed on it.[35] This is not a literalistic reconstruction of the war, but an illustration of how the curators wish the battle to be perceived in popular memory, emphasizing the museum's role as tool for political education.

Raising of Language

The visitor's path through the museum is deliberately varied in emotional tone, becoming a pilgrimage of sorts. The quasi-religious effect is heightened by the deliberately evocative tone in which the

33. *Jianjie*, pp. 2–3.
34. *Ibid.* p. 3.
35. Author's visit to museum, September 1997.

museum describes its contents.[36] Some of this language has clear echoes in the language used by the early leaders of the People's Republic to describe their capture of China, but the way it is used in the museum breaks new ground in its application to the War of Resistance.

Paul Fussell has dealt with the standardization or raising of language in the discourse of war in post-Great War Britain, the provision of a ritualistic, stylized language to overcome the horrific reality of conflict and render it publicly transmissible and binding rather than repulsive.[37] The museum is saturated with language of this sort, with the war being openly termed "sacred" (*shensheng*).[38] The tendency is most prominent in the Hall of Martyrs of the War of Resistance, which avoids any use of the word "death," instead preferring "sacrifice" (*xisheng*), emphasizing the sacral element of the war in a way that echoes the dichotomy between Chinese nationalism and Japanese militarism portrayed in spiritual terms elsewhere in the museum. For instance, the guide states that memorial tablets contain information including "name, occupation, native place, month and year of birth, and time and place of sacrifice."[39] The same guide describes the statue of the "nameless martyr" in the centre as depicting a warrior who has "fallen" (*daoxiale*), not "died."[40] Martyrdom itself, of course, is a common theme with a long history, the implication being that the soldiers died in service of a higher cause.

The descriptions also provide a link between the national resistance to Japan and what are implied to be primordial, emotive elements of Chinese cultural tradition; "the nameless martyrs," one states, "are at one with the mountains and rivers!"[41] Relationship to the land also appears in the explanation of the pose of the statue of the Unknown Martyr: "When the warrior (*zhanshi*) fell, he passionately kissed the great territory of his ancestral land (*zuguo*); however, his rifle never dropped out of his hands; instead it pierced the sky to its furthest height."[42] Similarly, the stone-carved martyrs' tablets are meant to symbolize all 35 million Chinese who died during the war, whose "names have already been gathered together in the Chang [Yangtze], in the Yellow River, and [whose] bodies will eternally rest peacefully in the great ancestral land."[43]

Nationhood and nationalism are also made explicit in a way that has not been common in the People's Republic, where "patriotism" (*aiguozhuyi*) has been the preferred term to "nationalism" (*minzuzhuyi*),

36. On the manipulation of language for political purposes in China, see Michael Schoenhals, *Doing Things with Words in Chinese Politics: Five Studies* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, China Research Monograph, 1992).

37. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 179.

38. *Jianjie*, p. 3.

39. *Ibid.* p. 17. *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: kangzhan yinglieting minglu* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: List of Names in the Hall of Martyrs of the War of Resistance*) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan, n.d.).

40. *Jianjie*, p. 17.

41. *Ibid.* p. 17.

42. *Ibid.* p. 17.

43. *Jiangjieci*, p. 34.

the latter having ethnic and racial implications which were regarded as reactionary. Yet the museum constantly refers to the war as being a time of trial for the Chinese nation, opening the way for a positive reassessment of the idea of nationalism.[44] Once again, it should be noted that the realignment of language towards inclusive nationalism has not obliterated the previous historiography. In the Hall of Martyrs, apart from the statue of the Unknown Martyr and the tablets of names of the fallen, there is a quotation from Mao Zedong, carved in large letters, stating: "Our countless martyrs have acted for the benefit of the people, and have bravely sacrificed themselves ahead of us. Let us raise high their banner, and stride forward over the traces of their blood."[45] Even the new historiography must pay its dues to the figure who still stands at the base of the legitimacy of the People's Republic.

Attendance and Audience

It is clear from pronouncements that the museum is certainly intended to have an ideological, educational role. But how does it interact with the community at large? Its director, Zhang Chengjun, presented a report three years after it had opened, detailing some of the activities which it had carried out to spread awareness of its contents. He noted that "the museum is located in the suburbs, and transport there is inconvenient."[46] Therefore, he went on,

> for the last three years, we have taken the initiative of sending over 5,000 leaflets to universities, middle and primary schools, factories, mines, enterprises and agencies, to let people know about our memorial's displays and the ways they can visit them. We wanted to create favourable conditions for all social units to start up patriotic educational activities.[47]

The museum attempts to increase attendance through special exhibitions and activities. In 1989, there was an exhibition on the outbreak of the Manchurian Crisis, and in 1990 a special "Conference for Deepening Patriotic Education," which tied the museum's activities in with the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Opium Wars, and was followed by the distribution of 10,000 books to schoolteachers. There was also a special exhibition on the war period in Beiping, which drew over 100,000 visitors.[48] By late 1996, in nine years of opening, over seven million visitors had come to the Museum.[49]

In terms of sheer numbers and distribution of materials, then, the museum's role has grown as part of the reassessment of the place of the War of Resistance in public memory and culture. How far, though, does this penetrate? Arthur Waldron has pointed out that "official commemor-

44. For example, see *Jianjie*, pp. 1, 3, 6.
45. *Ibid.* p. 16.
46. Zhang Chengjun, "Fulfilling," p. 197.
47. *Ibid.* p. 198.
48. *Ibid.* p. 198.
49. *Jianjie*, p. 1.

ation does not equal memory," and suggests that the rehabilitation of Zhang Zizhong after 1985 did not necessarily mean that people became more informed about who he was.[50] However, even if the public remain hazy about details of individuals, dates and events during the War of Resistance, the theme of the war can still resonate if the mood is right. The details of the handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997 were comparably hazy to many ordinary Chinese in Beijing, but there was nevertheless a strong feeling at the time that the handover had removed a "national humiliation" (*guochi*) from China's record, language that echoes the official voices in the press and broadcast media.[51] Although it is complex and marked by social and regional differences, nationalist pride in China is a phenomenon of public discourse in the 1990s in a way that it was not in the 1970s, and the reinsertion of memory of the War of Resistance at this time may well prove to be successful for this reason.

The consumption of propaganda spread via museums is naturally not an issue specific to China. There are instructive parallels to be drawn from Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge's discussions of the role of the museum in modern Indian public culture, where "nationalism, consumerism and leisure have become simultaneous features of contemporary life for important segments of the population."[52] They observe of the Indian museumgoers: "Viewers do not come to … museums as cultural blanks. They come as persons who have seen movies with nationalist themes, television series with nationalist and mythological narratives and images, and newspapers and magazines that also construct and visualize the heroes and grand events of Indian history and mythology."[53] (The same could indeed be said of the portrayal of the British war effort in the Imperial War Museum in London.) The War of Resistance Museum takes in an audience whose ideas have been similarly shaped, and works on them further, not only through an overt political agenda, but through externalities such as its self-avowedly "inconvenient" location that discourages the individual viewer in favour of tour groups from schools or work-units, and prevents too much appropriation of the site for individual, perhaps dissenting, interpretations.

It is clear, however, that the museum is actively involved in making an audience for itself, as it concentrates in particular on its role of educating school-age students; in 1994, they made up over 60 per cent of the one million visitors.[54] Yu Yanjun of the museum's educational activities staff

50. Waldron, "China's new remembering," p. 976.

51. Private conversations, Beijing, September 1997.

52. Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Museums are good to think: heritage on view in India," in Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, p. 46.

53. *Ibid.* p. 45.

54. Yu Yanjun, "Chongfen liyong bowuguan shehui jiaoyu youshi peiyang aiguozhuyi jingshen, zengqiang gongzhong minzu yishi" ("Making full use of social education at the museum effectively to nurture a patriotic spirit and strengthen public national consciousness"), in *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: wencong* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: Essays*), Vol. 5 (1994), p. 379.

provided justification for teaching schoolchildren about the war period in the social circumstances of the post-Mao era: "The … 1980s one-child generation of students, both boys and girls, with their luxurious lifestyles, have grown up in an environment in which they have always been placed at the centre of things."[55] The writer also expresses his concern that students are not aware of the new Chinese agenda in international relations with regard to foreign powers, as expressed in the museum displays: "There are many young people whose understanding of Japan is just from … television and the brand names of household appliances, and they do not know the historical tendency of the 'Japanese imperialists' to invade, as well as the hegemonic nature of the Western world today."[56] Therefore, the museum could provide an example of national community in the past which could serve as an exemplar for the present. What Yu did not state was that schoolchildren provide the most uncritical audience for the museum's propaganda purposes, first because they are unlikely to be able to make independent visits to the Museum, and therefore have to experience it via the official guides and tours provided for them, and secondly because they clearly have no direct memory of the war.

A variety of proactive techniques have been used since 1987 to educate student visitors about the museum's agenda. From 1990, the museum worked in close co-operation with local schools, including the Fengtai and Changxindian high schools and the Lugouqiao primary school, laying the ground for activities which could then be applied more widely. The dioramas proved to be the most popular of the regular exhibits with the children, but there was also a range of specially scheduled activities for their age group. History lessons on the normal school timetable were relocated to the museum, and special activity days for students were held for two weeks of each month, where former Red Army and Eighth Route Army soldiers acted as guides to the exhibits. The primary school students were also taken through a special exhibition on children who had shown bravery during the war.[57]

The most original approach, however, was the institution in 1993 of a summer school on the theme of "Life during the War of Resistance." It lasted five days, and over 600 pupils participated. The summer school broke with the main narrative theme of the war portrayed in the museum (the Nationalist and Communist combined war effort against the Japanese), and concentrated on life in the Japanese-occupied zones. The students were first shown documentary films, then taken to a reconstruction of an occupied zone, in effect a diorama expanded massively in scale. Yu Yanjun noted:

55. *Ibid.* p. 378.
56. *Ibid.* p. 378.
57. Yu Yanjun, "Jianhao qidi, bozhong weilai: kangzhanguan qingshaonian jiaoyu jidi gongzuo qingkuang huibao" ("Build up the base, sow the seeds of the future: a report on the groundwork on basic youth education at the Memorial Museum of the War of Resistance"), in *Zhongguo renmin kang-Ri zhanzheng jinianguan: wencong* (*The Memorial Museum of the Chinese People's War of Resistance to Japan: Essays*), Vol. 4 (1993), pp. 329–330.

We chose a hillside about two square kilometres in area, about five kilometres south of Lugouqiao … Using simulated installations, we created an "occupied zone" of the War of Resistance era, with "Japanese devils" (*Riben guizi*) with loaded rifles, "collaborationist interpreters" making menacing gestures, Japanese military jeeps and motorbikes shuttling back and forth continuously, ruins giving off thick smoke, houses burnt and derelict, … people's heads running with blood, compatriots trussed up and beaten, labourers being savagely oppressed by bayonets, the noise of planes bombing in the sky, the sound of gunfire on the ground, and … salted vegetables being eaten by the refugees, while the "devils" and "collaborators" ate bread and roast duck … A lifelike scene, realistic props and situations, to bring the history of the occupied zones from books and films to reality; the students wore refugees' clothes and straw hats, carrying their residence passes and undergoing ID checks.[58]

The summer school concluded with student military corps drill. Its aim was to "contrast the past and the present … and strengthen [the students'] consciousness of national defence."[59] A selection of comments from students and teachers after the summer school, although clearly self-selected by the museum for publication, suggests that the patriotic theme of the camp had been clearly understood by the participants. Yu Yanjun felt that the scheme's success lay in its combination of the lessons of the past with new methods of presentation. In future, he advised, policy-makers should "get rid of the traditional model of patriotic education," and use the new, interactive methods that would "make patriotic education more visible, tangible, and no longer just empty slogans and hackneyed inculcation."[60]

Conclusion

The War of Resistance Museum is a fascinating institution from many points of view. For those attempting to find the manifestations of the much-touted resurgence of Chinese nationalism in the PRC, its reinsertion of the formerly taboo subject of the Sino-Japanese War into official political and educational discourse stands as a (probably) permanent record of the new historiography. The museum makes it clear that nationalism is being reconfigured in the PRC to reflect the Communist Party's post-Mao identity and its representation of legitimacy in the face of a rapidly changing political environment. For those who agonize over the battle to find supposed objectivity in historical museums, it stands as a counter-example, an institution whose self-declared aim is to foster patriotism. Indeed, the museum stands as an example of how political education has been adapted to the social and technological norms of the 1980s and 1990s. How successful the museum will be in achieving its aims remains to be seen, but it is undeniable that there has been a considerable investment, both financial and ideological, in its establishment, and this makes it a turning point in the changing way in which China sees its past and present roles in the world.

58. Yu Yanjun, "Making full use," pp. 379–380.
59. *Ibid.* p. 380.
60. *Ibid.* p. 381.