

China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945.

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The English-language history of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945 has been dominated by the concern to explain and understand the origins of Communist rule and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. During the 1960s and 1970s a debate developed about the relative roles of appeals to nationalism and social justice in the Chinese Communist Party's mobilization of resistance to Japan during 1937 to 1945, as exemplified by Chalmers Johnson's *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* (1962) and Mark Selden's *The Yen-an Way* (1971). This debate and its subsequent interpretations lasted into the 1980s, when political change enabled access to archives and encouraged a more regionally diverse account of this struggle, as exemplified by Chen Yung-fa's *Making Revolution* (1986) and Lyman Van Slyke's contribution on "The Chinese Communist Movement during the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1945" in the *Cambridge History of China* vol. 13 (1986).

This focus on the China War as the point of departure for the establishment of the People's Republic of China has had severe consequences for history. On the whole, the role of the Nationalist Party and government is posed as being in opposition to and in conflict with the Chinese Communist Party, and the Japanese intervention is presented rather flatly without any perspective on its organizational complexities or the consequences of collaboration. Moreover, even with the additional regional diversity that has come to characterize more recent research, the geographical focus of published research has been the areas of Communist organization. One masterly exception to this has been Prasenjit Duara's study of Manchuguo, *Sovereignty and Authenticity* (2004).

China at War is designed to start the process of providing a more rounded history of this era. In particular, it starts from an acknowledgement of the complexity of the political environment across the area of the later People's Republic, recognizing the existence of several "Chinas" during 1937 to 1945. Setting aside the important colonial experiences of Japan and the European Powers, these "Chinas" included a Nationalist regime, a Communist regime and a Japanese-supported China government. Moreover, the political ecology of the period was also characterized by a high degree of localism regardless of any nominal affiliation that local leaders might espouse, or to which they might pay lip-service. *China at War* is also committed to bringing Japan and Japanese intervention in from the sidelines to the centre of historical explanation.

China at War emerged from collaboration between Chinese, Japanese and American scholars who attended a conference at Harvard in June 2002. The result is a fascinating new view of not only China during the war years, but also of the dynamics of nationalism often held to be responsible for the establishment of Communist rule. Shao Minghuang's chapter on Taiwan, for example, details how a generally pro-Japan population was incrementally diverted from this stand through the war years, as it came to be marginalized by the Japanese. Similar perspectives attended the participation of local people in the development of Manchuguo, though necessarily any sympathy for Japan had shallower roots.

The seventeen chapters in the volume are presented in four parts. The first deals with questions about state formation and the administrative efficiency of both the Japanese and Nationalist Party authorities in China; the second part deals with those areas of China that were occupied before 1937 – Taiwan, Manchuria, and Inner Mongolia; the third with areas of China that were occupied later rather than earlier by the CCP forces – Henan and Shandong; and the fourth with unoccupied or only partially occupied areas of China – the JinJiLuYu (Shanxi-Hebei-Shandong-Henan Border Region), Shanghai, Jiangxi and Guanxi.

There are several fairly clear conclusions to be drawn from the volume. One is the capacity that now exists for an exceptionally high degree of scholarship given the richness of sources that have been made available, particularly through archives and the publication of primary source material in the People's Republic of China itself, as well as the sophistication of the wider relevant literature. Odoric Wou's chapter in particular, on food shortages in Henan, is exemplary.

A second conclusion is that this volume clearly highlights the fragmentation of government in China during the war years; and a third is the extent and impact of the pressures the conduct of the war imposed on all the government agencies, Nationalist, Communist and Japanese. The fragmentation of governance has always been acknowledged to some extent. The Nationalist Party was based in Chongqing as the government retreated first south and, once the Japanese invaded, west. Japanese influence spread by linking cities along railway lines and through established lines of communication; the Chinese Communist Party operated behind Japanese lines. At the same time, the degree of fragmentation was even greater. The Communist Party's base areas and border regions were necessarily highly localized. A range of local armies and local warlords were often a more important focus than any notion of a wider political or administrative regime, this principle applied equally to nominal adherents to either Japan or the Nationalist regime.

Although the Japanese forces are often portrayed as invading colonizers who established a new and efficient regime as they went, in line with their "civilizing" mission (as described by Louise Young in *Japan's Total Empire* (1998)) it is also clear that Japanese efficiency was challenged by the China adventure. Too often assumptions were made about Chinese attitudes and reactions to Japanese policy that proved incorrect. Indeed in a number of places, as already noted, a fairly sympathetic local population became disaffected through the conduct of the war.

China at War provides fascinating and detailed studies of Japanese intervention in China during 1937 to 1945. In terms of the volume's stated goals of starting the process of reshaping the history of this period, it is much more than adequate. Necessarily the conceptual framework for much of the volume is concerned with national and nationalist concepts, and it talks about Japanese and Chinese actors quite freely. The use of these terms makes considerable sense for some parts of the population who were indeed conscious of their national identity and the possibility of invasion by a significant "other". At the same time, that kind of consciousness cannot be assumed to have been universal during 1937 to 1945. Peasants in North China during the war, for example, would by no means have been able to distinguish Japanese soldiers from Fujianese soldiers, who would have seemed equally as different and exotic. Most peasants would have held government of any kind in equal regard, no matter whether the government system in question was Japanese, Communist or Nationalist. Their requirement and their aspiration was that stability be maintained. It was precisely that absence of stability that undermined Japanese attempts at government in so many different ways and localities during the war, and paved the way for Japanese failure and withdrawal – and, subsequently, regime change.

Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China.

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An all too common failing, even among professional historians, is to look at the present as an inevitable, lineal outcome of the past. From this perspective, "China" seems to be eternal – a feature