shall and the other Allied leaders had made at the start of the war: China was not going to be a major theater of war in the Allied effort. This was perfectly understandable, but it could hardly be expected that the Chinese should consider themselves expendable. By creating a fiction that Chiang had to fight to show his value to the alliance, the Allies allowed the relationship between the US and China to erode. Rather than trying repeatedly to take Burma, a target of dubious value, it would have been perfectly reasonable to let Chiang use his limited resources to defend China, even if, in publicity terms, it appeared that China was not playing an active role in the wider war effort. It would also have been better, had Winston Churchill been willing, to use Chiang more as a credible envoy to other non-European peoples, a genuine symbol of nationalist nonwhite resistance who could have challenged Japanese pan-Asianism and communism alike. Instead, Chiang’s regime was made complicit in thankless and overly ambitious goals, giving the impression that China’s own aims and priorities always had to give way to those of the Western Allies and the USSR. The seeds were sown for mistrust between the US and China that would continue after the eventual Communist victory in 1949. Even today, the state of US-China relations shows that those wounds are a long way from being healed.

Meanwhile, the Japanese Ichigō advance continued to drive onward through south-central China. The atmosphere in the Nationalist zone became feverish as the prospect of a Japanese victory seemed suddenly more likely. In Guilin in November 1944 Graham Peck sensed a shrill hysteria. The city was like “a floating amusement park, adrift in a stormy sea,” populated by swarms of refugees. The railway station was full to bursting with people fleeing the city, running from the oncoming Japanese assault as fast they could be transported further west. The city fell on November 24, and the Japanese onslaught moved yet another step closer to Chongqing. The war that had turned into stalemate might suddenly be resolved with violent swiftness.

Chapter 19

UNEXPECTED VICTORY

Unlike F.D.R.’s previous three campaigns, the result of the 1944 presidential election was hard to predict. A dynamic reforming Republican governor, Thomas E. Dewey of New York, seemed to have a plausible chance of deposing the aging and ailing president. Now the Stilwell crisis had contributed to the already feverish atmosphere around the election. By having to recall Stilwell, American policymakers in China seemed to be at the beck and call of an ally who—thanks in part to “Vinegar Joe’s” supporters in the press—was now considered an unworthy partner for the United States. Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times returned from China ready to report the story. He had already composed his text by the time he evaded military censorship on a stopover at Cairo, keeping his draft in his jacket pocket while his bags were searched. Even back home in the US his story was stopped by censors once again, until on October 31 Roosevelt personally approved the lifting of the ban on the story. Atkinson’s article was devastating. It suggested that Stilwell’s recall was “the political triumph of a moribund anti-democratic regime,” and described Chiang Kai-shek as running a government that was “unenlightened, cold-hearted,” and “autocratic.” Above all, the article accused Chiang of a “basic unwillingness” to fight the Japanese.

Roosevelt had calculated correctly that the story would reflect badly on Chiang, rather than on the president’s American advisers. On November 7 the president was reelected by 432 electoral college votes to Dewey’s 99. Although Roosevelt won the popular vote by only 2 million votes, it was still a comfortable mandate, and he had a new vice president, Harry S. Truman, at his side. (Henry Wallace had been dumped after Democratic Party power brokers made it clear that they regarded him as a leftist eccentric who was unfit for the presidency.) China was clearly not the decisive issue; the world war in Europe and the Pacific was occupying the minds of the public much more. The Stilwell crisis had not turned the tide further against Roosevelt. Nonetheless, the relationship of the United States with Chiang Kai-shek’s government had now reached a new low.
Then, unexpectedly, relations between Chongqing and Washington got a boost. As it turned out, the new warmth would have its own dangers. But for a short period, it looked as if the recall of Stilwell and the re-election of Roosevelt might just have lanced the boil that had aggravated the US-China partnership.

Most important of all in changing the temperature was the sudden halt in December of the Ichigō advance (although it did not end formally until February 1945). Ichigō marked the furthest penetration of Japanese troops into Chinese territory during the entire war, putting the enemy in control of even more territory than they had held in summer 1938, when Japan had thrust so deep into central China. Nonetheless, the campaign failed to achieve most of its long-term aims. Although it did place the US air bases near Guilin out of use, these were simply relocated further inland. More importantly, the American capture of Saipan in the Pacific meant that there was another site outside China from which the US could bomb the Japanese home islands, a campaign which included the fierce firebombing of Tokyo in 1944-1945. And while Ichigō did open up the link between French Indochina (under Vichy control) and central and north China, the ragged state of the Japanese army on the Chinese mainland by early 1945 made the connection of little use. Some 23,000 Japanese troops were lost during the campaign. Yet while Ichigō failed to help the Japanese gain outright victory, it also crippled the Nationalists. The great breadbasket and recruitment provinces of Henan and Hunan were lost, and the campaign cost the Nationalists a further 750,000 casualties.

The halting of Japanese forces was something Chiang Kai-shek could cling to at the start of 1945, and he also found other grounds for cautious optimism. Chiang took Stilwell’s recall as a sign that America was “sincere” about helping China: “This is the greatest comfort for me in the new year.” He was still concerned about American attempts to arm militarist rivals such as Xue Yue and Long Yun, but told himself that the American attitude was “completely different” from the type of imperialism advocated by the British. Chiang was still persuaded that the US wanted to raise China’s status in the world, whereas the British had no intention of taking the country seriously in any postwar settlement.

Stilwell had left without waiting to brief his successor, General Albert Wedemeyer, nor had he left behind much in the way of paperwork (“Stilwell kept it all in his hip pocket,” observed one cynical veteran.) Wedemeyer was impressed by Chiang Kai-shek, but shocked by the state of the overall military command in China. Chiang also balked at the discovery that Wedemeyer intended to continue Stilwell’s policy of controlling Lend-Lease supplies. “It’s clear US policy hasn’t changed at all,” he wrote. “This makes my heart bitter.” Chiang remained convinced that the US was attempting to arm rival militarists, “distributing weapons as a bait, so the military will worship foreigners and disobey orders.” After his humiliation at Stilwell’s hands, Chiang was now ready to be suspicious at the slightest sign of disrespect from his allies.

Chiang’s rivals might have been surprised to know of his anger at the United States. Ambassador Clarence Gauss, whose increasingly despairing messages back to Washington showed his lack of confidence about the situation in China, resigned shortly after Stilwell’s recall, and Patrick Hurley was promoted from presidential envoy to full ambassador. Hurley’s arrival in post ended the policy of warmth toward the Communists advocated by John Service and supported at least tacitly by Gauss, and strengthened Chiang’s hand. Chiang had never had a clear understanding of the way that public opinion worked in a democracy. (That was his wife Song Meiling’s specialty, hence her assiduous courting of the American press and public.) Chiang also failed to understand how damaging the recall of Stilwell had been for his cause in the United States. Unfortunately, Hurley lacked the analytical abilities of his predecessors, and their experience of China. Whereas Gauss tended to think the worst of Chiang, Hurley thought the best, and not always to Chiang’s benefit. An Oklahoma oilman with a rambunctious manner, Hurley was known for his careless mangling of Chinese names, at first referring to the generalissimo as “Mr. Shek” and the Communist leader as “Moose Dung.” Hurley had excessive confidence in Chiang’s ability to unite China, and did not understand that the Communists were serious contenders for power. And understanding this immensely complex and delicate political situation was now critical to avoiding a civil war between the Nationalists and Communists.

Chiang was worried about the intentions of the CCP, and with good reason. The waning of his power had been matched by a steady growth in Mao’s. With party membership of over a million people, and some 900,000 regular troops supplemented by a similar number of militia troops, the Communists would clearly be a major force in the postwar order. Yet at this point, all Chinese parties assumed that the war against
Japan would continue for at least one or two more years. This created a dilemma for Mao as to how best to orient his party toward the new world. The Communists had to be seen to support the war effort against Japan. To move openly against Chiang would rob them of the moral high ground from which they could accuse him of emphasizing the fight against the Communists over the war against Japan. (This accusation remained powerful even though Nationalist troops were fighting the Japanese in both the Ichigô assault and in Burma, and the CCP had contributed to neither of these campaigns.) On the other hand, Mao was determined that “this time, we must take over China.” The party debated how far it could exploit the opportunities afforded by Ichigô. With the Nationalists on the back foot, and the Japanese close to exhaustion, might there be an opportunity for the Communists to place themselves in a better position for the postwar conflict, now surely just a year or so away? Mao advocated caution, noting that “our party is not yet sufficiently strong, not yet sufficiently united or consolidated,” a warning that the party should not try to occupy areas where its power was not completely assured. It still expanded cautiously into areas where the Nationalists had retreated, although implementation of its social policies was patchy.

The Dixie Mission had been one crucial part of the strategy, an attempt to create a new warmth with the US, and to persuade its American contacts that the CCP could provide behind-the-lines assistance for an American invasion of the Chinese coast. But the fallout from Stilwell’s recall in October 1944 now changed the relationship between Chiang and the Americans. Late in the previous year, Service had sent a telegram to Stilwell declaring “The Kuomintang [Nationalist Party] is dependent on American support for survival. But we are in no way dependent on the Kuomintang,” adding that “we need feel no ties of gratitude to Chiang.” Other officers disagreed strongly: Service argued that “as we did in the case of Yugoslavia,” the Americans should simply tell Chiang that they would arm any forces that were anti-Japanese. Hurley, for his part, made his view clear in a telegram to acting secretary of state Edward Stettinius (who had taken over from a weary Cordell Hull in December 1944): “In all my negotiations with the Communists, I have insisted that the United States will not supply or otherwise aid the Chinese Communists as a political party or as an insurrection against the National Government.”

As the Japanese continued to retreat, the Dixie Mission had been one crucial part of the strategy, an attempt to create a new warmth with the US, and to persuade its American contacts that the CCP could provide behind-the-lines assistance for an American invasion of the Chinese coast. But the fallout from Stilwell’s recall in October 1944 now changed the relationship between Chiang and the Americans. Late in the previous year, Service had sent a telegram to Stilwell declaring “The Kuomintang [Nationalist Party] is dependent on American support for survival. But we are in no way dependent on the Kuomintang,” adding that “we need feel no ties of gratitude to Chiang.” Even in a private telegram, this was an astounding thing to say of a regime that had been resisting Japan for over seven years. At least one group within the US wartime intelligence agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), also advocated the establishment of “a major intelligence organization in North China based at… Yenan, and operating through four main forward bases in 8th Route Army or guerrilla areas in Shansi, Hopei, Shantung, and Jehol, with seventeen advanced teams, and a large number of native agents.” This level of recognition from the Americans would have raised the status of the Communists to an even higher level.

In March 1945 Service reported on a conversation with Mao in which the Communist leader made it clear that he thought that America was making a foolish move by backing Chiang. The CCP, Mao claimed, was
the only party that truly represented the interests of the peasantry, the largest section of the country’s population. Stressing again the goodwill that Hurley had earned with his “five points,” Mao complained, “We don’t understand why America’s policy seemed to waver after a good start.”

Neither Hurley’s nor Service’s analysis was wholly wrong. It was true, as Hurley had it, that if the CCP did not merge its forces with the Nationalists, then it would use those forces to launch an attack on them. It was also true, as Service had it, that Chiang was desperate for the Communists not to be seen as an independent power base, even if it would aid the anti-Japanese cause. But both American viewpoints, widely differing though they were, understandably assumed that the best policy was the one that helped defeat Japan as fast as possible. This was, of course, by far the best outcome for the war-weary Allies as a whole. The price for China, however, might well be the swift outbreak of civil war. At the heart of the problem was a stubborn fact that the Americans could not or would not see. Neither Chinese side was sincere about a coalition government for its own sake. Both Chiang and Mao saw it as a temporary arrangement while their parties prepared to vie for absolute power.

But Chiang and Mao were not the only ones weighing up the new realities of power in China. In Nanjing, Zhou Fohai was also trying to protect himself. Throughout 1944 Wang Jingwei’s health had been failing. From the very start of the Nanjing government’s life, Wang had been a forlorn and faded figure, with Zhou, Chen Gongbo, and others bearing most of the burden. On realizing how hollow Japan’s promises of autonomy for the regime had been, Wang seems simply to have lost heart, and by the end of his time in office he was little more than a figurehead. Along with psychological despondency, Wang’s physical ailments also came back to haunt him. He had never really recovered from the assassination attempt in 1935, and in March of 1944 he was flown to Japan and was confined in the Imperial University hospital at Nagoya, where he became almost entirely bedridden. Zhou flew to Japan to see him in August. Wang was shockingly gaunt, but able to express his wish that Zhou and Chen Gongbo should take over the government in Nanjing. Chen Bijun, Wang’s loyal wife, made clear her fury at the thought of her rivals achieving ascendancy.

On November 10 Wang died of complications from pneumonia. Zhou Fohai was told the news the next day through the Japanese Embassy in Nanjing. “When I think about our journey together from Kunming to Hanoi, I can’t help but be sad,” he wrote. “Human affairs are not consistent.” Wang’s remains were flown back to Nanjing. In death he finally achieved what he had tried to do in life: he was reunited with Sun Yat-sen. A huge new mausoleum was built on top of the Purple and Gold Mountain just outside Nanjing, and Wang’s body was laid to rest just a short distance away from the last resting place of his old political master. Wang’s political journey had seen him move huge distances both politically—from radical revolutionary to collaborator with the Japanese—and geographically—from Nanjing to Europe, Chongqing to Hanoi to Nanjing again, and then Japan before coming to rest once more in Nanjing. Fourteen months later, he would be subjected to one final journey.

Chen Gongbo had taken over as acting head of the Reorganized Government. Zhou Fohai, meanwhile, remained fully engaged in his double game. While second-in-command to Chen Gongbo, he was also in constant communication with Dai Li, as they planned for the occupation of eastern China by Allied (US) forces. (By the summer of 1945, over 60,000 US military personnel, including 34,726 air troops and 22,151 ground troops, were present in the China Theater.) Zhou guaranteed that the soldiers of the Reorganized Government would join in alongside the regular American troops, and also that they would reject any alliance with the CCP. Zhou and Gu Zhutong, commander of the Nationalist Third War Zone (in eastern China), engaged in lengthy discussion about securing the coastline from Shanghai to Zhejiang in advance of an Allied invasion. The fraternization between the Nationalists and the Wang regime disconcerted many outside observers. John Paton Davies, for one, wrote of Gu Zhutong in a slightly bewildered fashion: “He is not particularly disloyal — or loyal — he is too busy trading with the Japanese.” But Zhou Fohai found a comparison that seemed to make sense to him. On August 21 Zhou observed that the Vichy government had had to relocate in the face of Operation Overlord. “Their situation is similar to ours,” he noted, adding “they don’t have time to mourn themselves, so we will mourn them.” In the last days of the war in Europe, the French collaborationist government would argue that its cooperation with Germany had been a means of protecting France when no outside help was forthcoming: Marshal Pétain would famously claim that when General de Gaulle had been France’s “sword,” he himself, as the head of the Vichy government,
had been France’s “shield.” Wang’s regime had of course used the same argument two years before the Vichy government had even been formed, seeing itself as engaged in the same task as Chongqing but through different means. Zhou saw other worrying parallels with the French situation. The Americans were still stuck in the French countryside outside Paris, and the streets of the capital were filled with Resistance fighters attacking the Germans. “This could happen in Nanjing and Shanghai,” Zhou wrote. “We can’t imagine how chaotic that would be.”

Davies expressed dismay that Chiang’s regime was talking to the collaborators. He would have been even more aghast if he had known of another set of even more confidential meetings in the spring of 1945. There is intriguing though still incomplete evidence that the Communists were engaged in talks with the Japanese at a small village in Jiangsu province, in anticipation of a land campaign in eastern China in the coming year. The Japanese proposed that they would not stand in the way of the Communist New Fourth Army or the 700,000 odd troops still under the control of the Nanjing regime, instead concentrating their fire on the Nationalists. It is hard to know how far these talks would have gone. As with Chiang, talking to the Japanese did not equate to surrendering to them, and the CCP should be given the benefit of the doubt as genuine anti-imperialists. Yet the Communists were, like the Nationalists and Wang’s regime, keen to make the most of a changing and unpredictable situation.

By the start of 1945 it seemed clear that the Nazi grip on Europe would end within months. Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill turned their attention to concluding the war in Asia as swiftly as possible. At Teheran, in November 1943, Stalin had pledged an eventual Soviet entry into the Pacific War when the European tide had turned, and now Roosevelt wanted to make sure that commitment was acted on. Far off in the New Mexico desert, an extraordinary experiment was taking place to develop an atomic bomb. But in early 1945 it was still unclear whether it would work, and the Allies had to make plans for a campaign to conquer Japan that might involve a long and extremely bloody campaign. The fate of much of Europe and Asia was to be decided at a conference that began on February 4, 1945, at Yalta, on the Black Sea, in the Crimea region of the USSR.

Much of the conversation at Yalta was about the fate of postwar Europe, with the division of the Continent into zones under Western and Soviet influence. But Asia was also a major topic of discussion. The Combined Chiefs of Staff were convinced that victory would not come until mid-1947, and told Roosevelt and Churchill so, increasing the pressure on them to make sure that Stalin would participate in the war in Asia.

However, Stalin’s participation came with conditions. He demanded control of the Kurile Islands, an archipelago stretching from the north coast of Japan to Russia’s Kamchatka Peninsula, and the southern part of Sakhalin Island, just off Russia’s coast. He also asked for a variety of military and transport concessions in Manchuria, as well as the maintenance of Outer Mongolia under de facto Soviet control. (The Nationalists still laid claim to all of Mongolia.) While Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria would be fully acknowledged, Soviet influence in the region would also be confirmed. Stalin wanted the other leaders to agree to these demands without any prior consultation with China. In return, Stalin would pledge to enter the war against Japan no more than ninety days after the end of the war in Europe. The deal was made in a series of secret agreements that supplemented the official record of the conference.

Chiang Kai-shek was not privy to any of the Yalta discussions about China’s future, but he had his suspicions. “The influence of this conference on China will be great,” he acknowledged. “I hope Roosevelt isn’t plotting with Churchill and Stalin against me.” When he heard even the public terms of the agreement, Chiang was plunged into gloom, thinking that the world would be thrown back into the same race for dominance that had marked the aftermath of the Great War. “This meeting of the three leaders has already carved the seeds of the Third World War,” he wrote. “Roosevelt is still calling this a diplomatic victory — this is really laughable.”

Chiang’s suspicions were fueled by rumors that there were secret clauses attached to the Yalta agreement. Finally, Roosevelt met the Chinese ambassador to the US, Wei Daoming, and admitted that there were indeed hidden agreements relating to Manchuria; on learning this, Chiang was furious. Meanwhile, Hurley had returned to Washington. He too was concerned at rumors of concessions to the Soviets, and after some delay Roosevelt allowed him to see the details of the Yalta agreements. Hurley was shocked by what he read, as he was by a State Department paper that suggested the Americans might arm the Communists if the former landed on the Chinese coast. Roosevelt supported Hurley’s views
on Chiang, although he cautioned him not to say anything in public that might make the job of reconciliation between the Nationalists and the Communists harder. But on April 2 Hurley held a press conference in Washington at which he declared that the United States would recognize only the National Government and have no further dealings with the Communists.28

Even if Roosevelt had wished to soften the stark position that Hurley had outlined, he had little chance to do so. The ailing president had used the last reserves of his energy in fighting the global war, and on April 12, 1945, just ten days after Hurley's announcement, Roosevelt died of a cerebral hemorrhage at his home in Warm Springs, Georgia. As the nation mourned, Harry S. Truman was sworn in as president. Among the problems the shrewd but underbriefed new commander in chief had to deal with was the growing crisis in China. For just as American intelligence in China had been weakened by the turf war between the OSS and Milton Miles's SACO (Sino-American Cooperative Organization), so differing voices continued to emerge from the State Department. Hurley clung to a position of absolute support for Chiang. Service and Davies continued to speak out in favor of alternatives in case Chiang proved recalcitrant or just collapsed. In turn, Hurley became more convinced that opposition to him was personal.29 These character-driven squabbles would lead to one of the postwar tragedies in American politics: the sterile debate on "Who Lost China?"

Although Hurley's declaration of faith in the Nationalists had been made in public, he still failed to understand that power had shifted within China and that he might have done better to advise Chiang to form a coalition government that would allow him room to regroup. Mao denounced the American's move angrily. "For all its high-sounding language," he fumed, "the Hurley-Chiang racket is designed to sacrifice the interests of the Chinese people, further wreck their unity, and ... lay a mine to set off large-scale civil war in China."30 Throughout the speech Mao denounced Chiang as "His Majesty," and poured scorn on his ideas for constitutional renewal through a National Assembly as no better than the paper-thin parliaments that had been convened during the warlord era of the 1920s. He added, a couple of days later, that "the policy of the United States toward China as represented by its ambassador Patrick J. Hurley is creating a civil war crisis in China."31

Mao's confidence was fueled, in part, by a conviction that the entry of the Soviet Union into the war would tilt the balance of power toward the CCP. But the Communist leader underestimated the protean pragmatism of Joseph Stalin. During the Yalta discussions, Roosevelt had ceded to Stalin a restoration of the rights in East Asia that Russia had lost after the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. But Roosevelt secured an assurance that the USSR would not actively support the Communists against the Nationalists. Roosevelt told Chiang about this condition, but Stalin did not tell Mao.32 The Communist leader was unaware of Stalin's betrayal.

Not that Chiang was happy to trust Stalin's good faith, and as it turned out, with good reason. On April 30 Adolf Hitler killed himself in his bunker under the ruins of Berlin. On May 8, 1945, the war in Europe ended. Now, at last, Asia would be at the center of the conflict, and the USSR would be part of that effort. In early July Chiang sent T. V. Soong, along with his Russian-speaking son Ching-kuo, to Moscow to negotiate terms with Stalin. Stalin agreed to recognize only Chiang as the ruler of China, but made extensive demands in return, including China's recognition of Outer Mongolia's independence and the granting of a privileged status for the USSR in Manchuria. The question of what China would cede to the Soviets was still unresolved when Stalin left for the Allied conference at Potsdam in the middle of the month.

Chiang was angered at Truman's refusal to intervene in the Sino-Soviet negotiations. "This is an insult," he fumed. "I didn't acknowledge Yalta. I didn't take part, I don't have responsibility for it, so why should I carry it out? They really do think that China is their vassal." Echoing his thoughts at the deepest moment of the Stilwell crisis, Chiang brooded: "American diplomacy really has no center, no policy, no morals."33

The Ichigô campaign had been just as destructive to Chinese society as it had to its military, creating yet more deprivation and destruction in China's most fertile areas. The efforts in the early war years to create a more integrated system of welfare provision had always become weaker the further one traveled from Chongqing, but by the last year of the war, they seemed a hollow mockery in the face of massive need. To tackle the problem, China engaged with a remarkable new organization: the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA). Roosevelt had realized that in the areas liberated from the Axis powers, there would be
immense misery, and a formally coordinated effort was needed to make provision to feed starving people and enable countries to rebuild their societies. Although some forty-four countries signed UNRRA’s founding document at the White House on November 9, 1943, it was always heavily bankrolled by the US and run primarily by American administrators.

The China office was headed by the American Benjamin H. Kizer, who arrived in Chongqing in December 1944. Kizer had been warned repeatedly that it was one of the worst postings possible: hot, hilly, and lacking in any workable transport network. The buildings he was assigned were better than many, however. “On clear days, which are rare at this season,” he noted, “they command a fine view of the river and the hills beyond.”

His personal comfort, however, was of trivial importance in comparison to the task he had been set. And the task was made more difficult from the beginning because the American and Chinese sides had such widely differing interpretations of UNRRA’s role.

The crossed wires between the Chinese government and UNRRA were evident in declarations made just a few months after the two sides had begun working with each other. Jiang Tingfu was a distinguished Nationalist figure who had been made head of CNRRA (Chinese National Relief and Rehabilitation Agency), the partner organization that was supposed to coordinate with UNRRA within China’s territory. Jiang declared on July 3, 1945, that the success of relief and rehabilitation efforts in Guizhou and Guangxi provinces showed that “China is demonstrating a determination to help herself before aid can reach her from outside.” Jiang detailed the way in which the Chinese government agencies were working alongside major NGOs such as the American Red Cross, the Chinese Red Cross, and the Associated Christian Colleges. Overall, Jiang declared, the joint effort was paying “enormous dividends” in “experience and ‘know-how’ gained.”

Yet despite the geniality of tone, Jiang was signaling an expectation of much greater provision by UNRRA. He expressed a widely held belief in official Chinese circles that if the US wanted a progressive government to emerge, they should also help pay the price. It was not the fault of the Chinese that their country had been battered into submission in the first place. Kizer, on the other hand, had reason to assume that UNRRA material would feed the maw of a ravenous and corrupt state, and his letters suggest that he was unable to take the Nationalist government entirely seriously. In May 1945, six months after the establishment of the UNRRA China offices, Kizer characterized Jiang as “dragging his feet,” an example of how the Chinese side wanted to “do nothing.”

However, the Nationalists had good reason to fear that the relief effort might be seen purely as largesse from the US. The blame for the failures of Nationalist provision (most notably the Henan famine) had fallen almost exclusively on the shoulders of Chiang Kai-shek’s regime, and corruption and incompetence had played a serious part in causing the disaster. Yet this explanation did not acknowledge that the wider constraints of the war had forced the government to make a series of deeply unappetizing choices. If food relief was now portrayed purely as a piece of American generosity that had no connection with sacrifices made by the ruling party, then Chiang’s government might well lose all of its legitimacy, be blamed for what went wrong, and be given no credit for any successes.

The Nationalists did not see themselves as a bankrupt and hollow regime. Chiang’s government was still determined to rule over a postwar China very different from the one that had gone to war with Japan in 1937. Many of the party’s planners saw the need to create a state where the obligations that government and the people had to one another were greater and more clearly defined. In this they were not alone. Roosevelt’s administration passed the G. I. Bill in 1944, providing training and education for returning veterans. In July 1945 the British people voted out the deeply admired wartime leader, Churchill, in favor of a Labour Party government under Clement Attlee with a program of extensive social welfare. One British example was particularly intriguing to some Nationalist planners. The Beveridge Plan, authored by a distinguished Liberal Party politician, had created huge enthusiasm on its publication in 1942, with its advocacy of a welfare state providing full unemployment and health benefits. It was adopted by all the main political parties and heavily influenced Labour’s winning election manifesto. Back in Chongqing, bureaucrats thinking about the shape of a postwar China noted with approval the “world-famous Beveridge Report.”

Despite Western imputation that the Nationalists were capable of little but corruption and chaos, these proposals were not out of character. From the start of the war, Chiang’s technocrats had linked the provision of welfare and refugee relief with the creation of a stronger, more united national body. Health care was part of the agenda of “hygienic
There is . . . the fundamental problem of China's difficult financial circumstances, which has all the government bureaus operating far below their potential efficiency. The picture of a fully equipped, fully staffed public hospital with virtually no patients is not uncommon, the reason being that there isn't enough money available for the hospital to feed its patients after paying its staff even on a thoroughly inadequate basis. This difficulty has come up over and over again in connection with every conceivable aspect of CNRRA operations and preparatory work.

The investigations of UNRRA also found the war-torn zones of China blighted by famine. In Henan UNRRA detailed cases of starvation that had been made worse by the massive destruction caused by the Ichigō campaign. UNRRA figures suggested that some 70 percent of the population in the province were in dire need in 1945; cases of malaria were reckoned at 130,000, and the number of people starving at over 2 million. The Nationalist aspirations toward social reform—though hampered by financial realities, political disintegration, and corruption—were matched by gestures that seemed to indicate political reform. In April 1945 Chiang called the Sixth Party Congress (May 5–21), the first since 1938. The proposed reforms had a liberal gloss, including a move toward the formalizing of multiple parties in the National Assembly, and for multiparty elections (though at the regional and local rather than national level). The Congress also declared its intention to reduce rents and reform land taxes. There were loud public attacks on the corruption that blighted public life. Clearly the Communist challenge had influenced the Nationalist program. Yet there were signs of something darker in the declaration, too—notably, Chiang's intention to set up committees to oversee (and limit) the democratization process.

The CCP responded in kind with its Seventh Congress, timed to overlap with the Nationalist Sixth Party Congress, from April 23 to June 11, 1945. It had been even longer since the Communists had held their most recent Congress (in Moscow in 1928, in exile from the Nationalist purge), and even the last Plenum had been in 1938. The tone was confident, even aggressive. “Our Communist Party has never been so powerful, the revolutionary base areas have never had so large a population and so large an army,” Mao announced on the opening day. And Mao himself was central to the proceedings, officially acknowledged as the paramount party
leader. The process that had begun with the Rectification movements now came to its climax. The Congress ended with one of the whimsical tales that Mao liked to tell to leaven his theory-laden language. A foolish old man of ancient legend, Mao began, found that his way forward was blocked by two mountains. So he began to dig away at them. His neighbors mocked him for engaging in such an endless task, but the foolish old man replied that even if he died before completing his task, then his sons and grandsons would carry on. "God was moved by this," said Mao, "and he sent down two angels, who carried away the mountains on their backs." In Mao's atheistic interpretation of the fable, God was none other than "the masses of the Chinese people," who would remove the twin mountains of imperialism and feudalism. With the masses behind them, "why can't these two mountains be cleared away?"

The relationship between the CCP and the Americans had now become more strained. In July, Wedemeyer wrote to Mao to inquire about the fate of four American soldiers and their Chinese interpreters who had accidentally parachuted into Communist territory in May and been placed in "protective custody." The American went on, "In view of our common desire to defeat the Japanese, it is my hope that incidents of this kind will not arise in future," but it was clear that the warmth which had been developing between the two sides had decidedly cooled.

Meanwhile, Allied plans developed for the push against the Japanese. In Potsdam, the leaders concentrated on the settlement for peace in Europe. But the US, Britain, and China also issued a declaration that called for "the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces," warning that "the alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction." In China itself, Wedemeyer was drawing on Stilwell's plans to train thirty-nine new divisions of Chinese troops for the recapture of eastern China, although Chiang Kai-shek rejected any suggestion that Stilwell himself might return to China for a land invasion in 1946. In turn, at Marshall's suggestion (prompted by Stilwell in a final act of revenge), General Claire Chenault was also recalled to the US at the end of July. There was anticipation in the air but also a sense of weariness. With peace now settled in Europe, the prospect of a war in Asia that might stretch into 1946 or 1947 was deeply depressing.

For both the Chinese and the Japanese armies were exhausted beyond measure. By the middle of 1945, the Japanese had been driven back from their most important Pacific conquests. From November 1944, Ameri-
end." But the conclusion was inevitable. On August 14, at 10:50 a.m., the emperor declared, in a prerecorded statement, that it was time to "endure the unendurable and suffer the insufferable." Few Japanese understood the full import of the broadcast at the time; the emperor spoke in a form of courtly classical Japanese, and the sound quality of the recording was poor. But the meaning was unequivocal. Japan would accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration and surrender without conditions.

The next morning Chiang Kai-shek rose at his usual early hour. "I thanked God that the mercy he gave me was so great," he wrote. "Every word in Psalm 9 is true, in my experience." Psalm 9 contains the lines "Thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever." Chiang continued with his prayer and, while meditating, heard the recording of the Japanese surrender broadcast. Chiang headed to the radio studios to make his own victory broadcast at 10:00 a.m. "Our faith in justice through black and hopeless days and eight long years of struggle has today been rewarded," he declared. In the course of the speech Chiang gave special mention to two people: Jesus Christ and Sun Yat-sen. Solemnly he declared, "the historical mission of our National Revolution has at last been fulfilled."56

The end had come, suddenly and unexpectedly. The war had broken out almost by accident in July 1937, escalating within weeks from a skirmish near Beiping to an exile from eastern China that would last eight years. China had changed immensely. In August 1945 China was simultaneously in the strongest global position it had ever occupied and weaker than it had been for nearly a century. When the war began, it had still been subject to extraterritoriality and imperialism. Now, not only had the much-hated system of legal immunity for foreigners ended, but China was about to make its mark on the postwar world. For the first time since 1842, when the Qing empire had signed the Treaty of Nanjing, the country was fully sovereign once again. Furthermore, China was now one of the "Big Four," one of the powers that would play a permanent and central role in the formation of the new United Nations Organization, and the only non-European one. In Asia the decades of power enjoyed by Britain and by Japan were at an end. While the US and USSR would take their place at the center of the new international order, China would now have an autonomous role that had eluded it throughout the republican era. The war with Japan was fought for Chinese nationhood and sovereignty, the inheritance of the 1911 revolution, and China had achieved that goal.

Yet China had also paid a terrible price. The war with Japan had hollowed China out. Not since the Taiping War of the 1860s had China come so close to disintegration; then, only the decision of the Qing dynasty to devolve the power of warfare to new provincial armies had prevented collapse. The war with Japan had brought China very close to the same abyss. Even now, at the moment of victory, the country was split. It was divided between parties, Nationalist and Communist, who talked about compromise but seemed set for civil war. And it was distorted by an utterly changed geography. For centuries China had been controlled from the north and the east. The war had forced the Nationalists to redefine their mission in the unfamiliar territory of the far southwest. And as he tasted the moment of victory, Chiang Kai-shek looked out over ruin both foreign and domestic. So many people had died: bombed, slaughtered in Japanese war crimes, drowned, starved, or killed in combat. Even now, the numbers are not clear, but some 14 million to 20 million Chinese seem to have perished during the eight years of conflict. The relationship with the US had become bitter, poisoned by the Stilwell fiasco. American disillusionment with the Chongqing government was fueled by the wreck of the regime that ruled China. The nation had grand visions, but the reality was mass hunger, official corruption, and a brutal security state that tried in vain to suppress the aspirations of a people who had been exorted to develop a sense of national identity and now demanded a state that matched their new sense of themselves. There was a widespread feeling within the country of change abroad. China could not avoid it. And what seemed deeply ironic was that a triumphant Mao Zedong might now reap the fruits of Chiang Kai-shek's victory.

And what of those who had taken the wrong turn in 1938? Zhou Fohai had realized long ago that his allegiance to Wang Jingwei and the Japanese-sponsored regime in Nanjing was a historical dead end. Zhou's diary ends in June 1945 and we do not have a direct record of his sentiments about the end of the war. Yet he must have reflected on the changes in the world since his flight from Chongqing in 1938. Perhaps he would have been pleased to see that Chiang, who was after all his old friend, had achieved nationhood. Perhaps he would have been disconcerted to think about how far the Communists had advanced.

Chiang had plenty of tasks to attend to on the first day of peace. At noon he drafted a version of the surrender document that would go to General Okamura Yasuji, commander in chief of Japan's China Expedi-
tionary Command. He also started to put together a list of the officials who would receive the Japanese surrender in each province. By early the next morning he had also signed off on the Chinese-Soviet mutual assistance agreement, although it still left the exact nature of Soviet support for Chiang's government ominously murky.

But there was one piece of Sun Yat-sen's unfinished business that Chiang turned to without any further delay: reunification. After finishing his radio broadcast, he cabled Mao, inviting him to come to Chongqing “to talk about his big plans.” Mao replied that he would have Zhou Enlai represent him in the talks, but Chiang cabled back that Mao himself should make the journey to the meetings that would decide the shape of China's postwar government.

China's long, eight-year war with Japan was over. The Chinese themselves at last had the power to write the next chapter of their story.

EPILOGUE: THE ENDURING WAR

The fighting had ended so suddenly. Even in early August 1945, Mao Zedong perhaps even hoped that the war against Japan would go on late into 1946, and that this would give the CCP time to consolidate its position. Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek moved fast to try and prevent encroachments on his territory. His first target was the British. Chiang hoped to occupy Hong Kong, returning it to de facto Chinese sovereignty. Had the British known (they suspected, certainly), the first serious confrontation of the postwar era might have emerged. In fact, the suspicion alone was enough to compel the British to rush to reoccupy Hong Kong. But most of Chiang’s attention was on the Communists. On August 12 he told Communist troops that they were not authorized to accept any surrender from the Japanese or collaborationist troops. On August 14 he made an even more significant move, signing a Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, which gave various privileges to the Soviets in northeast China, as well as renouncing any claim to Outer Mongolia. The very next day he invited Mao to come to Chongqing to negotiate a postwar settlement. Mao was reluctant until the US ambassador, Patrick Hurley, himself agreed to accompany him.

Mao was shell-shocked. He had never imagined that Stalin would betray him by signing a separate agreement with Chiang. However, Stalin did not have faith that the CCP really could defeat the Nationalist armies. Focusing on building his new empire in Europe, he did not want to waste time and energy supporting allies who would be pitting themselves against the might of the US, and Mao was left in a weak position. Still, the encounter between Mao and Chiang was historic. It was nearly two decades since they had met.

Mao stayed for six weeks in Chongqing, and in their discussions both sides made some show of compromise. Mao did not insist on a full coalition government, and Chiang conceded that the CCP could maintain twelve divisions of its own. Both Chiang and Mao knew it was vital that they should be seen to attempt to negotiate a solution, but they were also convinced that a civil war was inevitable. Overall, the meetings did not produce a firm agreement that would have maintained stability.

The resulting stalemate was fragile indeed. The CCP began to consolidate its position in the northeast of China, at first attempting to secure the
whole region. But the Communists clashed with some of the Nationalist troops being flown back into the region with American help. As it became clear that this might spark a civil war almost at once, the CCP scaled back its ambitions—at least for the moment. Meanwhile the Soviets, now aware that the Americans had no intention of allowing a joint Allied command structure in Japan, were less inclined to follow the Sino-Soviet agreement with the Nationalists to the letter. At the same time, they were at pains not to force a showdown with the Americans.1

As 1945 turned into 1946, President Truman made it clear that he would not allow American military forces to fight for the Nationalist government. He was taken aback by the sudden resignation of Patrick Hurley, who accused left-leaning colleagues in the State Department of undermining his position from within.2 Truman therefore decided to send to China the most prestigious envoy possible: General George C. Marshall, who had just left his post as the chief of staff of the US Army, would try to negotiate an agreement between the two sides.

Over the next few months, Marshall’s mission became an exercise in frustration. Neither side was genuinely willing to compromise. The Nationalists refused to allow the Communists to run a parallel military and political organization within their territory. The Communists balked at the idea of handing over their autonomous military power to an ill-defined Nationalist structure. Both sides agreed to an armistice on January 10, 1946, yet Marshall found it impossible to get them to settle on the next steps.3 During the first six months of 1946, Marshall’s attempts to achieve a real breakthrough were undermined by the escalation of fighting both by the Nationalists and Communists. By the summer of 1946 the Communists were firmly entrenched in the northeast (Manchuria). Chiang continued to demand that the Communists give up their arms (believing that they were weak and would be unable to sustain themselves), while the Communists insisted that the Nationalists must give up the advances that they had made during the course of 1946.4 On January 7, 1947, Marshall announced that he was ending his attempts to mediate between the two parties.

The behavior of the Nationalists hardly reassured the Chinese people that their fate was in safe hands. The economy was in a parlous situation at the end of the war against Japan, but not irrecoverable. But Chiang refused to reduce military spending, sure that an armed victory over the CCP was the only way that he could stamp his control over the country.

Chiang attempted to impose government price controls, with little effect, and issued new bonds which found few takers among the wealthy, who saw that the bonds issued during the War of Resistance had not been honored by the government.5 From 1947 inflation, which had been bad during the last years of the war, ran fatally out of control. The returning government also lost much of the goodwill of victory by its arbitrary and corrupt actions, regularly expropriating property and acting with arrogance in the territories it had reconquered.

The treatment of collaborators was a particularly painful question. When Wang Jingwei had died in Nagoya in November 1944, his body had been shipped back to China and interred beside that of his revolutionary comrade Sun Yat-sen. On his return to Nanjing, Chiang made it a first item of business to destroy this symbol in the most final form possible: he gave orders to use high explosives to blow up Wang Jingwei’s tomb. Chen Gongbo, who had become the head of the Reorganized Nationalist government after Wang’s death, was tried and executed in the spring of 1946.

There was more ambiguity in the way that some collaborators were dealt with. Chen Bijun, Wang Jingwei’s widow, was tried (like Chen Gongbo) in the spring of 1946, and she defended herself strongly, arguing that her husband had taken back sovereignty over territories already abandoned by Chiang’s government. Spectators at the trial applauded her and asked for her autograph. She was sentenced to prison, but not executed, and died in a Shanghai jail under Communist rule in 1959.6 And Zhou Fohai, who had been playing a double game for most of the last part of the war, was also spared execution. He might have expected even more lenient treatment, but his ambivalent protector, Dai Li, died in an air crash in 1946, and there were no other powerful figures in the regime who wished to use their political capital on behalf of Zhou. He died of a heart attack in prison in 1948. Overall, the collaborators became hidden and marginal figures as China was engulfed in the new crisis of civil war.

The Japanese were also condemned for their invasion of China. At the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (the “Tokyo Trial”) in 1948, the Nanjing Massacre was just one of the events of the China War used to indict the defendants. Seven defendants were sentenced to death, including General Matsui Iwane and former foreign minister Hirota Koki, both closely associated with the escalation of the war with China.7

The social critic Xu Wancheng had made his name in the pre-war pe-
Xu noted the cynical element in the CCP's strategy (as had Peter Vladimirov before him):

"The CCP is happy at disasters and delighted at calamities. Their only fear is that the empire is not in chaos. When Dushan was lost, the Xinhua ribao put this in big-character headlines, that Dushan had been overcome, and then was silent and said nothing more. The previous year, in this same newspaper, the CCP had said: "We are making efforts for the war of resistance." How much effort were they making?"

Xu was equally dismissive of the smaller parties such as the China Youth Party. "They have many theories, but have no military authority, and thus no political authority." He summarized, despairingly: "The first to suffer are the good ordinary people! As the blood flows between Nationalists and CCP, the ordinary people are suffering!"

To be fair, there were real achievements made under the Nationalists in the immediate postwar period, but more in the international arena than the domestic. China's wartime contribution meant that it was defined as one of the five permanent powers on the Security Council of the new United Nations, each of which had the right to veto resolutions put before the council. China also had a place within a whole range of other new international organizations. Even in 1945 there were still very few non-Western nations that had full and equal sovereignty in world affairs (and Britain and France continued to maintain large parts of their empire, even if India would be given independence shortly). China's status was significant well beyond the country itself, and formed a startling contrast to the semicolonized and prostrate state that had gone to war in 1937.

Yet the Civil War, once started, went badly for the Nationalists, in large part because of Chiang Kai-shek's judgments. During the war against Japan, Chiang had played an appallingly bad hand much better than might have been expected. During the Civil War, his judgment appears to have deserted him. In particular, his decision to extend his lines to try and recapture the northeast—the region which was the Communist heartland where Mao was underpinned by strong support from the neighboring USSR—was spectacularly ill-judged. In 1945-1946 George Marshall had encouraged Chiang to try and recapture the region, but had become much more pessimistic about the possibility by the spring of 1946.

As 1947 ground on, the Communist general Lin Biao's brilliant campaigning in north China drove the Nationalists further and further back. While major cities were still under Nationalist control, along with the rail lines, the territory was now Communist—an echo of the situation under the Japanese just a few years earlier. In the autumn of 1948 General Wei Lihuang found himself with some 300,000 Nationalist troops facing some 700,000 under Lin Biao. By November the region's major city of Shenyang (Mukden) had been lost, and the northeast with it. Lin's troops of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) drove on further, taking north China, and were poised for the conquest of central China too. During the first half of 1949 Chiang transferred his naval and air force headquarters..."
and had rightly been routed in 1949. All credit for leading the Chinese people in the “war of resistance against Japan” went to the CCP alone, and more specifically to Mao himself.

The myths surrounding Mao’s revolution in Yan’an became central to the country’s identity. But huge swathes of people were excluded from the narrative. At a time when Britain, the US, Germany, France, and Japan came to terms, joyously or painfully, with the titanic changes that the war had wrought on their societies, the experience of eight years of resistance was almost entirely removed from the public sphere in China. The Nanjing Massacre, the bombing of Chongqing, the collaboration of Wang Jingwei, the Communist areas that had not been under Mao’s control: all were sidelined or not even mentioned. The Japanese did turn up, often in somewhat stylized form, as the enemy (as in the Chinese opera The Legend of the Red Lantern, designated one of the “eight model operas” during the Cultural Revolution), but during most of the 1950s to the 1970s Mao’s government was trying to detach Tokyo from the Cold War embrace of the US, and there was no sustained effort to whip up genuine hatred of the defeated enemy. Much of the discussion about the Japanese circled around the need to establish “reconciliation” with those who had genuinely repented. The real venom was reserved for the Nationalists across the water in Taiwan, where they remained protected by the US Navy.

Many aspects of Chinese society and culture seemed to reflect changes that had happened during the war. Military service had habituated the Chinese to more collective ways of living, as had the trend toward living and working in the same place to avoid being caught traveling during bombings. More than that, the atmosphere of political mobilization that the war had brought about remained a constant in Chinese life. From the Aid Korea Resist America Campaign during the Korean War (1950–1953) to the Great Leap Forward (1958–1961), Chinese life was characterized by constant campaigns. In the latter case, the drive to increase economic growth gave rise to a horrific famine that killed some 20 million people or more. Yet of all Maoist China’s campaigns, the most intense was the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

Ostensibly, the great upheaval of the Cultural Revolution, when Mao declared war on his own party, had little to do with the legacy of the Sino-Japanese War. But two of the cities where the fighting would be fiercest— with tanks in the streets — were Chongqing and Chengdu. During the Cultural Revolution younger Communist cadres from ideologically
tory in the Anti-Japanese War set up in the city center was renamed the Liberation Monument (as in liberation by the CCP from the Nationalists) after 1949. In the early twenty-first century Chongqing made up for lost time. The city burnished its reputation as the last redoubt of resistance. Chiang Kai-shek's old mansion at Huangshan, from where he had seen the city on fire during the war, is now handsomely restored. The historical narratives inside portray him as China's national leader of resistance; his political and military shortcomings play little part in the description. The city's Three Gorges Museum has featured displays including dioramas of the bombing of Chongqing and a reconstruction of the great tunnel suffocation disaster of 1941.

Mass media have also been used to send out messages about the new interpretation of history. A series entitled "Temporary Wartime Capital" was made by the local television station in 2005, to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the war and celebrate Chongqing's role. The marketing of the DVD was revealing. The cover showed images, familiar in the West, of three great wartime capitals—London's Houses of Parliament, the US Capitol in Washington, DC, and the clock tower in Red Square in Moscow. But it also showed, portrayed twice as high as the other structures, the Anti-Japanese Victory Monument in the center of Chongqing. The international message was clear: the Second World War had been won by four, not three great Allies. And the domestic message was also pointed: Chongqing had had a role of global significance in the recent past, and this should be acknowledged by all Chinese.

Yet convergence still seems far off when it comes to the most contentious areas of wartime history. A joint committee of top Japanese and Chinese scholars was established in 2006 to provide an agreed version of a variety of questions in the history of the two countries. Despite efforts to reconcile views, disagreements over the way that the war was interpreted (particularly the issue of whether Japanese aggression was preplanned or not) meant that the report was never officially adopted by the Chinese government after it was presented in 2009.

As in China, historical memory of the war in Japan itself has been complicated. One version of events, often heard in China and sometimes in the West, is that Japan has simply refused to acknowledge its own war crimes. This view is too simple. It is true that there was and is a vocal right wing in Japan that downplays or denies wartime atrocities. The Japanese conservative mainstream is also often too quick to dismiss the enormity of Japanese crimes. Japan has also pointed to its sad distinction as the only country ever to have been attacked with atomic weapons to make a case for itself as a "peace nation"—but often with little context or explanation given for the events that led to the dropping of two atomic bombs. However, it is also true that there is a wide and lively public sphere in Japan which examines and in no way excuses the Japanese war record in China and elsewhere. The Japanese left, notably the journalist Honda Katsuichi, was instrumental in forcing their own country to re-examine the Nanjing Massacre in the 1970s, long before the issue was brought back to the public gaze in the West or China. Although there have been attempts in Japanese schools to introduce "revisionist" textbooks that minimize Japanese atrocities in China, they have not been widely adopted within the school system.

The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen China's inexorable rise to greater global influence, and part of that rise has been a new assertiveness about foreign relations, and relations with Japan in particular. Repeated events showed that memories of the war remain a flash point. Around the time of the handover of power from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping in late 2012, tensions over the sovereignty of the Diaoyutai Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea spilled over into Chinese streets. The islands are part of the unfinished business in the Asia Pacific region, claimed by Japan, China, and Taiwan. Informed by popular memories of Japan's wartime record in China, protesters railed against Japan's claims to the islands in massive demonstrations across Chinese cities. Young people with no possible personal memory of the war were using its legacy to make a statement about contemporary East Asian international relations.

But rather more noticeable within China, and more significant in the longer term, is the use of the war to unite people within China and to position the country as a cooperative rather than confrontational actor in world politics. The term "war of resistance against Japan" (KangRi zhanzheng or just Kangzhan) remains the commonest term to describe the war in China. However, the term "antifascist war" has also become more commonplace, particularly as writers seek to portray Chinese resistance not simply as a solo act of opposition to Japan, but rather as part of an act of collective resistance to the Axis powers. The implication is clear: at an earlier time when its contribution was needed, China delivered, and it should now be trusted as it seeks, once again, to enter international society playing a wider role. The new interpretations of history acknowl-
edge the role of the United States in China during the war, but not always
to the advantage of the US. One Chinese historian concluded that the
aim of the United States in making China one of the major world pow-
ers was to create a “vassal” for the US in the postwar world (an echo of
Churchill’s anxieties on the same question). Another agreed, declaring
that America had defined its foreign policy simply “to maintain its own
national interests.”

The war has also become a fixture in popular culture. In 1986 one of
the first revisionist films about the war was entitled The Great Battle of
Taierzhuang, celebrating the major Nationalist victory in April 1938. The
Nanjing Massacre has been re-created on film several times, including Lu
Chang’s City of Life and Death (2009) and Zhang Yimou’s Flowers of War
(2012). Even video games have taken the war on board; multiplayer games
allow enthusiasts to fight the Japanese Imperial Army.

Given the tacit permission to rehabilitate the record of the National-
ists, however, not all new interpretations of the war have made entirely
comfortable reading for the Chinese Communist Party. Fan Jianchuan,
a former soldier turned wealthy businessman in Chengdu, used his
fortune to set up a series of private museums outside the city. One of
these commemorated Sichuan’s contribution during the wartime period,
showcasing identity documents and uniforms from the Nationalist areas.
Fan published a book entitled One Person’s War of Resistance in which
he showed off some of his artifacts. In his reflections he talked about a
cup he had found which dated from the Cultural Revolution era. It was
inscribed with a heartfelt, semiliterate message from a victim of persecu-
tion: “I fought the Japanese, and I took a bullet in my leg.” Yet in 1966 the
old soldier was being attacked because he had fought for the Nationalists,
not the Communists. “For the eight years of the War of Resistance,” re-
lected Fan Jianchuan, “he had dodged death . . . and suddenly, overnight,
[his war record] was considered shameful?”

In more recent years Nationalist soldiers may not have been perse-
cuted, but instead they were being ignored as they died off. In 2010 Cui
Yongyuan, one of China’s best-known television hosts, gave an interview
in which he talked at length about his rediscovery of the Nationalist role in
the war. As a child he had seen films that implied that the Nationalists had
worked with the Japanese, and it was only as an adult that he gained
a greater understanding of their role when he toured a battlefield with
a Nationalist veteran who showed Cui where his comrades had fallen.

“This was perhaps the first time that I had met a Nationalist soldier,” Cui
recalled. “I really began to feel respect for them.” Cui interviewed over a
hundred Nationalist veterans in Yunnan province. He suggested that in-
dividual stories were the best way to explain the complexities of the war,
whether it was occasions when the locals had pointed out members of the
Eighth Route Army to the Japanese rather than hiding them, or occasions
when even collaborators might have shown some conscience. “Memoirs
from collaborators give a variety of self-justifications,” he observed, “but
it’s not always as simple as betraying your country. There were even some
collaborators who did what they did as a version of the war of resistance,
trading space for time.”

The unquiet spirits of the war against Japan were beginning to rise,
some seventy years after laying down their swords—or their lives.

Modern China has been marked by massive upheavals and destruction
that are just starting to be discussed openly. The devastating famine of
the Great Leap Forward and the destruction caused by the Cultural Revolu-
tion have only been partially acknowledged in China. Likewise, the war
against Japan, until recently, was only discussed in very limited terms.
The opening up of dialogue on the war, and in particular the role of the
Nationalists and of China as an international actor at that time, indicates
significant change in the way that China conducts its contemporary poli-
tics, both domestic and international.

Yet one of the most important conclusions we can draw from China’s
wartime history may still be unwelcome in China. And that is the conting-
ent nature of China’s path to modernity. The three men who sought to
rule China during the war — Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong, and Wang
Jingwei — each embodied a different path to the same goal: a modern,
nationalist Chinese state. There was nothing inevitable about the Chi-
inese Communist Party’s coming to power in 1949. Without the war with
Japan, there would have been a greater possibility of an anti-imperialist,
anti-Communist Nationalist government consolidating power. It would
have still been an immensely hard task, not least because of the National-
ists’ own huge flaws, but the war made it nearly impossible. Of course, in
an Asia ruled by Japan, China would have remained colonized for dec-
dades or more. The political conditions of China today are not the only
possible ones that history could have produced. One of the great lost op-
opportunities of the war was the tentative move toward pluralism both by
the Nationalists and the Communists. The increasing harshness of the war, along with a reluctance by either party to surrender ultimate power, made this a green shoot that withered quickly. But it was there, and deserves to be remembered, and considered afresh.

Another topic that is more widely discussed in China today is the danger of an economic crisis leading to social unrest. Large parts of the old "iron rice bowl" of guaranteed employment, healthcare, and pensions, which were instituted during Mao's years of rule, were abolished as part of the price of economic reform in the 1990s. From the mid-2000s, the government of Hu Jintao made moves to mend some of the holes in China's social-welfare safety net, with new plans to subsidize support for the elderly and the ill. Yet the debates of the early twenty-first century on this issue are not new. The war with Japan pressured both the Nationalists and the Communists to create a new social contract based on greater obligations between the state and the citizen. Today's debates are in part a legacy of that eight-year period of war when the state became more demanding of its people, but was also obliged to shoulder greater responsibilities toward them.

As the war comes to matter to China again, it will affect Western perceptions of China too. The immediate need to understand the continuing flare-ups in Chinese-Japanese relations provides a pressing reason to reevaluate the war. But there is also a more profound reason, one that has to do with historical completeness, even justice. Our collective history of the Allied contribution to the Second World War has moved a tremendous distance in the past few decades. The American role is now seen as part of a global war effort. The British have come to acknowledge the massive contribution of the empire and commonwealth in underpinning their decision to continue fighting. The Soviet Union's great resistance, costing some 20 million lives, now stands central to the understanding of the Allied war effort.

China remains the forgotten ally, its contribution only slowly being remembered as its experience fades out of living memory. Its involvement in the war was not as harrowing as that of the Soviet Union, which was engaged in a struggle to the death, a fight about race and power. But the suffering endured by China was still unimaginably great: the war against Japan left 15 million to 20 million dead, and 80 million to 100 million refugees. The flawed but real economic development that the Nationalists had begun in 1928 was destroyed. For eight years brutal death was an everyday possibility for ordinary Chinese, whether from the swords in Nanjing or the bombs dropping on Chongqing, or even the dams, destroyed in desperation by their own government.

Yet this weakened and crippled state, whose centers of gravity moved at huge speed from Nanjing and Shanghai to Chongqing and Yan'an, still fought for eight years when it could have surrendered to the enemy. The Chinese Nationalists and Communists were the only two major political groupings in East Asia to maintain a consistent opposition to the Japanese Empire through the whole period from 1937 to 1945. The Nationalists maintained some 4 million troops in China through the war, helping to tie down some half a million or more Japanese soldiers who could otherwise have been transferred elsewhere. The Communists maintained a guerrilla campaign that prevented the Japanese from gaining control of large parts of northern China, tying down troops and resources.

Without Chinese resistance, China would have become a Japanese colony as early as 1938. This would have allowed Japan dominance over the mainland, and would have allowed Tokyo to turn its attention to expansion in Southeast Asia even more swiftly, and with less distraction. A pacified China would also have made the invasion of British India much more plausible. Without the "China Quagmire"—a quagmire caused by the refusal of the Chinese to stop fighting—Japan's imperial ambitions would have been much easier to fulfill.

Throughout the war, Chiang Kai-shek's master of propaganda, Hollington Tong, created a variety of characters who were meant to represent China's continuing struggle to the outside world. The name he gave to one such character was highly symbolic: Yu Kangming, a name meaning "I fight fate."29

Both the Nationalists and the Communists did fight a fate that they had never sought. And in acknowledging their suffering, their resistance, and the terrible choices they were forced to make, we in the West also do greater honor to our own collective memories and understandings of the Second World War.