

# **OVERCOMING HUMILIATION AND EMBRACING GLOBAL CONTRIBUTION? A VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF RESISTANCE**

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**([www.rieas.gr](http://www.rieas.gr)) Publication date: 14 January 2018**

## **Introduction**

As Shao (2004) points since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century museums, libraries, reading rooms and public parks have been used as spaces ‘designed for cultural governance’ indicating the relations of power between the dominant group that makes them and the populace that receives their message. This is particularly true in countries like China: This short essay inspects ways of representation of Chinese power and inquires into the character of Chinese patriotism by studying the museum of resistance in Wanping, the suburb of Beijing. It is found that while Chinese patriotism is usually found between narratives of Chinese victimhood and strength the current dominant representation feeding popular conceptions of contemporary Chinese patriotism is strength, of a global character. The essay briefly discusses the conclusions of Denton’s and Vickers’s visit in the war of resistance museum in Beijing and then moves to describe research findings from my own visit to the museum of resistance on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December 2017 focusing on the ways by which China’s character during the war is increasingly portrayed as global. The museum is not studied for its overall presentation, but focus is primarily placed on exhibits that have been utilized to paint the ‘global’ character of Chinese power, such as the ‘cooperation’ sculpture and the ‘Great Victory’ exhibit.

## **Humiliation or Global Struggle?**

There seems to be an agreement between Vickers (2011) and Denton (2007) that the Chinese patriotic narrative portrayed by the museum of resistance in Wanping (Beijing) is a combination of humiliation by the crimes of the Japanese imperialists but also one of Chinese strength that stresses the victory of China in the war against fascism (1931-1945). Vickers (2011) argues that the [museum of resistance] “retains the old narrative of a messianic party delivering liberation from oppression... [but also] the [it] invokes the themes of national humiliation and victimhood...” Denton (2007) also agrees; he concludes that the museum of resistance expresses a “tension between emphasis on suffering and victimization on one hand, and heroic resistance and victory, on the other.” But regardless of this Denton (2007) also points out that “contrary” to what he was expecting “a new exhibit, entitled Great Victory,

downplays atrocity and places new emphasis on the war as a key part of *the world anti-fascist struggle*.” The downplaying of atrocity reflects changes to the museum that took place in 2005, when many of terrifying exhibits of Japanese atrocities such as 3D dioramas Mitter (2000) was referring from his visit in the 90s have been removed (Vickers, 2011)).

My recent visit to the museum indicated that while it has a section dedicated to atrocities committed by the Japanese, covered extensively by Denton (2007), this only occupies only a very small part of the overall presentation. What really dominates the view of history by the CCP at the moment is perhaps more one of ‘global strength’ and less one of ‘victimization’. A case indicating that is the sculpture addition titled ‘cooperation’ by Wang Shushan on the Burmese expedition 1942. The sculpture includes 6 men from China the US and Great Britain operating a weapon situated in a Burmese Jungle. The inscription reads “After the outbreak of the pacific war, at the request of the Allied forces, China dispatched an expeditionary force of 100,000 soldiers to Burma. In Burma and India, Chinese, the US, and British troops cooperated with each other in military operations. Inflicting a heavy blow to Japanese fascism. The statue shows *the cooperation* of Chinese, the US and British troops in fighting against Japanese aggression.” The expedition is portrayed as one signifying cooperation between British, US and Chinese soldiers; this fits in with presenting China as a ‘global power’ in the fight against fascism. The choice of showing Chinese troops in Burma intends to show that China does not only care about its local territory but also helps other countries in a ‘global struggle’. Moving on, as Jameson (1981) argues the opinions expressed by a written text should not be analyzed only for what they mention, but also for what they fail to mention; as behind concealing facts lies the moral judgment of the narrator. The inscription hides the fact that the very reason, as Mitter (2013) points out, of the failure of the Burmese expedition has been the *lack of cooperation* in both the leadership of the Chinese and British army’s as well as the soldiers themselves: for instance, Mitter (2013) raises the fact that Stillwell, which was the US general in charge of part of Chiang Kai Shek’s armies in Burma (the Chinese 5<sup>th</sup> army), called mockingly Chiang ‘peanut’ in his personal diary and he considered him a coward for suggesting a defensive strategy. Chiang’s words in the diary also sound like a mockery to the inscription of the exhibit “I know that I’ve sacrificed a great deal for nothing, for the sake of this plan of the Americans and the British.” The lack of cooperation and amicable relations of the troops was evident in the battle of Pinyinmana in central Burma, where the British troops were unwilling to protect the Chinese troops from enemy fire leading to the failure of Stillwell’s plan to win by drawing the Japanese forces to a trap (ibid). The exhibit is not of historical value; it rather tries to elevate the Chinese contribution to the pacific war as one that shows the global character of Chinese power. The Burma expedition has been also mentioned in the 2005 people’s education press history textbooks for secondary school history teaching; again, the textbook highlights the cooperation of Chinese, British and American troops and the fact that China helped to save ‘7000 British troops from certain death’ (Rose, 2013).

Section 4 of the main museum exhibition has been dominated by pictures flags and objects that showed the global character of Chinese power; as the introduction

note on the section writes: “China provided important guarantees such as necessary air bases for the allied forces to fight against the Japanese army.” A large exhibit shows Chinese people pulling a hand operated bulldozer clearing the ground and making an airfield for the allied forces; an airplane is projected with blue light in the horizon and sound also dramatizes the display. The Chinese are celebrated for assisting in the plight of the Jewish people; He Fengshan the consul of Vienna in the late 30s is posited as an important figure who printed passports to fly Jewish people to Shanghai away from the Nazi death-camps. A picture of a hospital chamber and a nurse in Huade road is also displayed, argued to have been built by the Chinese especially for treating Jews and next to it the picture of two Jewish girls born in Shanghai holding Chinese dolls; the girls are named as Naomi and Dagmar by the inscription which humanizes them (Chomsky, 1988) and proposes a Chinese global humanity and benevolence. The Chinese are celebrated as well to have provided intelligence to US commanders in a very interesting picture positing the late conservative communist party official Li Xiannian, who was an officer during the war, with American intelligence agents in August 1944. Pictures also show overseas Chinese enlisting in the American army to fight the war; according to the inscription: “during the WWII, more than 13,000 overseas Chinese served in the US army.” Similarly pictures also show the Canadian No. 136 Corps, which mainly consisted of Chinese soldiers. Chinese are also shown as to their support to Singapore: a picture shows drill of the forces of the Anti-enemy mobilization General council of overseas Chinese in Singapore, argued by the inscription to have numbered about 1,000. A flag is also exhibited of the overseas Chinese forces in the Philippines. Pictures were also displayed from the Korean youth association of north China, an organization of Koreans that intended to fight Japanese aggression, as well as pictures of the Korean liberation army and the Korean army of volunteers established in China in the late 30s to fight Fascism. The choice of exhibits has a clear intention to show the global aspect of Chinese power during the war by linking China with the individual struggles of other mainly Pacific but also Western countries.

### **Global Victory**

This same ‘global’ representation of China is also suggested by the Great Victory exhibit which when I visited the museum in the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December was placed on the beginning of the museum’s tour route in the left side of the main entrance chamber. The most interesting aspect of the inscription is the manner in which it connects explicitly the memory of the war with the present intentions of Chinese leadership. The description reads: “The Chinese people suffered huge national sacrifices for the victory of the world anti-fascist war and made great historical contributions towards maintaining world peace.” Again here the word ‘world’ is mentioned two times in one sentence, and although mention is also given to sufferings clearly the sentence is mainly concerned with the global aspect of Chinese struggle against fascism. China is not acting for itself but serves a higher purpose of ‘maintaining world peace’. The inscription moves to repeat the foreign policy of China as decided in the 12<sup>th</sup> party congress; i.e. non-alignment, non-intervention and peaceful development: “China will firmly take the path of peaceful development, adhere to its independent foreign policy of peace...” This resounds Hu’s speech in the

12<sup>th</sup> party congress: “In the thirty-three years since the founding of our People’s Republic, we have shown the world by deeds that China *never attaches itself to any big power or group of powers, and never yields to pressure from any big power*” (Whiting, 1983). In the end of the inscription however there is a section dedicated to the current chairman of the party Xi Jinping and posits a very different message: “China is willing to make arduous efforts to achieve its two ‘century goals’, realizing the Chinese dream of the Great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation, and promoting the lofty cause of peace and development of mankind.” Here China is not portrayed as a power that is non-aligned but rather as a *global* power following a proactive foreign policy aiding the development of other countries or interfering to promote ‘the lofty cause of peace...of mankind’. This is fully in the spirit of Xi’s Asia-Pacific dream that seeks a China that is a strong actor in Asian affairs funding great infrastructure projects and winning stakes in the resources of neighboring countries to the east and west of Chinese mainland (Miller, 2017). The significance of the exhibit is that it links in a mirror way the CCP character during the war with its current role as ‘global’/’worldly’/’outward’ and not ‘nationally’/’inward’ oriented. The use of the expression ‘Chinese two century goals’ is also meant to perhaps hijack legitimacy from the UN’s very own ‘Millennium goals’ for global development and sustainability.

## **Conclusion**

As Xi’s China strives to achieve the Chinese dream and the belt and road initiatives the patriotic subject is in constant transformation. The era of Jiang Zemin’s patriotism of hatred towards Japan and humiliation by the atrocity gets increasingly sidelined by a global strength and victory patriotism. This reflects the end of the non-alignment attitude of Chinese foreign policy in the 80s and 90s and the birth of the more proactive foreign policy in economics and security terms posed by Xi in the 2010s. China also invests heavily in the infrastructure of other neighboring countries of the Pacific and seeks the cooperation of its neighbors. What is portrayed by the museum of resistance is therefore a patriotism that would make the Chinese imagine themselves as the benevolent elder brother of the Asian/world family that would risk its life to enter foreign battles to save others, rather than only save itself. China’s self-esteem increases, and the manner history is displayed in the museum alters to mirror the changes in mass psychology. China now is evidently displayed as having a global character during the war, in assisting Jews, Americans, and British; or in fighting the war of the Singaporeans, the Koreans and the Philippines against Japanese oppression. What was known as the Anti-Japanese war becomes increasingly the global resistance against fascism, and China is presented as the victor of the global victory against fascism. While the findings presented here reflect a visit in the resistance museum in December 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017, more research is needed to be done in patriotic museums and other media of the patriotic narrative (film, school history textbook) to identify the current dominant representation of China during the war and its relations with Xi’s political agenda.

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