A FLOATING HISTORY: THE KOREAN WAR AND CHINA’S POLITICAL USE OF WAR MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

The Korean War has served as one of the crucial historical conflicts in China’s relations with other countries, especially with the United States. However, the narrative of the official memory and the meaning of the War in China have changed dramatically from the wartime period to the present. Based on textual and content analysis, the thesis tries to explore the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)’s political use of the Korean War and relevant memory through the lens of official documentaries.

The thesis looks into six series of official documentaries which cover three historical periods: the 1950s, the early 1990s and the 21st century. It adopts an analytic framework to look into four types of messages: constitutive norms, relational contents, cognitive contents, and social purposes. Then it analyzes the link between the narrative and the CCP’s political purposes in each period and makes a longitudinal comparison to discuss consistency and inconsistency of the memory.

The thesis concludes that the structural frame of the War itself remains constant since the wartime period while the specific interpretation of the War has changed dramatically over time. The political purposes of the CCP have changed from building a communist country in the Cold War era to legitimating itself during an ideological crisis, and then to seeking global power. Accordingly, the theme of the narrative has turned from maligning-others to self-legitimacy, and then to self-glorification.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

In May 2019, CCTV6, the film channel of state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV), switched scheduling plans to air a series of documentaries and classic films about the Korean War. They tend to portray the hardship that the Chinese force suffered and emphasize the Chinese soldiers’ resolution and bravery which led to the ultimate victory over the powerful enemy, the United States.

The context of the rescheduling was China’s tougher attitude towards the United States as trade tensions mounted in 2019. In this case, the CCTV’s decision to air Korean War-related films served a part of the official propaganda campaign during the trade war. The main strategy was to draw parallels between the current trade dispute with the U.S. and the Korean War, which has long been known in China as the War to Resist the U.S. and Aid Korea. It aimed to “use movies to echo the current era” and delivered the message that “there's no equal negotiation without fighting”.

This is not the first time that the China used the Korean War to illustrate points about contemporary politics. Instead, the Korean War has been one of the main components of official historical commemorations in China. While the Korean War has been used to repeatedly drawn parallels to contemporary events, China’s position and conditions in the international arena have dramatically changed in the postwar era. Correspondingly, the content of the official history of the war has altered substantially over the past decades. In this case, the state’s political use of the Korean War memory provides a microcosm of China’s domestic politics over past decades as well as its changing relations with the United States, South Korea, North Korea, and the Soviet

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This thesis then focuses on the changing official memory of the Korean War in China through the lens of official documentaries. Through longitudinal research, it seeks to explore how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) treated its Korean War experience to serve changing social conditions and its own political purposes in the different postwar periods. The questions addressed will include what the CCP’s political goals are in each period; how the reconstruction of the Korean War memory work as a part of the state’s political use of history in 21st century; as well as which thread of the wartime experience remained constant and which have changed.

Official documentaries are great materials to investigate the state’s political construction of memory in China. The Chinese official documentaries are usually generated by official studios serving particular propaganda purposes. Considering the strict control over the expression in China, they reflect the official narratives and messages that the authorities plan to promote at a given time. The changing narratives and interpretations of the Korean War in China are visible in them. In other words, the changing Chinese political transformation and foreign relations can be investigated through the lens of war memories preserved in the official documentaries.

The topic of war memory lies at the intersection of sociology, political science, cultural studies, and communication. Numerous literature has laid its foundation. This thesis will review works pertinent to collective memory, construction of war memories in China, and the Korean War memory in China. Regarding collective memory, it will examine the Chinese case from a general perspective based on a review of the main perspectives to view collective memory help. For textual and content analysis, the thesis will adopt the Zheng Wang’s analytic framework proposed in his book Never Forget National Humiliation: Historical Memory in Chinese Politics.
and International Relations. With regard to the construction of war memory in China, most works focus on the China’s war against Japan during the World War II while much less attention was paid to the Korean War. As for the Korean War memory in China, most literature tend to conduct the comparative studies or focus on a particular period. A longitudinal research is barely seen under this topic. Also, the Chinese perspective is discussed less often compared to the view of participant countries. Keun-Sik Jung’s *China’s Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial Hall of the “War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea”* provides many insights that help identify the time period of memory construction. In short, the article tend to contribute to the gap in China’s war memory studies and also the in the studies of the Korean War memory.

The thesis includes four chapters. The first chapter provides the literature review on collective memory, the construction of war memories in China, as well as the Korean War memory in China. The analytic framework and research methods used in the following chapters will be discussed in detail here. The second chapter looks into the state’s political use of the Korean War through the lens of official documentaries. It will examine a series of six documentaries produced in three different periods. All of the documentaries selected were produced by central TV stations and official film studios covering the wartime period to the present. They are: (1) the 1950s: *Resist America and Aid Korea* [*kangmei yuanchao 抗美援朝*] (1951) and Paean to Heroes [*yingxiongzan 英雄赞*] (1958); (2) the early 1990s: The History is not Far Away [*lishi bingbu yaoyuan 历史并不遥远*] (1990) and The Battle [*jiaoliang 较量*] (1995); (3) the 21st century: *The Semicentennial Echo* [*bangeshijide huixiang 半个世纪的回响*] and *The Great War to Resist America and Aid Korea* [*weidade kangmeiyuanchao 伟大的抗美援朝*]. What should be mentioned is that there was a gap in the 1960s- early 1980s in
documentary films regarding the Korean War in China due to the cultural revolution and its subsequent restoration. Then the last concluding chapter conducts a longitudinal comparison to figure out the consistency and inconsistency of the content of the documentaries.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter will review the academic works laying the foundation to look into the state’s political uses of historical memories in China. It will cover the themes including collective memory, construction of war memories in China, and the Korean War memory in China. The literature presented will help examine the Chinese case from a general perspective and also introduce the analytic framework that will be used in the following sections.

2.1 Collective Memory: Three Perspectives

There are the two main perspectives to view collective memory: the cultural, presentist, and instrumentalist perspective.

2.1.1 The Cultural Perspective

Based on cultural studies, the cultural scholars identify collective memory as a culture system that has been established. According to Kim and Schwartz, collective memory is “an ordered system of information and symbols animated by cultural values.”\(^2\) Also, Berger and Luckmann argue that collective memory is a fact rather than an exercise in “reification” or “objectivation.”\(^3\) Some cultural scholars even believe that collective memory are originated from primordial ties of blood, kinship, and language. As Gong argues, collective memory is an nonmaterial psychological and perceptual factor that transferring from generation to generation.\(^4\) In other words, the cultural perspective consider collective memory as a relatively stable and

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\(^2\) Kim and Schwartz, 7.


essential social fact transmitted across generations and exert an independent influence on individuals and society.\textsuperscript{5}

In this case, the cultural perspective tends to examine the content and influence of a collective memory on community. Identity formation is one of the key impacts. Anthony Smith claims that “no memory, no identity; no identity, no nation”.\textsuperscript{6} H. Richard Niebuhr asserts that, people must share the same past to become a real community. The extent of common memory indicates the measure of unity.\textsuperscript{7}

Besides, collective memory also forms the basis of collective behaviors. Kim and Schwartz believe that collective memory supplies “standards and frames of reference” for the present.\textsuperscript{8} Pennebaker also maintains that wars, prejudice, nationalism, and cultural identities can be rooted in powerful collective memory, whether real or concocted.\textsuperscript{9} In other words, collective memory is considered as the source and instruction for the collective consciousness and behaviors by the cultural perspective.

Given that, the cultural scholars bring cultural difference into focus relying on regional studies and comparative studies. To be specific, they tend to trace the cultural uniqueness of a particular community in its memory and usually draws comparisons among disparate cultures. For instance, Gerrit Gong proposes the idea of “sense of history” referring to the leverage of historical context and consciousness over a community. He argues that the American sense of history is “too short”. It results from the American tradition of continuing immigration which gives the U.S. a “new-world identity”. The U.S. then emphasize the future more than the past

\textsuperscript{7} Robert L. Rothstein, \textit{After the Peace: Resistance and Reconciliation} (Boulder, Colo: LRienner Publishers, 1999), 210.
\textsuperscript{8} Kim and Schwartz, \textit{Northeast Asia’s Difficult Past}, 7.
and tends to look forward. In contrast, China is subject to a “too long” historical memory and has formed a “single old-world identity”. Chinese people thus often look backward and use their past as a criterion and a road map for its contemporary relations.\(^\text{10}\) Similarly, Zheng Wang compares the cultural differences between China and the U.S. by importing the idea of “context” in a culture developed by Edward Hall. “Context” refers to the amount of commonly assumed information in a society.\(^\text{11}\) He suggests that China has a higher level of “historical context” which tends to incorporate more of the “context”, namely history, tradition, customs, circumstance, etc. Conversely, the U.S. is “low historical context” in nature which considers very little of the context in their communication.\(^\text{12}\) The cultural distinctions are often used to explain different reactions towards an event or conflicts among countries.

The cultural perspective sheds light on the importance and function of collective memory. However, it pays insufficient attention to the change of collective memory across time within a particular community. Also, it overlooks the different selection of memory pertinent to a history which leads to clashes of history among countries.

2.1.2 The Presentist Perspective

The presentist scholars consider collective memory as a socially constructed outcome rather than a social fact. Funkenstein defines collective memory as “a system of signs, symbols, and practices”.\(^\text{13}\) Yang and Yue identify collective memory as a socially constructed product incorporating mnemonic practices carried out by social actors in symbolic forms such as

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\(^{10}\) Gerrit W. Gong, Memory and History in East and Southeast Asia: Issues of Identity in International Relations, Significant Issues Series, v. 23, No. 3 (Washington, D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2001), 28.

\(^{11}\) Martin J. Murray, Commemorating and Forgetting: Challenges for the New South Africa (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 71.


narratives, images, and sounds. Some scholars further developed this perspective when recognizing the importance of material objects themselves in remembrance. For instance, Richard Terdiman argues that memory resides “not in perceiving consciousness but in the material symbols and rituals”\(^\text{15}\). In this sense, collective memory is completely perceived as a manufactured product and material objects are the embodiments of collective memory.

In this case, the presentist perspective tend to focus on the construction of the collective memory with the emphasis on the present circumstances. Halbwachs, who made the groundbreaking work on the subject, states that “collective memory reconstructs its various recollections to accord with contemporary ideas and preoccupations”\(^\text{16}\), which differentiates it from the concept of history. In other words, he believes that collective memory is the continually reproduced image of the past determined by the present conditions, concerns and demands in each epoch in our lives. Building upon the G.H. Mead’s philosophic theory of temporality, socialist scholars Maines, et al. point out the temporal nature of memory. They believe that collective memory is a set of selective pasts which only could have occurred in the present social structure.\(^\text{17}\) In an extreme form, the presentist scholars believe that only contemporary events are real and the memory is something present and entirely invented with historical elements. In this case, collective memory is something fluid and only forged by the people in each generation to comply with the new circumstances.\(^\text{18}\) Also, the reconstruction of collective memory is considered as the approach to use the past to serve the present.


In short, the presentist perspective considers collective memory as a tool and stresses its selection and change due to the present conditions. However, it overly underplays the legacy of the previous memories and neglects the dynamics during memory reconstruction.

In sum, both two perspectives offer a great angle for examining collective memory. However, neither of them is solely able to provide an adequate understanding of the issue. In addition to weaknesses mentioned above, the two perspectives tend to take collective memory as a hegemonic narrative. In other words, they ignore the different versions of memories existing in a society as well as the clashes or the divergent impacts.

2.1.3 The Instrumentalist Perspective

Integrating the foci of the previous two angles, the instrumentalist perspective stresses the link between content and influence of collective memory. It claims that collective memory is used as an instrument to promote the individual or collective interests of a certain group. In other words, it is intentionally constructed by an individual or group for the particular purposes. Winter and Sivan use the term “collective remembrance” to refer to the process of creating collective memories which they believe is the outcome of agency, the product of individuals and groups who come together to speak out. Similarly, Kim and Schwartz define collective memory as “the distribution of beliefs, feelings and moral judgement about the past.” In this light, collective memory consists of not culture or commemoration alone, but of the relationship

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between the content and influence. Also, the dynamic process of memory construction should be paid attention to.

In order to investigate how collective memory is instrumentally used, the instrumentalist perspective tend to break down the process based on social actors. Ashplant, et al. use the term “the politics of memory and commemoration” to indicate the struggle of different groups to promote and seek recognition for their version of memory. The state, social groups, and the public are the three main actors considered in the studies of collective memory. Many scholars focuses on the contestation among different versions of the memory and tries to examine the present politics through the lens of the memory. For instance, Vera Schwarcz describes the multi-layer construction of the reinterpretation of the May Forth Movement in China in 1989 as an “onion” of memory. She points out that there are two layers including the CCP-led interpretation of the movement and the unofficial version, which was led by intellectuals to recollect cultural figures prominent in 1919 but suppressed in official memory in 1980s. Besides, Guobin Yang looks into the memory boom of the Cultural Revolution in the 1990s. Due to the growing market-based culture industry and the rising Cultural Revolution generation, the alternative memories tried to reconstruct Chinese morality, which challenged the state-controlled memory in the 1990s. In short, the political purposes are thus essential to analyze the memory construction and clashes. Through selectively remembering and forgetting, each group uses memory to achieve its own political purposes.

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What should be pointed out is that except for the social actors within a society, the external forces from the international arena also affect the memory construction. For instance, He states that the success of the Japan’s postwar mythmaking largely because their intention of memory construction coincided with the American strategy of supporting a stable conservative government in Tokyo.\(^{26}\) Ashplant also says that the narratives of war memory have to negotiate the realities of international power relations such as multi-state alliances.\(^{27}\)

War memory is a special type of collective memory. A war is usually a defining moment of a country and often forms the postwar relations among involving countries. State leaders thus are particularly concerned with shaping wartime experiences from the top down, especially in an authoritarian state. As Ashplant et al. state, war commemoration evokes the sacrifice and belonging evokes both the sacrifice that may be required from the citizen as the cost of belonging, and the means by which the nation-state persuades its citizens to die for it.\(^{28}\) Yinan He introduces the concept of “mythmaking”, referring to the process of selective construction of “half-truth narratives and beliefs about the origins, identity and purposes of a nation”.\(^{29}\) He then proposes three main types of mythmaking pertinent to a wartime experience.

The first one is the self-glorification. It “inflates or fabricates claims of national virtue” which can promote moral superiority and legitimatizes leaders, national missions and aspirations.\(^{30}\) Similarly, Ashplant et al. argues that each state seeks to place itself at an essential position as to secure its own place as a legitimate element within the nation-state even in the transition of political environment.\(^{31}\) Suisheng Zhao also points out that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)


\(^{27}\) Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 57.

\(^{28}\) Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 8.

\(^{29}\) He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”

\(^{30}\) He.

\(^{31}\) Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper, 267.
reshaped the wartime experience to portray its central role against Japan which contributed to its postwar victory over the KMT.32

The second one is self-whitewashing which aims at rationalizing past wrongdoing against others. It can be observed in Japanese war memory in the postwar period. According to He, Japanese elites created the “myth of the military clique” which let a small group of militarists responsible for the war while victimized the rest of the nation at the same time. Besides, they ignored its aggression and its atrocities in Asian countries.33 The strategy became an important trigger for disputes and chasms in Asia.

The third one is maligning-others which could include denigrate others as culturally inferiors, and accuses them of malicious intent or holds them responsible for past trauma.34 Especially in moments of crisis, people tend to look back to the “historical enmity”.35 For instance, China emphasizes the trauma Japanese aggression and repeatedly looks back to this history during the territorial disputes with Japan which can evoke a sense of unity and mobilize the mass to defend self and community.36

So as to delve into the content of a memory, scholars often closely examine the material objects which the memory is embedded and transmitted through. As Benedict Anderson says, printing and print capitalism link people to a larger imagined community.37 Also, material objects are the vehicles of collective memory used to present the selective facts. Textbooks,
public monuments, documentaries, movies and popular literature are the materials that are commonly analyzed.38

Textual and content analysis thus come to be the research methods typically used. Derived from social identity theory and the Harvard Identity Project model, Zheng Wang develops an analytic framework for identity and memory research based on textual and content analysis. His analytic framework aims at looking into how the content of the memory reflect the interests and purposes of any given group. Collective memory is viewed as a variable and is further broken down into four non-mutually exclusive types of messages: (1) constitutive norms refer to the messages which state rules and social roles that define the group membership, group interests, and constitute the basis of the collective pride and self-esteem; (2) relational contents refer to the ways a group views another. They help frame a group’s relation to another group, leading to a competing or cooperative relationship. Besides, they may also constitute a source of social mobility and social change as well as a basis for mass mobilization. (3) cognitive contents refer to a group’s understandings of political and material conditions. They put a group into a broader context and indicate how a group interprets the world and its own role in it. (4) social purposes refer to the goals that are shared by group members.39

The article will also adopt the instrumentalist perspective and use Zheng Wang’s analytic framework as the main approach to examine the subjects in the following chapters.

38 Reilly, “Remember History, Not Hatred.”
39 Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation, 32.
2.2 Reconstruction of Collective Memories in China after 1949: From Victor to Victim

Using the past to serve the present is a longstanding tradition in contemporary China. The materials used stretch from the ancient to the very recent past. For instance, Rana Mitter points out the cases including the condemnation and the revival of Confucianism in different periods in the twentieth century as well as the reassessment of Mao’s Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution not as socialist triumphs but as chaotic disasters in the post-Mao era.40

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the constantly emerging reinterpretations of Chinese history are always part of a much wider political phenomenon in transition. Reilly states that in revising official narratives of historical memory, Chinese leaders have played a two-level game, maneuvering on both domestic and international levels simultaneously to advance multiple goals.41 Considering both transforming domestic and international contexts after 1949, the construction of historical memories in China can be divided into two major phases: the Mao era and the era of reform.

The first phase refers to the Mao era, covering from 1949 to 1976. In this period, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) had to address political problems both at domestic and international level. Domestically, the key goal of the CCP was to legitimate itself as a post-war governor and to build a Communist state. The Kuomingtang (KMT) regime on Taiwan, supported by the U.S., remained the biggest threat to the fledging Communist regime. Their anti-Communist guerrilla forces still operated in various parts of the mainland.42

41 Reilly, “Remember History, Not Hatred.”
42 He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”
Internationally, the CCP’s goals in the period were to ease political tensions and seek official recognition from more countries. The security concerns were mounting due to armed conflicts or military encirclement taking place in the surrounding countries.\textsuperscript{43} In addition, the new regime was isolated on the international stage due to the Cold War. Many countries, including Japan and South Korea, after 1949 followed the official U.S. line and continued to recognize Chiang Kai-shek’s KMT government on Taiwan as the legitimate ruler of China.\textsuperscript{44}

Consequently, the CCP, according to Waldron, took an approach that combined “selective commemoration with general oblivion” to generate the official memory.\textsuperscript{45} Mitter argues that the official memory in the Mao era was anchored on class struggle and prioritized the Civil War between 1946 and 1949. It praised the significance of the Communism and the CCP’s leadership, while demonize the KMT and the United States at the same time.\textsuperscript{46} In addition, the wars involving foreign conflicts were understate or partially commemorated. Especially in the official narrative of the Sino-Japanese War, stories of Mao and Yan’an base areas were placed at the center.\textsuperscript{47} Waldron states that, under Mao, all tributes in the Sino-Japanese War were paid to the heroic Communist resistance and the CCP leadership in the rural areas but without noting its limited scale. Meanwhile, the patriotism and enormous sacrifices of non-Communist participants, and all of the KMT forces were almost entirely denied or neglected.\textsuperscript{48}

Mitter points out that the memory construction in the Mao era centered on “the most important fissures” between the Communists and the Nationalists which became almost “a

\textsuperscript{43} He.
\textsuperscript{44} Mitter, “Old Ghosts, New Memories.”
\textsuperscript{46} He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”
\textsuperscript{47} Mitter, “Old Ghosts, New Memories.”
\textsuperscript{48} Waldron, “China’s New Remembering of World War II.”
codeword for any politically tendency”.\textsuperscript{49} The narrative emphasized the revolutionary rupture that took place in 1949, portraying China as a victor and the CCP as a revolutionary vanguard.\textsuperscript{50} In contrast, the KMT was portrayed as the demons and bogeymen behind every reverse in policy and the United States represented the evil imperialism. The establishment of the PRC was an inevitable victory of the Communists against imperialism, but more notably, against the class enemy within, personified in Chiang Kai-shek.\textsuperscript{51}

The second period refers to the era of reform, starting from the mid-1980s. In the post-Mao era, a series of domestic and global transformations reshaped the context in the realm of historical memory which forced the CCP to reexamine the construction of memory based upon the changing present. Mitter points out that the CCP was confronted with an ideological gap, which forced the new leader to look for a new unifying ideology. After the Mao’s death, Mao Zedong, the most powerful symbolic power in the early PRC period, became a contested, problematic figure. The reassessment or even condemnation of the Great Leap Forward, Cultural Revolution and other Mao-centered events dominated the domestic discourse.\textsuperscript{52} In this case, the CCP faced the challenge of reconstructing the Party’s post-Mao identity and representation of legitimacy.

Deng Xiaoping and his economic reform policy also provoked fierce debate about the future path in China. Within the leadership, according to He, reform-oriented strategy confronted resistance from conservatives such as Chen Yun regarding the downside of reforms.\textsuperscript{53} In society as a whole, the reforms split China along lines of region, income differential, generation and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{51} Mitter, “Old Ghosts, New Memories.”
\item \textsuperscript{52} Mitter, “Behind the Scenes at the Museum.”
\item \textsuperscript{53} He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”
\end{itemize}
sex.\textsuperscript{54} Rising inflation, unemployment and corruption fueled the public resentment. The south and coastal provinces acquired through the Special Economic Zones (SECs) the “centrifugal economic power” which left less developed areas resentful of richer provinces.\textsuperscript{55} Under this background, the outbreak of the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 shocked the CCP leadership, resulting in more actively control over social stability in 1990s.

In short, previous ideology, which focused on class struggle, not only was discredited in the past decades but also hindered the implementation of the new economic reform. The CCP thus needed to provide a legitimating ideology in the face of the ideological collapse and grapple with the quest to unify and bind the Chinese together in the face of forces which are driving society apart.\textsuperscript{56}

Apart from the mainland, the decline and final collapse of the Soviet Union had immense consequences on Asia, which reshaped the context where China was involved. Jager and Mitter argues that the most significant change appeared to the reconstruction of relations between the United States and its Cold War allies in Asia, particularly with Japan.\textsuperscript{57} China was increasingly concerned over Japan’s expanding military capacity and a renewal of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, which drove China to take a more strident rhetoric against Japan.\textsuperscript{58} Meanwhile, China’s economic and geopolitical rise in the region led to the emergence of a new Asian multilateral framework, which also engendered China’s up-and-down relationship with the United States.\textsuperscript{59} Besides, changing power relationships in the Asia-Pacific region in the post-Cold War period also sparked resurgence of nationalist sentiments in China. The public expressed higher desire to

\textsuperscript{54} Mitter, “Old Ghosts, New Memories.”
\textsuperscript{56} Mitter, “Old Ghosts, New Memories.”
\textsuperscript{58} Reilly, “Remember History, Not Hatred.”
regain the territories lost, namely to reunify with Taiwan, to the motherland through unequal treaties.\textsuperscript{60} Now that the KMT represented the anti-independence constituency in Taiwan in this period, the CCP stood in need of rebuilding the KMT’s image.\textsuperscript{61}

Considering these newly emerging concerns, the new official historical memory was reoriented to revolve around China’s “century of national humiliation”. The new narrative emerged in particular after the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 1985 and was intensified as a nationwide account through the patriotic education campaign in 1990s. The century of national humiliation told the tale of China going from being at the center of the world to being the Sick Man of Asia after the Opium War in 1840, only to rise again with the establishment of the PRC in 1949.\textsuperscript{62} Mitter points out that the new framework of narrative manifested a shift towards an new understanding of the contemporary history as part of a trajectory of continuity, rather than change, in interpreting the past.\textsuperscript{63} The story stressed the international conflict more than the domestic one. It not only made a new emphasis on the foreign powers’ invasions and Chinese misery during the past, but also set the ground for China’s status as a major international power.\textsuperscript{64} The reinterpretation of the history of the Sino-Japanese War was at the center of the reconstruction. In this period, the “vivacious Japanese imperialist aggressors” substituted for the KMT villains.\textsuperscript{65} The CCP became the most determined patriot who led the Chinese people to change their fate, won national independence, and end

\textsuperscript{60} Jager and Mitter, 192.
\textsuperscript{61} He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”
\textsuperscript{63} Mitter, “Presentism and China’s Changing Wartime Past*.”
\textsuperscript{64} Mitter.
\textsuperscript{65} He, “National Mythmaking and the Problem of History in Sino-Japanese Relations.”
national humiliation. The Sino-Japanese War was redefined to stress on the “world anti-fascist war”, with China as a member of a global alliance with an international role.

In this sense, a new victimization narrative superseded the victor narrative in the Maoist era. “China as victor” was replaced by “China as victim” in national discourse. Oksenberg believes that the new strategy was a mixture of assertive nationalism and confident nationalism. Assertive nationalism attributes Chinese weakness to external economic exploitation and cultural infiltration but recognize the useful role of the outside world, particularly its technology, in the quest for modernity. Meanwhile, confident nationalism believes that Chinese culture is sufficiently resilient to survive the contacts with the outside world that are necessary to remedy China’s current deficiencies in the globalization.

Callahan states that the discourse of national humiliation illustrates a active notion of history and recovery in China which have both the material and symbolic functions. It emphasizes not only a matter of catching up to the West militarily and economically but also in the quest for “cleansing national humiliation” in foreign policy. In other words, China in the era of reform builds active national salvation upon national humiliation and founds national security upon national insecurity.

2.3 The Korean War and the Post-war Memories in China

On October 19, 1950, Chinese forces of People’s Volunteer Army (CPVA) crossed the Yalu River and entered the Korean War. On 31 December 1950, CPVA began their third-phases offensive crossed the 38th parallel southward, which marked a symbolic watershed in the Korean

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66 Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation, 102.
67 Mitter, “Presentism and China’s Changing Wartime Past*,”
68 Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation, 102.
70 Callahan, “National Insecurities.”
War, signifying China’s counterattack and a U.S. retreat.\textsuperscript{71} As what Mitter points out, the Korean War for China was one of great significance not just in terms of territorial control in the region, but rather as part of the state-building process within the PRC itself.\textsuperscript{72}

In addition to its significance, the story of the Korean War was contested and cautiously constructed since the wartime period, which makes the war come to be one of the most crucial ideological and cultural resources that China uses to serve the present. Regarding the construction of the wartime experience, China’s entry into the Korean War and the decision to cross the 38\textsuperscript{th} parallel have been significant topics needed to address. Hajimu believes that the narrative around the Korean War reflects the Beijing’s concerns over national security, which represented by the interpretation of the meanings of the presence of U.S. forces.\textsuperscript{73} Besides, the commemoration of the armistice is another issue. In reality, China failed to achieve initial demands, including the recognition of the PRC in the UN and the U.S.’s withdrawal from Taiwan, at the time of armistice. However, the war has been glorified as a “good war” and a victory of the new PRC regime.\textsuperscript{74}

According to Jung, the structural frame of war memory and commemoration of the Korean War persisted without significant change, coexisting with the evolving political realities in East Asia by the 40\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the Korean War armistice in 1993. Since the wartime period, the narrative surrounding hostility and alliance in the war lied at the center of the memory construction. From the Chinese side, the outbreak of the Korean War was attributed to an American imperialist invasion into Korea and subsequent resistance by the North Korea

\textsuperscript{73} Hajimu, “The Korean War through the Prism of Chinese Society.”
\textsuperscript{74} Ford, “China Under Mao Zedong,” 2018.
military and civilians. Chinese entry in the war was explained as a reaction to the U.S. Army’s closing in on the Yalu Review as a threat to China’s peace building. The narrative underscored the hostile relationship between the United States and China at the time.75 As for alliance, Mitter believes that the narrative of the Korean War as a victory reflected the China’s revolutionary diplomacy led by Mao. North Korea was emphasized as China’s blood alliance.76 What should be noticed that during the decades after the war, the role of Soviet Union was underplayed in the memory, which indicated the China’s growing split with the Soviet Union.77

Before the mid-1980s, even though the Korean War should have had significant meaning during the Cold War, it did not sufficiently function as a device of political propaganda due to the downfall of Peng Dehuai, the chief commander of the war, during the Cultural Revolution.78

Since 1993, a peace-centric narrative replaced the theme of hostility and alliance.79 The backdrop was the growing interdependence in Asia. In 1992, South Korean and China established diplomatic relations. The increasing communication and cooperation between China and South Korea, mainland China and Taiwan, as well as China and the U.S. raised new requirement to reconstruct the Korean War memory. The new narrative put the Korean War into the memory of the Century of Humiliation. According to the exhibition in the Andong Memorial Museum, the Korean War Armistice Agreement, signed in 1953, was portrayed as the ending of China’s history of unequal treaties which enable China to overcome its disgraceful past.80

76 Jung.
78 Jung, “China’s Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial Hall of the ‘War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea.’”
79 Jung.
80 Jung.
To sum up, the works about collective memory help examine the Chinese cases from a general perspective and also establish the analytic framework that the thesis uses in the following section. The literature about other two themes help divide the construction of the Korean War memory in China into three periods, namely the 1950s, the early 1990s and the 21st century. However, most of these works were based on comparative studies and most attentions were paid to China’s war against Japan during the World War II or to the Korean perspective of the Korean War. In this case, the thesis is expected to contribute to the literature owing to the longitudinal study it conducts and the focus on the Chinese perspective of the Korean War.
Chapter 3 The Korean War in Memory: from the Perspective of Official Documentaries

This chapter is going to examine the reconstruction of the Korean War memory through the lens of official documentaries. It will use textual analysis and the analytic framework previously mentioned to look into the description of the war and the image of self, ally, and enemy and then will answer how the change in Korean War memory informs the CCP’s perception of both domestic and international politics in different time periods.

3.1 The 1950s

3.1.1 Background

The 1950s was the first decade after the establishment of China. Within China, the CCP faced the challenge of legitimating itself as a post-war governor, instead of just a leading revolutionary party. Also, it also needed to build a communist state. In the international stage, the intensifying Cold War restricted the CCP’s position and actions which forced the CCP to figure out the approach to place China into the binary system as a socialist force.

Resist America and Aid Korea [kangmei yuanchao 抗美援朝] and Paean to Heroes [y ingxiongzan 英雄赞] are the two official documentaries that will be discussed in this section. They were both produced and released by the state-owned film studio before the complete withdrawal of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (CPVA) from North Korea in 1958. In this case, they both served as a crucial approach for the authority to achieve mass support and
mobilization for its military intervention in Korea in the 1950s. People’s Daily praised them as “a glorious moment in the history of people’s film”\(^{81}\).

The documentary *Resist America and Aid Korea* was produced by the state-owned Beijing Film Studio and was first released in December 1951. It covers the period from the June 1950 to the December 1951, talking about the story until the China’s second phase campaign. The other documentary *Paean to Heroes* was produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio and was first released in 1958. It first touches upon the development of the war and primarily focuses on the period from the armistice to the complete withdrawal of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army (CPVA) from the North Korean in 1958.

### 3.1.2 Course of the War

The two documentaries portrayed the course of the Korean War in the same way. The outbreak of the Korean War was attributed to the American imperialist aggression into Korea, accompanied by “traitors in the South”, which was a great threat to the “peace, justice, and order” in Korea, China, Asia, and the whole world. Subsequently, the North Korean army and civilians was forced to resist and fight for the “freedom and independence” of their own country. From the Chinese perspective, the U.S. action in Korea was the first step of a bigger plan to “set Asia on fire”. China’s entry into the war was a reaction to this plan which set the next target on China. The idea was supported by the U.S.’s closing in on the Yalu River as well as the U.S. 7th fleet entering into Taiwan. Both of these events were interpreted as the U.S.’s “armed occupation of a part of Chinese territory”.

\(^{81}\) Shan Wanli 单万里, “Zhongguo wenxian jilupian de yanbian” 中国文献纪录片的演变 [The evolution of Chinese documentary], *Dianying yishu* 电影艺术, no. 6 (2005): 54–60.
During the battle, China and North Korea achieved a definite victory over the UN forces, especially the U.S. army. Chinese and North Korean soldiers were courageous and powerful while American soldiers were weak-willed and easily destroyed. The American army was compelled to retreat to the south of the 38th parallel and sign the Korean Armistice Agreement. It was “the first failure the U.S. encountered in the battlefield” which caused “a great shock to the imperialist world”. Afterwards, with the help of the CPVA, the Workers’ Party of Korean and the leader Kim Il-sung led the Democratic People’s Republic of Korean (DPRK) to rapidly reconstruct the country damaged by the war. In contrast, South Korea was struggling due to the “shackle of American imperialism”. DPRK always attempted to “peacefully unify the North and the South”. In order to “peacefully settle the Korean issue and ease tensions in East Asia”, China “voluntarily proposed” to withdraw the army to show the support for peace and urged the U.S. to take the same action in South Korea.

3.1.3 Content Analysis

Based on Zheng Wang’s analytic framework discussed in Chapter two, the following section will discuss four categories of messages delivered in the documentaries: constitutive norms, relational content, cognitive norms and social purposes.

a. Constitutive Norms

Self-image delivers the constitutive norms which specify a group’s roles and rules, interests, and basis of pride and self-esteem.82 In the two documentaries, the Chinese image is closely related to two ideas: national independence and justice. It is directly demonstrated by the

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Chinese slogan of “Resist America! Assist Korea! Defend our home! Defend our nation!” during the Korean War.

Firstly, the CCP and Chinese soldiers are portrayed as people’s great saviors. Chinese soldiers are represented as a group of humanitarian heroes and invincible fighters at the same time. They “voluntarily propose to enter the war” to fight against evil American and assist the Korean as well as protect Chinese people and territory. In Korea, they “love and treat every Korean civilian as their own family member”. They voluntarily help the Korean people do farm work, repair roads and railways, and construct factories. They are even willing to sacrifice themselves to “rescue kids and belongings from houses on fire”. They pledge to “revenge the sufferings and brutalities in Korea caused by the American imperialists. On the battlefield, Chinese soldiers are unconquerable and leave the elite U.S. forces only two options: “to surrender or to die”.

Moreover, the Chinese civilians who offer domestic support also constitute a part of the story of defending nation and people. Soldiers’ family write letters to offer emotional support to the soldiers on the front line. Everyone in China is actively engaged in “production competition and movement” to prepare supplies in need. What is mentioned particularly in the documentary is the response in Xinjiang. Every civilian in Xinjing province considers the contribution to the war as a “glorious mission”.

In this case, national independence and liberation are placed at the center of China’s interests which is built upon the nationalistic narrative the CCP using since the Sino-Japanese War. After Mao came to power within the Party, the CPP conducted a strategy that combined nationalism and communism. The CCP eschewed their old slogans of class warfare and violent
redistribution of property in their propaganda and concentrated solely on national salvation. At the same time, the Party systematically reinterpreted modern Chinese history to place the CCP in the central role during the war against Japan. The Communist-led resistance movements were depicted as “a continuation and culmination of the history of courageous Chinese resistance to foreign imperialism”.

In the Korean War, the Chinese soldiers represent the force which firmly guides and leads the mass to defend the nation.

Under this narrative, the unity and sacrifice for country are highly praised and constitutes the basis of Chinese basis of pride and self-esteem. It corresponds with the CCP’s strategy of using nationalistic sentiment as the antidote to the disputes. The emphasis on voluntary and mass participation also shows an attempt to achieve political consolidation. Leaders faced a series of critical problems when deciding to enter into the Korean War. In 1950, political environment in domestic was still unstable. After the Civil War, forces of resistance and counterrevolution were still active all over the country, especially in southern and western China. Tibet still lay outside the CCP’s control. More importantly, after Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT forces retreated to Taiwan, the revolutionary and nationalistic enthusiasm during the wartime further prioritized the task to retake Taiwan among the masses. This strategy is further strengthened but the portrayal of allies and enemies in the Korean War.

85 Hajimu, “The Korean War through the Prism of Chinese Society.”
86 Hajimu.
b. Relational Contents

The portrayal of the ally and enemy constitutes relational contents reflecting a group’s relation with others.\(^8^7\) In the documentaries, the relation between DPRK and China are rooted in nature and that the collaboration should be a decision without doubt. DPRK is mainly called as China’s “brother”, “close comrade”, “family” and they are “shared blood” [xuemaixianglian 血脉相连]. The closeness results from the geographic, cultural and historical connections. In particular, the two nations fought alongside each other against the Japanese fascists with the help of the Soviet Union and eventually achieved emancipation and established the republic. In this sense, the two nations are depicted as one group. They not only share interests but also face the same threats. The sufferings in Korea would eventually happen in China, which gives emotional support to the idea of “the U.S.’s bigger plan in Asia”.

Moreover, the “spirit of internationalism” is at the center of China’s relations with Soviet Union and other socialist countries. People in these countries are someone who “loves peace”. The support that they give to DPRK and China show their “sympathy” and efforts to “pursue and maintain world peace”.

On the other side, South Korea is mainly recognized as a group of “traitors”. In the documentaries. Yi Seung-man, the leader in the south, is called as “the traitor to the country” [maiguozei 卖国贼] and his army as “bandit force” [feibang 帮]. He was controlled by the American imperialism and put South Korea in the dark. Ordinary people in South Korea “are living in prison” and “work like slaves”. In other words, from the Chinese perspective, DPRK is recognized as the only legal regime that should rule Korea and be able to lead the country to prosperity. The expression tries to describe the relations between North and South Korea in the

\(^{87}\) Wang, 14.
same way the CCP did in the its relation with the KMT. It can connect the nationalistic and revolutionary sentiment against the KMT to the Korean War, which constitutes a basis of mass mobilization in the early stage of the PRC.

Furthermore, the U.S. is also represented as the other force of evil after the Japanese imperialism who stands at the opposite side of peace, justice, and order. The U.S. is called a “warmonger” and President Truman is a “notorious war schemer”. Under the banner of “peace and justice”, the Americans actually commit atrocities and destroy peace and order in Korea. Also, the U.S. “is hostile to the liberated China and Chinese people” and tries to “push China into an abyss of disaster again”.

Relational contents in the two documentaries build the narrative based upon the narratives and memories of the Sino-Japanese War and the Civil War. It continues the CCP’s intention to promote the idea that “wherever there is a Communist Party, there the people are liberated”. 88 Additionally, the narrative also makes the security concerns become a confrontation that have already taken place. During the Sino-Japanese War, Japan was presented as “the most recent avatar of the enemy of the Chinese nation” and Chiang government as “a villain that had sold out China to the imperialists”. 89 In the Korean War, the differences between DPRK and China, between the KMT and South Korea, as well as between the U.S. and the Japanese fascist have all been blurred. In this case, the comparison lays foundation to justify the entry into the war and mobilize the mass. It also represents the binary cognitive model which will be discussed next.

88 Wang, 133.
89 Zhao, A Nation-State by Construction, 115.
c. Cognitive Contents

Cognitive content puts a group into a broader context and reflects the ways a group understands the world and interprets its own role in the world. Highly ideological and binary language was noticeable in the documentaries. In the Korean Peninsula, the North side represents everything good and right while the South side only speaks for everything bad and evil. People in North are living a great life while those in the south are living like “prisoners”. Moreover, China, DPRK, and other countries led by Soviet Union stand for “world peace”. Korea is “the outpost of protecting socialist community”. The U.S. and other imperialist countries are evil aggressors who try to “destroy the world peace”, “build an international order controlled by robbers”, and “establish a global order under terror and death”.

Furthermore, the contrasts are also demonstrated through the course and outcome of the war. During the wartime, China was portrayed as the side that has a potential battlefield superiority. The China-DPRK alliance is powerful spiritually and is unstoppably moving forward to push enemy back. The U.S. army is a “paper tiger” [zhilaohu 纸老虎]. The American soldiers are “easy to give in” and “admit their failure”. As a result, the Chinese victory manifests the new prospect that “East wind overpowers West wind” [Dongfeng Yadao xifeng 东风压倒西风] in the international stage.

In this case, this narrative reflects the revolutionary nature of legitimacy in the Mao’s era. To be specific, it describe the entry into the Korean War as an approach to serve the international aspects of the domestically revolutionary mission. Mao’s “continuous revolution” strategy never took the CCP’s rise to power in China as the ultimate goal. Instead, it emphasized

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90 Wang, Never Forget National Humiliation, 14.
domestically transforming China’s state, population, and society. Internationally, it aimed at reasserting China’s central position in the world.\textsuperscript{92} Simultaneously, the regime should also foment revolutionary world-view within Asia.\textsuperscript{93} In this case, the link helps place China within the Cold War binary and justifies China’s entry into the War.

In addition, justice is used as the talisman of China’s international military involvement during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{94} Under the binary narrative, the type of regime determines the nature of a force. Ideology was of central importance to their identity and behaviors.\textsuperscript{95} In this case, the communist side is righteous and just in nature. Justice thus is able to justify Chinese decision to enter the War and provide the basis to portray the armistice as a victory.

\textit{d. Social Purposes}

According to three sections above, the documentaries demonstrates that the Chinese purposes in the Korean War are defending nations and pursuing justice and peace. What should be further noticed is the approach to achieve these purposes. In these two documentaries, socialist reform and the socialism are the way to go, which corresponds with the CCP’s objectives to achieve the victory of socialism over capitalism and eventually realize communism.\textsuperscript{96}

In the Korean Peninsula, the root conflict between North and South Korea lies in the different type of regime after the Japanese occupation. DPRK led by the Workers’ Party of Korean and eventually achieved emancipation and complete independence. After the World War

\begin{itemize}
  \item Jian Chen, \textit{Mao’s China and the Cold War}. 14.
  \item Wang, \textit{Never Forget National Humiliation}, 133.
\end{itemize}
II, DPRK has been efficiently restored through a series of socialist reforms, particularly including modern factories, socialist industrial reform, infrastructure construction, education, and agrarian reform. All the outcomes credits the “advantages of socialism”. It is also the momentum for the victory over the U.S. in the war and the post-war restoration after the Korean War. The socialist production cannot be impeded even during the wartime. China shares the same situation. In 1958, “a strong socialist nation” is waiting for its “glorious army” back from Korea. In other words, the narrative serves the socialist reforms which was implemented in China after the establishment and finished in 1956.

This narrative reflects the China’s strategy when was transiting from a state-seeker to a state-retainer. On the one hand, the CCP was still a revolutionary party. It not only won the victory of the Chinese revolution but also continued to liberate and save other countries under the evil ruler similar to the KMT and the Japanese during the Sino-Japanese War. On the other hand, as an authoritarian governor, the CCP aimed to maintain its mass support and establish a socialist country. It then has to recall the wartime unity and sacrifice to deal with discontents and challenges and also promote socialism.

3.2 The Early 1990s

3.2.1 Background

The memory of the Korean War was barely utilized as an approach of political propaganda in three decades after the 1950s due to the dramatic political change in the domestic political environment. In August 1959, the CPVA commander Peng Dehuai was purged after he was criticized at the meeting of the CCP at Lushan. After his death in 1974, he was eventually exonerated in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping. However in the following decade, the difficulty in
deciding on the evaluation concerning Peng Dehuai further restricted the scope and content of the public discourse on the Korean War.97

After the long neglected time from the 1960s to the early 1980s, the memory of the Korean War reentered into the official political discourse, as a part of a series of the “new remembering” of China’s war memories, when it came close to the 40th anniversary of the Korean War armistice.98 The background of the new interpretations was the ideological gap the CCP confronted with due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Mao’s death, and the economic reform. The new strategy was marked by the launch of the Patriotic Education Campaign since the mid-1980s. This campaign focuses on history education talking about “what China was like in the old days”. It aims to educate Chinese people, especially the young people, about China’s humiliating experience due to foreign incursions, as well as the CCP’s position in leading China to achieve national independence.99

In this section, the documentary The History is not Far Away [lishi haibu yaoyuan 历史还不遥远] and The Battle [jiaoliang 较量] will be examined. The History is not Far Away was produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio and was released in 1990 as the official documentary of the 40th anniversary of the CPVA’s entry into the Korean War. At that time, the CCP faced a dramatic transformation within Chinese society in the post-Mao era. Internationally, China had already established diplomatic relations with the United States, but not yet with South Korea.

The Battle was released by the August First Film Studio in 1995 and it was abridged from a Chinese military video collection The War to Resist America and Aid Korea

98 Mitter, “Behind the Scenes at the Museum.”
[kangmeiyuanchao zhanzheng 抗美援朝战争] launched in 1992, the year when China and South Korea established diplomatic ties. It was selected as one of the 1995 Five “One” Project Works by the Publicity Department of the CCP. Two documentaries provided a microcosm of the way in which China treated its wartime experience in a transitional period.

3.2.2 Course of the War

In the documentary, the description of the War itself basically maintains the framework built up in 1950s with several differences. In this case, the Korean War started as the Civil War in Korea. When the South “suffered a devastating blow”, the United States entered the war to “interfere the Korean domestic affairs” with a true attempt to use it as an excuse to “wage a war in Asia”. Same as the previous period, the U.S.’s invasion into the Taiwan Strait and the bombing in the northeastern China seriously threatened Chinese security as well. In this case, when Kim Il-sung requested China to enter the war and aid Korea, Chairman Mao resolutely decided to “take the responsibility of internationalism and aid Korean army”, regardless of the fact that China was still a fledging country,

During the War, China was in a weak position at the beginning, instead of holding a superiority in power. Even so, the CPVA managed to defeat the well-equipped U.S. army relying on “highly political consciousness, revolutionary spirit, and flexible strategy and tactics”. In particular, China rapidly improved the weapons and the Chinese army constructed a transport route which could not be destroyed and ensured supplies during the wartime. In contrast, in addition to the failure on the battlefield, the U.S. faced intensifying domestic conflicts and with allies. Then the U.S. insincerely participated in the negotiation while committed brutalities in the neutral zone at the same time. In this case, China had to fight southwards in order to “achieve
armistice as early as possible”. The Korean War Armistice Agreement signed in 1953 symbolized the final victory of the Chinese and the Korean who successfully stopped the sufferings, defended the nation and brought peace back to Korea.

3.2.3 Content Analysis

The following part will elaborate the four types of messages delivered in the documentary and particularly discuss the changes compared to the previous period and the reasons.

a. Constitutive Norms

In the documentary, China’s image is displayed in two layers. On the one hand, China is a fledging country. On the other hand, China is able to defeat a superior force with a weaker force. The image defines the roles, interests, and basis of pride.

In this time period, China was a newly established country with weak economy and limited military power, instead of a powerful socialist country presented in the 1950s. In the documentary, “an infant in the cradle” is used as a metaphor for China in the early stage. In particular, it is urgent for the country to “rehabilitate people and national economy” after years of wars. China thus needs a stable and safe environment to restore the country.

However, what the U.S. had done in Korea led China to “a question of survival”. The U.S. is “attacking China using a knife” when approaching Yalu River and bombing cities in northeastern China. The collaboration between the U.S. and Chiang Kai-shek shows also their attempt to “attack back to mainland”. The crisis in neighboring country, namely Korea, also imposes a threat to China. In short, the American imperialists intend to “choke the new China to
death”. Given these conditions, China’s entry into the Korean War is portrayed as a defensive action to ensure national security. Under this narrative, national security is placed at the center of the China’s national interests, which is closely tied to the existence of the PRC.

In stark contrast to the pre-war weaknesses, the Chinese soldiers remain humane and invincible in the battlefield as they were in 1950s. They still “cannot bear the brutalities that the U.S. committed in Korea” and “they are willing to make sacrifices to eliminate aggressors and revenge the sufferings in Korea on the U.S.”. Also in spite of severe weather and casualty, they never lose a single game and win a complete victory over the U.S.

However, there are two difference that should be noticed. Firstly, Chinese soldiers are portrayed as a group led by the CCP. Differing from the narrative in 1950s, the Chinese army is “sent out by Chairman Mao” instead of “voluntarily proposing to enter the war”. They “are entrusted by the Chinese people to defend our nation”. Their entry into the War is to “serve the nation and people”. During the war, Chinese leaders implement “mobile warfare” making full use of the advantages of Chinese soldiers. Moreover, it is possible to defeat an enemy with superior equipment, provided “relying on people and a right leadership”. In this case, the narrative represents a situation that the leadership of the CCP has legitimized and which is widely supported by the Chinese people. Also, the wise leadership of the CCP brings the ultimate victory.

Moreover, the victory is achieved with weak military equipment at the beginning. The factors that bring the triumph are “high political awareness [gaodude zhengzhi juewu 高度的政治觉悟]”, “heroically revolutionary spirit [yingyongde geming jingshen 英勇的革命精神]”, and “flexible strategy and tactics [linghuode zhanlue zhanshu 灵活的战略战术]”. To be more specific, the CCP plans out the suitable tactics which makes a great contribution to the ultimate
victory. The soldiers are willing to sacrifice themselves, and, more importantly, realizes that they should follow the CCP’s lead and strategy. In this case, the spirit and intelligence of Chinese people could overcome the material weaknesses. In other words, these factors emphasize the unification under the CCP’s leadership.

Given the pre-war weaknesses and the ultimate victory, China’s pride and self-esteem are built upon China’s ability to overcome backwardness and grow stronger with the leadership of the CCP. In this sense, the nature of the new narrative built in this time period turns to defensive and self-glorifying. It corresponds to the motif of China’s Patriotic Education Campaign to highlight the past humiliations and the CCP’s contribution. The narrative commemorates China’s weakness which constitutes China’s national insecurities. It then emphasized the national salvation, namely the progress achieved under the leadership of the CCP, to legitimize the Party and enhance its popular support.

b. Relational Contents

The images of the ally and enemy basically remained constant while being brought into a new framework. Regarding the ally, DPRK is the “brother of China” and forged a friendship with China during wars. More importantly, the documentary portrays the Chinese army as a separate force from the Korean army instead of a single group as it was in 1950s. Also, it uses a new metaphor, namely “lips and teeth [chunchixiangyi 唇齿相依],” to refer to the relationship between China and the DPRK. It reflects the strategic thinking of Chinese leaders instead of a connection rooted in nature. In this sense, China is quite geographically close to the DRPK.

101 Reilly, “Remember History, Not Hatred.”
Provided that the DPRK is destroyed by the American invaders, China is not immune to the threats.

In spite of mentioning the “responsibility of internationalism”, the content pertaining to communism and the role of Soviet Union and other communist countries is excluded in the new narrative. It indicates the dramatic ideological change in the post-Mao era. The crisis of communism occurring internationally discredited communism as a doctrine that is able to save China. Mao Zedong and Maoism became contested figures after Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. In this case, Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatism emerged from the economic “reform and open” policy that tends to replace the previous ideology and fill the ideological fissure. Thus, the documentary intentionally leaves out communism while stressing the victory led by the CCP discussed above.

In regard to the enemy, South Korea is nearly excluded from the narrative. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s, South Korea and China was experiencing diplomatic talks to normalize relations. The discussion about how to settle the hostilities from the Korean War was one of the essential topics. China informally agreed to revise its textbooks during the talks. In other words, the conflicts with South Korea was intentionally forgotten in the war memory to push the talks forward.

The United States then is the only enemy portrayed in the documentary. In contrast to the completely negative image, the new narrative presents a two-folded image. On the one hand, the U.S. is a powerful modernized country. It is “the world’s leading economic country” that has a “steel output 140 times higher than China’s”. It is also “a highly modernized military power with atomic bomb” and the American army “has never lost a battle”.

102 Mitter, “Behind the Scenes at the Museum.”
103 Jung, “China’s Memory and Commemoration of the Korean War in the Memorial Hall of the ‘War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea.’”
On the other hand, the U.S. is arrogant and underestimates the power of China. MacArthur “asserts that there is slight possibility that China will enter the war. Otherwise, it will encounter a catastrophe”. During the War, American leaders fail to understand and resist China’s flexible tactics which “put an end to their dreams in Korea”. Facing the “disastrous defeat in Korea”, the U.S. “fight for dignity” in an inhumane way. It “derails the armistice talk” and commits atrocities against prisoners of war and the civilians in neutral zones by slaughter, bombing, and germ warfare”. Moreover, it even threatens to use the atomic bomb. Its brutalities are blamed by “all the people on the side of justice”.

The narrative indicates the way in which the Patriotic Education Campaign characterizes foreign powers. On the one hand, foreign powers invades and insulted China in the opposite of justice and peace. On the other hand, they take a leading role in modernization which counters China’s backwardness in the previous century. In this way, the new narrative set a goal to catch up to the West militarily and economically and eventually “cleanse national humiliation”. This narrative builds a foundation for the cognitive content and social purpose that will be discussed in the following sections.

c. Cognitive Contents

Despite keeping some highly ideological words used in 1950s, the narrative is primarily built upon international cooperation and international order. Firstly, China and the U.S. should have a cooperative relationship rather than standing in an opposing position, which serves the opening-up strategy conducted since the Deng’s era. Documentaries define the U.S.’s entry into the War as an action to “fight a wrong war against a wrong rival at a wrong time in a wrong place.” Also, even though “Chinese and Americans fought with each other yesterday”, two sides

\footnote{Callahan, “National Insecurities.”}
are able to “sit together as friends” immediately after the armistice. Moreover, the documentaries presents Nixon’s visit to China in 1972 which ended China’s years of diplomatic isolation and marked the key step in normalizing relations between China and the U.S.. This event “accords with the wills of two countries” and demonstrates “a new page of history”. Moreover, “China welcomes friends from every country to enter China” as what we did with the U.S..

Furthermore, a new international order is conveyed in the documentaries which corresponds to the idea of national salvation discussed above. In the war, the U.S. “manipulates the United Nations” to invade another country and fulfill its own ambitions as “what western powers have done for hundreds of years”. China’s victory in the Korean War symbolizes “a success of the anti-aggression tide” and the fact that “the old era has gone forever”. Moreover, the narrative places China into the international system and demonstrates its role as an active player in the international stage.

d. Social Purposes

In this time period, modernization becomes the China’s primary purpose. The military imbalance at the beginning placed China in a weak position and urged China to make improvements. During the War, Chinese soldiers had to rely on spirits and tactics to deal with the deficiency of their weapons. The powerful weaponry gave the U.S. multiple opportunities to “survive from trouble and even launch several strong counterattacks”. The advantage also allowed the U.S. to “clamor for unreasonable requests” during the negotiation. Moreover, the function and importance of transport lines also showed the needs to modernize China materially. The documentaries define the Korean War as a “modern war heavily depending on supplies”.

China’s success in constructing “indestructible transport lines” “enabled China to take proactive actions” and make “a huge contribution” to the ultimate victory.

The narrative corresponds to the intention to encourage modernization in the patriotic educational campaign which aimed to promote the CCP’s new legitimacy based on pragmatism. Facing the stagnated economy and eroded public confidence in the Party in the post-Mao era, Deng decided to concentrate on economic development. The CCP also claimed that the success of economic development depended on political stability and national unity. In other words, the economic performance was used to legitimate the CCP in the post-Mao era.

3.3 The 21st Century

3.3.1 Background

When entering the 21st century, China has been deeply involved in the international system and began to seek for global power under the strategy of the peaceful rise and China’s great rejuvenation. In this section, the documentary *The Semicentennial Echo* [*bangeshijide huixiang 半个世纪的回响*] and *The Great War to Resist America and Aid Korea* [*weidade kangmeiyuanchao 伟大的抗美援朝*] will be examined in detail.

*The Semicentennial Echo* was produced by the Central Newsreel and Documentary Film Studio and released in 2000 for the 50th anniversary of China’s entry into the Korean War. It comprised five episodes and offered plenty of details based on interviews with hundreds of the Korean War witnesses which were revealed for the first time. Also, it was selected as one of the 2000 Five “One” Project Works by the Publicity Department of the CCP.

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105 Zhao, *A Nation-State by Construction*, 121.
The Great War to Resist America and Aid Korea was initiated by China Central Television (CCTV) in 2014 and was co-produced by the National Archives Administration of China, the Academy of Military Science of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army, and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. It contains five episodes and uncovers many original documents and historical materials for the first time. It was published on the CCTV documentary YouTube Channel in 2019 May during the China-U.S. trade war.

3.3.2 Content Analysis

In the documentaries in the period, the narrative keeps the story in the early 1990s that China as a fledging country is finally able to win a victory over the powerful U.S.. However, there is a big shift in the interpretation of the world.

a. Constitutive Norms

In this period, patriotism characterizes China’s self-image and serves as the root motive for every decision and behavior of the CCP, Chinese soldiers, and Chinese civilians. To be specific, the primacy of the CCP’s leadership depends on its great contributions to defend the country and its role as the most thoroughgoing patriot. Firstly, the CCP and the leaders demonstrate strong competences and foresight to lead and defend the country. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War in Korea, Chairman Mao decided to “suspend the ongoing demobilization of the People’s Liberation Army(PLA)” and reorganized them in a “Northeast frontier force”. It was “a precaution against the possible spread of the War” and eventually turns out to be “a wise and far-sighted decision” because it allowed the Chinese army to be well-prepared. Moreover, the CCP’s leaders were capable to “make full use of Chinese advantages”
which “enables China to defeat an enemy way more powerful than itself”. For instance, the CPVA commander Peng Dehuai resorts to tunnel warfare to “maximize strengths on the ground and minimize weakness in the air”. In this case, although China’s involvement in the War was still portrayed as a passive and defensive decision, the CCP and the leaders showed an ability to proactively defend and successfully lead the country.

Furthermore, Chinese soldiers led by the CCP were resolute patriots. They fought against enemy with “iron wills”. They were “unflinching “and are always willing to make sacrifices on the battlefield because “their home is not far behind them”. In addition to the direct commands, the connection between brave soldiers and the CCP is further illustrated through the death of Mao Anying, the son of the Chairman Mao. Quoting from the memoir of Chairman Mao’s secretary, the documentary revealed Mao’s reaction to his son’s death. He said that “even though it is dangerous, I have to send my son to the battlefield to defend the country.” Compared to the previous period, Chinese soldiers not only acts as guardians of the people but also embodied the patriotism in China.

Moreover, patriotism also accounts for the link between Chinese civilians and the Party. After entering the War, patriotism “breaks across the country”. “Protecting our home and defending our country is the most basic political awareness for all”. In this case, everyone should support the Party and the soldiers at the front because “they are on our sides” and “we are one”. Soldiers “are bleeding out there for us” and we should “support them spiritually and materially together”. We will “definitely achieve victory against imperialists” when “all Chinese people are mobilized show solidarity”. In other words, the message conveyed under this narrative is that everyone, who loves and hopes to defend China, should unite and give support to the CCP and follow its lead.
Documentaries in this time period placed more emphasis on nonmaterial interests rather than material interests which were stressed in the previous period. To be specific, some nonmaterial interests, such as national dignity and respect from other countries, gained more attention than such material interests as security and territory. In short, China’s pride and self-esteem rely on regaining national dignity and improving international influence. China’s performance in the Korean War sharply contrasted with “the humiliation when signing unequal treaty in the Opium War in 1840” and eventually enabled the Chinese to “get rid of the label ‘sick man of Asia’”. Also, the victory “shatters the myth that the U.S. is invincible” which “forces the U.S. to view China as a strong rival and the whole world has to reassess China”. More importantly, the Korean War taught all Chinese “a great lesson of national dignity” that “only when China grows strong can Chinese people actually stand up”.

The narrative in this time period continues the self-glorifying nature of the previous period. However, the revolutionary spirit stressed in the past is entirely replaced with patriotism. It corresponds to the change when the CCP started calling itself “Party in power” instead of a “revolutionary party” when entering the 21st century. Its new narrative reflected the CCP’s efforts to maintain governance by offering pride and strength in exchange for loyalty. In short, not only the CCP’s ability to achieve economic development but also its patriotism legitimize its leadership in this period.

b. Relational Contents

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108 Osnos, 5.
Consistent with the previous period, the United States remains the only enemy presented in the documentaries. However, the U.S.’s brutality and atrocity stressed in the past are excluded from the narrative. Instead, documentaries concentrate on explaining the U.S.’s failure in the Korean War in terms of strategy. To be specific, the wrong strategy was attributed to its significant underestimation of China. In addition to the arrogance derived from its material superiority previously emphasized, the lack of knowledge about China also led to the underestimation. “The Americans thought they knew everything while in fact they know nothing. Instead, China is the one who knows everything.” The knowledge about China that the U.S. ignores included “China’s constantly growing power” as well as “the resolution to defend national dignity, equality, and peace”. In this case, China was portrayed as a humble country in sharp contrast to the haughty U.S..

Moreover, the term “hegemony”, rather than imperialism, is used to describe the U.S. in this time period. The dispute in Korean Peninsula “is rooted in the expansion of hegemony after World War II” and what the U.S. had done manifests “its military and diplomatic hegemony”. For instance, the U.S. “arbitrarily breaks the principle of non-intervention in other’s internal affairs” before the outbreak of the Korean War. During the War, it “attempts to coerce China into accepting unreasonable conditions”. Thus, the China’s entry into the War was to fight against hegemony which was also equated with “fighting for justice”.

This new narrative also is indicated by the reemergence of the Soviet Union in the story. Rather than an ally, the Soviet Union is represented as another hegemonic force. Its competition with the U.S. for supremacy “leads to the split in the Korean Peninsula”. Additionally, it “signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance but refuses to send out air force to aid China in the Korean War”. This results from the fact that Soviet Union cares only
about its own interests and “hesitate to directly conflict with the U.S.”. In contrast, as another socialist power, China shows its “courage and a sense of responsibility for the world”.

In this case, the relational contents in this time period also turns to self-glorification rather than conveying hostile messages as what previous documentaries did. In other words, the contrasts between China and other countries are used to demonstrate the positive image of China, instead of defining enemies or friends. This narrative reflects China’s new understanding of the world and the new interpretation of its role in the world which will be discussed next.

c. Cognitive Contents

In this time period, the relation between current hegemonic countries and emerging powers had completely replaced the binary relation starting from the Cold War as the primary angle for China to interpret the world. The narrative corresponded with China’s strategy of a peaceful rise when entering the 21st century.

To be specific, the world before the Korean War was dominated by the hegemonic powers, namely the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The battle in the Korean Peninsula “is one of the representations of the competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union for global supremacy”. The threat that China was facing was not confined to the Korean Peninsula. More importantly, the U.S. global strategy as a whole influenced “China’s future in the world”. The idea was supported by incorporating the Vietnam War into the story. What the U.S. does in Vietnam, Korea, and Taiwan together shows its long-term aims at China which eventually were targeted at the Soviet Union. Moreover, the Soviet Union failed to treat China as an equal ally and lets China “fight alone against the U.S.”, let alone took no account of China’s interests. In this sense, China was a victim of the current bipolar system.
As a result, China’s entry into the Korean War represented its resolution and effort to challenge the current international system. In order to illustrate this point, documentaries differentiate the War to Resist America and Aid Korea from the Korean War. The Korean War “starts as the Korean Civil War and ends with a tie”. However, the War to Resist America and Aid Korea “begins when China rises up to fight against hegemony and defend our country and ends with China’s complete victory over the U.S.”.

In this case, China’s performance in Korea demonstrated that the emerging power has already shaken the current order. All Chinese people “could no longer bear any oppression” and then “have already been mobilized and organized” as a powerful force. The U.S.’s ignorance about this new trend “leads to its failure on the battlefield and negotiating table”. Afterwards, China was recognized as “another strong power by the world” and “its interests are taken into account by many other countries”. For instance, the UK “realizes the importance of China’s sovereignty and wills and starts to remeasure its strategy in Asia, particularly in Hong Kong”, instead of “blindly following the U.S.”.

Furthermore, China was “a power of peace [hepingliang 和平力量]” differing from the two superpowers. China “is pushing for a peaceful resolution all the way”. The Chinese army’s withdrawal from Korea further “proves that China’ entry into another country only to defend national security and help others to resist invasion instead of violating other country’s sovereignty”.

d. Social Purposes

Based on the cognitive contents discussed above, documentaries promotes a new purpose which corresponds with the strategy of China’s great rejuvenation. In addition to the
modernization highlighted in the previous period, China calls for an increasing political and
diplomatic leverage. The pursuit was supported by the idea that “politics determines the War”.
The threats and oppressions that China suffers from before the War result from its weak position
in the world which makes it vulnerable. During the wartime, China “is confronted with economic
blockade by virtue of the U.S.’ control on the UN”. China thus has to change the status quo and
“seek for a bigger voice in the international stage” in order to better defend its own interests.
Moreover, the documentaries also underscore the political significance of the victory in the
Korean War in China. It “contributes to clear up the previous misunderstanding about China and
to establish a new China’s image in the world”. Also, it “allows China to participate in a
multilateral conference as a great power for the first time and to grow as an essential participant
in international negotiations from then on”.

Chapter 4 Conclusion: A Longitudinal Comparison

Over the past decades, the description of the course of the Korean War basically remained constant. From the Chinese perspective, the United States entered the Korean war, in conjunction with its entry into the Taiwan Strait and the bombing in the northeastern China, and imposed a threat to China’s national security. As a reaction, China decided to enter the war to defend the nation, resist America, and aid Korea, which was a righteous decision. In the end, China won an unquestionable victory over the U.S., which shocked the whole world.

Although this structural frame of the War itself remain constant, the specific interpretation of the War has changed dramatically corresponding to the present conditions and the CCP’s goals. The Korean War memory in the 1950s used a highly ideological and binary narrative to malign others in order to serve the CCP’s goal to build a communist country in the Cold War era. Then in the early 1990s, in order to fill the ideological gap and promote the economic reform, the memory construction turned to defensive narrative and focused on self-legitimacy. When entering the 21st century, in order to seek for global power, the memory is based on patriotism and hegemony narrative and focuses on self-glorification.

Nevertheless, some key messages persist over time. More importantly, many ideas might not derive only from the Korean War and relevant memories but also are expected to be observed in other wars in China’s contemporary history. Firstly, the national independence and integrity are the core national interests in China and constitute a main component of China’s national security. They together promote the thought that all Chinese people should not and cannot tolerate any invasion into China and should unify together and make efforts to defend and protect nation.
Secondly, the CCP’s leadership plays the central role in achieving the ultimate victory. The CCP always represents the force which firmly guides and leads the mass to defend the nation. The army under its lead is powerful and brave. Its leaders always adopt right strategies leading to the final success.

Thirdly, China and Chinese people should be afraid of any other country, especially the U.S.. In the Korean War, China won a complete victory over the powerful U.S.. The outcome greatly undermined the world’s confidence in the U.S. and also demonstrated the power of China. Afterwards, its memory has been often used as a historical evidence that shows China’s ability to win the victory in the rivalry with the U.S..

In the future, there are many relevant questions that should be further discussed. The topics might include how and why the Korean War is remembered as a victory, whether these memories actually influence public perceptions of the War and the participant countries, as well as if they work, whether they lead to the impacts that the CCP initially expected.


