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## Relocation and Dislocation: Civilian, Refugee, and Military Movement as Factors in the Disintegration of Postwar China, 1945–49

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### Abstract

This article argues that massive human displacement was one of the defining factors in China's immediate postwar period (1945–49). It shows that at least three distinctive groups were dispersed during the wartime years and needed to be resettled after the war ended in August 1945: civilian refugees, administrators who had been relocated to the temporary capital at Chongqing, and troops transferred in anticipation of an upcoming civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The article argues that China's new sovereign status in 1945 was paradoxically a source of weakness when it came to resettlement and reconstruction, as China sought international funds to undertake its own reconstruction, but could not demit responsibility to an external actor to organise matters as the United States did for western Europe. A growing sense of anomie and unsettlement prevented resettlement and China remained a zone in which international and domestic conflict came together. Both sets of factors shaped the dislocation that destroyed the possibilities of a stable resettlement in China after the great displacement of wartime.

**Keywords:** China; postwar; UNRRA; relief and rehabilitation; Jiang Tingfu; Chiang Kai-shek; CNRRA

Displacement and resettlement in Europe has become a major topic of historical enquiry. One country little analysed but greatly affected by the same phenomenon was China. During the immediate postwar period, China was faced with a massive crisis of displacement and resettlement. Millions of people had fled their homes during the wartime years of 1937 to 1945. The end of the war with Japan did not lead to a peaceful relocation, however. Instead, a new displacement emerged, the results of which were instability, a wide sense of anomie among the wider population, and ultimately the destruction of the ruling Nationalist regime.

This article makes the following arguments about the Chinese postwar, in particular, that short period from 1945 to 1949. First, that at least three distinctive groups were dispersed during the wartime years and needed to be resettled after the war ended in August 1945. One such group was civilian refugees; a second was administrators who had been relocated to the temporary capital at Chongqing, in southwest China; and the third, large deployments of troops who were being placed around the country in anticipation of an imminent civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The instability of China's postwar settlement can only be understood in the context of the simultaneous

nature of these disruptive relocations of people: refugees, government officials, and soldiers.

Second, China's new, essentially fully sovereign status in 1945 was paradoxically a source of weakness when it came to resettlement and reconstruction. Instead of the humiliating convenience of having an occupier upon whom all responsibility could be devolved, China sought international funds to undertake its own reconstruction, but could not and would not demit responsibility to foreigners to bring about the results. The irony is that resettlement became more difficult precisely because China had, deservedly and necessarily, regained sovereignty. Yet the fragile nature of postwar China made it an environment that any government would have found hard to stabilise, especially because there was no external actor able or willing to fund full reconstruction in the way seen in Europe.

Third, a combination of internal and external factors came together to create the sense of anomie and disturbance that prevented resettlement, and instead ended up in civil war. In many European societies, the postwar was a period when all passion was spent, but a new order could be created without the fear of a renewed conflict (outside a few flash-points such as Berlin). China, however, remained a zone in which international and domestic conflict came together. Until August 1945, that conflict was between China and Japan, with an incipient civil war in the wings. After August 1945, the international conflict was an unstated one between the United States and USSR, with a parallel civil war in China between the Nationalists and Communists. Both domestic and international factors shaped the dislocation that destroyed the possibilities of a stable resettlement in China after the great displacements of wartime.

Movement, both organised and individual, undermined the successful rehabilitation of postwar China, in stark contrast with the ultimately relatively stable west and east Europe, but similar to societies such as post-partition India and Pakistan. During the war years, Chinese politicians and thinkers had proposed a range of schemes for a stable postwar society, with competing ideas on social welfare, constitutional change, and China's international status. However, the fulfilment of these ideas was based on premises that were very hard to achieve. Political stability was destroyed by the emergent civil war (1946–9). Economic stability suffered from the dire financial straits postwar China was in. Then, this already very fragile situation was underpinned by a state in flux because of the immense amounts of human movement going on at any time. China's postwar has not traditionally been defined as a period undermined by dislocation and resettlement, as opposed to internal ideological differences, the Cold War, or the desire for rural revolution; but in fact, all those factors were shaped to a significant degree by the instability of the immediate situation in 1945.

Population movement in wartime has been a staple of modern European history for years. The stories of wide-ranging refugee flight in Eastern Europe and in France in 1940 have become part of the wider narrative of the war. So have accounts of the massive population movements postwar, which ended the political tensions between majority and minority populations in the interwar era in the most brutal manner possible. Yasmin Khan has written about the comparability of the European and Asian experiences, bringing the two continents into more direct comparison than is usually made. There has also been considerable new research on the role of international institutions in shaping the postwar period, as well as the efforts of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and other organisations to shape relief and rehabilitation. However, this work has mainly concentrated on the European theatre.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch, and David Feldman, eds., *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives 1945–1949, Past & Present Supplement 6* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Y Khan, "Wars of Displacement," in *Cambridge History of the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

However, the importance of population movement in shaping wartime and postwar China is now becoming more widely recognised. This article argues that three different population movements (governmental and military as well as refugee) came together to disrupt any stable programme of relocation in 1945, but the refugee crisis was the most prominent of these, and recent scholarship has given considerable attention to the topic in the wartime years. Stephen MacKinnon's pioneering book about refugees in the temporary wartime military headquarters at Wuhan was one of the first to put the "refugee question" at the centre of scholarship on the World War II era in China; Helena Lopes's highly innovative work on refugee flight in wartime Macau demonstrates that new patterns of social provision affected relations between the European colonial powers in East Asia.<sup>2</sup>

A brief terminological note is in order here: in general, scholars in the China history field refer to "refugees" during this period. Strictly speaking, most of those who fled in wartime China were IDPs (internally displaced persons) rather than refugees across international borders, although the latter did exist too, in many cases coming from Southeast Asia. However, contemporary documents refer to those in flight as *nanmin* ("people in distress") or *nanbao* ("compatriots in distress"), for which "refugees" has become a standard translation. The distances travelled by many refugees in China, after all, were the equivalent of a voyage across several European countries.

In late wartime and postwar China, relief, reconstruction, and resettlement were all part of a nexus which combined very different elements of scale at the global, national, and local levels. What made the war against Japan so distinctive was the combination of three methods of coping with the forced migration of large numbers: an indigenous tradition of refugee relief based in religious and social organisations, the increase in formal provision by central and local government, and the involvement of international organisations, notably the fledgling United Nations. The local, the national, and the global came together at that moment in unprecedented ways; by 1945, all three were of immense relevance to China's postwar path. These different levels of engagement were not in opposition to one another; rather, they dealt with different sorts of problems that came from the strange reality of China being both a major Allied belligerent and modernising power as well as a predominantly agrarian society with many premodern elements in its social and economic relationships.

At the global level, from 1943 the establishment of UNRRA gave an international institution a major role in shaping the resettlement process in China, in anticipation of an Allied victory within the next few years. This drew on prewar League of Nations precedents, when China had been involved in international organisations dealing with food supply and hygiene issues.<sup>3</sup> At the national level, the crisis led the government to create significant new institutions to cope with the sudden flight of millions of refugees as well as seeking to improve hygiene and food supply provisions. At the local level, cities and villages coped with influxes of new people, and with the hygiene, disease control, and food supply issues that came with them.<sup>4</sup>

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2015), 277–97. For a transformative argument on this question, see P. Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> S. MacKinnon, *Wuhan 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Helena F. S. Lopes, "Inter-Imperial Humanitarianism: The Macau Delegation of the Portuguese Red Cross during the Second World War," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 46:6 (2018), 1125–47.

<sup>3</sup> S. Amrith and P. Clavin, "Feeding the World: Connecting Europe and Asia, 1930–1945," *Past & Present Supplement* 8 (2013), 29–50.

<sup>4</sup> N. E. Barnes, *Intimate Communities: Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018); Lu Liu, "A Whole Nation Walking: The 'Great Retreat' in the War of

None of these layers was invented in wartime; they drew on policies already in place in the prewar years. Yet the wartime period accelerated the interaction of the three levels, while simultaneously showing how fragile they all were in a war-battered, impoverished state. The experience of UNRRA in China showed the complexity of balancing these three levels. UNRRA provided over \$517 million of aid to China between 1944 and 1947.<sup>5</sup> UNRRA in China, led by Benjamin H. Kizer, itself sent supplies into China, which were then distributed by a parallel Chinese organisation, the China National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRRA), led by the historian and liberal politician Jiang Tingfu from 1943–6 (and P. H. Ho from 1946–7). Huge amounts of good work was done, including restoring the dykes on the Yellow River blown up by the Nationalists while fighting the Japanese in 1938, and food and medical relief for thousands of people in cities destroyed by the war, such as Hengyang in Hunan province.<sup>6</sup> However, the two sides operated only in wary concert. UNRRA's representatives debated whether or not China should shoulder more of the costs of the immensely expensive relief and rehabilitation project; China's representatives angrily pointed out that their economy had been destroyed because they had resisted Japan essentially alone between 1937 and 1945. UNRRA had to deal with starvation and destruction across most of China's provinces, yet it also became caught up in the civil war as the Nationalists and Communists turned their attention to attacking one another.<sup>7</sup>

From phenomena such as China's entry into international organisations to the efforts to create reconstruction to underpin a new constitutional republic on the ground, there are numerous examples of a post-1945 Chinese trajectory that did not lead inevitably to communist government; while the contingency may not be as great as it was in Europe, where Stalin's intervention was crucial, in 1945 there was still no foretold path for postwar China. A new history of China's wartime also makes possible a reinterpretation of the Chinese postwar. The short period, with its core in the years from 1945 to 1949, the last years of the Nationalist government and China's republic on the mainland, are often regarded as little more than a coda shaped by a brutal civil war. Yet this period deserves attention in its own right. Reconstruction, rehabilitation, and resettlement were central to the Chinese postwar. Coping—and failing to cope—with the movement of people was also at the heart of the period.

China's sheer size meant that the consequences of internal displacement and resettlement varied considerably. Regions of China experienced that turmoil in vastly different ways. For the southwest, refugee flight and relocation was central, whereas for the northeast and the communist-run Chinese Liberated Areas Relief Association (CLARA) areas, the movement of troops as the civil war became fiercer shaped events. Whatever the cause of the mass population movements, the rootlessness that came from an immense, hard-to-complete project of relocation depressed morale around the country. Movement and relocation were critical reasons the postwar years were so turbulent in China. They also explain why the place that China sought in the global order, for which it had fought hard, and which the United States wished it to hold, never materialised.

For in the end, the Chinese government's failure to cope with the movement of people was also at the heart of the period. Accounts of the time show a population with a growing sense of anomie and alienation from the reconstructed order coming into being.

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Resistance, 1937–1945” (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002); R. Mitter, “Classifying Citizens in Nationalist China during World War II, 1937–1941,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45:2 (2011), 243–75.

<sup>5</sup> R. Mitter, “State-Building after Disaster: Jiang Tingfu and the Reconstruction of Post-World War II China, 1943–1945,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61:1 (2019), 176–206.

<sup>6</sup> M. Muscolino, *The Ecology of War in China: Henan Province, the Yellow River, and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), chap. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Mitter, “State-Building,” 25–6.

It was not just in China where the psychological, economic, and military factors came together in such a toxic way. From the contemporaneous civil war in Greece to the horrors surrounding the partition of India, relocation and resettlement went tragically wrong around the globe in 1945–50. As Milinda Banerjee's piece in this collection shows, the interaction of dislocation and emotion were powerful factors in the partition of Bengal during this period. China's experience should be recalled more than it is, not because it is unique, but because in important respects it is so typical.

### **The Anomalous Status of Wartime China: A Revisionist Political and Social History**

To understand the nature of China in the immediate postwar, it is necessary to understand its history during the war itself. The history of China still sits in the shadows of World War II historiography, and remains controversial among those who know it. As Hans van de Ven has argued, it was portrayed during the Cold War as the story of an incompetent Nationalist military regime which failed to fight its Japanese foes effectively, sucked its American allies dry for aid that was used for corrupt purposes, and was then justifiably defeated by a better-organised and more morally worthy Communist enemy in the civil war that followed the war against Japan. Revisionist history in China, Taiwan, and the West has significantly altered this picture since the 1990s. While there are still broad areas of controversy, dominant interpretations today (including within China itself) give the Nationalist government much more credit for defeating the Japanese, acknowledging that the majority of set-piece battles were fought by Nationalist troops, with the Communists expending more effort on guerrilla warfare.<sup>8</sup>

The first phase of the war in China lasted from July 1937 to December 1941. During this period, after the initial Japanese invasion, an uneasy united front of Nationalists and Communists resisted the enemy in the interior of China. Japan occupied most of the eastern seaboard, establishing various collaborationist governments, most notably one under Wang Jingwei and then Chen Gongbo based at Nanjing between 1940 and 1945. In December 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States and British Empire into the war on China's side. During this period, China was treated as an important but secondary theatre of war by the Western Allies. No Western ground troops served in China, but an American commander-in-chief, General Joseph Stilwell, was sent to serve Chiang Kai-shek; the two ended up having a toxic relationship which ended with Stilwell's recall in 1944. Nationalist China became more besieged, weakened, and corrupt as the war went on; in contrast, the communist Red Army became larger and stronger. The atomic bombings of Japan in August 1945 brought the war in Asia to a sudden close. This proved a reprieve for the Nationalist government, but it would not be a long one, as the incipient civil war broke out in late 1946 and ended with a Communist victory in 1949.

Wartime China was a highly anomalous state among the wartime allies. It was much more disunited politically and weaker economically than the United States, USSR, or Great Britain. Its level of sovereignty changed during the conflict itself. In 1937, there were still areas of foreign control on Chinese soil, notably the International Settlement in Shanghai. In 1943, new treaties were signed ending all extraterritorial legal rights (including those in Shanghai) for U.S. and British citizens, essentially confirming China's sovereignty once Japan had been defeated. Yet despite its regaining of sovereignty, in 1945 China was falling apart internally. Had it not been for the atomic bombings, it is a moot point whether Nationalist China would have survived, and the United States was making contingency plans for what would happen to the war in Asia in 1945–6 if it did

<sup>8</sup> Hans J. van de Ven, *War and Nationalism in China, 1925–45* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003).

not, including negotiations with other actors such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Nationalist generals opposed to Chiang Kai-shek.

As it was, Chiang's China was temporarily saved by the sudden end of the war in August 1945. More than that, China was treated, at least nominally, as a wartime victor; in fact, Chiang had been invited to the Cairo Conference in November 1943, a gesture of symbolic importance although the conference made few important decisions, but he was excluded from major postwar conferences such as Yalta and Potsdam. However, this status also meant that China had to bear the burdens of the victor. Western Germany and Japan had the bitter privilege of a rich, liberal United States to pick up the bill for reconstruction and the responsibility for organising it. In contrast, a poor and weak China desperately needed international funds to undertake its own reconstruction, but as a sovereign actor, it could not and would not demit responsibility to foreigners to bring about the results.

The revisionist history of World War II has also provided a new subfield: the social history of wartime Nationalist China, with a particular concentration on the massive refugee crisis, and associated issues of health and hygiene provision. Refugee flight within China was not a new phenomenon by the time of World War II; civilians fleeing before marauding armies had been seen in China for centuries. What made the war against Japan so distinctive was the combination of three methods of coping with the massive forced migrations: an indigenous tradition of refugee relief based in religious and social organisations, the increase in formal provisions by central and local government, and the involvement of international organisations, notably the still-new United Nations.

This had not been true in 1937, when the war broke out; then, the global element was very much eclipsed by the fragmenting, shattered local. There were different phases of refugee flight, with varying geographical implications. The first phase of the war in 1937–8 saw significant movement in the Yangtze delta, some of which marked temporary movement and eventual return to people's home territories. However, one significant and longer-term shift was the move to the interior of the country, the transition made by millions living in eastern China, which came under Japanese occupation, to the southwest, a region controlled by China's National Government. Part of the move was foreseen, with the shift from the capital at Nanjing (established by Chiang's government in 1928) to the southwestern city of Chongqing planned from as early as 1935. However, a much larger exodus of people from eastern China took place at the same time, with over 10 million coming to the southwest, as Lu Liu shows.<sup>9</sup>

Southwest China then became the nexus for the state to rethink refugee policy, welfare, and health at a national level, even while China itself was deeply divided. The results were very far from a perfect or complete package. However, they mark a real shift in terms of the actions and capacities of the modern wartime Chinese state. As Nicole Barnes has shown, women's health was a particularly important issue, as much for natalist reasons as feminist ones. The regime established in southwest China used, among other methods, identity cards to tag refugees and enable them to claim welfare. The mass migration of millions of people led to a further concern about hygiene, with extensive programmes undertaken both in city and countryside. This was differentiated at the local level, so in Chongqing programmes of mass vaccination became part of the landscape, whereas in the countryside there was more attention to issues such as preventing sewage polluting fresh water supplies. Addressing the refugee crisis was as much an issue of hygiene as it was of employment.<sup>10</sup> There were influences from the prewar period, when China had taken part in international health regimes through the League of Nations.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Liu, "A Whole Nation."

<sup>10</sup> Barnes, *Intimate Communities*.

<sup>11</sup> Amrith and Clavin, "Feeding the World."



Wartime conditions made it much harder for the National Government to continue its welfare provisions. From 1943 to 1945, China suffered from very high inflation, which destroyed individual lives, and also reduced the capacity of government to spend. While corruption and incompetence were undoubtedly among the reasons, the war situation meant Japanese pressure on the government in all sorts of damaging areas, from the circulation of fake banknotes to the destruction of existing market and transport networks.

Part of the problem was addressed by the same means that had assisted much of Europe: the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Established in 1943, UNRRA aimed to supply the immediate needs of countries that had been destroyed by the war. In China, UNRRA started working straight away in the Free China zone, the part of the country which had never been occupied; to observe the proprieties of sovereignty, its China office operated in tandem with the parallel China National Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (CNRRA), led from 1943 to 1946 by Jiang Tingfu. UNRRA provided a much-needed internationalist element to a patchwork of relief in areas such as primary healthcare that depended on a fledgling national structure, as well as local charitable and civil society efforts. Among the issues that it tackled were starvation and malnutrition, rebuilding of shattered infrastructure, and provision of basic healthcare. China was also a very sensitive place for UNRRA to operate; it needed just as much help as other shattered countries in Europe or Asia, yet because it was an Allied belligerent, it also had to exercise autonomy over the way funds were distributed, even if that made them more subject to corruption or misuse. The China that emerged into sudden peace in 1945 was expected to be a regional or even world leader, at a time when it could scarcely stand on its own feet.

## The Postwar

All the layers of engagement, at international, national, and local levels, were present by the last year of the war, but the political context changed suddenly in August 1945. The war with Japan was over, but it had become clear through most of the later war years that a confrontation was looming between the ruling Nationalists and their uneasy wartime partners, the CCP. There had been clashes between the two sides even before Japan's defeat, and many feared that a civil war was imminent. However, discussions on a coalition government took place in October 1945, and during much of 1946 General George C. Marshall did his best to negotiate an agreement between the two sides, although he ultimately failed. The United States wanted a pro-American China, but were not prepared to pay any price to secure it, particularly when it was ruled by Chiang, a leader disliked and distrusted by Marshall and Truman.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the task of reconstruction loomed in front of the whole country. China was penniless; it had a huge task before it and no money. The overall situation in China in 1945 was appalling. Reports from UNRRA representatives make it clear that the task had been magnified by the suddenness of the end of the war. The plan had been slowly to bring in relief behind a moving front as the Japanese were pushed back through 1945 and into 1946; instead, in August 1945, there was an instant emergency. In April 1946, UNRRA estimated that over 6 million Chinese were in critical need and that some 32 million needed supplementary food.<sup>13</sup> One problem was split authority, with a turf war between the American-dominated UNRRA and the Chinese CNRRA, a conflict tied up with China's deep sensitivity about sovereignty. The UNRRA/CNRRA attempt to rehabilitate China

<sup>12</sup> D. Kurtz-Phelan, *The China Mission: George Marshall's Unfinished War, 1945–47* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Mitter, "State-Building," 20, 23.

was happening at the same time a civil war was breaking out, with military mobilisation a top priority for both the CCP and the Nationalists. The relief effort was also hampered by the emergent political divide. Communist areas were run by CLARA, which declined to operate under Nationalist authority but rather wanted to receive UNRRA assistance and engage with outside agents as autonomous actors in their own right.<sup>14</sup> However, the most serious problem was the sheer size of the task and its context. No other Allied belligerent, with the partial exception of France, had to face such a problem of population displacement on its own territory, and with so few resources.

The sudden end to the war meant that for the first time, millions of displaced Chinese could think about returning home. However, in doing so, they came up against the other dominant relocation of the era: the mobilisation of troops as China moved into civil war. Below, I will discuss four different types of movement, each of which addresses a different aspect of the relocations in postwar China. First was the organised move of the government from its temporary capital at Chongqing back to Nanjing; second was the need to deal with both internal and cross-border refugees; third was the transfer of thousands of troops across China to hold the critical Northeast region; and fourth was the reduced capacity to provide relief in an apolitical manner across Nationalist/Communist boundaries.

First, there was the return of the capital from its wartime home in Chongqing back to Nanjing. This involved an organised move, but one that concerned thousands of key personnel at a time when China's government was in flux. While the move was ultimately successfully achieved, the practical difficulties were numerous and showed that fine language about relocation could not so easily be put into action.

Second, these difficulties flag the problems with the single most vulnerable group that had to contemplate moving, civilian refugees. One survey suggested that 95.4 million people had become refugees during the 1937–45 war.<sup>15</sup> The case study here shows how one major city, Kunming in the southwest, was a microcosm of the problems. Kunming was one of the major cities of Free (i.e., unoccupied) China; because it was in Yunnan province, run by the militarist leader Long Yun (who was only uneasily allied with Chiang), it became famed for its relatively liberal atmosphere, and was the site for Lianda (the United Resistance University) which was based there during its exile from eastern China. Kunming's location meant that it received not only refugees from the rest of China but also from Southeast Asia, as the province has a western border with Burma. Its political situation also meant that it had to balance its desire for provincial authority with the need to work with the central government (and to draw on its resources). Refugee problems that had emerged during the war continued into the peace, but the sudden end to the war in August 1945 multiplied the effect of problems in ways that worsened the problem.

The third element of movement was instability caused by the need to relocate large numbers of troops at short notice. Within days of the end of the war against Japan, the Nationalist government starting planning troop movements to secure parts of the country where the Japanese or the Communists were in control. Local Japanese commanders were even ordered not to surrender to CCP commanders but to wait for the arrival of Nationalist troops. The experience of Huang Yaowu, a junior Nationalist officer (discussed below), shows how military relocation led to a sense of disillusionment and anomie that fed into wider instability in China.

Finally, the dislocations fuelled one other major division that had formed in wartime and became even clearer in the immediate postwar: the divisions between Nationalist and

<sup>14</sup> "UNRRA relief for the Chinese people: a report by CLARA" (Shanghai, 1947, typescript), UNRRA Files (box 2), Harvard-Yenching Library, Harvard University.

<sup>15</sup> MacKinnon, *Wuhan*, 48.



Communist China. The CLARA areas had been designated their own assistance, yet in practice, there was little cooperation between the two sides. Mass movement became an important issue after 1945 because China itself was not stable, nor was there one single stable authority. The divisions between the Nationalist and Communist views of their rehabilitation efforts demonstrate this starkly.

### Organised Relocation: Return to the Capital

The different types of relocation all interacted with each other, increasing the sense of wider disorganisation as postwar China scrambled to reconstruct itself. The first type of relocation was cumbersome, but planned. China was the only major Allied belligerent to have moved its capital during the conflict, although the USSR would have moved to Kuibyshev had the Nazis taken Moscow. In 1937, the Nationalists moved their headquarters to Chongqing, and it was a move of profound symbolic importance to Chiang to return to their capital at Nanjing, as he declared in a speech on 5 May 1946:

This is the day of commemoration for when our country's father [Sun Yatsen] established a revolutionary government 25 years ago, and now our National Government has returned to Nanjing today. During the eight years of the War of Resistance, relying on all the comrades of the nation, from beginning to end they supported the national strategy of the War of Resistance against Japan, following orders from the centre . . . making bloody sacrifices, . . . enabling them to seize today's ultimate victory, and moreover eliminate all unequal treaties, and eliminate our Chinese nation's 100-year national humiliation. . . . This is the most valuable day of commemoration in our Republic of China. But remembering when Nanjing fell on 13 December 1937, the comrades in the capital suffered the tragedy of a massacre, we ought to think of the agony of this, and never forget that life . . . under the iron hooves of the enemy during eight years of the War of Resistance against Japan . . . we must use our efforts to self-strengthen.<sup>16</sup>

With this speech, Chiang sought to draw a line, or perhaps, complete a circle. More than eight years earlier, he and his National Government had had to withdraw from their capital at Nanjing. The government, run by Chiang's ruling Nationalist (Guomindang or Kuomintang) party had been formally established in 1928, but the outbreak of war with Japan meant the organised evacuation of government to Wuhan and Chongqing in autumn of 1937. Nanjing was supposed to be defended to the death by Nationalist troops left behind, but in fact, General Tang Shengzhi, the commander, slipped away from the city by boat the night before the enemy arrived. The occupation of the city on 13 December 1937 was followed by one of the most horrific war crimes of the era: the Nanjing Massacre ("Rape of Nanking") during which thousands of civilians were killed, and which Chiang referenced in his speech. In 1938, one of Chiang's erstwhile colleagues (and rivals), Wang Jingwei, defected to the Japanese. In 1940, Wang was given permission to establish a "Reorganised" National Government at Nanjing, which was essentially a client government under Japanese domination. Wang himself died in 1944, and his successor Chen Gongbo surrendered in 1945; Chiang had Wang's tomb blown up as one of his first acts. It became immensely important to Chiang to return the capital to Nanjing. While the symbolism was clear, there were also good strategic reasons for doing so: east-central

<sup>16</sup> Doc. 24, "Jiang Jieshi guomin zhengfu huandu" (Chiang Kai-shek broadcast on return to the capital), 5 May 1946, in Zhang Kaiyuan, Zhou Yong (ed.), *Qiandu Dingdu Huandu* [Moving the capital, settling the capital, returning to the capital] (Chongqing: Chongqing chuban jituan, 2014), 234.

China was a much more natural area of Nationalist influence than Sichuan and western China, and access to the wider world was much easier from the east than the west.<sup>17</sup>

By returning to the capital in 1946, Chiang indicated that the long War of Resistance was finally over. His lecture was also meant to indicate that one other aspect of the wartime years was complete: the almost constant dislocation of people. Yet simply decreeing the move was not enough. Documents show that at least three major issues emerged: first, the need for capacity to move so many government employees, second, issues of safety on the journey, and third, dealing with the fragile political situation in much of China as the exodus took place.

The transition of thousands of state employees down the Yangtze in 1937 had been a huge task in itself, one that some of its participants referred to as China's Dunkirk.<sup>18</sup> To move the capital back would be equally momentous, particularly when there were so many tasks facing the government. For Chiang Kai-shek, it was a top priority, as he made clear in an announcement on the very day of Japan's surrender, 14 August 1945.<sup>19</sup> Here, the fact that China was now in alliance with powerful Western nations provided a resource that could be exploited: "When it comes to the problem of transportation equipment for the return of our officials, we are discussing resolving it with the help of allied nations." Physical capacity was a major problem, as there were no more than 100,000 tons of shipping that could make it up the Yangtze, and "it's not sufficient to address our current urgent needs." Another priority was therefore to "increase transportation capacity," for which there was a range of possibilities.<sup>20</sup> One suggestion was that ships should be brought in from Haikou, on Hainan Island, which had been under Japanese occupation (with a fierce CCP resistance under a local commander, Feng Baiju) in 1945. Another was to refurbish older ships; still another was to ask the British trading firm Swire to allow use of their ships. International assistance might also help; a plan was suggested to build new ships under the relief and rehabilitation [*shanhou jiuji*] programme underpinned by UNRRA.

Getting people onto the ships was not the only challenge. A document issued the following day noted that the Economy Minister, Weng Wenhao, had authorised a range of measures to make sure that shipping was physically safe. The most immediate problem was that much of the Yangtze had been mined during the early phase of the war. The end of the war made it imperative to de-mine the river, as water transport was the most efficient means of moving large numbers of people if the transportation could be found. The shipping office demanded that "minesweeping work be done quickly," and that the "provincial governments send down orders to the counties to pass on to each *baojia* [household responsibility group] to report on the mine situation there and indicate the shipping lanes." Ships' captains were also to be educated on what mines looked like. While there were clear problems with transportation by water, road transport was also very difficult. Large numbers of roads were "under repair" and the government declared that it would request assistance from the United States to deal with the land transport problem.<sup>21</sup> By this stage, it was evident that international assistance would be necessary to deal with most of the structural problems in China at the time.

The political geography of China was yet another consideration. The documentation must have been drawn up before the sudden declaration of Japan's surrender, and

<sup>17</sup> On Wang, see J. H. Boyle, *China and Japan at War, 1937-1945* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972).

<sup>18</sup> Su Zhiliang et al., *Qu da houfang* [Going to the interior] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005), 153-4.

<sup>19</sup> Doc. 2, "Guomin gongbao guanyu Jiang Jieshi" (Government Gazette on Chiang on returning officials), 14 Aug. 1945, in Zhang, *Qiandu*, 211.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

plans had been made to deal with the areas where there was a substantial Japanese presence in a scenario where there would be a slow, land-based capture of occupied areas. In that situation, the National Government would need a “plan for how we connect with the shipping officials who are not connected to the enemy or collaborators,” as well as “a plan for how we retake enemy ships and property (including wharves and warehouses).”<sup>22</sup> The document added that the government would need to liaise with companies and reestablish property rights destroyed by the occupation.<sup>23</sup>

In August 1945, the end of the war meant that fighting the Japanese was no longer an issue. However, the government was still keen to regulate the provision of transport: “After this, shipping companies and car companies must not freely issue boat and car tickets, but must manage distribution through a specialized agency.”<sup>24</sup>

Yet by early 1946, the exodus was under way, reversing the great movement to “the Interior” that had started in 1937. In February, units were given more precise details about how they should arrange to ship back home. Units where members had died (always a grisly possibility in a city repeatedly hit by air-raids between 1938 and 1943) were ordered to take back family members of the bereaved. Officials were given allowances of one hundred kilograms per person; workers, just fifty. Excess material could be removed; units were encouraged to hand over unnecessary files to the Academia Historica (the state archive) and were enjoined to keep control of expenses, as each unit would be responsible for covering costs from the wharf in Chongqing to arrival in Nanjing.<sup>25</sup>

The plan aimed to bring back 169,290 government employees to the capital by air, road, and water. Two land and water routes were possible: “The northern route would be a car from Chongqing. . . then take the Longhai railway to Shaanzhou, then change cars to Luoyang, then take the Longhai railway to Xuzhou, change at Pukou, then on to Nanjing. This would take 15 days.” Alternatively, “The southern route is from Chongqing in a car down to the Yangtze, switching boats down to Hankou, then on to Nanjing, and that takes about 16 days.” Each month, the report noted, numbers on each route had reached around 35,000 people, “and there is the possibility of increase.” On air transit, four-fifths of those travelling were flying from Chongqing to Hankou, switching to a ship down to Nanjing, and about a fifth was flying directly to Nanjing.<sup>26</sup> Relocation was all very well in theory, but the reality was that China’s road, rail, and riverine transport was not remotely set up to make such transitions smooth, even for those who were priorities for relocation such as National Government officials. As we will see later, ordinary refugees were left in even more precarious circumstances.

And even when achieved, relocation was sometimes the beginning, not the end, of a process in which the turbulence of the war gave way not to a more stable new beginning but rather a whole range of new problems. One of the thousands of people who made the move was Chen Bulei, chief secretary to Chiang Kai-shek and thus one of his most important advisers. Chen’s prominence in the National Government meant that he was never going simply to be one of the figures with chests neatly tied up by the Chongqing wharf, taking the most uncomfortable and indirect route across China’s broken transport infrastructure. He left in March 1946:

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Doc. 3, “Guomin gongbao guanyu Xingzhengyuan” (From the Executive Yuan, Shipping Authority, on the work of returning officials), 15 Aug. 45, in Zhang, *Qiandu*, 211.

<sup>24</sup> Doc. 2, “Guomin gongbao,” 211; doc. 3, “Guomin gongbao guanyu Xingzhengyuan,” 211.

<sup>25</sup> Doc. 8, “Jiaotongbu zhaoji youguan renyuan” (Transport department announcement re personnel), 2 Feb. 1946, in Zhang, *Qiandu*, 217.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

At 9.30am [24 March 1946] . . . I flew. Since I came to Chongqing on 7 December 1938, it's been seven years, and now I was returning to the east. Toward this mountain city [Chongqing], I have feelings that I can't speak.

Chen arrived at Shanghai's Longhua airport and travelled into the city with family. They "gathered together to see each other . . . with mixed feelings of grief and joy."<sup>27</sup>

But on return to Shanghai, his long exile over, Chen knew that relocation home would not mean that life could restart from where he had left off in 1937. In particular, the dire economic situation in postwar China affected him greatly. The last years of the war had seen very serious inflation in the Nationalist areas, and shortly after the surrender, on 2 October 1945, Chen noted in his diary: "Last month's items of expense were over 100,000 Chinese yuan. But from now on, my income will decrease, and my household economy will be under pressure; this worries me."<sup>28</sup> As time went on, it became clear that the turbulence of the postwar meant that hopes for smooth relocations and a positive reconstruction, as eventually happened in Europe, would come up against the dire realities of China's situation.

Nonetheless for Chen, and thousands of other government officials, the return to the capital was mostly complete by May 1946. More complex, however, were the problems surrounding the many refugees who had arrived in the southwest on their own initiative and now needed to return in a fashion very different from the planned and ordered return of government employees. We will now turn to the history of one city which faced the dilemmas of refugee flight and relocation in the war and postwar.

### Kunming: Coping with the Refugee Crisis

Although the majority of refugees in wartime China were IDPs, there were a small number of people in the southwest who were cross-border refugees from the Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia, the region bordering southwest China which had suffered multiple disasters. Burma had been taken by the Japanese in 1942, leading to the flight of much of its Chinese population. In fact, throughout Southeast Asia, there were diaspora Chinese communities in many of the states and colonies of the region (known in Chinese as *Huaqiao*, often translated as "overseas Chinese"). When the Japanese occupied the region in 1941–2, many of them fled out of fear of the consequences either from the Japanese or from indigenous communities who harboured resentment against the ethnic Chinese.<sup>29</sup>

The tactics used to cope with the refugee influx showed the different levels of engagement between the global, the national, and the local. Kunming was the end point for the Burma "hump," the perilous air supply route from India to China across the Himalayas. Without this supply route, Nationalist China would have been in an even worse state than it was. Yet it was up to local governments and authorities to work out how they could deal with the practicalities of resettlement.

The process had started shortly after the invasion of Burma. A report from the Yunnan provincial government on 26 May 1947, reviewing the province's treatment of refugees during the war and immediately after, noted:

In the summer of 1942, because the situation on the Burma border was very fierce, *Huaqiao* from Malaya were continually coming to China and in mid to late April, the

<sup>27</sup> Wang Taidong, *Chen Bulei riji jiedu* [Reading Chen Bulei's diary; hereafter CBLD] (Beijing: Zuojia chubanshe, 2011), 281.

<sup>28</sup> CBLD, 273.

<sup>29</sup> "Yunnansheng shehuichu" (Yunnan provincial social affairs bureau short history of the period of the War of Resistance), 26 May 1947. In Zhang Kaiyuan, Zhou Yong, ed., *Kangzhan shiqi de Yunnan* [Yunnan during the War of Resistance era] (Chongqing: Chongqing chuban jituan, 2015), 923.

majority of Huaqiao living in Burma had retreated, and more than 10,000 had arrived at Kunming. The work of relief (*jiuji*) became an urgent task, and they organised a Yunnan Province All-Circles Committee for Assistance to Huaqiao, to undertake the following tasks. . . .

In the first instance, the committee needed to provide material assistance to refugees who had arrived with nothing:

Reassurance and solicitation [of assistance]. When the Huaqiao arrived in Yunnan, the central government sent high officials to Kunming to offer support, and the provincial government then sent high officials from each agency separately to offer support at the reception centres, and our office then got together with all the provincial circles to carry out two big conferences on support work, receiving Huaqiao so that they could watch [educational] plays and distributing towels, medicine, soap, etc., and carrying out meetings to generate reassurance with the military college and air college.<sup>30</sup>

The ideas of “reassurance” and “support” in the sense of “comfort” were both important in the wartime and postwar context. Refugees had been uprooted from a settled existence to seek shelter in highly unfamiliar parts of China; now they needed some sense of familiarity. The reassurance came from different sources: a Confucian tradition of mutual assistance and a much more modern feeling that it was important to create a sense of a united Chinese republican nation-state in the midst of wartime chaos and fragmentation.

Yet assistance was not just psychological. The committee took on a range of tasks, including the “provision of food and shelter” at nine locations providing for over 11,200 people: “They also set up places . . . to receive orphaned children, and homeless wives, for long-term care.” They also arranged transportation for a proportion of the fifteen to twenty thousand Huaqiao who arrived in Yunnan, as well as setting up markets through local temples [*wenmiao*] enabling them to sell goods to support themselves.

Also crucial was the provision of hygiene in a situation where infection was a real possibility from the significant inflow of people:

Hygiene provisions. At that time there was a lot of [infection] chaos flowing around, and deaths were very high. Through this office, we discussed a provincial hygiene experimentation station, and spread out treatment agencies throughout the city, to popularise preventative injection, and to set up hospitals in the city to receive those suffering from infection.<sup>31</sup>

The last year of the war against Japan saw a heightening of tensions, with major campaigns such as the Ichigo offensive of 1944. There was a new influx of refugees: “At the start of 1945, around two thousand people came in from [other provinces] to Zhen [Yunnan]/Xiang[Hunan]/Gui[Guangxi].” The authorities organised a relief committee for them, which followed these protocols: “A registry for refugee compatriots. Refugee compatriots coming to Yunnan to be directly registered at the general refugee station [*nanmin zongzhan*], receive their refugee ID, and then be authorized for a reception place.”<sup>32</sup> This tactic drew on techniques developed earlier in the war, where refugee relief structures established by the government included issuing identity documents (ID) to

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

regulate the refugees.<sup>33</sup> There was also recourse to more traditional bonds that contrasted with those created by the machinery of the modern state: thus for food and shelter, as Cantonese-speakers, Macaonese refugees went to a Guangdong same-place society [*tong-xianghui*], Hunan people to a Hunan same-place society, and others were set up in temporary reception places. A third element was the presence of transnational organisations, such as the Red Cross:

Hygiene provisions. There were a comparatively large number of the refugee compatriots who reached Kunming who became sick, and after discussion we asked the Red Cross Kunming Branch the Yu Dian [Help for Yunnan] Hospital, and every day we sent representatives to the reception centres to treat people.<sup>34</sup>

Kunming was a microcosm of a phenomenon that emerged more widely in wartime China—the combination of modern medical tactics with indigenous, local systems of welfare relief and hygiene maintenance. Other non-western societies showed similar combinations, including India where the idea of *seva* service became linked with Hindu ideas of social reform.<sup>35</sup>

However, the end of the war in summer that year did not automatically mean a smooth passage home for either group of refugees. For the Huaqiao:

As for Nanyang [SE Asian] Huaqiao who came back to China . . . after victory, they called out that they would return overseas, but because there is a . . . transport problem, which for a while could not be resolved, they drifted to all sorts of places in the country. The numbers who lost their jobs increased day by day . . . just in one place, Kunming, there were over 300 Huaqiao workers who had no way to make a living.<sup>36</sup>

A committee was set up to deal with the problem of unemployed workers, which operated from 28 April 1946 to the end of February 1947.<sup>37</sup> By the end of February 1947, the repatriation of all the Southeast Asian Huaqiao in Kunming had been achieved. However, it was also important to deal with the IDPs as well, “managing and investigating the return [*qiansong*] of refugees from every province who have come to Yunnan and are being sent back home.” Between 16 January and 2 March 1946, there were arrangements for discounted or free cars for these travellers; the authorities gave half-price transit to 463 people and free transit for 386. In a common usage of the time, the moral standing of the refugees was emphasised by referring to them as *yimin* or “righteous people”; among them, the “naked poor refugees” [*chipin nanmin*] were given free rides.<sup>38</sup> The idea of the refugees as “righteous” stemmed from a longer tradition that displacement should not be seen as a means of denying common identity and had become a recognised way to refer to the first wave of refugees from occupied Manchuria in 1931–2; in the era of the nation-state, referring to the “righteous” was a way of emphasising that leaving home did not mean that refugees were excluded from society.

A “temporary refugee dispatch office” was set up in Kunming. The office registered a total of 17,186, and the total who were judged to be genuine refugees was 14,598: “By

<sup>33</sup> Mitter, “Classifying Citizens.”

<sup>34</sup> “Yunnansheng,” 927.

<sup>35</sup> R. Srivatsan, “Concept of ‘Seva’ and the ‘Sevak’ in the Freedom Movement,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 41:5 (4–10 Feb. 2006), 427–38.

<sup>36</sup> “Yunnansheng,” 927.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> “Yunnansheng,” 928.



the end of November, they had all been transferred, and that was the end of it.”<sup>39</sup> This was a relatively small (though by no means trivial) exercise, but it illustrates in microcosm the type of decisions having to be made repeatedly in many provinces, all at the same time.

The Kunming operation should be placed in context of China’s political geography of the era. Only the southwestern region, essentially Sichuan and Yunnan, had remained uninvaded by the Japanese, and was therefore capable of sustaining the multilayered nexus of central and local government effort, combined with nongovernmental organisations and international organisations. In contrast, much of central and eastern China, which had been under rival, mostly collaborationist regimes for the past eight years, did not have that sort of infrastructure. The Kunming enterprise was very small in overall terms, but it illustrates the importance of the local. At the highest levels, there were grand and somewhat impractical schemes which involved the combination of UNRRA resources with a new national Chinese government infrastructure. These intentions and efforts were very real, as China’s National Government strove to find a way to act as a sovereign power while under enormous economic strain and internal division.<sup>40</sup> However, as had happened so often during the war itself, it was local structures, constrained by the breakdown of existing transport networks, that had to cope with the reality of population movement.

### Military Transportation

In the period after the Japanese surrender, the feeling of victory quickly gave way to further uncertainty, not least for those many Chinese who had to relocate. One obstacle in the way of the resettlement and stabilisation of the civilian population was the fact that the end of the war with Japan did not mean peace, but instead a swift move to another war. This meant yet more relocations, this time of immense numbers of troops.

On 5 May 1946, Chiang spoke about the importance of the return to the capital, after the previous decade and a half of invasion, retreat, and war. “Also fourteen years ago,” he observed, “when Shenyang in the northeast [Manchuria] was invaded, the national shame was inscribed even more deeply . . . , and became a historical lesson for eternity for our Chinese nation.” He added, “But although today we have recovered Shenyang, when it comes to completion of governance and sovereignty over the Northeast, we still need the compatriots of the whole country to continue their efforts for the country, for the nation, to work together, to maintain the glorious results of our final victory.”<sup>41</sup>

The line about Shenyang had a double meaning. It referred not only to the recovery of the Manchurian city from the Japanese, but also the recent recapture of the city during the first brief phase of the civil war that had been halted with the arrival of General Marshall in late December 1945. And it was in the northeast that another type of movement was to be found: the deployment of major armies in the starting phase of that incipient civil war.

The experience of the young army officer Huang Yaowu shows how movement over vast distances had become a significant part of the lives of many. In 1945, he was just seventeen years old, and a very junior officer in the New Sixth Army transported as part of the Nationalist military deployment to the Northeast. Yet in the months and years after the Japanese surrender, he found himself increasingly rootless and seized by a sense of anomie and lack of purpose, more acted upon than acting; Huang, like so many others, was subject to major moves across country while coping with the huge financial and infrastructural crisis that China faced in 1945.

<sup>39</sup> “Yunnansheng,” 929.

<sup>40</sup> Mitter, “State-Building,” 29.

<sup>41</sup> Doc. 24, “Jiang Jieshi guomin zhengfu huandu,” 234.

Huang recalled years later the process by which he was sent to the Northeast. The region was in a very different situation from the southwest in 1945. The region had been occupied by Japan after the “Manchurian Incident” of 18 September 1931. However, the establishment of the client state of “Manchukuo” the next year meant that the region escaped being at the heart of armed conflict during the war years. When the USSR finally invaded Manchuria, much of the region was in Soviet hands by the time of the Japanese surrender announcement on 15 August (and in fact some fighting carried on for a few days afterwards). When the Japanese laid down arms, however, the Nationalists knew that the region was likely not only to stay under Soviet occupation but become a base area for the CCP (as indeed it did). It became imperative for Chiang’s government to send troops to secure the region.

This was not easy, as Nationalist troops were concentrated in the southwest and centre of China (that is, the areas unoccupied by Japan or their collaborators). Frantic preparations were made to transfer troops to the Northeast, using American military assistance. The movement of government officials was hindered, as we have seen above, by the damage done to prewar transport networks. Similar emergency measures had to be put in place to move military personnel.

Huang received orders on 31 December 1945 to prepare for transition to the Northeast. Before boarding ship, Huang had to shower in disinfectant. “As I boarded the ship,” he recalled,

I didn’t know that I was going to fight a civil war. I thought that the Japanese had surrendered, that going to the Northeast was like going to Nanjing, to deal with the Japanese weapons and soldiers . . . I didn’t understand the situation in China at that time.<sup>42</sup>

During the next three years, Huang would leave and rejoin the army on a regular basis, as the organisational structures began to crumble further. Huang’s experiences give a sense of how imperfect and fragile the postwar settlement in China was. His story is one of a young man moving from place to place, trying to find a job or a settled life, and failing. While he was clearly no advocate of the CCP, he became deeply disillusioned with the Nationalists as the civil war drew on; his fading sense of commitment to the government would become commonplace among many of the politically uncommitted people of the era. Mobility meant displacement and rootlessness.

The deployment of central government troops to the Northeast was another example of movement as a gesture with huge political implications. The Northeast had never been fully integrated into the Nationalist state. Although Zhang Xueliang, the militarist leader known as the “young Marshal” who controlled the region, acknowledged Chiang’s authority after the Nanjing government was established in 1928, Zhang had stayed neutral before eventually siding with Nanjing in the civil war of 1930, and had never allowed Nanjing officials any major role in the Northeast. When troops were sent into the Northeast, it was important not just that they be there, but that the locals be given an idea about who these relocated troops, not native to the region, actually were. There was already a reminder of the changing fortunes of the Northeast, as the region now had plenty of defeated Japanese troops and civilians waiting for repatriation.<sup>43</sup> By moving in Chinese troops, the National Government was also redefining national identity, bringing the region into the ambit of a pan-China political entity in a way that it had not been for over two decades. “Letting the locals gather had a purpose,” Huang noted, “to let them

<sup>42</sup> Huang Yaowu, *Wode Kangzhan* [My war of resistance] (Shenyang: Chufeng wenyi, 2010), 94.

<sup>43</sup> On Japanese going back home, see L.Watt, *When Empire Comes Home: Repatriation and Reintegration in Postwar Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asia Center, 2009).

see us in person . . . all in uniform, wearing steel helmets, holding our rifles in their hands.” The hope was that when they saw these “spirited” young soldiers, this would “shape public opinion, [to believe] that they’d fight amazingly well here.”<sup>44</sup>

Yet Huang became increasingly uncertain about how spirited he really felt, and his constantly changing physical location became part of his anomie. He had left the army to try and find other work, but little was available. “I didn’t want to return to the army, I didn’t want to fight a civil war,” he reflected, “but I had no work, no food, and was just continuing to float around [*liulang*] everywhere.” He recalled in bitterness: “People at that time couldn’t decide their own fates.”<sup>45</sup>

This sense of “floating” expressed the rootlessness that the Nationalists found ultimately impossible to cope with. The combination of refugee flight, economic devastations, and the polarisation of politics made it hard to imagine how a new settlement could be made to endure. And ironically, sovereignty made it worse: China could not be seen to be under control by any other country. But in addition, the polarisation of politics also meant that no other country could force intervention in the emerging civil war. George Marshall’s mediation could call for compromise, but could not assure it.

Because the Northeast (Manchuria) was at the heart of the civil war, Huang returned to the northeastern city of Changchun in 1947. He was able to take advantage of a useful network that had emerged in the early twentieth century, a homosocial link through service in the army. He ran into an old comrade in Changchun, who asked him, “Hey, Huang Yaowu, what are you up to?” His old comrade invited him to come back with him to the nearby city of Jilin (about 100 km away), and set him up with a job there; his friend had originally got his job through a connection he had made during service in India. Huang was given a veritable feast in the straitened circumstances of 1947, serving a hotpot with cabbage and pieces of white meat. Impressed, Huang asked how his friend had managed this, and was told: “The only way is if you become a soldier.”<sup>46</sup> Huang would hang on in the army for another year, but finally slip away (with his new bride) during the siege of Shenyang by the CCP in 1948.

The world of mobility and the ability to move freely, if in the direst circumstances, that Huang described would disappear in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). The CCP had no desire to have independent armies that soldiers could join or leave at will, and indeed much of what Huang describes in his account is the very different and much more disciplined way that People’s Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers were trained and socialised. But this is a reminder that that world did not arrive for the CCP fully-formed—it was forged in the civil war. It is to the Communist view on the dislocations of the postwar that we turn now.

### The Communist Areas and the Breakdown of Reconstruction

One major factor that interfered with any successful programme of resettlement and reconstruction in postwar China was the emerging Cold War. Between 1945 and 1947, the refugee relief efforts moved from being at least nominally nonpartisan to the subject of another front in a growing civil war defined by the U.S.-Soviet divide. In Europe, as Jessica Reinisch has shown, UNRRA came to grief because the European borders which had seemed natural points of reference in 1943 were points of contention by the time the Cold War had set in in 1947.<sup>47</sup> In China too, the emergence of Cold War divisions

<sup>44</sup> Huang, *Wode Kangzhan*, 99.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>47</sup> J. Reinisch, “Auntie UNRRA at the Crossroads,” *Past & Present* Supplement 8 (2013), 70–97.

made relief supported by a supposedly neutral international organisation the frontline of a conflict that showed how difficult it would be to create a stable environment in China.

The context for the movement of Nationalist troops was the extraordinary expansion of the Communist presence in China during the war. By the time of the Japanese surrender, the CCP had around a million troops under arms. The last vestiges of any Nationalist–Communist cooperation broke down in late 1946, and General Marshall quietly slipped out of China at the very start of 1947. The CCP knew by this stage that their conflict with the Nationalists would be resolved only by war, but were still at pains to make sure that their case was heard as part of the wider argument about political solutions. CLARA claimed authority in seven regions: “Shensi-Kansu-Ning Hsia, Shansi-Suiyuan, Shantung, Kiangsu-Anhwei, Shansi-Chahar-Hopeh, Hopeh-Jehol-Liaoning, Shansi-Hopeh-Shantung-Honan.”<sup>48</sup>

UNRRA had early on, in 1944, declared that it would work with whichever authorities were in practice in command, a recognition that sovereignty in theory and control on the ground did not always match in the war-torn countries of Europe and Asia.<sup>49</sup> The CCP issued a report in the name of Dong Biwu [Tung Pi-wu], the senior CCP figure who acted as director of CLARA, which pushed that interpretation further and sought to legitimise the CCP’s claims, arguing it was acceptable for UNRRA to approach rivals for power in a country (although this sidelined the fact that those other countries to which the provision applied were not themselves active belligerents on the Allied side).<sup>50</sup> The CCP noted that their representatives, Dong Biwu and Zhou Enlai, had insisted that CLARA needed representation, which it received in Shanghai from July 1946.<sup>51</sup> In the same month, Dong Biwu, in his role as chairman of CLARA, wrote to Fiorella LaGuardia, director of UNRRA, to say:

[During the war] the suffering and losses of the people in the Communist-led Liberated Areas were by far the greatest . . . in order to crush the unparalleled resistance of the people the enemy attempted the most cruel demolition and devastation of these areas . . . the [Japanese] “three-fold destruction policy of: kill all, loot all and burn all” created artificial desert-areas.<sup>52</sup>

CLARA argued that it had been badly treated by UNRRA and CNRRA. The report claims that, according to CNRRA figures, of 266 million people living in former Japanese-occupied areas, those in the CLARA areas “including Manchuria” ran up to 150 million. The total number of war refugees entitled to relief was 42 million; “three-fifths of them, 26 million people living in the Liberated Areas, are entitled to more than one-half or three-fifths of the supplies . . . [up to date] three-fifths of the victims of war and destruction only got one-half of one percent of the relief supplies.”<sup>53</sup> On 29 November 1946, Zhou and a colleague sent a telegram to LaGuardia. They complained that CLARA areas were being left out and that they wanted an “exceedingly modest” sum of \$175 million. They also complained that despite CLARA’s hard work, the Nationalist relief effort run by CNRRA was hampering progress. “CLARA worked against time, as with each passing month UNRRA supplies were delivered and swallowed up by the bottomless pit of the warehouses in Shanghai and in the provinces. The quantity of supplies on which it was still possible to draw sank. UNRRA and CNRRA answered with delays and non-recognition of CLARA’s

<sup>48</sup> “UNRRA relief for the Chinese people: a report by CLARA,” 452.

<sup>49</sup> “UNRRA report, 15 September to 31 December 1944,” [https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/10/10/cf082c4c-608a-4e8d-b924-10946c1b7b61/publishable\\_en.pdf](https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/10/10/cf082c4c-608a-4e8d-b924-10946c1b7b61/publishable_en.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> “UNRRA relief for the Chinese people,” 452.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

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

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

communications.”<sup>54</sup> It was only in January 1947 that UNRRA approved \$52 million of supplies for CLARA:

UNRRA based this highly inadequate supply program upon the wrong assumption that the Communist Areas were not industrialized, therefore did not require industrial rehabilitation supplies; that they were not food-deficit areas, therefore required little agricultural machinery, that they had few hospitals or doctors, therefore could not be entitled to medical supplies and that the character of supplies sent to China was such that the Communist Areas had no legitimate claims to a higher percentage than the program suggested above. In the face of previously established needs it is obvious that the UNRRA-suggested program was a rationalization and an attempted legalization of its failure to live up to its obligations as the relief and rehabilitation agency entrusted to fulfill the objectives of the United Nations.<sup>55</sup>

The report went on to argue that in spring 1947, only small amounts were delivered to CLARA largely because the Nationalist government refused to allow more through. Jiang Tingfu, during his period as head of CNRRA, had always denied furiously any suggestion that CLARA had not been given its rightful share of the reconstruction materiel.<sup>56</sup> However, by 1947, the CCP were accusing the Nationalists of using aircraft to strafe supply convoys to CLARA; they argued that this was because UNRRA was part of the “Truman-Chiang Kai-shek alliance,” and that UNRRA was essentially backing up CNRRA’s (and therefore Chiang Kai-shek’s) policy of discrimination, causing deliberate harm to ordinary Chinese by doing so.

There were reports of famine in a CLARA part of northern Jiangsu in spring 1946, yet, the report complained, UNRRA allotted just 300 tonnes of flour for a population of “23 million,” saying that the Nationalists kept the flour on barges for six weeks so that by the time it arrived the famine was over.<sup>57</sup> It went on to claim that ludicrous items were sent as part of the shipment: UNRRA tried “to rehabilitate the peasants of Shantung with mouldy chocolate and spoiled cigarettes.” Other useless items sent were electrical generators with parts missing, and trucks that had to be cannibalised.<sup>58</sup>

CLARA gave its own account of one of the cases where the rehabilitation work had gone seriously wrong, with the rehabilitation of fisheries at Yantai (Chefoo). The story CLARA told (clearly in a partisan manner) was an example of how the combination of political conflict and lack of infrastructural rehabilitation was preventing reconstruction. They accused the Nationalist navy of blowing up the fishing ships (doubtless on the grounds that they were doubling up as an incipient CCP navy); they added that the fish that were caught could not then be sent to the market in Shanghai which was anyway rigged. “But when the greater part of the UNRRA fishing vessels are lying idle and when fish caught by these vessels of Shanghai are rotting in the holds and can’t be sold . . . while the people in Shanghai go hungry, the policy of political discrimination becomes a policy against the common people of China as a whole,” the report complained. It went on to complain that medical supplies were being sabotaged, or plain useless material was being sent: “UNRRA medical experts . . . are cabling Shanghai frantically if they are supposed to treat dysentery with gauze, and meningitis with plaster of Paris. The withholding of adequate supplies is one of the worst crises of UNRRA/CNRRA’s policy of

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 457.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 458.

<sup>56</sup> Mitter, “State-Building,” 27.

<sup>57</sup> “UNRRA relief for the Chinese people,” 460.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

discrimination.”<sup>59</sup> UNRRA material was also being used for dubious private gain—in North Jiangsu, locals were forced to give up land to acquire newly arrived UNRRA supplies.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, the militarisation of Chinese society and the consequent mass movement of troops, which was happening simultaneously with the movement of IDPs and refugees, was destroying any possibility of stabilisation. The tensions between the CCP and the Nationalists show that the emerging Cold War ideological conflict was also becoming a crucial fault line, greatly hampering any chance of stabilisation. A similar fault line had of course occurred in Europe in the same years, but was mostly contained by the deal struck at Yalta and Potsdam between the Soviets and the United States which created clear borders across the continent. In China, the temporary Cold War agreement between the Soviets and Nationalist Chinese in 1945, that the Soviets would not intervene outside Manchuria, rapidly crumbled as it became clear that the indigenous conflict between the CCP and Nationalists had its own dynamic power separate from the U.S.-Soviet antagonism, and would become a full-scale war in its own right, in a way that the conflicts in Europe (outside Greece), either in the west or east, did not.

## Conclusion

The immediate postwar years in China, from 1945 to 1949, have inevitably been associated with the civil war that dominated most of those years. Of course, the failures of resettlement and rehabilitation do demonstrate that the fissures of Cold War politics were central to the failure of postwar China to become stable. However, that civil war has been read geographically and chronologically in a way that does not fully explain its causation. Geographically, it has been seen at the global level either as part of an emergent global Cold War, or at the national level as the manifestation of a struggle between the Nationalists and Communists. Chronologically, it is often interpreted forward, that is, as a prelude to the CCP victory in 1949 and Mao’s China, rather than backward, as an extension of the China-Japan war of 1937–45.<sup>61</sup> Not enough attention has been paid to the links between the war against Japan and the shaping of the immediate postwar, or the way in which different layers of interpretation—global, national, and local—interacted during those years. Above all, the importance of location, relocation, and dislocation, and the fact that China was on the move in 1945, and remained so for the next four years, has been underplayed, not just because of refugee flight and attempts to deal with resettlement in its aftermath, but also because of the complexities surrounding the forms of movement more directly under government control, of both administrators and troops.

In this interpretation, there is a certain similarity with the case of France. There too, an Allied leader (Charles de Gaulle) had to return to control over a society with highly polarised politics and a legacy from collaboration that had not been publicly debated, along with a powerful Communist movement. In terms of reconstruction, however, China was much more like Eastern Europe, with immense numbers of deaths, a huge expanse of territory smashed beyond recognition by repeated invasion and attacks, and with its infrastructure almost entirely destroyed. In its status as a non-Western society seeking to make the most of a new sovereignty, China was profoundly similar to India, which went through the joy of independence and the trauma of partition during the same years.

Dislocation undermined the bigger frameworks that both the Chinese and the Allies hoped for in shaping a postwar China. The U.S. government saw China as a significant postwar ally, and UNRRA certainly brought China into a new framework of international organisations. The Nationalist government believed that it should have that international role, but also saw itself

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 461.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>61</sup> Hans J. van de Ven, *China at War: Triumph and Tragedy in the Emergence of the New China, 1937–52* (London: Profile, 2017), is a recent exception.



as establishing a postwar semi-authoritarian, semi-democratic welfare state at home, not a “democracy” in the sense that the Americans might have assumed. The Communists in turn saw themselves establishing a much more radical alternative. Yet none of these grand plans were able fully to comprehend the way in which the impact of dislocation on Chinese society had changed the ability of states or parties to impose political answers. Whether it was government officials seeking to pick up the reins in their abandoned capital, refugees seeking funds to return home, or troops moved at high speed around the country with a civil war about to break out, displacement, and the rootlessness and anomie that it caused, is a highly underexamined factor in explaining the sudden collapse of Nationalist authority on the Chinese mainland and the eventual rise to power of the Chinese Communist Party.

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