



Bringing Asia into Focus: Civilians and Combatants in the Line of Fire in China and Indochina

Christopher Goscha

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INTRODUCTION

Bringing Asia into Focus: Civilians and Combatants in the Line of Fire in China and Indochina

CHRISTOPHER GOSCHA, guest editor

As readers of *War & Society* know well, the study of war has long shifted from strict military history to wider, interdisciplinary reflections on the impact of war upon states, societies, and cultures. Starting in the 1960s, Michael Howard's work on violent conflicts in European history, in particular the Franco-Prussian one of the nineteenth century, connected war to wider socioeconomic questions and major political transformations in European statecraft.¹ In his highly influential *The Face of Battle* published in 1976, John Keegan explored what the experience of war on the battlefield might mean for the common soldier fighting in three historic battles: Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme.² He invites us to move our focus from the vantage point of the general staff to that of the 'grunt' sent into the heat of battle or civilians running for cover. Others have explored the larger cultural and ideological transformations attending such violence. For World War I (WWI), the works of George Mosse, Paul Fussell, Jay Winter, Modris Eksteins, and Peter Englund certainly come to mind.³ Nor was such early scholarship the limited reserve of the English-language world. In 1973, the famous French medievalist, Georges Duby, used the battle of the Bouvines in 1213 to provide a fascinating *Annaliste*-minded account of war, the experience of it, the societies supporting it, and the mental world underpinning it.⁴ And of course historians have not been alone. Anthropologists,

¹ Michael Howard, *War in European History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) (first published in 1976) and *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France* (London: Routledge, 2001) (first published in 1961). See also William McNeil's fine study, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society Since AD 1000* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

² John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976) (reissued by Penguin).

³ George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); and Peter Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow: An Intimate History of the First World War* (London: Profile Books, 2011).

⁴ Georges Duby, *Le Dimanche de Bouvines* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

sociologists, literary specialists, economists, political scientists, and philosophers have provided equally important studies. The names of Michael Mann, Charles Tilly, and, more recently, Stathis Kalyvas among many others have contributed to making violence a key component of our understanding of social, cultural, and political change in Europe.⁵

The papers in this issue on civilians and combatants in the line of fire in China and Indochina owe a great deal intellectually to this exciting scholarship on the West and to a rapidly growing body of literature on the experience of war in Asia. However, until recently, Asia has struggled to find its place in this wider work in spite of having been the site of scores of transformative conflagrations reaching back to antiquity. While this thematic issue on Sino-Indochinese experiences of war is not out to ‘de-centre’ or ‘re-Orient’ the study of war and society, it does open by asking why Asia is only recently finding its voice in this wider body of scholarship despite a past marked as much by violent conflict as that of Europe. And the delay is not necessarily the unique product of ‘Europocentrism’ or Saidian ‘Orientalism’. In addition, given that the workshop producing these four papers had initially asked its participants to relate their case studies to others occurring in Asia and to this wider scholarship on the West, I have taken the risk of sketching out four periods or types of wars in Asia that might help us to think in more comparative terms both within Asia, with other parts of the non-Western world at war, and with the better-known Western experiences. Rather than summing up our papers at the end, I try to incorporate our arguments, approaches, and findings in this wider discussion.

The overall goal is simply to suggest ways that might help us to bring Asia back into the picture. However, let me be clear that these essays are part of a wider shift that is *already* under way when it comes to studying war, society, and culture in Asia, as we shall see. Scholars of China are leading the way. I would like to thank the editors of *War & Society* and professor Jeffrey Grey in particular for accepting our papers as a special issue. Professors Shawn McHale, Diana Lary, Edward McCord, and Stein Tonnesson provided expert critiques of all four papers, for which we are all extremely grateful. I would also like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Institut d’Etudes Internationales de Montréal, the History Department of the Université du Québec à Montréal, and the *Réseau Asie* in France, especially Jean-François Sabouret, for the funding that has allowed us to undertake this project.⁶

⁵ Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation States 1760–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael Mann, ‘Were the Perpetrators of Genocide “Ordinary Men” or “Real Nazis”? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 14.3 (2000), 331–66; Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1990* (Cambridge: B. Blackwell, 1990); and Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶ This is part of a collaborative research project on the socio-cultural experiences of war in China and Indochina between scholars (Vatthana Pholsena, François Guillemot, and Christian Henriot) at the Institut d’Asie Orientale (CNRS/ENS) in Lyon and Christopher Goscha at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Also see our contributions in the *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 9.2 (2010).

Relocating Asia in the study of war and society

There are several reasons explaining the marginalization of Asia in the international scholarship on war and society. True, in the past, out-dated *clichés* contrasting a ‘pacific’ Asia to a ‘bellicose’ West downplayed what was in reality a very warlike Asia. Anti-colonialists confronted by Western military might from the nineteenth century emphasized the violent nature of Western aggression and naturally portrayed their countries as harmonious, peaceful places. A handful of scholars working on the rise of consolidated states during the early modern period in Europe contrasted the perpetual violence characterizing this region with a seemingly placid, idyllic Asia. China may have invented and exported gunpowder and lethal military technology, but Asians were purportedly less warlike than their European counterparts.

Of course no serious observer believed or believes such things. Tokugawa Japan (1603–1868) and Qing China (1644–1911) may have created prosperous and strong states that resulted in long periods of relative peace, but this does not mean that war was absent or that ‘Asians’ were less prone to violence than ‘Westerners’; nor were they always victims of foreign aggression. The Manchu leaders who conquered Han China from the steppes did so through particularly violent means and had no qualms about extending and consolidating their imperial rule over central Asia through violence (including ‘campaigns of extermination’ in the Far West).⁷ Thailand, Burma, and Vietnam were very violent places, too. On the high seas, Geoff Wade has demonstrated that Admiral Zheng He’s famous voyages across maritime Southeast Asia were not as peaceful as recent commemorations of it in China would have us believe. A century before the Portuguese arrived on the scene ‘to open’ the Malacca straits, the Ming had already attacked the coveted port of the same name in a bid to control the lucrative spice trade. The Ming were also colonial conquerors across large swaths of Southeast Asia and what we now consider southern China and upper Vietnam.⁸ And, lest we forget, at the turn of the seventeenth century, Tokugawa rulers taking Japan in hand were tempted to launch a simultaneous war of conquest against Korea and China. War is as much a part of Asian history as it is of the West. One is still going on as I write.

There are other, more important, reasons explaining why Asia has been sidelined in the study of war and society. Until recently, training in Asian languages was relatively limited and North America and Western European universities and research centres offered more jobs on modern Europe and North America than on China, Korea, Vietnam, or say Indonesia. There were simply more people working on the West and its wars than other areas of the globe. And some of the most influential among them had experienced World War II (WWII) firsthand as civilians fleeing Nazi oppression or as combatants such as Michael Howard, Paul Fussell, Georges Mosse, Hannah Ardent, and others. Things were much more difficult in Asia, where repeated conflicts have disrupted the development of universities and research centres from the nineteenth century until very recent times. True, Western-run colonial states

⁷ Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁸ Geoff Wade, ‘The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment’, Asia Research Institute, Working Paper, No. 31 (October 2004), available at: <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps04_031.pdf> (accessed 4 June 2012) and Geoff Wade, ‘Ming Chinese Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia’, in *Colonial Armies in Southeast Asia*, ed. by Kark Hack and Tobias Rettig (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 73–104.

in Asia invested in education and promoted research, but it tended to focus on ancient times and colonial agendas. European authorities certainly did not appreciate scholars investigating the darker sides of nineteenth century wars of colonial conquest, as we shall see.

Most importantly, if the West enjoyed a long peace after WWII, the same was not true in Asia. The advent of violent wars of decolonization and the Cold War not only incurred terrible human and material damage, but it also rendered extremely difficult access to sources, archives, interviewees, and local scholars. Indeed, the Cold War manifested itself most violently in Asia and this over the entire second half of the twentieth century in *both* Chinas, both Koreas, both Vietnams, both Laos, both Cambodias, in Indonesia, and Afghanistan. Decades of war and radical social revolution in places like China and Indochina destroyed or scattered primary sources. Most of the Khmer Rouge records (1975–79) no longer exist. And yet this regime was responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million people. ‘In country’ study remained off limits due to colonial wars in Indonesia and Indochina and radical social revolution in places like China. For decades, Taiwan was *the* major language training ground for young scholars until Deng Xiaoping’s ‘modernizations’ opened the mainland to the non-communist world. Similar things could be said for Vietnam (I arrived in Hanoi in 1988 to study Vietnamese thanks to Hanoi’s decision to follow Beijing’s and Moscow’s lead). Until recently, few non-communist scholars could dream of working in archives housed in Beijing or Hanoi, let alone Pyongyang. This was in contrast to the situation in Western Europe, North America, and Australia where access (whatever its limitations in a democratic system) to archives was always easier and more open. All of this worked against in-depth research on war and society in Asia.

Admittedly many of these methodological obstacles also confronted scholars working on the European communist world. However, the crumbling of communist states in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 changed things greatly, lifting taboos and prohibitions that sparked an intellectual renaissance, generated contacts with foreign scholars and scholarship, and allowed local and foreign scholars alike to investigate the past and the archives as never before. Little wonder we now have some remarkable accounts of Eastern European societies, states, combatants, civilians, and cultures at war. One has only to think of Catherine Merridale’s *Ivan’s War*, Richard Overy’s *Russia’s War*, Jan Gross’ *Neighbors*, or Timothy Snyder’s recent *Bloodlands*,⁹ and I could go on.

Do we see similar things happening in Asia since the end of the Cold War? Things are certainly changing as universities and research centres open more jobs in Asian studies, attracting young scholars eager to learn the languages and do the research on the ground like their colleagues working in and on the former East Bloc. Scholars of China in particular have recently penned seminal investigations of China at war. However, let us not forget that the disappearance of communist single-party states remained limited to Eastern Europe and the Soviet empire — not Asia. Communist parties remain in power in China, North Korea, Laos, Vietnam, and in a post-communist authoritarian guise under Hun Sen (trained by Hanoi) in Cambodia.

⁹ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Richard Overy, *Russia’s War: A History of the Soviet Effort: 1941–1945* (London: Penguin, 1998); Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin, 2002); and Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

While access to archives has certainly improved since the end of the Cold War in China and Vietnam, it remains subject to strict party control.¹⁰

Questions of political legitimacy are also at stake. For one, communists now in charge of capitalist economies in Asia have latched on to their ‘heroic wars’ of ‘national liberation’ as a, if not *the*, vital source underpinning their political legitimacy. Marx and Lenin can hardly fit the bill when the party is urging people to ‘get rich’ and sending its elites to study in liberal capitalist democracies in Western Europe, Japan, and North America. The problem is that many of the socio-cultural subjects explored in the new scholarship on war and society do not always fit with the official version of heroic war or please the powers that be. Of course, this problem is not unique to communist regimes (*Le chemin des Dames* until very recently was taboo in France). However, authoritarian states in China, Vietnam, North Korea, and even Russia today are much more prone to limit scholarly investigation into troublesome subjects and periods. To call into question the righteousness of sacred war, to underscore its brutality, and the suffering it inflicted on these states’ own people and soldiers in the name of communism is to undermine the only remaining historical source of legitimacy these single-party states or authoritarian ones use to justify their monopoly on power in the present.

Things are getting better in China, Vietnam, and Laos, as papers in this issue suggest; but all of us (like others working on China, Indochina, and no doubt the former Soviet Union) have had to tread carefully, conduct interviews discreetly, and exploit sources creatively. Inside these countries, things are even trickier, especially for younger scholars who may be very interested by new approaches to the study of war, but who do not dare risk their careers by rocking the boat in departments where the party still assigns its delegates. Scholars working on the violence of the Cultural Revolution in China have learned this the hard way. Deng Xiaoping’s liberalization of historical enquiry has real limits. In Vietnam, academics have left the ‘non-heroic’ study of the experience of war to journalists and novelists, and not without reason. When veteran and heroine of the Vietnam War, Duong Thu Huong, wrote of the devastating impact of war on common soldiers, civilians, and society, the communist party lashed out, furious that she would dare to call into question the party’s ‘sacred war’ (*chien tranh than thanh*). When she produced a private documentary on the plight of 600 dissident veterans held in a decrepit psychiatric ward, the party ordered the film to be destroyed. So worried was the Politburo by this assault on its official history that the General Secretary referred to her publicly as ‘that dissident slut’. Duong Thu Huong lives in exile in France today.¹¹

¹⁰ Of course, archival problems are not limited to the communist world. Mark Mazower deplored the sad state of the national archives in Greece when it came to researching his book, *Inside Hitler’s Greece: The Experience of Occupation, 1941–44* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

¹¹ See Duong Thu Huong, *Novel Without a Name* (New York: Penguin, 1996); *Paradise of the Blind* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1993); and Nina McPherson’s biographical entry for Duong Thu Huong available at: <http://vietnamlit.org/wiki/index.php?title=Duong_Thu_Huong> (accessed 4 June 2012). See also: *Chuyen nhung nguoi lam nen lich su, hoi uc Dien Bien Phu, 1954–2009* (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2009) and especially the French language translation and more critical adaptation of this book *Dien Bien Phu vu d’en face, Paroles de bo doi*, ed. by Dao Thanh Huyen, Dang Duc Tue, Nguyen Xuan Mai, Pham Huai Thanh, Pham Hoang Nam and Pham Thuy Hoang (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2010). The most famous novel on the ‘sorrow’ of the Vietnam War is Bao Ninh, *The Sorrow of War* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996) (first published in Vietnamese in 1991).

Even the anti-war scholars outside of Vietnam who condemned French and American wars against this same Vietnam have carefully avoided criticizing Hanoi's glorification of war and crackdown on those who would explore the darker sides of the experience of war for combatants and civilians. Indeed, many of these scholars have often celebrated it in their efforts to discredit the official Western case for war and American exceptionalism. It is only recently that a new generation of scholars, such as Heonik Kwon, Shaun Malarney, Shawn McHale, and Christina Schwenkel, have produced sophisticated and insightful studies of memory, suffering, and war in Vietnam, from the various Vietnamese sides (and not just from the communist point of view, as François Guillemot's contribution to this issue demonstrates).¹²

Factoring Asia into the bigger picture

Despite the formidable obstacles discussed above, things are nonetheless changing when it comes to the study of the transformative and destructive effects of war on Asian states, societies, combatants, and civilians. Stewart Lone has recently edited a region-wide and welcome volume on civilian daily lives in war-torn Asia.¹³ Much of this new scholarship focuses on China and Japan during WWII. This is quite understandable given the extraordinary destructiveness of the Asia-Pacific War between 1937 and 1945, if not from 1931 when the Japanese conquered all of Manchuria by force. However, if Asia is to find its rightful place in the wider scholarship on war and society, then it might be useful to think about other periods or types of war that have deeply affected state-making and socio-cultural change in Asia over the *longue durée* and how they could open up the possibility for wider comparisons within Asia, with other areas of the non-Western world, and with Western experiences. These are merely suggestions, designed to promote intra and extra Asia comparisons and to suggest possible areas for further research.

Consider the following four periods in modern history during which wars have had immensely transformative effects on Asian states and societies as well as on the combatants and civilian lives caught up in them:

1. Civil conflicts in Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
2. Violent wars of colonial conquest in Asia during much the same period (civil and colonial wars often overlapped)
3. The devastating effects of WWII on Asia, and lastly
4. The Asian intersection at which decolonization and Cold War collided in particularly violent ways.

Obviously one could add all sorts of other periods and typologies, such as ethnic and religious conflicts, violent Asian imperial expansion such as that of the Ming and

¹² Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre. Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Shaun Malarney, *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam* (London: Curzon Press, 2003); Shawn McHale, 'Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War, 1945–1954', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 4.3 (October 2009), 98–138; and Christina Schwenkel, *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009).

¹³ *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Asia*, ed. by Stewart Lone (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007).

Qing noted above, or transformative wars occurring in antiquity, say, in the Chinese and Roman empires.

Civil war and social change: The example of the Taiping

As in the USA, civil war shook the Chinese state and society to its very core in the mid-nineteenth century. As Qing China fell into a vicious circle of economic recessions and lost its central control over the peripheries, hundreds of thousands of hungry people and badly paid administrators joined forces with those promising a better life and future. The Taiping leaders offered just such a salvation and made good on their promise in 1851, when they mobilized an army of tens of thousands and marched on Nanjing where they based the 'heavenly kingdom'. At its apogee, this kingdom covered one-third of China and counted some thirty million people. Full-blown civil war ensued when the Qing army, now backed by worried Europeans supplying it with modern industrially produced weapons, prevented the Taiping from taking Shanghai in 1860. In 1864, still receiving Western arms, the Qing counterattacked in Nanjing in a bid to end this southern rival state once and for all. Although the Taiping revolt ended in that year, it sparked a series of rebellions in central and western China that were not crushed for good until 1871.

Like the American civil war, the one in China incurred massive material and social destruction. In all, the Chinese civil war lasted some fifteen years and killed somewhere between twenty and thirty million people through famine, disease, and battle. In comparative terms, 600,000 Americans (both Confederate and Union forces) perished during the bloodletting. As in the American case, modern industrial arms found their way into the Chinese battlefields. Thanks to Western imports, the Qing deployed modern artillery in their bid to take Nanjing with devastating results. The third battle for this city in 1864 alone left thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, dead during three days of fighting.

In a beautifully crafted book, Drew Gilpin Faust has explored the meaning and the nature of the suffering endured by soldiers, their families, and the societies underpinning them during the American civil war.¹⁴ In contrast, we know relatively little about the transformative nature of the massive civil violence in China on civilians and combatants, societies, and statecraft. With over twenty million dead, social suffering must have been profound. Demographics changed dramatically, leaving wide swathes of the country depopulated and others serving as the sites of new concentrations. Johnathan Spence has certainly provided a superb study of this revolt, including its social dimensions,¹⁵ but in-depth studies on the feeding, lodging, and healthcare of these refugees, or the social and political structures designed to help them, would be welcome. Local economies imploded while new ones emerged, warlord armies rose as did local fiefdoms to support them, and civilians died in massive numbers. Religion had already tried to respond to the social suffering of Qing China; the internal make-up of the 'heavenly kingdom' reflected it.

The Qing never truly recovered from this social fracturing, nor did the violence end with the implosion of the imperial state in 1911.¹⁶ Civil conflict continued to kill

¹⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and The American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

¹⁵ Johnathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

¹⁶ Jacques Gernet, *Le Monde Chinois*, 4th edn (Paris: Armand Colin, 1999), pp. 461–509.

civilians and combatants in the absence of a centralized state as warlords — often well armed by the West and Japan — carved up China internally. Starting in the 1980s, Diana Lary was among the first scholars to study the social impact of the warlord years on Chinese society and people. Edward McCord followed her lead. It is perhaps no coincidence that these two scholars have been at the forefront of recent efforts to understand better human suffering and social change in this China in an almost perpetual state of war from the early nineteenth century onwards.¹⁷

The Chinese and American civil wars are but two examples among many when it comes to civil conflicts in Asia. Similar conflagrations occurred elsewhere in the region on large scales and in periods reaching back to antiquity. In continental Southeast Asia, for example, a little studied thirty-year civil conflict in the eighteenth century opposed Vietnamese violently. Known as the Tay Son rebellion, this conflict (actually a series of civil and Asian clashes) eventually saw the Nguyen dynasty emerge victorious in charge of the first unified Vietnamese state running from the Red River to the Mekong Delta. But this long civil war also generated extraordinary destruction as well as human suffering and social change. As Vatthana Pholsena shows for the twentieth century, these eighteenth-century wars for Vietnam extended into the upland non-Vietnamese areas. And like the Qing, the Nguyen never truly healed the social dislocation and divisions that this protracted civil violence had sown. George Dutton estimates that ‘several hundred thousand people were killed on the battlefields, and it is likely that tens of thousands more died as a result of wounds or illness’. And eighteenth century Vietnam was not China. Its estimated total population ranges between five and ten million (the casualty rate as a function of total population was thus very high).¹⁸ Similar internecine and regional conflicts occurred in eighteenth-century Thailand and Burma, giving rise to bureaucratically sophisticated, territorially consolidated, and expansionist-minded states. But again they also generated important socio-cultural changes and human suffering about which we would like to know much more. A remarkable group of scholars led by Michael Charney is revolutionizing our understanding of war, society, and state formation in pre and early modern mainland Southeast Asia.¹⁹

¹⁷ Diana Lary, *Warlord Soldiers: Chinese Common Soldiers, 1911–1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Edward McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Edward McCord, ‘Burn, Rape, Kill and Rob: Military Atrocities, Warlordism and Anti Warlordism in Republican China’, in *The Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Chinese Society*, ed. by Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001); Edward A. McCord, ‘Cries that Shake the Earth: Military Atrocities and Popular Protests in Warlord China’, *Modern China*, 31.1 (January 2005), 3–34; and Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁸ George Dutton explores the transformative effects of the Tay Son uprising and wars in *The Tay Son Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), Chapter 4 (p. 132 for casualties, p. 179 for the population).

¹⁹ Michael W. Charney, *Southeast Asian Warfare, 1300–1900* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Michael W. Charney (ed.), ‘Warfare in Early Modern South East Asia’, *South East Asia Research* (Special Issue), 12.1 (2004), pp. 5–136. See also Victor Lieberman, *Burmese Administrative Cycles. Anarchy and Conquest, 1580–1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Michael Charney, ‘Warfare in Early Modern South East Asia: Introduction’, *South East Asia Research*, 12.1 (2004), 5–12; among others.

Asian wars of colonial conquest

A second comparative field of research would be the colonial wars of conquest of the nineteenth and early twentieth century occurring across all of Asia (indeed across most of Asia *and* Africa). What made these conflicts particularly destructive was how they spread industrially produced Western weaponry into non-Western areas of the globe and often did so on very uneven terms (although, I wonder, perhaps not as often as we might think). Although American Admiral Matthew Perry might not have opened up his guns on the Tokugawa leaders when he forcibly entered Nagasaki in 1854, his steam-powered warships, equipped with powerful Paixhans shell guns, left no doubt that behind Western expansion loomed unprecedented levels of mechanized, industrial firepower. And although conflict was averted in the 1850s as well as the colonization of Japan, the Meiji leaders taking over from the shogun in 1868 were determined to modernize the country in accordance with the Western model. High on their list was a military revolution that would allow Japanese nationalists to build a modern army and to join Westerners in colonizing the rest of Asia by force. They succeeded remarkably well in that endeavour, but with simply devastating consequences for millions of Asians over the next fifty years.

By the turn of the twentieth century, the Japanese, Americans, French, British, and Dutch, through a number of often very violent clashes, had conquered almost all of Asia. Some of these conflicts lasted very short periods of time and were limited to ports and cities; others were drawn out brutal affairs for both civilians and combatants reaching deep into the countryside. ‘Pacification’ campaigns deployed across newly conquered lands from Algeria to Indochina by way of Burma and the Philippines turned rural areas upside down, sowing death and destruction in their wake. Militarily superior Western and Japanese armies deployed some of the most lethal industrial weapons of the nineteenth century in Asia, including artillery and eventually machine guns, tanks, and bombers. Rarely did commanders on the ground or in the air distinguish between civilians and combatants when ‘pacifying’. Scholars and anti-colonialists have described the horrific details of this violence. Missing are detailed studies of the social, economic, demographic, and cultural consequences of this violence on local societies.²⁰ Rare too are innovative studies of the experience of battle as seen by the common soldier or civilians, such as those proposed by Keegan and Duby. In fact, the field still awaits the in-depth study of a single battle of colonial conquest in nineteenth-century Asia to serve as a methodological way of exploring deeper questions about the experience and nature of war for combatants and civilians.²¹

²⁰ Recent scholarships on the violent American colonial conquest of the Philippines are changing this. Vicente Rafael, ‘White Love: Surveillance and Nationalist Resistance to the US Colonization of the Philippines’, in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Paul A. Kramer, ‘Race-Making and Colonial Violence in the US Empire: The Philippine-American War as Race War’, *Diplomatic History*, 30.2 (April 2006), 169–210; and Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

²¹ Of course one of the earliest works of history comes to us from Thucydides, an Athenian general who served in the Peloponnesian wars. See: Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars* (London: Penguin Classics, 1972).

In fact, this is not quite true. Two Frenchmen attempted to do precisely this, one covering the French attack on Vietnam in 1883, the other writing as colonial control over Vietnam came unravelled some seventy years later in a valley called Dien Bien Phu. Their names were Pierre Loti and Paul Mus. Their examples are worth a brief detour, if only because they suggest that contemporary sources for wars of colonial conquest do exist, as does a methodological precedent for using a single battle to think about war and society in the colonial context. The object of their analysis? The Battle of Thuan An in 1883, the loss of which saw Vietnam enter the French empire where it would remain until 1954. Something of a modern war correspondent before his time, Pierre Loti accompanied French troops into the heat of battle on the beaches of Thuan An, located near the imperial capital of Hue in central Vietnam. In fact, as an officer, he watched the violent orgy of the French attack (*la grande tuerie*) from the ship's deck. He noted the shells raining down on the adversary with devastating effect, walked among the corpses strewn across the sand after the French victory, and interviewed soldiers about 'what they had just done'. He was profoundly shocked by what he witnessed that day. Based on all of this, he wrote an extraordinary series of articles on the frenzy of violence and the nature of men at war on both sides of the colonial divide, speaking of both the humanity and inhumanity that he had observed in that crowded hour. The publication of his text in the pages of *Le Figaro* caused an uproar in France and cost him his job in the army. Later editions of his account censored much of the gruesome details that called into question the idea of 'peaceful conquest' — *On en avait tué beaucoup, presque au vol*.²² Nonetheless, Loti's war journalism provides an invaluable source for studying this type of violence and there is no reason to think that similar accounts do not exist for other colonial conflagrations occurring across the Afro-Asian 'Global South'. Western military archives hold invaluable after-action reports of colonial operations, as recent work by scholars of the Filipino-American war (1898–1902) have demonstrated.

One of the rare scholars to step back and think in more analytical and theoretical ways about such violence was French sociologist Paul Mus. He relied on Loti's account of Thuan An, his own experiences as a soldier in France in 1940, and his presence in the French army reoccupying southern Vietnam in 1945 to pen an extraordinary socio-cultural analysis of the nature of battlefield violence (and the ideas of Durkheim were never far from his mind). It is hard to sum up in a few lines the breadth of Mus' analysis of French and Vietnamese men at war both in the past (Thuan An) and the present in which he was writing (Dien Bien Phu). High on his list was an attempt to understand what he called the 'psychology of violence'. And while he never put it as such at the time, he was one of the first scholars to explore the notion of what Joanna Bourke has recently called 'intimate killing'.²³ Mus probes what the experience of colonial violence and war meant for the French and the Vietnamese 'grunts'. He discusses the physical setting, the nature of combat, its

²² See the original version, containing in brackets the later censored parts, of Loti's account of the battle in 'Tonkin, la prise de Hue: Dans le campement des marins de l'*Atlante*', *Gulliver*, 5 (January–March 1991), 202–15.

²³ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

mental and cultural contexts, as well as questions of discipline, morale, motivation, and ideology before returning to the matter of up-close killing (he lost his only son to the Algerian War). In another chapter, he goes further to examine the psychological nature of colonial massacres and political manipulations, before moving on to questions of social memory.²⁴

However, neither Mus nor Loti used the battle of Thuan An to consider the wider social dislocation that colonial conquest inflicted upon Vietnam. Having taken the beach, the French went on to sack Hue, emptying the capital of most of its inhabitants. Combat operations into the surrounding areas resulted in the dispersion of tens of thousands of refugees across central and northern Vietnam. And colonial conquest — as would be the case across Asia and Africa — set into motion new types of accommodation and created new elites. Jacob Ramsay, for example, has recently shown that the French conquest of southern Vietnam two decades earlier not only emptied southern cities like Saigon, but also allowed new groups to move in under French protection.²⁵ Saigon itself changed dramatically due to war. And yet we know little about such social changes generated by colonial violence in Vietnam and elsewhere across what became colonial Asia.

Wider ‘East-West’ connections also come to mind from this colonial context. More than during the Taiping rebellion or the American civil war for that matter, colonial conflicts in Asia at the turn of the twentieth century saw modern industrial weapons used, most notably the machine gun, rapid loading rifle, and artillery. Indeed, the deployment of modern industrial violence in Asia served as something of a laboratory for Western strategists planning the upcoming bloodletting in Europe. As Michael Howard has brilliantly demonstrated, European strategists were closely following the Sino-Japanese, the Boer, and the Russo-Japanese wars for lessons to be learned from the use of these new weapons. Thanks to the Boer War and above all to the trench warfare opposing Russian and Japanese soldiers in such places as Mukden, European general staffs were perfectly aware of the devastating impact artillery and machine guns would have on the men going over the top. Indeed, Japanese and Russian combatants suffered massive casualty rates, driving those surviving the first salvo quite literally into the ground.²⁶ In other words, trench warfare first appeared in 1904–05 in Asia because that is where artillery first rained down on men with deadly force from both sides. Conceivably, one could argue that it ended there too in 1954, during the battle of Dien Bien Phu. If French commanders spoke of Verdun to describe the valley floor after this epic battle for Vietnam, the reason is simple: both sides — the colonizer and the colonized — had used modern artillery with devastating effect, each side driving the other into the ground.

²⁴ Paul Mus, *Le destin de l'Union française, de l'Indochine à l'Afrique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954), Part II, pp. 115–220. On Mus and his analysis of men and societies at war, see Christopher Goscha, ‘So What Did You Learn From War? Violent Decolonization & Paul Mus’ Search for Humanity’, *South East Asia Research* (2012), forthcoming. For an essential account of men in the heat of battle, see John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II* (London: Aurum Press, 2009) (first published in 1980) as well as Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*.

²⁵ Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 156–66.

²⁶ Michael Howard, ‘Men Against Fire: Expectations of War in 1914’, *International Security*, 9.1 (Summer 1984), 41–57.

Before fast-forwarding, it is worth remaining in colonial Asia a bit longer because empires in the non-Western world continued to serve as testing grounds for evolving Western weaponry. And the Japanese were now as active as their Western counterparts in pushing their colonial ambitions. Having defeated the Russians, the Japanese created their own empire in Korea, Taiwan, and Manchuria. Despite a reprieve during the Taisho years, the rise of the militarists in the late 1920s saw Japan renew its colonial drive and expand its empire straight into China via its port cities. In so doing, the Japanese and Western colonizers never hesitated to use modern industrial violence against those who would challenge their colonial right to rule, whether communists, nationalists or religious movements, and regardless of how asymmetrical the confrontations were. Aerial bombing is a case in point. The Italians were the first to deploy aerial bombing and they did so in the non-Western world in 1911, in Libya.²⁷ But as Christian Henriot shows in his article in this volume and elsewhere, the impact of Japanese bombing of Shanghai (the Zhabei neighbourhood in particular) in 1932 was devastating for civilians and combatants alike, overwhelming the army's medical services and the city's capacity to respond, and fracturing its social fabric and political power and institutions long before full-scale Japanese invasion occurred in 1937.²⁸ In central Vietnam in 1930, the French bombed famished villagers revolting with the support of communists, resulting in large-scale casualties, great human suffering, and massive social dislocation about which we need to know more. As in Shanghai, this colonial bombing made no distinction between combatants and civilians, adumbrating things to come in WWII in Europe and Asia (and this before Guernica and the Spanish Civil War).²⁹

World War II and Asia

It is hard not to agree with Diana Lary when she laments how scholars writing on World Wars I and II can so rightly attach so much importance to the human suffering and material destruction inflicted on Europeans and those of the former Soviet Union in particular (which counted twenty-six million dead), and yet ignore that of Asians. In China alone, between twenty and thirty million soldiers and civilians died in the war against the Japanese due to battle, bombing, disease, famine, and other war-related catastrophes. True, much attention has been paid in recent years to the Nanjing Massacre of 1937, when the Japanese army returned and went on a rampage killing some 100,000 soldiers and civilians (Chinese authorities insist on the number of 300,000 fatalities). Without wanting to minimize for an instant the awful suffering that most certainly occurred in the capital, Nanjing (and the European Holocaust to which it is compared) is but part of a much more terrible and far-reaching story of

²⁷ Mark Mazower, 'Libya Remembers, We Forget: These Bombs are Not the First', *The Guardian*, 25 March 2011.

²⁸ See, among other publications, Christian Henriot, 'Invisible Deaths, Silent Deaths: Bodies Without Masters in Republican Shanghai', *Journal of Social History*, 43.2 (Winter 2009), 407–37; and Christian Henriot, 'A Neighbourhood Under the Storm: Zhabei and Shanghai Wars', *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 9.2 (2010), 291–319.

²⁹ Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics, and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), Chapter 7; and Martin Thomas, 'Fighting "Communist Banditry" in French Vietnam: The Rhetoric of Repression after the Yen Bay', *French Historical Studies*, 34.4 (Fall 2011), 611–48.

human suffering, material destruction and, as Lary argues movingly in *The Chinese People at War*, massive social, political, economic, and cultural transformations.³⁰ Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* also tries to shift our attention away from Western to Eastern European suffering.³¹ These two books go together.

A growing number of scholars of China are currently in the process of renewing our understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of WWII on China. In the 1990s, scholars such as Stephen MacKinnon, Edward McCord, Hans J. van de Ven, and Diana Lary among others organized a series of conferences and path-breaking edited volumes and special journal issues that have opened up new approaches and innovative socio-cultural themes for studying the Chinese people at war mainly but not exclusively between 1937 and 1945.³² Edward McCord has provided sophisticated accounts of civilian suffering in the 1920s, for example, including the sensitive question of rape and massacre.³³ Stephen MacKinnon has examined the cultural transformations resulting from the battle of Wuhan in 1938;³⁴ while Diana Lary has explored a wide variety of social changes in her recent book.³⁵

A second team of scholars has recently established *A Joint Study of the Sino-Japanese War, 1931–1945* based at Harvard University. This multi-year project seeks to promote new research on this conflict, including socio-cultural aspects. It also aims to bring together scholars from all over the world to do so, including those from Japan and China. To this end, the organizers have held three major conferences, published much of their findings, and provided an excellent website at the disposition of the scholarly community, including bibliographies of major publications in English, Japanese, and Chinese;³⁶ it is a wonderful source.

A third group of scholars grouped around Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh have used the city as a unique opening into the socio-culture transformation of Chinese society during WWII. Christian Henriot, whose work appears in this volume, and Wen-Hsin Yeh organized several international conferences on Shanghai during WWII, bringing together leading historians in the field and producing invaluable volumes on the socio-cultural transformation of the city in a time of war.³⁷ A fourth,

³⁰ Lary, *The Chinese People at War*.

³¹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*.

³² Lary, *The Chinese People at War*; Hans J. van de Ven, 'War in the Making of Modern China', *Modern Asian Studies* (Special Issue: War in Modern China), 30.4 (October 1996), 737–56; and *Scars of War; China at War: Regions of China, 1937–1945* ed. by Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary, and Ezra F. Vogel (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). It is impossible to cite all of the work being done by this exciting group of scholars. To cite a few of the recent book-length publications of the editors see: Stephen R. MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938: War, Refugees, and the Making of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); McCord, *The Power of the Gun*; Lary, *The Chinese People at War*; and *Warfare in Chinese History*, ed. by Hans J. van de Ven (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2000).

³³ McCord, 'Burn, Rape, Kill and Rob'.

³⁴ MacKinnon, *Wuhan, 1938*; Stephen MacKinnon, 'The Tragedy of Wuhan, 1938', *Modern Asian Studies* (Special Issue: War in Modern China), 30.4 (October 1996), 931–43.

³⁵ Diana Lary, 'Drowned Earth: The Breaching of the Yellow River Dykes, 1938', *War in History*, 8.2 (2001), 191–207.

³⁶ *A Joint Study of the Sino-Japanese War, 1931–1945*, Harvard University Asia Center, available at: <<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~asiactr/sino-japanese/index.htm>> [accessed 4 June 2012].

³⁷ *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai Under Japanese Occupation*, ed. by Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and *Wartime Shanghai*, ed. by Wen-Hsin Yen (London: Routledge, 1998).

younger group of scholars, such as Rana Mitter and Neil Diamant, are currently working on cultural and memorial aspects of the WWII period.³⁸ And Mark Peattie, Edward Drea, and Hans van de Ven have recently published a collection of essays on the military history of the Sino-Japanese War.³⁹

While China suffered the brunt of the Japanese colonial thrust into Asia in 1937, the war affected the rest of Asia in profound ways, which I can only evoke in passing here. In Vietnam, for example, a war-induced famine that broke out in northern Vietnam in 1944 ended up claiming one million lives. As David Marr and Gabriel Kolko have recently shown, far from directing the Vietnamese revolution to victory in August 1945, the communist leaders of the Viet Minh rode the famine and a wave of hungry peasants to power.⁴⁰ In other words, like their counterparts in China, without the social transformation generated by WWII the communists may well have never come to power in Vietnam. Disaster was often self-inflicted and exacted a terrible human price. In June 1938, the Republic of China deliberately destroyed the southern dike on the Yellow River in Henan province. The force of the river served as a weapon to stop the Japanese advance, thereby providing the retreating Republican army with the chance to escape destruction. People living in the vulnerable plains, however, received little or no warning. Within days, the river flooded 70,000 square km of territory. It slowed down the Japanese, but at the cost of 800,000 civilian deaths — more than all of those killed during the entire American civil war. Meanwhile, millions of refugees fled in search of food and shelter. As during the Taiping conflict a century earlier, massive social change occurred about which we know little.⁴¹

Contrary to communist China's heroic version of the war, Mao and his colleagues also inflicted extraordinary suffering on their own people in wartime. Rather than attacking nationalist soldiers holed up in the city of Changchun in 1948, communist troops laid siege to the city between June and October 1948. They eventually took the city without firing a shot, but at the cost of 160,000 civilians who starved to death.⁴² In my paper, I also argue that Vietnamese communists drove their civilian population and combatants to physical exhaustion during a series of set-piece

³⁸ *Ruptured Histories: War and Memory in Post-Cold War Asia*, ed. by Rana Mitter and Sheila Miyoshi Jager (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Rana Mitter, 'Modernity, Internationalisation, and War in the History of Modern China', *The Historical Journal*, 48.2 (2005), 523–43; Rana Mitter and Aaron William Moore, 'China in World War II, 1937–1945: Experience, Memory, and Legacy', *Modern Asian Studies* (Special Issue), 45.2 (2011), 225–40; and Neil J. Diamant, *Embattled Glory: Veterans, Military Families, and the Politics of Patriotism in China, 1949–2007* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010).

³⁹ *The Battle for China: Essays on the Military History of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–1945*, ed. by Mark Peattie, Edward Drea, and Hans van de Ven (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Gabriel Kolko, *Un siècle de guerres* (Laval: Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2000), pp. 290–302.

⁴¹ Lary, *The Chinese People at War*, p. 62 and Lary, 'Drowned Earth', pp. 191–207. An emerging wave of environmental history of war is now emerging for China and Vietnam. See: Micah Muscolino, 'Violence against People and the Land: The Environment and Refugee Migration from China's Henan Province, 1938–1945', *Environment and History*, 17.2 (2011), pp. 291–311 and his 'Refugees, Land Reclamation, and Militarized Landscapes in Wartime China, 1937–1945', *The Journal of Asian Studies* (2010), pp. 453–478. For Vietnam, see: David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

⁴² Andrew Jacobs, 'China is Wordless on Traumas of Communists' Rise', *The New York Times*, 2 October 2009, p. 1.

conventional battles between 1950 and 1954. So much so that this may well have been one of the main *social* causes explaining the Politburo's decision to sign on to the Geneva agreements ending the conflict in July 1954.

While this expanding body of work on China is rapidly providing us with a better understanding of 'Asian' experiences of war, scholars also have been working on Japan. It goes without saying that John Dower penned the two landmark studies on socio-cultural aspects of the war in the Pacific theatre during WWII. Published in 1986, *War Without Mercy* explored the ideological and racist forces explaining the particularly violent nature of combat between Japanese and American soldiers. He followed this up with his Pulitzer prize-winning history of the American occupation of Japan, in which he once again explores from both sides of the divide the socio-cultural nature and complexity of the Japanese defeat, foreign occupation, and the very tricky notion of accommodation.⁴³ Dower's work has certainly inspired a new generation of research on the socio-cultural effects of WWII on Japan domestically and in the empire. The works of Laura Hein, Louise Young, Naoko Shimazu, Lee Kennedy Pennington, and Peter Duus among many others are changing the field.⁴⁴ At a region-wide level, Paul Kratoska has produced a very important edited volume on *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire*, while Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper have weighed in with equally impressive monographs on *Forgotten Wars* and *Forgotten Armies* in Asia during WWII.⁴⁵ What is patent is that the study of war, culture, and society in Japan and China is clearly in the forefront when it comes to studying wartime Asia; however, this is not the case when it comes to the Cold War and violent decolonization.

Cold war, decolonization, and the spread of modern violence

Indeed, a final example of how war struck Asia violently and arguably more lethally than anywhere else in the world occurred when the Cold War, civil war, and decolonization combined in China, Korea, Indochina, and Indonesia. Wars of decolonization immediately broke out in Asia when nationalists took advantage of the Allied defeat of the Japanese in mid-August 1945 before Western powers could return to re-claim their colonial states lost to the Japanese during WWII. The British and Americans avoided colonial wars in the Philippines, Burma, and India. However, upon emerging from Hitler's European empire, the French and the Dutch immediately moved to restoring their colonial states in Indochina and Indonesia by force.⁴⁶

⁴³ John Dower, *War Without Mercy* (New York: Pantheon, 1986) and *Embracing Defeat* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

⁴⁴ *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States*, ed. by Laura Hein and Mark Seldon (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2000); Louise Young, *Japan's Total Empire: Manchuria and the Culture of Wartime Imperialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Naoko Shimazu, *Japanese Society at War: Death, Memory and the Russo-Japanese War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Lee Kennedy Pennington, 'Wartorn Japan: Disabled Veterans and Society, 1931–1952', PhD dissertation (Columbia University, 2008); and *The Japanese Wartime Empire, 1931–1945*, ed. by Peter Duus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵ Christopher Bayly and Timothy Harper, *Forgotten Wars: Freedom and Revolution in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) and *Forgotten Armies* (London: Penguin Books, 2005). Paul Kratoska, *Asian Labor in the Wartime Japanese Empire* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2006).

⁴⁶ On colonialism in Europe under the Germans, see Mark Mazower's *Hitler's Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

At the same time, civil wars spread across the region following the Japanese defeat as a wide range of socio-political forces — nationalists, communists, and religious leaders — took advantage of the break in colonial control and central authority to advance their own post-colonial projects. Massacres, assassinations, and ethnic cleansing occurred as power relations shifted and pre-existing central authorities weakened along with their regional allies. Geoffrey Robinson has provided a penetrating analysis of this process in Bali over the *longue durée*. In it, he demonstrates how shifting state power, socioeconomic divisions springing from this, and manipulation by the Dutch and Indonesians gave rise to recurrent civil violence in this so-called Asian paradise.⁴⁷ Shawn McHale and François Guillemot have examined massacres in southern Vietnam in 1945–47. Whereas Guillemot argues that the communists directed such violence as a policy, McHale stresses the destabilizing impact of WWII on post-war southern socioeconomic conditions allowing for this violence.⁴⁸ And writing on Burma during the twentieth century, Mary Callahan has produced a model in the genre for understanding how war drove state-building.⁴⁹

Colonial violence soon submerged these civil conflicts when the Dutch and the French arrived to restore their colonial states and, in so doing, shifted power relations among differing Asian groups yet again. Indeed, much of what Timothy Brook has said about the socio-political dynamics of collaboration (I prefer Jan Gross' 'strategies of accommodation'⁵⁰) in China during WWII could easily be applied to other areas of Asia during this 'second' colonial conquest.⁵¹ By 1947, full-scale wars of decolonization were underway in Indonesia and Indochina, while to the north, civil wars resumed violently between the communists and non-communist nationalists in China and Korea. While a wide range of political, diplomatic, and military histories cover these conflagrations, our knowledge of the socio-cultural dynamics of these conflicts remains remarkably sparse.

Added to this civil-colonial war mix in Asia were the Cold War and its internationalization and intensification of violence following the Chinese communist victory in 1949. Despite his earlier doubts, Stalin was impressed by the success of the Chinese communists and the fact that Moscow and Beijing now controlled the Eurasian land mass. So impressed was he that he turned over control of the 'eastern revolution' to Mao Zedong. Meanwhile, deeply worried by the spread of communism into Asia, the Americans put their anti-colonialism on hold and threw their weight behind the French to intervene directly to protect South Korea in 1950. Mao's decision to assist

⁴⁷ Geoffrey Robinson, *The Dark Side of Paradise: Political Violence in Bali* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁴⁸ François Guillemot, 'Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades During the Vietnam War (1950–1975)', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 4.3 (October 2009), 17–60; Shawn McHale, 'Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War, 1945–1954', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 4.3 (October 2009), 98–138. For a wider take on violence and the state, see Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century', *The American Historical Review*, 107.4 (October 2002), 1158–78.

⁴⁹ Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Jan T. Gross, 'Themes for a Social History of War Experience and Collaboration', in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, ed. by Istvan Deak, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 15–36.

⁵¹ Timothy Brook, *Collaboration: Japanese Agents and Local Elites in Wartime China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

his communist brethren in Korea and Vietnam and the American decision to hold the line against communist advances after having ‘lost’ China ensured that modern warfare and all its attending destruction would now enter Korea and northern Indochina with devastating effect before moving on to other areas of the ‘global south’.

The impact of this on Asian and non-Western societies caught in the intersection between Cold War and decolonization was massive. According to Robert MacMahon, of the twenty million deaths due to wars occurring between 1945 and 1991, all but 200,000 occurred in the south.⁵² I would argue that the mix of violent decolonization, civil conflicts, and Cold War was particularly devastating in China, Korea, and Indochina where modern weapons were deployed massively in and against non-industrialized armies, states, and societies. While the statistics are subject to caution, they reveal nonetheless the terrible impact on combatants and civilians. The Korean War left around two million Korean civilians dead. The Chinese People’s Army lost over 400,000 soldiers, the Korean People’s Army over 210,000 combatants, while the Americans suffered 34,000 and the South Koreans 70,000 battle-related deaths. Another 400,000 Chinese and North Korean combatants died of disease. When one adds civilians, the total South Korean deaths reached 415,000 and up to one million for North Korea. During the Chinese civil war of 1945–49, total battle deaths for both armies totalled 1.2 million. If one adds civilian deaths, then the total rises to several million. In Indochina, the numbers are equally frightening. For the Indochina war, the Vietnamese communists have never released their figures. Estimates range between 125,000 and 500,000 for total deaths on the side of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), civilians and combatants combined. The French Union forces lost around 110,000 soldiers, most of whom were Vietnamese as François Guillemot analyses in his paper. For the Vietnam War, the numbers increased to over a million for the DRV and Republic of Vietnam, whereas the Americans lost some 58,000 men. While all death and destruction is deplorable anywhere it occurs, Asians — not Westerners — clearly paid the heaviest price in these deadly post-1945 conflicts. One counts Asian casualties during the second half of the twentieth century in millions.⁵³

The uneven deployment of modern violence is one of the reasons for this imbalance in human suffering. Without airpower, communist Vietnamese and Koreans never dropped napalm on American or French territories or civilians. Developed by the Americans during WWII, the French first used napalm against their adversaries during the battle of Cao Bang in late 1950 and continued to do so throughout the rest of the war.⁵⁴ The Americans let loose modern war in even more devastating ways when they took over from the French, as Stathis Kalyvas and others have begun to show.⁵⁵ Because the DRV’s Ho Chi Minh Trail dropped through eastern Laos, the

⁵² Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 57.

⁵³ Micheal Clodfelter, *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference, 1900–1992*, Vol. 2 (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1992), entries for Chinese Civil War, Korean War, Indochina War, and Vietnam War.

⁵⁴ Nguyen Huy Tuong, *La campagne de Cao Lang* (Hanoi: Editions en langues étrangères, 1962), pp. 76, 83.

⁵⁵ Stathis Kalyvas, Mathew Kocher, and Tom Pepinsky, ‘Aerial Bombing and Counterinsurgency in the Vietnam War’, *American Journal of Political Science*, 55.2 (2011), 1–18.

Americans pulverized large swathes of the countryside with massive bombing and the use of pesticides. In per capita terms, more bombs fell on this one tiny country than on any other in the history of warfare. Vatthana Pholsena explores the human suffering and transformative power of this destruction on Laotian society and revolutionary state-making.

There are other reasons explaining the violence of war in China, Vietnam, and Korea. One reason of course is the fact that Korea and Indochina were the frontline states against which American leaders and their allies were determined to hold the line with the massive use of modern force. However, communist nationalists in all three of these countries were not as ‘un-modern’ as we might think. All three created veritable war states, complete with bureaucracies, economies, and intelligence and security services. They were more than simple ‘national liberation fronts’ or ‘guerrilla movements’.

Moreover, these communist war states sought not only to fight guerrilla wars against the American-backed Republic of China, the American-backed French, and the Americans themselves in Korea and Vietnam. Each of them willingly sought to field a professional, modern divisional army and to take the battle to their adversary in order to achieve military victory on the battlefield. The People’s Army won in China in 1949, its counterpart in Vietnam inflicted a historic defeat on the French at Dien Bien Phu, while the American-led United Nations coalition fought the Sino-North Korean professional armies to a stalemate in battles of attrition in Korea reminiscent of the Russo-Japanese war. This is not Al-Qaeda.

However, lacking mechanized logistics on a par with those used by their adversaries, the communist leaderships in these countries countered by mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people to supply their divisions with foods, medicines, and weapons. In the end, the DRV mobilized 1.7 million civilians to haul food, build roads, and lug equipment during the Indochina War. Half of these civilian workers were women. And to achieve such high levels of social mobilization, these leaders moved to increase their control via the creation of a structured party-state reaching to the grassroots level. In many ways, this uneven shift to conventional war by semi-modern armies and states gave rise to the party-state, as I argue in my paper for communist Vietnam.⁵⁶ In an excellent study, Christian Lentz has also shown, during the battle of Dien Bien Phu, how mass mobilization went hand-in-hand with nation-state building in ethnically non-Vietnamese areas of the northwest.⁵⁷ Nowhere else in the south did this combination of state-making, social mobilization, and modern warfare occur, nor with such devastating impact on civilians, soldiers, and the societies and ecologies sustaining them. There was no Dien Bien Phu during the Algerian War. The Front de Liberation National (FLN) did not have the external support to help them do it, nor did they have the state or the army to organize it.

⁵⁶ I make this argument for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in my *Vietnam: Un État né de la Guerre, 1945–54* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011).

⁵⁷ Christian C. Lentz, ‘Making the Northwest Vietnamese’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 6.2 (Summer 2011), 68–105 and his ‘Mobilization and State Formation on a Frontier of Vietnam’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38.3 (2011), 559–86.

Conclusion

We need to know more about the nature of this violence, the human suffering it entailed, and the high levels of social transformation and mobilization it generated. It is in this wider context that I would like to situate the following papers, themselves part of a bigger reorientation already underway in the study of war and society in Asia. The field is still largely wide open for those seeking to study war and society in this part of the world. And Asian experiences hold out the attractive possibility of developing wider comparisons within Asia, with other areas in the non-Western world,⁵⁸ and with the exciting scholarship on Western experiences of war from antiquity to the present. I can only hope that these papers contribute, however modestly, to this endeavour.

⁵⁸ Steven Heydemann provides a good theory-oriented starting point for the Middle East in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. by Steven Heydemann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).