Victor or Victim:
China’s Different Narratives on the War of Resistance against Japan, Their Justifications, and Their Effects on Sino-Japanese Relations

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Between 1937 and 1945, China and Imperial Japan were engaged in a deadly war. What began as a small clash in northern China escalated into a large-scale conflict, which eventually pulled in international actors, became the Pacific front of World War II, and resulted in Japan’s defeat.\(^1\) This conflict, commonly called the War of Resistance against Japan, has been at the core of defining the modern Chinese nation. Specifically, the War of Resistance is an invaluable collective memory that has established the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and forged a distinctive Chinese national identity that remains to this day. Collective memory is generally separated into shared accomplishments and shared humiliations – or what political psychologist Vamik D. Volkan has termed chosen glory and chosen trauma.\(^2\) However, China has employed the War of Resistance as both a chosen glory and a chosen trauma to create two parallel yet Janus-faced themes in Chinese history. Moreover, the Chinese leadership shifted its preference of the themes over the years. While Mao Zedong – during the lead up to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (1945-1949) and the early years of the PRC (1949-1976) – promoted the chosen glory, the post-Mao leadership, especially after 1989, advocated the chosen trauma regardless of which leader was in charge.

The chosen glory and chosen trauma themes respectively translate into what I will call the victor narrative and the victim narrative. In this paper, I argue that Mao’s embrace of the victor narrative and the post-Mao CCP’s embrace of the victim narrative were strategic choices designed to consolidate the legitimacy of the CCP and to address China’s geopolitical interests. I will start the paper by introducing the two narratives. I will then examine the uses of each narrative or lack thereof throughout China’s post-WWII history, which I divided into five

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periods: the Civil War (1945-1949); the early years of the PRC (1949-early 1970s); normalization of Sino-Japanese relations and Mao’s death (1972-1976); the post-Mao transition period (1976-1980s); and the post-Tiananmen Square period (1989-Present). For each time period, I will analyze the domestic and international contexts that led to the preference of one narrative over the other. I will conclude by examining the future. I will explore China’s future role in the world, whether the change in the role entails a departure from the current victim narrative, and the potential benefits and harms of such a departure.

**Overview of the Victor and Victim Narratives:**

The victor narrative celebrates the Chinese people’s heroic resistance during the war. The narrative maintains that the Communists defeated the Japanese imperialists and concluded China’s Century of Humiliation characterized by foreign imperialism. In other words, the War of Resistance was a successful “peasant-led struggle to regain control of the nation’s destiny” that “made it possible for the proletariat… to achieve their own emancipation” through a communist revolution.

Meanwhile, the victim narrative emphasizes Chinese suffering under the Japanese imperialists. This narrative focuses on highlighting atrocities that Japan committed, such as the Rape of Nanjing; quantifying Chinese suffering through the “endless counting” of casualties; and demanding apologies from the Japanese government. Inherent in this narrative is China’s resentment at losing national face to a formerly inferior tributary state of Japan. The repeatedly

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deployed symbolism of Japan as the little brother or student beating the old brother or teacher of China suggests such resentment. 6

**Period 1: 1945-1949**  *Chinese Civil War*

The conclusion of World War II brought about a civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists (Kuomintang, or KMT). The two forces collaborated in the face of Japanese aggression, but as their common enemy was now absent, they competed for political control. During the Civil War, the Communist leader Mao Zedong championed the victor narrative to consolidate the Communists’ power against the KMT. Mao needed to portray the Communists as strong and heroic saviors of the people to win their support; the victor narrative accomplished this more effectively than the victim narrative that lamented China’s losses. To obscure the reality that the KMT was more instrumental than the Communists in defeating Japan, 7 Mao manipulatively used the victor narrative to elevate the CCP’s credentials and mobilize the people against the KMT.

Mao’s speech to party cadres in August 1945 aptly describes his manipulation. Mao claimed that the Communists had “liberated vast territories and pinned down the bulk of the Japanese invading forces;” 8 for instance, “only by [the CCP’s] determined resistance and heroic struggle” were 200 million people in the Great Rear Area (a region that supported the War of Resistance 9) saved from Japanese aggressors. 10 Mao then declared: “The victory of the War of

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6 Ibid., 72.
Resistance has been won by the people with bloodshed and sacrifice…it is to the people that the fruits of the War of Resistance should go.”¹¹ Mao inflated the Communist contribution to the war. By emphasizing that the common people were part of the struggle, Mao also legitimizd the Communists, the champion of the people, as the optimal party to be in power.

At the same time, Mao mobilized the people against the KMT by portraying it as a traitor and a threat. Mao suggested that the KMT leader, Chiang Kai-shek, tried to destabilize the CCP-KMT anti-Japanese coalition by “launch[ing] three large-scale anti-Communist campaigns in 1940, 1941, and 1943, [which] failed only due to the CCP’s correct policies and people’s opposition.”¹² Mao further declared, “even right up to 1944, Chiang Kai-shek never ceased his clandestine attempts to make peace with Japan.”¹³ By claiming KMT sabotage, Mao opened the possibility in people’s minds that without the CCP, they could have suffered more casualties or even lost the war. Mao went on to depict the KMT as a threat: if the KMT won the Civil War, China would yet again be “a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country under the dictatorship of the big landlords and the big bourgeoisie.”¹⁴ Mao emphasized that the KMT did not represent the common people’s interests and were thus unfit to rule. By using words such as ‘colonial’ and ‘dictatorship,’ Mao also correlated KMT rule with the horrors of foreign colonization and oppression, perhaps to elicid a visceral response against the KMT.

**Period 2: 1949 - early 1970s Building a New China**

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¹⁰ “The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory In The War of Resistance Against Japan,” ibid.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid.
¹⁴ “The Situation and Our Policy After the Victory In The War of Resistance Against Japan,” ibid.
In 1949, the CCP defeated the Nationalists and established the People’s Republic of China. The Nationalists fled to the island of Taiwan, and the CCP shifted its focus from fighting to modernizing the mainland and consolidating its power. To establish the necessary credibility for the CCP’s rule, Mao championed the victor narrative and suggested the indispensability of the CCP in the War of Resistance. He actively suppressed any victim narrative that revealed the CCP’s weakness, such that his China “lacked memorials, museums…historical writings and literature devoted to the war” and references to China’s losses.\(^\text{15}\) Mao also eliminated the roles of wartime allies America and Britain from the historical record to ensure that the CCP received the full credit for defeating Japan.\(^\text{16}\)

Mao used the victor narrative to advocate his modernization policies. In a speech to the CCP Congress on June 6, 1950, for example, Mao alluded to the people’s victory over Japan and the KMT to reassure them of their capacity to implement agrarian reforms:

"We won the War of Liberation by relying mainly on these 160 million people. It was the victory of the agrarian reform that made possible our victory in overthrowing Chiang Kai-shek. In the autumn we shall start agrarian reform [again]…in order to topple the entire landlord class."\(^\text{17}\)

Mao’s policy for modernization was self-reliance: China must be “completely independent of foreign influence by becoming economically self-reliant and militarily strong.”\(^\text{18}\) The emphasis on China’s independence reflected a sense of confidence associated with the victory over Japan and the Western imperialists. Self-reliance helped justify nation-wide agrarian and technological

\(^{15}\) Coble, 395.
\(^{16}\) Ibid., 396.
reform campaigns designed to modernize China, most notably the Great Leap Forward of 1958-1960.\textsuperscript{19}

The victor narrative also justified Mao’s persecution of his enemies. As part of the Hundred Flowers Bloom campaign, he purged “anyone who had collaborated in any sense with anyone other than [the CCP]”\textsuperscript{20} during the War of Resistance. This included not only collaborators with the KMT and Japan but also anti-fascists that collaborated with the West. All of them were labeled as ‘rightists’ and were “publicly humiliated, shot, or [put] in a labor camp.”\textsuperscript{21} During the Cultural Revolution, Mao and his followers, namely the Red Guards, further persecuted these collaborators by destroying their personal documents, forcing them into self-criticism sessions, and often killing them.\textsuperscript{22} Mao even targeted writers and artists whose work failed to follow the CCP’s official anti-Japanese narrative. He lamented that there was “only a small number of good…works truly praising our revolutionary heroes” and declared that the other, “bourgeois, revisionist trash must be resolutely opposed.”\textsuperscript{23} Mao used the narrative of the CCP and the people’s victory over Japan to prosecute non-conformists.

In contrast, internationally, the CCP refrained from open antagonisms against Japan. The CCP wanted Japan as a strategic partner both to stimulate China’s economic development and to weaken the U.S.-Japan Cold War alliance that threatened China’s communist rule.\textsuperscript{24} To gain economic assistance for its modernization, China sought to reestablish economic ties with Japan.

\textsuperscript{20}Coble, 396.
\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 397.
\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 407.
\textsuperscript{23}“Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-Tung’s Thinking; Actively Participate in the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution,” \textit{Peking Review} 9, no. 18 (Apr. 1966): 5-8.
after 1949. Although U.S. pressure prevented official restoration of economic relations, China and Japan “concluded four private trade agreements between 1952 and 1958,” which increased the bilateral trade volume to $151 million by 1956. In wooing Japan to dodge the anti-China pressure from the U.S., China also engaged in a “people’s diplomacy” involving a lenient release of Japanese prisoners of war and appeal to leftists in Japan.

China considered friendly relations with Japan especially important in the 1960s. In 1960, China broke diplomatic relations with the USSR. The Sino-Soviet split of 1960 led to a security crisis: China was diplomatically isolated, surrounded by unfriendly forces such as the USSR to the North, Taiwan to the East, and India and the U.S. (engaged in the Vietnam War) to the South. As a measure of security during the Cold War, China needed a neighbor that was friendly or at least non-antagonistic. The split also caused an economic depression with the abrogation of over three hundred bilateral agreements and contracts with the USSR. Combined with the economic crisis stemming from the failed Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, China was in dire need of Japanese economic assistance. To induce Japanese cooperation, Mao deemphasized the War of Resistance and expressed neither victor nor victim narratives abroad. In 1964, he even praised the Japanese people for their anti-U.S. demonstration regarding U.S. bases in Okinawa, calling them anti-imperialist patriots and declaring that “[t]he [25]

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25 Ibid., 3.
26 Ibid., 4.
27 Ibid., 1.
28 Sadako Ogata, "Normalization with China" Institute of East Asian Studies at University of California, Berkeley, 1988, 9.
Chinese and Japanese people should unite.”\textsuperscript{30} This statement, published in the Peking’s Foreign Language press, confirms that Mao deployed friendly rhetoric to the international audience.


After two decades of relative friendliness, China normalized relations with Japan in September 1972. This official normalization materialized only because the U.S. had started negotiating a Sino-American rapprochement earlier that year to counter Soviet influence in East Asia. This reversed the U.S.’ previous policy against fraternizing with communist China, in turn removing barriers for Japan to pursue its own normalization.\textsuperscript{31}

While Mao and the CCP were already convinced of the economic and security benefits of normalization with Japan – hence the efforts for friendly relations since the 1950s – explaining normalization to the people was tricky business. After all, for decades the CCP had vilified Japan and its ‘rightist’ collaborators in China to establish domestic legitimacy. Even Mao admitted, "now that I'm collaborating with the rightists, my reputation isn't good.”\textsuperscript{32} Because the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution had already undermined his mandate to rule, Mao had to ensure that the normalization sparked little public resentment. Carefully alluding to the War of Resistance could distract the Chinese people from the discrepancy between the CCP’s history of deploying anti-Japanese rhetoric and its pursuit of normalization with Japan.

Using the victim narrative was out of the question because the CCP needed Japan to establish favorable economic and diplomatic relations with China. Eager to prevent the memories of war from complicating dialogue at the negotiation table, Mao and then-Premier

\textsuperscript{31} Ogata, 32.
Zhou Enlai accepted Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei’s apology for Japan’s war behavior and renounced demands for war reparations.\(^{33}\) Mao even thanked Japan for helping the CCP rise to power;\(^{34}\) although Mao meant this as a joke, the statement still revealed that Japan had a complex status in China as both the people’s enemy and the state that put the CCP in power.

While there are not enough declassified sources available to me to merit a fully comprehensive analysis, the available evidence suggests that Mao used a form of victor narrative to justify the normalization. On October 1, 1972, a few days after the signing of the normalization agreement, the Peking NCNA International Service news agency issued the following statement:

"[Normalization negotiations] have fulfilled a long-time desire of the Chinese and Japanese people... the policy of those who dreamed of isolating China has gone bankrupt and the still extant counter-revolutionary schemes to encircle China are falling apart."\(^{35}\) The statement also declared China’s firm opposition to the war of imperialism, especially "the Soviet revisionist scheme."\(^{36}\) Although not explicitly anti-Japanese, the victor narrative Mao used here still emphasized China’s victory over foreign enemies trying to weaken China. This narrative arguably alluded to the Century of Humiliation and helped justify normalization as a means to strengthen China. Mao reestablished CCP as the voice of the people, just as he had done after the Civil War. Mao also invoked the public disillusionment with the USSR, implying that the new alliance with Japan and eventually the U.S. would weaken this enemy.

Despite successfully normalizing relations, China and Japan struggled to negotiate bilateral policies after 1972. The challenge was exacerbated by the deaths of Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong in 1976 that caused much confusion in China. Yet China and Japan laboriously

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\(^{34}\) Kingston, 10.


\(^{36}\) Ibid.
continued the negotiations, and the two sides ultimately signed the Sino-Japanese Peace
Friendship Treaty in 1978.37


Mao's death in 1976 led to a profound transformation in China. Deng Xiaoping, a
pragmatist, soon rose to power and launched economic and political reforms for China to recover
from the devastations of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. For Deng,
stimulating economic growth and establishing political stability were more effective ways of
maintaining the CCP’s legitimacy than continuing Mao’s strict adherence to communism.

One effect of such political reforms was the reexamination of the Maoist narratives on the
War of Resistance. Starting from the mid-1980s, an increasing number of scholars published
books on the war, and many of them broke the Maoist taboo of highlighting the KMT's important
contribution to defeating Japan.38 Although acknowledging the KMT could undermine the
CCP’s legitimacy, Deng and the CCP were willing to allow such acknowledgement, in part
because they had a high geopolitical interest in Taiwan. Ever since the KMT fled there at end of
the Civil War, Taiwan had had a separate Nationalist government. Moreover, Taiwan had
adopted a capitalist model and thus presented a stark contrast with the mainland politically and
economically. The CCP wanted Taiwan to unify with mainland China and hoped that
acknowledging the KMT’s role in the War of Resistance would establish a common ground that
could facilitate negotiations of unification.39 The reexamination of the KMT’s role marked a
shift in what the CCP presented as the official narrative of the War of Resistance. A greater and
more fundamental shift would follow in 1989.

Affairs* 52, no. 3 (1979): 420.
38 Coble, 399.
39 Ibid., 402.
**Period 5: 1989 – Present Post Tiananmen Square Transformation**

1989 was watershed year in which the CCP started to promote the victim narrative as China’s dominant discourse against Japan. There are two explanations for this radical change: China’s economic advancement in the international community and the famous pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square that Deng and the CCP ruthlessly repressed.

By 1989, China had achieved exponential economic growth and had established itself as a rising economic power. Yet, China still lagged behind Japan. China resented this economic inferiority to Japan because it was China that once dominated over Japan.\(^40\) To regain regional control, China started to compete with Japan over their relative power in East Asia.\(^41\) Because China no longer needed to depend on Japan for economic growth as much as it had in the 1960s-70s,\(^42\) the CCP saw less risk in deploying anti-Japanese rhetoric to resist Japan’s quest for a greater share of regional and international power.

But the more crucial reason lay in the domestic sphere. In light of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations in June 1989, the CCP was facing a legitimacy crisis. The CCP knew that its post-Mao political and economic reforms empowered the people to reject the communist ideology. This was exacerbated by the fact that the ideology was also weakening internationally: the Berlin Wall fell later that year. The CCP also knew that its suppression of the Tiananmen Square protests itself undermined its credibility and mandate to rule. The threat of a regime change loomed ever larger. In this light, the CCP understood that its legacy as a victor over Japan was no longer sufficient in maintaining legitimacy.\(^43\) Instead, ”there was a felt, if unstated,

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\(^40\) Gries, 87.
\(^41\) Ibid., 98.
\(^43\) Chen, 49.
need on the part of the Chinese government to come up with a new legitimizing ideology to [replace] the original Marxist-Leninist-Maoist vision. The logical candidate...was nationalism."44

A victim narrative was key to Beijing's construction of the nationalist rhetoric: "[t]he communist state created a sense of being besieged in order to exalt the voice of patriotism."45 Therefore, in the 1990s, the CCP launched a system of patriotic education that taught the War of Resistance through a victim mentality. Such education was designed to implant a "consciousness of suffering" in people's minds.46 The CCP also reinstated an old holiday called National Humiliation Day that commemorated the time when Japan made imperial claims on Chinese territory in 1915.47 Furthermore, increasing number of monuments and museums that vilified Japan appeared in mainland China; they aroused anger against Japanese barbarianism through exhibitions such as grisly photographs of the Rape of Nanjing and paintings of massacres.48 Meanwhile, domestic problems such as the CCP’s suppression of ethnic minorities and the disaster of the Cultural Revolution remained strikingly uncommemorated.49 The CCP wanted to "shift the focus of youthful energies away from domestic issues back to foreign problems."50

These patriotic campaigns were significantly effective. A May 1995 survey by China Youth Daily revealed that 96.8% of youth was outraged at Japan’s wartime atrocities. In a 2005 opinion poll by Asahi Shimbun of Japan and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), 92% of Chinese still considered unresolved historical issues to be very or somewhat important to Sino-Japanese affairs. 53% of Chinese stated that school education, memorials, and museums

44 Coble, 404.
45 Ibid., 403.
46 Zhao, 18-19.
49 Ibid.
50 Callahan, 186.
formed the basis of their historical perspectives, and that number was 67% among the youth who had undergone the new patriotic education.51

The CCP, pleased to see the public distracted by the anti-Japanese sentiments, escalated its rhetoric of Chinese suffering. For example, in 1995, the head of state Jiang Zemin declared that 35 million people perished during the War of Resistance. This was a significant inflation of the figures presented by Mao in 1949, 3.92 million, and by the KMT in 1945, 1.75 million.52 Clearly, the CCP now saw much more importance in China’s victimhood. The sentiment was, in scholar Peter Hayes Gries’ words: “China’s early postwar political elite had needed heroes, not victims; many Chinese today have different needs.”53 For the massacre at the Rape of Nanjing, China claimed the death toll to be 300,000, although the figure remains controversial to this day.54 Iris Chang, the Chinese-American author of a fiercely anti-Japanese book Rape of Nanjing (1991) that became highly popular in China and elsewhere, went as far as to say, “[t]hree hundred thousand, please keep in mind, is more than the death toll at [the atomic bombing sites] Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined.”55 Although her radical views do not speak for the entire Chinese populace, it nevertheless demonstrates the rapid intensification of anti-Japanese sentiments in China.

The proliferation of the victim narrative marred China’s foreign policy towards Japan. Furthermore, the rise of revisionist conservatives in Japan exacerbated Chinese antagonism and has created a vicious circle of mutual condemnation. Since the 1980s and especially 1990s,

52 Gries, 80.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid., 81
controversies regarding Japan’s revisionist textbooks, Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes, and Japanese prime ministers’ visits to the Yasukuni Shrine where some Japanese war criminals rest have contributed to the deterioration of Sino-Japanese relations. In these controversies, China has used its victimhood to condemn Japan’s lack of remorse for its crimes and to demand an apology. Jiang Zemin’s 1998 visit to Japan, in which he failed to obtain a written apology from Japan, was considered a major defeat for China and deepened China’s resentment towards Japan.\(^{56}\)

The CCP could endure some strain on Sino-Japanese relations as long as the victim narrative portrayed the CCP as defiant against Japan and secured the CCP’s domestic legitimacy. Therefore, the CCP became increasingly alarmed as the Chinese public’s anti-Japanese sentiments escalated beyond the CCP’s control, even backfiring on its foreign policy. In 2005, there were widespread anti-Japanese protests that took place in over 40 cities. In addition to condemning Japan’s right-wing textbooks that deemphasized Japan’s wartime aggressions, the protestors denounced Japan’s bid to secure a seat on the UN Security Council. Although the CCP was previously quiet on the UN issue due to calculated interests, it now had to publicly oppose Japan to avoid the Chinese people’s backlash. The CCP was infuriated that the unintended level of public radicalization thwarted its foreign policy interests. Jiang Zemin lamented that “the [public’s] anti-Japanese patriotic movement’ would threaten political stability” in China.\(^{57}\)

Through the victim narrative, the CCP sought to maintain sufficient economic and political partnerships with Japan while maintaining its legitimacy domestically. But it has been difficult to achieve the optimal amount of nationalism necessary for this goal. The CCP has had

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\(^{56}\) Coble, 405.

few viable choices. If it allows anti-Japanese sentiments to continue escalating, the CCP risks a detrimental breakdown of Sino-Japanese relations. Parts of the Chinese population may also consider the CCP to be too conciliatory towards Japan and call for a change in leadership. Meanwhile, if the CCP intervenes in the radicalization, then the public can accuse the government of being a traitor friendly to Japan. The CCP has realized that nationalism is a double-edged sword.

In this light, the CCP’s use of the victim narrative has produced mixed results. On the one hand, it has radicalized some people beyond the CCP’s intended level. But on the other hand, although reliable approval ratings for the CCP are scarce, the public’s internalization of the victim narrative suggests that the CCP successfully reconsolidated its power after its legitimacy crisis. The plethora of Sino-Japanese controversies and the media coverage the global community has given them also suggest that the CCP attracted enough international attention to strengthen China’s presence in the world. There is an interesting paradox in that the victim narrative confesses China’s weakness precisely when China has to demonstrate strength to be a future global superpower. It is difficult for China to resolve this paradox. The victim narrative could continue establishing domestic stability, which is necessary given the decline in people’s adherence to the communist ideology and the growing resentment among ethnic minority groups that the CCP has suppressed. However, the CCP’s maintenance of the anti-Japanese nationalism could lose its salience and effectiveness over time. The younger generation is more open to Japan economically and culturally, and suppressed minorities could point to the CCP as the ‘imperial power.’

‘Period 6’: The Future
China has become an important, if not central, economic and political power in the world. China will continue its rise to international prominence, dominating the global economy and perhaps providing a serious economic challenge to the U.S. Politically, China will remain a major player in global affairs as a member of the UN Security Council and will continue to be tasked with missions vital for global security as a nuclear power next to North Korea. China will further expand its influence in the developing world, such as Latin America and Africa, through business ventures. China has surpassed Japan economically in terms of GDP and could gain a greater political influence than Japan in East Asia in the future.

If China does surpass Japan in both GDP and amount of regional power and establishes the necessary domestic legitimacy, then the victim narrative stemming from China’s inferiority complex may no longer be necessary. Since the War of Resistance would be a memory close to a century old, China could potentially find a more contemporary narrative to shape China’s national identity. But even if the CCP chooses to maintain discourse on the War of Resistance (the past few decades in China and South Korea have demonstrated that historical grievances against Japan do not easily fade), the CCP could assert China’s status as a modern global superpower by readopting a victor narrative that demonstrates strength. The CCP could also recognize the roles of the KMT and foreign allies in the War of Resistance to help ensure favorable relations with Taiwan and the global community.

This departure from the victim narrative would bring notable benefits. For instance, it would help repair some of the damage to Sino-Japanese relations and enable China to negotiate even more strategically important agreements with Japan in terms of trade, investment, politics, and security. In addition, China would have a stronger international image that will help legitimize China’s increasingly central role in the world.
However, the cons of such a departure may be more significant. The departure could alienate parts of the Chinese population that still fundamentally embrace anti-Japanese sentiments. People who equate a ‘truly Chinese’ identity with anti-Japanese sentiments might question the CCP’s right to rule if it relaxes its condemnation of Japan. This could lead to the decline in CCP’s legitimacy, which would bring uncertain results. Would the CCP remain in power but change its leadership, or will other political forces in China, especially the pro-democracy forces, replace the CCP? If the CCP falls and democratization begins in China, would anti-Japanese rhetoric fade because it is not central to the identity of a democratic China, or would anti-Japanese sentiments escalate in the absence of a strong government to contain such nationalism? Would anti-Americanism, which is currently gaining strength, be as prevalent as anti-Japanese sentiments were?

Conclusion

From 1945 to the present, the CCP government has deployed both victor and victim narratives in remembering the War of Resistance against Japan. The CCP leadership preferred one narrative over the other based on the domestic and international interests at the time, and such preference changed over time from victor under Mao to victim after Mao. We have yet to see which narrative, if at all, the CCP will adopt in the future. However, we can expect that its choice of narrative will reflect China’s new and fundamentally transformed identity.
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