

GOVERNING THE DEAD

MARTYRS, MEMORIALS, AND
NECROCITIZENSHIP IN MODERN CHINA

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MAP 1. Republic of China, 1947. Prepared by Mike Bechthold.

Introduction

Tens of millions of Chinese, military and civilian, lost their lives during internecine conflicts, foreign invasion, and war-related disasters in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ The Nationalist government (1925–1949), not unlike the Union government during the American Civil War (1861–1865) and the European states during World War I (1914–1918), rose to care for the war dead. By selecting whom among millions of fatalities to enshrine as national ancestors, the Republic of China connected the living to the idea of the nation, emotionally and ritualistically facilitating loyalty to the imagined community.² At the same time, the Nationalist government created the state apparatus necessary to manage the necroconstituency and, by extension, consolidate control over the living. It was only the state apparatus, with its well-disciplined and well-equipped manpower, that could orchestrate the relief of the trauma of mass deaths. Beleaguered by enemies on multiple fronts, hyperinflation, and internal clashes, the Nationalist state nonetheless managed to govern its dead.

The regime constructed China's first public military cemetery and hundreds of local martyrs' shrines, collected biographical data on at least half a million war dead, collectively mourned millions of fallen soldiers and civilians, and disbursed millions of yuan to tens of thousands of widows and orphans.³ The bureaucracy, created to govern the dead and the bereaved,

became the institutional foundation that fortified China's centralized authority, even after the end of Nationalist rule.

This book took shape during many sweltering afternoons spent poring over brown leaves of documents that contained biographical information about fallen soldiers and civilians at the Academia Historica (Guoshiguan) in Taiwan in 2014. The barely legible pages that have slowly succumbed to the passage of time reveal the afterlives of the Chinese war dead in the first half of the twentieth century. Let the three men who died on the eve of China's transition from empire to nation-state shed some light on how and why a nation cares about its dead.

The Afterlives of Three Rebels

On the morning of October 10, 1911, two severed human heads were captured on camera chillingly lying on broken pieces of brick. The heads, with cropped hair, belonged to Liu Fuji (1883–1911) and Peng Chufan (1884–1911), two soldiers of the New Army, whom the Qing imperial government (1644–1912) had equipped and trained according to Western standards. They were executed for treason after an accidental explosion in the city of Hankou had tipped off the authorities about their plan to revolt. An accomplice, Yang Hongsheng (1886–1911), was caught transporting explosives for the mutineers. In a different photograph, Yang is shown just moments before his execution sitting on the ground with his face and shaved head smeared with blood, his arms bound behind the back, and his stockinged feet shackled with irons.⁴

By the evening of October 10, the mutiny by the New Army soldiers in Wuchang, Hubei Province, broke out, setting off a negotiation that led to the overthrow of the empire and the founding of the Republic of China. The three decapitated rebels were subsequently hailed as martyrs, and their afterlives became part of the nation-building process. The process first took place at the provincial level.

The Hubei provincial government looked for a suitable place to build a shrine to ensure that the three martyrs' great contributions would "last as long as the rivers and mountains."⁵ Cai Jimin (1886–1919), one of the uprising leaders, and Lan Tianwei (1878–1921), a former Qing dynasty military governor, planned to use funds from the sale of public bonds in northern provinces to build a shrine and construct bronze statues for the Wuchang uprising martyrs.⁶

A public sacrifice was held on September 29, 1912, drawing over three hundred Wuchang townsfolk and uprising participants. Peng Chufan's remains,

which had been preserved in a tightly sealed coffin and placed in the office of the viceroy of Huguang (which included Hubei, Hunan, and the surrounding areas), were brought back to the site of his execution. Two multicolored tents were set up to host large lifelike portraits of the other two martyrs, Liu Fuji and Yang Hongsheng. Strips of white funerary cloths were hung up according to traditions. The altars were filled with fresh fruits, incense, and sacrificial vessels to feed the martyrs' spirits. During the ceremony, Peng's father and the attendants removed their hats to show respect. Standing in front of Peng's spirit tablet, Peng's wife and sons cried their hearts out, tugging at the heartstrings of more than a thousand bystanders, most of whom showed up for the lively scene. Officials of the new Republican government in Hubei, including Cai Jimin, also arrived to read elegies and make political speeches. At noon, the ceremony concluded with military music being played to accompany a martial demonstration with rifles.⁷

In December 1912, the Hubei provincial government ordered the Peng, Liu, and Yang families to transport the bodies of the three martyrs back to their hometown for interment. The Qing viceroy's office where their sealed coffins had been stored was being converted into the office for the military governor of the new republic—the Beiyang government (1912–1928). To make up for the mandatory eviction, which seemed utterly disrespectful to the celebrated national martyrs, Beiyang vice president Li Yuanhong (1864–1928), a former New Army officer, instructed the Military Affairs Office to send out a full military band to perform during the departure ceremony at the martyrs' shrine. The Ship Administration Bureau was tasked with providing proper transportation for the coffins and the bereaved families. The Fifth Army Division, which was stationed on the Han River, was ordered to fire cannons in a demonstration of sincerity and respect when the ships carrying the three martyrs' bodies passed through. The grieving families were reportedly granted death benefits and 2,000 yuan each to bury the bodies in their ancestral villages.⁸

In 1928, the Beiyang government was effectively dissolved. In its place was the national government (*guomin zhengfu*)—established by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) in Nanjing—under the Nationalist Party (Guomindang). Again, the Hubei provincial government petitioned the new authorities to honor the families of Peng Chufan, Liu Fuji, and Yang Hongsheng. The petition even included a heartfelt letter from the mother of Peng Chufan. The elderly Mrs. Peng, née Hu, requested additional assistance because her husband had also died leaving her and her widowed daughter-in-law no patriarch on whom to rely.⁹ Wu Xinghan (1883–1938), a commander during the Wuchang uprising, and other uprising participants also appealed to Nanjing

on behalf of Liu Fuji.¹⁰ However, both petitions were lost somewhere in the bureaucratic maze after being sent off to the Nationalist government's Executive Yuan and the Military Affairs Commission (Junshi weiyuanhui) for further consideration. Such occurrences did not deter the political circle in Hubei from continuing to pressure Nanjing to grant the Wuchang uprising the historical significance it deserved.

The political cachet associated with being the birthplace of the republic motivated Fang Benren (1880–1951), who had been appointed by the Nationalist government as the Hubei provincial chairman and the head of the civil affairs department, to petition on behalf of the Peng, Liu, and Yang families. The death benefits granted by Vice President Li Yuanhong and former Hubei provincial governor Wang Xiao had stopped coming because the Beiyang government had collapsed. Fang proposed in 1929 that the Nationalist government award these pioneering martyrs' families "forever annuities" (*yongjiu xujin*) for their sacrifice to the republic.¹¹ Judging that the three martyrs were soldiers, the Executive Yuan forwarded Fang's proposal to the Ministry of Military Administration (Junzheng bu), which, however, did not respond.¹² In addition, the national government redirected back to the Hubei provincial government the 1928 petition from the representative for bereaved families of Hubei 1911 revolutionary martyrs "who first rose in revolt" (*shouyi*).¹³

The tepid responses from various offices of the Nationalist government were triggered by the assertion in these petitions that the Wuchang uprising on October 10 was the pioneering moment that brought forth the fall of the 2,000-year imperial system and the foundation of the republic. The Nationalist government, with its original power base in the southeastern China, saw the Hubei revolutionaries as political rivals and chose to promote a different set of martyrs from an earlier uprising in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. This episode of three Wuchang uprising martyrs shows how the dead played a key role in legitimizing postimperial powers.

The Dead and the Nation

The dead necessitate that political, social, and cultural institutions develop the ritual and rhetoric to control the way by which they are remembered. The dead are invested with significance to affirm political legitimacy, to recreate social coherence and temporal continuity, and to constitute the national spirit. Thomas Laqueur's "work of the dead" underscores the desire of the living to ascribe meaning to moments of death, the afterlife, and corporal remains, and to treat them accordingly.¹⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust's "work of dying" indicates how humans consciously anticipate, approach, and manage

deaths.¹⁵ Achille Mbembe defines the “work of death” as the *necropower* of the state to determine “who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not.”¹⁶

My book examines such “work” in the context of twentieth-century China’s political and social transformation. The millions of revolutionary and war dead needed to be both disposed of and mourned. The dead do not have agency, but they are powerful. Fallen combatants and civilians gained posthumous significance by serving as intimate bonds between the new political regime and the old familial lineage, as haunting ghosts of the local community, as ancestral deities of the imagined nation-state, and even as bones of contention in international disputes. At the same time, the state exerted necropower by directing scarce resources to construct shrines to the loyal dead and to recompense families of fallen soldiers while depriving the citizenry of military protection and encouraging the general population to resist the enemy even at the expense of their lives. The nation-state’s efforts to manage the dead and bereaved families touched on multiple facets of China’s modernity, altering the relationships between the state and society, the nation and the family, and the living and the dead.

It is no surprise that the attempt to discipline the dead manifested as soon as the gun smoke from the 1911 uprisings in various regions of the Qing Empire dissipated. The new republic hastily evicted the loyal ministers and valiant generals who died for the empire from the state altar to make room for new “national martyrs” (*guoshang*). Two early Republican regimes, the 1912 Nanjing Provisional Government and the Beiyang government, tried to erase memories of past dynasties by ordering provinces to appropriate temples previously dedicated to Qing dynasty heroes for the commemoration of anti-imperial and revolutionary “martyrs” (*lieshi*). Such spatial confiscation was supplemented by a new narrative of martyrdom crafted by a Nationalist Party faction in southern China. The new Republican hero faithfully reflected the Confucian ideal man as filial, lettered, loyal, and willing to be martyred (*xun*) for righteousness while embodying the anti-establishment martial spirit of the turn of the century. This vision tapped into popular aspirations and bridged differences among political factions. Once in power, the Nationalist Party under Chiang Kai-shek projected such a vision of Republican martyrdom into the destiny of a new China.

The origin of *guoshang* can be traced back to the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE). “Guoshang” (The state’s fallen), is one of the “Jiu ge” (Nine songs) from the *Chu ci* (Songs of Chu). Allegedly collected by Qu Yuan (338–278 BCE), these ballads belonged to the shamanistic tradition of southern China.¹⁷ The song “Guoshang” lamented the spirits of soldiers who died a

violent death in battle and could no longer return to the land of the living. In the twentieth century, the term *guoshang* was evoked to denote those who martyred themselves for the nation.

Related to *guoshang* is *lieshi*, which appeared in writings dating back to the third century BCE. *Lieshi* initially indicated one who was unafraid of difficulty and death, or one who was fierce.¹⁸ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *lie* became associated with Han ethnonationalism (as opposed the Manchu imperial rulers) and Republicanism. *Lieshi* became “one who dies for a righteous cause.”¹⁹ In addition, *zhonglie*—those who died “as a result of their loyalty to the Han people or the Republic”—and *xianlie*—“those who died to bring about the Republic” became widespread in the twentieth century.²⁰ Furthermore, Katherine Carlitz translates *lie* as “ardently heroic” or “heroically virtuous,” which exclusively denoted sixteenth-century women who died young defending their virginity or widow chastity.²¹ Unmarried women who killed themselves after being raped were praised as *lienü* (female martyrs). Women who committed suicide after their husbands died were hailed as *liefu* (widow martyrs).²² In the twentieth century, those two terms also denoted women who died for a political cause.

An equivalent of the verb “to martyr” is *xun*, which literally means “to follow in death.”²³ The *Liji* (The book of rites), from the fifth to third century BCE, illustrates that some people practiced burying family members, particularly concubines, with the dead patriarchs whereas others considered the custom contrary to propriety.²⁴ The *Hanshu* (The history of the former Han dynasty), from the first century CE, contains the term *xunguo*—to die for one’s country.²⁵ In the sixth century CE, *xun* was also defined as “giving up one’s life on behalf of another.”²⁶ Neo-Confucianists in the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) further imbued *xun* with noble and moral implications: the meaning of *xun* as “noble sacrifice” became predominant.²⁷ By the seventeenth century, *xun* appeared frequently in heroic tales of men and women who died for “upright fidelity,” especially in relation to the doomed Ming Empire (1368–1644).²⁸ In the late imperial era, *xun* appeared in various combinations, such as *xunyi* (to martyr for righteousness), *xunzhong* (to martyr for loyalty), and *xunsi* and *xunnan* (to die a martyr’s death).²⁹ The moralization of *xun* continued into the twentieth century. Two combinations with specific connotations, *xunguo*—to die for the (Chinese) nation—and *xundang*—to die for the (Nationalist) party, dominated the public discourse during the Republican era.

Beyond crafting new definitions of worthy death, the Nationalist regime further gained allegiance from its constituency by first extending national martyrdom, previously reserved for members of the Revolutionary Alliance

(Tongmenghui) and of its successor, the Nationalist Party, to the National Revolutionary Army (Guomin geming jun) soldiers whose deaths paved the road to victory for the Northern Expedition (1926–1928). The expedition established Nationalist direct authority over Jiangsu, Anhui, Zhejiang, and Jiangxi Provinces and nominal control over other regions. Despite objections from revolutionary veterans whose authority was threatened by the emerging crop of martyrs, servicemen, civilian officials, county heads, and militia leaders were allowed into Loyal Martyrs' Shrines (Zhonglie ci) over the course of the 1930s. These shrines manifested the hallowed space reserved for the loyal dead that the Nationalist government ordered each locale to create throughout China. During the 1940s, the state viewed every citizen as a combatant eligible for the honors of martyrdom. Concurrently, mass fatalities prompted the state apparatus to bureaucratize and differentiate the dead and the bereaved, which constituted state making.³⁰ The state scrutinized the posthumous lives in statistical data, biographies, spirit tablets, and petition letters from grieving relatives, and determined whose families would receive honors. The state's recognition and support could determine who would survive and who would not, especially during wartime.

Russ Castronovo argues that although the dead neither vote nor pay taxes, “the final release from embodiment plays a resonant role in the national imagination by suggesting an existence, posthumous as well as posthistorical, that falls outside standard registers of the political.”³¹ Hence, it is in the best interest of the state to attempt to capitalize on such existence. In the case of China, the Nationalist commendation and compensation laws (*baoyang fuxu tiaoli*) in response to the increase in conflict casualties exponentially expanded the *necrocitizenry*, defined as the population of the deceased who are acknowledged by the state and who are posthumously incorporated into the nation.³² Making and remaking the necrocitizens allowed the Nationalist state to collect metaphorical taxes from their afterlives. In other words, the government extracted value—in the form of patriotic rhetoric and embodiment—from its necroconstituency to legitimize its presence.

In the context of the southwest border in the United States, Margaret E. Dorsey and Miguel Díaz-Barriga define necrocitizenship as both “the construction of citizenship in a war or militarized zone and the privileging of sacrifice and death as the highest mark of citizenship.”³³ The Nationalist state's concern with death manifested in the elaborate celebration of those who gave their lives to the state, even when it meant fewer resources for the living. Furthermore, necrocitizenship emphasizes not only the state's concern with the death rather than the life of its citizenry but also the living's evocation of sacrifices to bargain for entry into the constituency.³⁴ These

evocations were ubiquitous in petition letters in which the offspring of martyrs vowed to follow in their fathers' footsteps. The intense private emotion caused by death of a loved one could morph into fervent hatred of the enemy and passionate devotion to the idea of national unity.

The capacity to discipline the tens of millions of war dead—to control their physical and rhetorical presence—was critical to the state-building project in twentieth-century China, particularly under the Nationalist Party. Compensation committees were formed under the Ministry of the Interior, the Nationalist Party's Central Executive Committee, and the Military Affairs Commission and tasked with compiling information on the dead. This formation was then used for commemorating war heroes and compensating bereaved families. The records collected by these organizations, albeit scattered and incomplete, shed light on the new reach of the Republican state apparatus in comparison to that of the imperial state. Diana Lary and Stephen MacKinnon argue that the suffering of the Chinese people during the eight years of the War of Resistance against the Japanese Army (1937–1945, also known as the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Anti-Japanese Resistance War) was largely “unrelieved.”³⁵ However, the Nationalist government spent a significant amount of resources on the worthy dead and their families in the form of stipends, tuition waivers, funeral and burial fees, and commemorative structures. In general, the Nationalist government was conscientious and efficient in addressing petitions, although red tape, financial constraints, logistical problems, and excessive demands undermined its efforts to implement compensation regulations. Offices regularly disagreed on whether certain requests should be honored and on the amounts of compensation to which petitioners were entitled. Even if the verdict was positive, in many cases the stipend might never reach the beneficiary, as the provincial or county government was often responsible for disbursing the funds. Many petitions, after traveling through the bureaucratic labyrinth, were left unresolved, leaving the title of martyr an empty promise.

Bureaucratic paper trails also reveal women's important role in facilitating the new state-family connection and in creating new space in the new republic. On the one hand, widows and mothers who lost their husbands and sons on the battlefield, though often considered victims of war, gained significant social and political capital, shaped the domestic hierarchy and the family-state relationship, and dictated the way that wars should be remembered. On the other hand, the state not only changed death from being a family affair to a public affair by taking charge of burying and commemorating the war dead but also replaced the patriarch by taking up his role in promising welfare and education for his widow and orphans. Furthermore, by declaring a fallen

man a martyr, the state effectively removed the patriarch from the everyday conflicts of the domestic life, reverently placing him on the ancestral altar. The death of the familial patriarch and his replacement by the Nationalist party-state—a powerful and distant authority—made the family less of a terrain of struggle that could allow for more independence and radical thoughts among female and younger male members.

Under the Nationalist regime, the body and memory of the war dead of twentieth-century China became the field in which the state and the family negotiated a new, more intimate relationship based on both legality and morality. Although a martyr's death legally qualified his family for compensation according to the law, the republic continued to rely on Confucian principles of gendered propriety to decide borderline and exceptional cases. The Nationalist government judged petitions not only on the contribution of the martyrs to the party and the state but also on the virtuous conduct of bereaved families. Widows often appealed on the basis of virtue, especially if their cases did not legally qualify for compensation. Women thus helped further the state's intrusion into the domestic sphere, allowing the state to discipline them on the basis of female chastity. The expectation that martyrs' widows would devote themselves to preserving the martyrs' lineages during peacetime became the obligation for women to contribute to the war effort by raising sons to be soldiers and by sacrificing their own lives to safeguard their moral purity to the nation. Such an expectation for women's roles speaks to "the prevalent trend in nationalist discourse of subordinating women's roles in the male-centered nation," as Charles R. Kim and Jungwon Kim argue in the context of Korean history.³⁶ Republican China was not an exception to patriarchal nationalism.

In the end, the Nationalist government struggled to take care of its dead for a number of reasons. In the late 1920s, when the Nationalist government first promulgated compensation regulations for martyrs who died during anti-imperial uprisings, the number of eligible recipients was in the thousands. In the 1930s, the categories of people eligible for benefit included servicemembers and bureaucrats who suffered injuries and death in the line of duty. The total war that broke out in 1937 led to a record number of county heads, militiamen, citizen soldiers, and civilians requesting compensation. Hyperinflation forced the government to raise the amounts of stipends up to a hundred or a thousand times by the late 1940s. A 600-yuan stipend in 1928 became 600,000 yuan in 1947.³⁷ Even though it was impossible for the war-fatigued Nationalist government to cater to all of the war dead and their bereaved families, the Nationalist government expanded the compensation regulations to include nongovernment employees, noncommissioned

militias, and civilians. Anyone from children to the elderly who reportedly displayed resistance to the Japanese invasion was eligible for reward. By implementing these policies, the Nationalists revealed that the military forces lacked the capacity to protect the people and that the state apparatus failed to relieve the expanding constituency. At the same time, the idea of China became stronger than ever.

China was reimagined during the War of Resistance against the Japanese Army in 1938 when the fleeing Nationalist government assigned the duties of “resisting the enemy” (*kang di*) and “protecting the homeland” (*shoutu*) to the general population with the promise of posthumous honors. “People’s war” not only was a military strategy to fight a superior enemy but made the general population worthy of being the national dead. The ending of the Second Sino-Japanese War to a large extent marked the final step in the nation-building project in China. The whole population, based on their newly granted eligibility for martyrdom, was incorporated into the nation-state. The Nationalist state viewed both military and civilian casualties as resistance to the enemy and confirmation of its legitimacy. During the “times of emergency” (*feichang shiqi*) and in the “war zones” (*zhanqu*), the citizenry were made to “pay for their participation in political life with an unconditional subjection to the power of death,” as Giorgio Agamben theorizes.³⁸ Death from overexertion while on duty, at the hand of enemy soldiers, or by war-related catastrophes became a Chinese citizen’s ultimate sacrifice for the nation.

The Mode of Commemoration

A visitor to any major town or village in twentieth-century Europe would have encountered a war memorial, a *monument aux morts*, or a *Kriegerdenkmal* intended to commemorate lost lives during World War I.³⁹ A visitor to China around the same time would similarly have found in many counties Loyal Martyrs’ Shrines with the names of martyrs carved on wooden tablets, sacrificial meats on the altar, and clay statues of ancient heroes in the corner, all of which strived to manifest nationalism, partisan loyalty, and traditional reverence for the spirits.

What sets China apart from Western mode of war commemoration was how the Loyal Martyrs’ Shrines, a localized commemorative project initiated in 1911 and reiterated throughout the 1910s to 1940s, combined nationalist martyrdom with the practice of ancestor worship.⁴⁰ Republican-era commemoration manuals incorporated both traditional rituals, such as soul-summoning elegies and sacrificial items reserved for ancestor worship,

and modern rites, such as raising the national flag, bowing to Sun Yat-sen's (1866–1925) portrait, and playing military tunes. During an enshrinement ceremony, government representatives delivered standardized elegies, dictated timed moments of silence, and presented flower wreaths. New commemorative rituals wrested the dead away from their families, lineages, and communities and employed their posthumous identities to promote national belonging, party loyalty, and militaristic value.

Although the Chinese government built some public cemeteries during World War II, they were fewer and smaller than those organized by national war graves commissions in the West. The primary means of commemoration were the government-mandated Loyal Martyrs' Shrines, which hosted spirits and contained no bodies. The local population paid reverence to these spirits and fed them with sacrificial provisions in exchange for their moral power.⁴¹

In China, each person is believed to have multiple souls that simultaneously stay with the body in the grave, go to the underworld, and dwell in the tablet bearing the person's name. Families of the fallen frequently transported their bodies back to their home counties for burial, offered sacrifices at the ancestral altars, visited the graves, and prayed at local temples for their salvation. Simultaneously, county governments organized public sacrifices for the same dead at the local Loyal Martyrs' Shrines and conjured their presence by reciting their names and deeds.

The Loyal Martyrs' Shrine project shed a new light on the entwined relationship of politics and religion in twentieth-century China. This relationship is exemplified by Rebecca Nedostup's concept of "superstitious regimes." The Nationalists and their Communist successors, like modernizing elites in other countries, went after various traditions viewed as impeding nation building and modernization.⁴² Although the Nationalists failed to rid the populace of beliefs deemed as superstitions or regulate religious practices at the local level, they manifested the global disenchantment trend in their rhetoric of the afterlife. The supernatural did not make an appearance in Republican sources, whereas tales of perfectly preserved corpses that belonged to people of exceptional morality populated late nineteenth-century commemoration prints.⁴³ Instead of miracles, the twentieth-century political regime promised the martyrs that their "noble spirits would remain" (*haoqi chang cun*) for as long as the regime lasted.

The Chinese way of honoring the dead distinctively focuses on spirits rather than bodies. It offers a striking contrast to Christianity, for instance, in which the flesh of the eminent dead bears extraordinary powers.⁴⁴ Furthermore, whereas the ghostly soldiers in Will Longstaff's painting *The Menin*

Gate at Midnight triggered debates about psychic and spiritualist influences in the 1920s and 1930s, references to “loyal spirits” (*zhonghun*) frequently appeared in Republican China’s government documents, newspapers, and other publications without controversy.⁴⁵ “Comforting the loyal spirits” (*yi wei yinghun*), which was frequently used as the rationale for enshrinement and offering sacrifices in the late Qing, continued into the Republican era.⁴⁶ The Chinese dead, however, are not worshiped.⁴⁷ Instead, they receive sacrifices from the living. The imperial practice of organizing public sacrifice (*gongji*) to virtuous members of the local community influenced the manner of honoring the dead in the twentieth century. Commemoration practices included offering sacrifice (*jisi*), enshrinement (*ru ci*), spring sacrifice (*chun ji*), autumn sacrifice (*qiu ji*), and remembrance (*jinian*). Republican-era elegies echoed some rhetorical elements of shamanistic rituals as seen in “Da zhao” (The great summons) and “Zhaohun” (Summoning the soul) of the *Chu ci* (Songs of Chu). The privileges of enshrinement and sacrifices bestowed on the loyal dead not only constituted posthumous honors but were also necessary to ensure a proper afterlife.

The enshrined spirits of the Chinese dead became ancestors and guardians of the community. The connection between offering sacrifices to the dead and forming a community was ever more crucial in the construction of the nation in twentieth-century China. Republican leaders sought to create a nationally coherent body of both the living and the dead, different from the multiethnic, multireligious, and multinational Qing Empire. With the success of the Northern Expedition, the Nationalist government in Nanjing was able to implement many nation-building projects that sought to create what Presenjit Duara calls “an identification of the citizen with the nation-state and an increase in his participation, commitment, and loyalty to it.”⁴⁸ One of the projects was the memorialization of the loyal dead. The war dead catalyzed the rise of nationalism as a new religiosity. Any combination of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian cosmologies could hardly rationalize the catastrophic level of war in twentieth-century China, especially when their imperial and elite patrons had lost their political power or rejected these beliefs themselves.

The imperial tradition of shrine building for the virtuous and the practice of offering sacrifices to the loyal dead provided the infrastructure and the rhetoric for the Loyal Martyrs’ Shrines during the Republican era. Beginning in the Song dynasty, as the central and local governments emphasized virtues in their undertakings, such commemorative shrines as those for the chaste and the filial (*jie xiao*), eminent officials (*minghuan*), and local worthies (*xiangxian*) were built in many localities.⁴⁹ From 1470

to 1550 CE, two provinces in the Lower Yangzi River region, Zhejiang and Jiangsu, saw a burst of Local Worthies' Shrines for male exemplars of Confucian virtues and Eminent Officials' Shrines for men with contributions in administration, water control, or disaster relief. These shrines, often paired together, helped "communicate a model of secular social power" as none of them was efficacious (*ling*), that is, able to grant prayers with miraculous favors. These secular shrines replaced "supernatural power with the social power of the resident elite," as Katherine Carlitz argues.⁵⁰ The tradition of Local Worthies' Shrines continued during the Qing dynasty.⁵¹ Another type of secular shrine was the Temples of Literature (*Wenmiao*), which often hosted schools as well as altars to the sages, eminent officials, and local worthies.⁵²

With the construction of the Manifest Loyalty Shrine (*Zhaozhong ci*) to the east of the Forbidden City in 1724, the empire began to enshrine all fallen military men and irregulars, regardless of rank, and to have their biographies composed by scholars of the Hanlin Academy, the most prestigious academic institution in the imperial era. The Qianlong Emperor (r. 1735–1796), who carried out a multitude of military campaigns himself, ordered shrines for officers and officials built throughout the empire by the end of the eighteenth century, and commissioned other war mementos. Under the reign of Jiaqing (1796–1820), war commemoration expanded to the prefectural level, largely because of the unprecedented level of casualties in the White Lotus War (1794–1804). When the Manifest Loyalty Shrine in Beijing ran out of room to host memorial tablets of the military dead, the Qing government authorized the construction of dozens of Manifest Loyalty Shrines in the provinces and counties, creating an imperially dictated space for the war dead.⁵³ The construction of local shrines in the first half of the nineteenth century showed the imperial effort to broaden the culture of war to a larger audience, to localize war commemoration, and to strengthen the ties between the state and local communities.⁵⁴

In the aftermath of the Taiping Civil War (1850–1864), many county authorities and local communities sought to commemorate the dead of their own defense forces with the authorization of the Board of Rites and financial help from provincial governments. Regional leaders such as Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) and Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) petitioned to build shrines for officials, gentry, and militia soldiers from their areas.⁵⁵ The *North-China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette* and the *North-China Daily News* reported thirty-one petitions from local gentry from 1876 to 1905 requesting permission to build memorial shrines to local martyrs. Many of these shrines would later host Republican martyrs.

The Loyal Martyrs' Shrine undertaking during the Republican era was an expansion of imperial governments' attempts to supplant local cults with state-sponsored shrines and to reorient the public toward civic virtues by evoking exemplars of extreme loyalty and sacrifice.⁵⁶ A critical development in the Ming dynasty was the incorporation of the war dead into the Confucian state cult. The Hongwu Emperor (r. 1368–1398 CE) bade capital and local governments establish altars and provide sacrifices for the untended souls of dead soldiers in every rural community, marking the beginning of the state's attempt to monopolize the afterlife.⁵⁷ These altars were often hosted within the City God Temples, which served as part of the state orthodoxy. The Ming government also commanded the construction of the City God Temples in every locality to supplant the local shrines that venerated ghosts and spirits.⁵⁸ The move toward creating an imperially dictated space for the war dead was furthered by the Manchu rulers. State efforts to commemorate the loyal war dead became increasingly prominent in the Qing dynasty, as it was a conquest dynasty that constantly engaged in large-scale military campaigns.

Republican-era propagation of shrines to heroism was, however, unprecedented in Chinese history, as is well documented by communication between the central government and the provinces as well as between the provinces and the counties. One may argue that the sea of paperwork simply reflected a well-oiled bureaucratic machine rather than the construction of local shrines on the ground. Nonetheless, there was evidence for physical shrines and the sense of political belonging fostered by the Nationalist government's shrine-building project. Bureaucratic correspondences also revealed increasing support for the modern nation-state as the legitimate broker of violence. Regional power holders, groups of different political affiliations, and local communities to a large extent shared the Nationalist ideals and practices concerning the loyal dead.

By making the war dead visible to the public through enshrinement and commemoration rituals, the state prepared communities that had experienced tremendous loss for further sacrifice. The Nationalist government created the Loyal Sacrifice Shrines that combined ancestor worship with civilian revolutionary martyrdom. The extensive Loyal Martyrs' Shrine project attested to the vision, capacity, and influence of the Chinese Republic.⁵⁹ The population of these shrines integrated in China's landscape, the nationalist religiosity embedded in commemorative rituals, and the legitimacy of Republican martyrs acknowledged by local communities demonstrated a level of success in state making.⁶⁰

The Nationalist state's shrine project was aimed at mobilizing the population for the war effort through the creation of rhetoric that celebrated patriotic citizenship. Before the age of museums, these shrines played an essential role in crafting national identity. The shrines and their exhibitions shaped the way the nation narrated its national past, imagined its geographical extent, and defined the qualifications for citizenship.⁶¹ Commemorative objects—in particular, the spirit tablets of martyrs—were visual aids that connected the participants in regular sacrifices to the historical narrative crafted by the Nationalist state. The shrines had the effect of creating a historical time that began in 1911 and a coherent community that faced episodic obstacles marked by the dates, places, and circumstances of death inked on these tablets. The state instilled patriotism in local communities through the display of martyrs' biographies in the shrines and via regular commemorative events held on anniversaries of important occurrences, such as the beginning of the Northern Expedition, the Mukden Incident in 1931, and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident in 1937. The latter two events refer to the Japanese Army's invasion in Manchuria and China, respectively. Public sacrifices to martyrs familiarized ordinary citizens with the idea of the national community, readying them for the birth of the nation.⁶² This point was even more poignant when the Republican-era public memorials were dedicated to soldiers and civilians.

Although the Nationalist government tried to reserve the Loyal Sacrifice Shrines as the exclusive space for Republican revolutionaries, Nationalist Party members, and fallen soldiers of the National Revolutionary Army, communities translated the central government's directives into something that also served local interests. Instead of following the state regulations to appropriate Guan-Yue Temples—dedicated to the two paragons of military prowess and loyalty, Guan Yu (160–220 CE) and Yue Fei (1103–1142 CE)—local authorities often chose shrines of lesser significance and status to convert into Loyal Martyrs' Shrines.⁶³ This strategy was adopted to avoid conflict with local interest groups. County governments and local groups used the government-mandated shrines to offer sacrifices to traditional deities, village militiamen, Taiping Civil War heroes, and other unauthorized martyrs. The Loyal Martyrs' Shrines in Beijing (as Beijing was then renamed) and Chongqing teemed with businesses, societies, and tenant farmers, undermining the sanctity prescribed by the state regulations. In addition, as Kirk Denton shows, one finds the legacy of the Republican-era Loyal Martyrs' Shrines in People's Republic commemorative structures, especially in terms of crafting a national discourse of martyrdom and localizing the central government's vision.⁶⁴

Despite the official dictation of solemn remembrance and loyalty to the body politic, the familial and individual memories of the dead were multifaceted and often contradicted the government's mandate. The dead, although appropriated by the new nation-state, never fully left the familial realm. Whereas many bereaved families in Republican China petitioned for months or years to receive the posthumous honors bestowed by the Nationalist government, others declined state funerals and requested permission to remove bodies of martyrs from public monuments for private burial. Such resistance was not uncommon. Chang-tai Hung argues that even for the Communist regime, death was still "an intensively private matter among the martyrs' loved ones" and the "cult of the red martyr" was a "contested terrain" over which the Communist Party could not maintain a monopoly.⁶⁵ Similarly, Akiko Takenaka maintains that although the institutions of the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors those who died for the emperor, occasionally helped bereaved families find solace, the state could not fully control their responses.⁶⁶ Heonik Kwon demonstrates the palpable tension between the Vietnamese government and the bereaved families who turned to spirit mediums to find the corpses of their loved ones from the Vietnam War.⁶⁷ Likewise, in Republican China, the national dead did not cease to be family members and friends whose former lives spilled beyond the margins of the pages of the national biography.

When family members of the fallen sought representation within the new Chinese nation-state through their affiliation with the recognized dead, their petition narratives revealed their emotions and affective connection to the nation. In piles of official documents, powerful narratives of loss and survival emerged. In one instance, a son told of having to witness the executioners of his father prospering while his family was destroyed. In another instance, a woman was reduced to absolute indigence after her husband and younger son were killed and her pregnant daughter-in-law committed suicide out of desperation. In yet another instance, an elderly father became temporarily paralyzed and mute after learning about the brutal torture and execution of his son. Although I agree with many historians who see the War of Resistance as "the nadir of civilian suffering in modern China," the complexity of experience and awareness of various segments of the population with regard to the nature and level of destruction deserves more understanding.⁶⁸ The immense sense of loss bound the survivors to the institutions of the state. Nonetheless, like many imperial predecessors, the Republican state followed the "metaphysically impoverished" Neo-Confucian funerary ritual, which offered neither spiritual comfort nor atonement after death.⁶⁹ The bereaved were left to find ways to mourn. In the search for closure, family members

expressed their emotions in petition letters to the state, which they hope would validate their pain and provide relief.

The Virtue of Violence

According to his biographer Zheng Lie (1888–1958), Lin Juemin (1887–1911) “assumed a calm countenance, lifted his head with self-composure, and stretched out his neck for the executioner’s sword.”⁷⁰ His co-conspirator in the plot to overthrow the provincial government, Lin Yimin (1887–1911), “continued to fight while drenched in blood and only crumpled after his life force was drained from a bullet in his head,” as Zheng Lie described in his 1912 collection of martyrs’ biographies.⁷¹ Such vivid descriptions of heroic demise reveal a paradigmatic turn to celebrate brutal deaths for political ideals and support the necessity of violence.

Violence in various forms has always been as part of Chinese culture, despite the official norms of harmony.⁷² In twentieth-century China, violence prompted traditional expressions of loyalty and sacrifice while shattering the integrity of the established worldview. Such a rupture/revival dynamic is the same as what Paul Fussell and Jay Winter contradictorily and yet complementarily describe as the European experience around World War I.⁷³ Although conflict had traditionally been deemed tragic and sorrowful in Chinese literature, it was celebrated in the twentieth century and became associated with virtue. Writings on war by individuals, groups, and the government hailed violence as a necessity, dwelled on gory details of abrupt demise, and celebrated the dead as paragons of virtue. Furthermore, elegies for war heroes evoked expressions of virtues found in Confucian classics, such as righteousness, martyrdom, loyalty, and humaneness. Petition letters, martyrs’ biographies, and public elegies constructed lives of moral conduct and deaths of selfless sacrifice for war heroes. National martyrs were hailed not only as heroic combatants but also as virtuous family and community members. Indeed, as Louise Edwards and Lili Zhou argue, with the 1911 Revolution, “a new ideal of masculine virtue emerged, and it was one that propounded the virtue of violence.”⁷⁴ Unlike the peaceful, stoic, and penitent death for which the Union soldiers and their grieving parents yearned in the midst of uncertainties and cruelties of the American Civil War battles, a death worthy of enshrinement in Republican China was characterized by violence, patriotism, and a sense of righteousness.⁷⁵

The Nationalist government crafted credible narratives of national birth, national belonging, and national sacrifice that allowed citizens to identify themselves with the nation. The expression “dying heroically in battle”

originated in imperial China, but only in the twentieth century did the expression acquire patriotic ramifications.⁷⁶ Nationalist revolutionaries reportedly shouted “Long live China!” before their last breath. These patriotic tropes in Republican China were common in many parts of the world where anti-colonial movements surged.⁷⁷ Biographies of martyrs celebrating heroism consolidated the ideal of sacrifice for the new Chinese nation-state. War and destruction, devastated families and communities, and social and financial capital associated with national martyrdom further enticed people to commit to the new rhetoric of belonging. Bereaved widows and mothers reiterated the state-approved rhetoric of sacrifice in exchange for recompense and acknowledgment from the government. Petitioning for compensation fortified the shared notion of martyrdom among the population. The increasing presence of such stock phrases as “dying for the nation and the party” in petition letters signified a change in perception of those who wished to present themselves and their dead family members as revolutionary and loyal citizens.

Another question to ponder with respect to the nature of violence is why, decades later, World War II could be seen as a precursor to even larger-scale violence in China, whereas after 1945 Western European countries were relatively peaceful.⁷⁸ Given that postwar demilitarization took place in both mainland China and Western Europe, that did not explain the divergence. Rather, the transformation in the way by which wars were commemorated in the first half of the twentieth century serves as a better explanation. In China’s case, the mythologized presence of civilians in war narratives and the erased divide between formal armed forces and civilian militias in government documents extended and legitimized the realm of violence.⁷⁹ This process of civilianizing war intensified during the Japanese invasion.

The myth of civilians saving the nation out of patriotism permeated both popular and official narratives of the War of Resistance. In collections of martyrs’ tales printed in the 1940s, the Nationalists ascribed a lofty ultimate purpose for civilian deaths by turning tragedies into epics. In official documents, civilians killed by the Japanese Army were not victims but active agents willingly and even willfully offering their lives to protect the national pride. As the formal armed forces retreated, the Nationalist government issued new regulations promising civil bureaucrats, local militias, and the general population official titles, military posts, monetary rewards, and posthumous fame if they defended their communities from the invasion. The blurred distinction between military and civilian was not only the doing of the state. Intellectuals with Nationalist affiliation urged the public to develop a chivalrous spirit and dare to die for the nation. Bereaved family members

and local communities supplied tales of martyrdom to the government for recognition and compensation.

The modern Chinese state and society further valorized violence in the commemoration of civilian and military war dead during the War of Resistance. That conflicts were viewed as rational political choices, inevitable in the modern age, and inseparable from human experience laid the rhetorical ground for new levels of violence in later decades. Political struggle continued during the Korean War and the Taiwan Strait War of the 1950s. The Great Leap Forward (1958–1961) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) testify to how mid-century wars normalized death and violence in the cultural, social, and economic realms.

Rather than focusing on the prominent wars of the late 1930s and 1940s like many scholars of modern China, the next five chapters examine the making of modern China through its dead during a period of prolonged conflict.⁸⁰ This period began with anti-imperial agitations in the last two decades of the Qing dynasty and ended with the conclusion of the Nationalist-Communist struggle for power in mainland China.⁸¹ I rely on bureaucratic records, petition letters, government gazettes, periodicals, and other printed materials collected during my multiyear archival research in eleven national, provincial, and municipal archives and libraries in China and Taiwan.⁸² The protagonists of my book are those who died in armed conflicts and the living—top decisionmakers, middle-range bureaucrats, local officials, bereaved family members, and witnesses—who dealt with the most catastrophic period of human history thus far. In the following pages, I examine changes in political definitions and legal regulations of martyrdom, the communal and personal experience with conflicts, and the memorialization of violence in the immediate aftermath.