

## The Experience of War Four Sino-Indochinese Perspectives

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The study of war has changed dramatically over the last few decades, moving from a focus on classical military history to interdisciplinary reflections on societies at war and the combatant's experience of battlefield violence. No one text or one school of thought can explain this shift. Nor is it our aim here to do so. However, given that this collection of essays seeks to explore the socio-cultural dimensions of the experience of war in Indochina<sup>1</sup> and China in the twentieth century, it is important to situate our work within this larger historiography. It has certainly been of inspiration to us and has opened up new and fruitful avenues of research and points of comparison. We also hope that by connecting our work to this wider body of international research, we can contribute modestly to bringing Asia into the wider picture both empirically and conceptually. This seems important in light of the relative paucity of studies on the socio-cultural experiences of war in Asia compared to those on the West. This despite the fact that some of the most destructive conflicts of the twentieth century occurred in Asia: the Russo-Japanese, the Sino-Japanese, the Korean and Indochina wars.

This collection of essays takes as its point of departure the concept of the 'experience of war'. While politics, diplomacy and military operations have their place, what interests us most here and in our collaborative research are how socio-cultural approaches can help us to understand better how Asian societies, civilians and individual soldiers may have experienced warfare during the twentieth century in China and Indochina. Few would disagree that George Mosse's *Fallen Soldiers* marks an important milestone in the shift towards

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<sup>1</sup> We are using this term for the sake of convenience, since our work focuses on a geographical area that was embroiled in a conflict known in much of the literature as the Indochina Wars.

studying how societies and soldiers experienced modern warfare as it emerged with deadly force from the industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In this seminal text, Mosse, driven from his native Germany by the rise of the Nazis, placed the concept of ‘war experience’ at the heart of his reflection on European societies and combatants during World Wars I and II. On the one hand, he attempted to understand the unprecedented degree to which modern, industrial warfare manifested during WWI ended up ‘brutalising’ societies, cheapening human life, and thereby opening the way to the utilisation of an unprecedented degree of violence against people and societies during the rest of the twentieth century. On the other hand, Mosse examined how post-war governments created national myths, that of ‘the fallen soldier’ in particular, to legitimate mass death by casting it as a sacred, heroic contribution to the Nation.

The Myth of the War Experience was designed to mask war and to legitimize the war experience; it was meant to displace the reality of war. The memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience, which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate ... The cult of the fallen soldier became a centrepiece of the religion of nationalism after the war, having its greatest political impact in nations like Germany, which had lost the war and had been brought to the edge of chaos by the transition from war to peace.<sup>3</sup>

Although Mosse’s work was linked to his own breathtaking research interests, it was also part of a wider reorientation in the ways by which historians studied World War I, industrial warfare, indeed the question of twentieth-century ‘modernity’.<sup>4</sup> One of the results was the emergence of cultural approaches to the study of the experience of war. On this count, Mosse was certainly not alone in taking to task the heroic, nationalist myth of war by focusing on modern warfare’s destruction of humans and societies. In 1975, as WWI veterans disappeared and the Vietnam War ended, Paul Fussell penned an equally influential study of the combat experiences of British soldiers in World

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<sup>2</sup> On the American Civil War, see among others Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> See Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989) and the wider debate he helped set off.

War I, entitled *The Great War and Modern Memory*.<sup>5</sup> A literary historian and critic, Fussell had experienced World War II as an American infantryman. He participated in the Normandy invasion and dedicated his book to his friend, killed beside him in France in March 1945. Fussell relied on memoirs, poems and novels produced by mainly British veterans of the Great War to provide a study of the soldier's experience of trench warfare. Fussell also wanted to understand what the 'real' experience of war was as much as the modern myth masking it. A third seminal cultural analysis is Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*.<sup>6</sup> Here too the author seeks to understand how societies and states negotiated the mass death generated by modern war during WWI.

Parallel to this 'cultural turn' in the study of war, a shift in military history also occurred in the late twentieth century that focused on the fighting man and the 'real' nature of combat. John Keegan's ground-breaking study, *The Face of Battle*, was particularly revolutionary in this regard.<sup>7</sup> In it, this famous British military historian revisited three important battles—Waterloo, Agincourt and the Somme—to provide the first in-depth analysis of the violence that these clashes inflicted on the bodies of the men sent to fight them. Breaking with conventional military history of the heroic type and sparing us the tactical view from the General Staff, Keegan focused on the soldier's experience of war in the heat of battle. Of equal importance though less known is John Ellis's *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II*. Whereas Keegan ended with the battle of the Somme in World War I, Ellis focused on the impact of modern warfare on the 'grunts' sent into World War II.<sup>8</sup> Like the cultural approaches deployed by Mosse, Fussell and Winter, Keegan and Ellis helped shift the study of war from high politics and battle tactics to socio-cultural reflections on societies and men at war. To our knowledge, no such shift occurred in the study of Asian wars.

The cultural shift certainly occurred in France and World War I was again the point of departure. Heavily influenced by George Mosse's works, Annette

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and *A la guerre, Psychologie et comportements pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II* (London: Aurum Press, 1980).

Becker and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau have led the charge in favour of the idea of *culture de guerre*. In 1997, they defined this ambitiously to include ‘the field of all the representations of the war forged by contemporaries; of all the representations that they construed for themselves of this immense trial, first during the war, then after it’. Better known as the Péronne school,<sup>9</sup> two major ideas underpin *culture de guerre*—*consent* and *brutalisation*.<sup>10</sup> Consent was a way for the Péronne scholars to explain the extraordinary ‘will to win’ and ‘mobilisation’ of the societies and their soldiers over such a long period of time and in such atrocious conditions. It included such things as religious, national, ethnic loyalties and beliefs, camaraderie, and the dehumanisation of the enemy. Violence is the second component. Relying largely on Mosse, Péronne scholars argue that WWI marked a break in the civilian codes of behaviour explaining the brutalisation of societies, the violence this inflicted on soldiers, and that which they could in turn impose on their enemies.<sup>11</sup> In the late 1990s, the Péronne scholars concluded that no longer could the study of this ‘first’ modern, industrial war be analysed without considering the horrors that society and its soldiers were accepting. Historians had to go beyond the sanitised and pacified accounts of battlefield violence to take a hard look at what modern war actually did to the soldier physically and psychologically. The Péronne school is now producing some of the most important research on the experience of war.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Named after the museum inaugurated in this French city in 1992 and where the *culture de guerre* school sank its roots in 1989: Le centre de recherche de l’Historial de la Grande Guerre de Péronne (Somme).

<sup>10</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, ‘*Violence et consentement: la “culture de guerre” du premier conflit mondial*’, in Jean-Pierre Rioux and Jean-François Sirinelli (eds), *Pour une histoire culturelle* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 252. A third idea these two authors advance for *une culture de guerre* is that of ‘total war’. This is part of a wider historiographical shift (see below).

<sup>11</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, ‘*George L. Mosse: Réflexions sur une méconnaissance française*’, *Annales HSS*, No. 1 (January–February 2001), pp. 183–186; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau (ed.), *Au cœur de la guerre: La violence du champ de bataille pendant les deux conflits mondiaux, La violence de guerre, 1914–1915* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 2002), pp. 73–97; and for a thoughtful critique, see: Leonard V. Smith, ‘The “culture de guerre” and French historiography of the Great War of 1914–1918’, *History Compass*, No. 5 / 6 (2007), pp. 1967–1979.

<sup>12</sup> Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau et Annette Becker *14–18, retrouver la Guerre* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2003) and Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Les armes et la chair. Pour une histoire de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2009).

In the meantime, scholars have gone in different disciplinary directions. Christopher Browning, for one, explored how ‘ordinary men’ could become mass murderers during WWII. Rather than concluding that Germans were somehow genetically programmed anti-Semitic killers, he suggests that what happened to these men could have happened to you and me. Christian Ingrao has done similar things for the Eastern front. Joanna Bourke and Nial Ferguson also took on the taboo subject of why men kill and may like to kill, while Omer Bartov focused on the role of ideology and the politicisation of the Weimar and its soldiers to provide a trenchant analysis of the barbarisation of warfare and soldiers on the Eastern front during WWII. Catherine Merridale produced a pioneering account of daily life in the Soviet Red Army during World War II.<sup>13</sup> In another vein, several scholars have explored the social and cultural history of European cities at war. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, for example, have produced a two-volume magisterial study of the social and cultural transformation of Paris, Berlin and London, while Roger Chickering has done similar things for Freiberg and more research on cities at war is on its way.<sup>14</sup>

While this rapid review of the history of the ‘experience of war’ might lead one to conclude that the study of the ‘war experience’ is a Western-centric one, things are changing. Independently or in communion with the wider historiography, an increasing number of scholars have begun work on social and cultural aspects of warfare in Asia during the twentieth century. Leading the way is John

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Christian Ingrao, *Les chasseurs noirs, La brigade Dirlewanger* (Paris: Perrin, 2009); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 2000); Nial Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London: Allen Lane, 1998); Omer Bartov, ‘The conduct of war: soldiers and the barbarization of warfare’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 64 (supp., Dec 1992), pp. S32–S45; Omer Bartov, ‘Soldiers, Nazis, and war in the Third Reich’, *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 63 (March 1991), pp. 44–60; Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War, Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939–1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), among many others.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany, Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roger Chickering and Marcus Funck (eds), *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919*, paperback edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (eds), *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919, Volume 2: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Dower at MIT. Dower provided the first book-length analysis of the brutality of the Pacific War in his study of the role race played in opposing Americans and Japanese grunts in a ‘war without mercy’. Although some have contested his approach based on race, no one can deny the revolutionary importance of this book appearing four years before Mosse’s *Fallen Soldiers* in 1990. Dower then went on to pen an equally important study of the socio-cultural aspects of defeat, occupation and regeneration in *Embracing Defeat, Japan in the Wake of World War II*. He won the Pulitzer Prize for it. Via these two books, he provided the landmark socio-cultural studies for wartime Asia.<sup>15</sup> While it would be exaggerated to think that Dower produced this work in complete isolation from the studies of ‘war experience’ focused on the Western front, it is worth noting that his reflections were also connected to similar research being done by Japanese scholars on socio-cultural aspects of war.

Things are now on the move elsewhere. Scholars of China, Neil J. Diamant, Diana Lary, Stephen MacKinnon, Ezra Vogel, Edward McCord and others have begun to study in socio-cultural ways the impact of warfare on twentieth-century China. Through a number of edited volumes, conferences and collaborative research projects, China scholars have begun to explore socio-cultural aspects of modern warfare in China between 1931 and 1949. Diane Lary and Stephen MacKinnon have led the way with the organisation of two major conferences and the publication of two edited volumes on the subject, *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* and *China at War, Regions of China, 1937–1945*.<sup>16</sup> Strangely absent, however, is any in-depth work on the Korean combatant’s experience of war between 1950 and 1953.

As in the new work on war and society in the West, the city at war also stands out as an important research topic in Chinese studies. Leading the way on this front are Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh who have organised a number of conferences and edited volumes on the socio-cultural history of

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<sup>15</sup> John Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986) and his *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon (eds), *Scars of War: The Impact of Warfare on Modern China* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001); Neil J. Diamant, *Embattled Glory: Veterans, Military Families, and the Politics of Patriotism in China 1949–2007* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010); Stephen R. MacKinnon, Diana Lary and Ezra Vogel (eds), *China at War, Regions of China, 1937–1945* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Feng Chongyi and David Goodman (eds), *North China at War: The Social Ecology of Revolution, 1937–1945* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

Shanghai during the Sino-Japanese war of 1937–1945.<sup>17</sup> Christopher Goscha has recently begun a research project on the socio-cultural transformation of the colonial city in a war of decolonisation, using Saigon during the Indochina War as his case study. Significantly, like Dower's work on the 'brutality' of combat during the Pacific War, Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh's work on wartime Shanghai has emerged quite autonomously of that of Chickering, Winter and Robert on Paris, Berlin and London during WWII.

In recent years, war and gender have also emerged as a promising area of research for scholars focused on Asia. The participation of women in armed independence struggles and/or communist insurgencies in Southeast Asia has been the focus of remarkable studies. Pioneering works by François Guillemot, Karen Gottschang Turner, Phan Thanh Hao and Sandra Taylor on North Vietnamese female communist fighters come to mind.<sup>18</sup> Works on 'women warriors' have enriched the concept of the 'experience of war' by exploring the private sphere of a combatant's life, bringing to light the (often unattainable) balance female combatants sought among the traditional demands of their society, the sacrifices of a revolutionary life, and their own desire for freedom and independence. Books by Vina Lanzona and Agnes Khoo, respectively studying the Huk female insurgents in the Philippines and women communist fighters in the Malaysian anti-colonial struggle, tackle just such issues.<sup>19</sup>

A word needs to be said about the study of massacre in the Asian region.<sup>20</sup> The Japanese massacre in Nanjing has generated scores of books and several documentaries and films. And here the connection between European and Asian historiography is more apparent. That Joshua Fogel, one of the leading

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Henriot and Wen-Hsin Yeh (eds), *In the Shadow of the Rising Sun: Shanghai under Japanese Occupation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Wen-Hsin Yeh (ed.), *Wartime Shanghai* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998); and Christian Henriot, 'Shanghai and the experience of war. The fate of refugees', *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2006), pp. 215–245.

<sup>18</sup> François Guillemot, 'Death and suffering at first hand: youth shock brigades during the Vietnam War (1950–1975)', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (October 2009), pp. 17–60; Karen Gottschang Turner and Phan Thanh Hao, *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (New York: John Wiley, 1998); Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> Agnes Khoo, *Life as the River Flows: Women in the Malayan Anti-Colonial Struggle* (Kuala Lumpur: SIRD, 2004); Vina A. Lanzona, *Amazons of the Huk Rebellion: Gender, Sex and Revolution in the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> To name but one recent collaborative and comparative project, see: David El Kenz (ed.), *Le massacre, objet d'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005). For Asia, see Alain Delissen's chapter on



experts of this massacre, asked Charles S. Maier to preface his book *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* leaves no doubt that historians working on Hiroshima, Nanjing and the Holocaust are reading each other's work. Ian Buruma, a specialist of Germany/Europe and Japan/Asia, did something similar with the publication of his book, *The Wages of Guilt, Memories of War in Germany and Japan*.<sup>21</sup> The Vietnam War has its own appalling list of mass deaths, although fewer studies probing the socio-cultural impacts of these mass killings have been produced. There are notable exceptions, such as Heonik Kwon's thoughtful book on remembrance and commemorative rituals performed by survivors and descendants of the civilians killed in the My Lai and Ha My massacres.<sup>22</sup>

One might ask about Asian scholars. With the shadow of the Cold War now gone and in the context of freer societies and political systems emerging in parts of Southeast Asia, some scholars have been able to reassess their countries' violent past in a more open manner. The collection of essays entitled *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present*, edited by Mary Zurbuchen and involving several Indonesian intellectuals, has addressed historical events in Indonesia's past (e.g. the 1965 mass killings) that had been left unexamined under Suharto's authoritarian rule.<sup>23</sup> When it comes to China, Vietnam and Laos, as the scholars in this special issue demonstrate, part of the problem is that it has not been easy, even for the winners, to take up the prickly question of the 'scars of war' on society and combatants, especially when the legitimacy of the communist leadership in Beijing, Hanoi and Vientiane remains so closely tied to these 'sacred' wars of 'resistance' and 'national liberation'. In these single-party states, to suggest that these conflicts were anything less than heroic is to risk incurring the wrath of the official powers-that-be. This seems to be particularly the case in Vietnam, where novelists and former veterans of the war against the Americans, such as Bao Ninh and Duong Thu Huong, have been the only ones to take up the question of the 'experience of war'. They have

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the massacre of Koreans in Kantô in 1923. For a ground-breaking model, see John Horne and Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London: Phoenix, 2002); Joshua A. Fogel (ed.), *The Nanjing Massacre in History and Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre. Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>23</sup> Mary Zurbuchen (ed.), *Beginning to Remember: The Past in the Indonesian Present* (Singapore and Seattle: Singapore University Press, University of Washington Press, 2005).



paid dearly, too, for challenging the myth, as Mosse predicted. The Communist Party in Hanoi effectively ran Duong Thu Huong out of the country (she lives in exile in France). This is a concern in China, too. Added to it is the Chinese need to combat any attempt by Japanese scholars to provide contesting accounts of the war.

That said, things seem to be changing in China and among Chinese scholars. If the number of Mainland Chinese scholars attending the conference held by Ezra Vogel in Harvard in June 2002 is any indication, Chinese scholars are increasingly willing to discuss in more nuanced and critical ways the China War, including society and combatants' experience of war. Significantly, things may also be changing in Vietnam. In 2009, Vietnamese journalists critical of the Party's heroic spin on war succeeded in publishing—though not without difficulty—an account of the battle of Dien Bien Phu that focused on the violent experience of war of the *bo doi*.<sup>24</sup> More of such work appears to be on the way.

While this special issue focuses on the 'experience of war' in Asia, in particular that of China and Indochina, it seeks to connect these 'Asian' and 'Western' historiographical threads and at the same time contribute to our understanding of the experience of war in Asia in socio-cultural ways. It is not so much that the existing historiography is 'Eurocentric', but rather that scholarship on the Asian and Western theatres remains often unconnected and unequal in its treatment. Unconnected in that scholars would benefit greatly from comparing and contrasting the experiences of war in different Asian and Western societies, cultural, religious and combat experiences, as Christopher Goscha and Vathana Pholsena suggest in their contributions. Imbalanced in that most of the scholarship on the 'experience of war', *culture de guerre*, 'cities at war' and social history of the army focuses on the Western front, mainly the industrialised Western armies and societies. Relatively little of this new history takes up wars on the Asian theatre during World War II. Even less deals with colonial conquest, wars of decolonisation or the Cold War in Asia. This historiographical blind spot is surprising given that the Sino-Japanese War resulted in hundreds of thousands

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<sup>24</sup> *Chuyen Nhung nguoi lam nen lich su, hoi uc Dien Bien Phu, 1954–2009* (The Words of Those Who Made History: Dien Bien Phu, 1954–2009) (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2009) and especially the French-language translation and much more critical adaptation of this book, Dao Thanh Huyen *et al.*, *Dien Bien Phu vu d'en face, Paroles de bo doi* (Paris: Nouveau Monde Editions, 2010). However, unlike China, this critique of the war is coming from critically minded journalists and not from the academics, although some important scholars helped this project come to fruition.

of deaths among Asian soldiers and civilians. The Cold War alone spawned or intensified a series of violent conflicts in the South that claimed the lives of all but 200,000 people of its estimated 20 million victims (1945–1990). At the centre of the paroxysm was Asia, the site of sustained violence between 1945 and 1991.<sup>25</sup> The number of dead, civilians and soldiers alike, in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam for this period numbers in the millions, including 1.5 million Cambodians who died at the hands of the Khmer Rouges between 1975 and 1978. Total casualties for the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) range from 20 to 30 million. The experience of this violence had profound impacts upon local societies, the results of which are being felt to this very day.<sup>26</sup> And surprisingly few scholars have followed Pierre Loti or Paul Mus's lead in analysing the nature of the violence experienced by troops engaging each other during the wars of colonial conquest in the nineteenth century before or as European capacity for killing was being transformed by the industrial revolution.<sup>27</sup>

The articles in this issue are the result of a collaborative project among scholars at the Institut d'Asie orientale (Christian Henriot, Vatthana Pholsena and François Guillemot) and the Université du Québec à Montréal (Christopher Goscha), focusing on the experience of war as outlined above and based on the country specialisations and theoretical approaches of the four scholars involved: China, Laos and Vietnam.<sup>28</sup> While our topics reflect our respective research interests, we believe that together these papers suggest four different ways for studying the 'experience of war' in Asia in socio-cultural terms: the city at war, civilians, trauma and memory, the soldier's experience of battle violence, and massacre.

Christian Henriot provides an excellent example of what a social history of the war-torn city might look like. He zooms in on a particular neighbourhood in Shanghai, Zhabei. Home to hundreds of workshops and thousands of skilled

<sup>25</sup> Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War, A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 56–57.

<sup>26</sup> MacKinnon *et al.*, *China at War*, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> For Pierre Loti's original (and censored) account of the violent conquest of upper Vietnam in the late nineteenth century, see: *Tonkin, la prise de Hué: Dans le campement des marins de l'Atalante*, *Gulliver*, No. 5 (January–March 1991), pp. 202–215 and Paul Mus, *Le destin de l'Union française: De l'Indochine à l'Afrique* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1954). See also: Christopher E. Goscha, 'Qu'as-tu appris à la guerre? Paul Mus en quête de l'humain', in Christopher Goscha and David Chandler, *Paul Mus (1902–1969), L'espace d'un regard* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2006), pp. 269–290.

<sup>28</sup> These papers were first presented at a workshop organised at the Institut d'Asie Orientale (Ecole Normale Supérieure of Lyon) in France on 30 October 2009.

workers, as well as conveniently located at the heart of a transportation network, Zhabei was an economic powerhouse by the late 1920s. The destruction of this vibrant city through three successive waves of military attacks at five-year intervals (1927, 1932, 1937), thoroughly portrayed by Henriot, amounts to a record of social ruination and human tragedy.

Vatthana Pholsena shifts our attention to how war was experienced by civilians in the countryside. Through the accounts of survivors of the US bombing in southeastern Laos between 1964 and 1973, a life under relentless bombardment is recounted and remembered. Her article also stresses the importance of acknowledging the complexity of the memory/history relationship, and begins to examine how oral history can contribute to unravelling such complexity.

François Guillemot pens an important analysis of a massacre that occurred in 1947 on the outskirts of Saigon. In the aftermath of the French army's return to Cochinchina in late 1945, the situation on the ground was extremely confusing: no one force among the several Vietnamese political forces operating in the region (a mixture of nationalist and religious movements, including the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects as well as the Viet Minh) had the upper hand in the Mekong Delta. Guillemot convincingly explains that the massacre of civilians perpetrated by Viet Minh forces in 1947 was a political operation that aimed to strengthen communist control through ruthless repression in an extremely fluid political environment. The use of terror by an organisation that prided itself for being rational and modern was legitimised under the guise of 'legal' violence by the Viet Minh leadership.

Finally, Christopher Goscha takes to task the Vietnamese 'myth of war' by considering how the Viet Minh *bo doi* may have actually experienced battle during the battle of Dien Bien Phu. He also considers what might be the differences and the similarities in the type of 'modern' war that flowed into northern Vietnam in 1950 when the Cold War and decolonisation mixed in particularly violent ways.

None of these papers represents the last word. On the contrary, this is just the beginning. The social and cultural history of wartime Asia remains to a large extent unexplored.

