

Chinese National Spirit Has Been Gathered and Sublimed During Chongqing People's Anti-Bombing Struggle

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Abstract

Keywords: Due to the enhanced strategic position during the anti-Japanese war, Chongqing became the target of Japanese invaders' bombing. The undifferentiated bombing for up to six years and 10 months by Japanese invaders caused heavy casualties and property losses to Chongqing people. Faced with the bombing, Chongqing people waged heroic anti-bombing struggles to defend national dignity, enhance national pride and self-confidence. Chinese national spirit has been gathered and sublimed during their anti-bombing struggles.

Key words: Chinese national spirit; Chongqing people; Anti-bombing; Cohesion; sublimation

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INTRODUCTION

Chongqing is a famous historic cultural city located at the confluence of Yangtze River and Jialing River. It is surrounded by mountains, guarded by the turbulent rivers and treacherous shoals of the Three Gorges in the east, and therefore is known as the "natural barrier". In 1890 China and Britain have signed *Continued Special Articles of Yantai Treaty* which opened Chongqing as a trading port. Next year, Chongqing set up the customs office to formally open to the outside world. Due to land and water transportation convenience and increase in foreign exchanges, since the modern times, Chongqing has gradually developed to be the largest industrial and commercial city and economic center in Southwestern China. During the war, as Nanjing, Wuhan and other cities fell one after another, the national government and a large number of factories, enterprises, schools, research institutes, financial institutions, news and cultural institutions, foreign diplomatic institutions moved to Chongqing in succession. Chongqing has rapidly developed to be a political, military, economic and cultural center at the rear areas, a political arena of the anti-Japanese national united front, and a command center in the Far East in the world anti-fascist war. In September 1940, the national government issued an order:

Chongqing is an important city controlling Yangtze River and Hanjiang River in Southwest China. In the beginning of the war, the government's first plan is to move to Chongqing. After three years of fierce struggles, Chongqing people have united in dedication to jointly resist Japanese aggression, and have established the national cause of fighting against the enemy. The situation of Chongqing has been consolidated. The city has become the military, political and economic hub in wartime, and will develop to be the construction center in Southwest China. We hereby declare Chongqing to be the provisional capital under the governance of Executive Institute. Taking into account the

constructional system of Xijing, we will properly plan its future scale to comfort the public and highlight the great event.¹

Thus, Chongqing's status as the provisional capital of Republic of China has been established.

With the rapid enhancement of Chongqing's strategic position, it became an important military objective of the Japanese invaders. In order to destroy China's rear base, shake people's will of resistance, and force the national government to compromise and surrender, from the air strike to Guangyangba airport in Baxian on February 18, 1938 to the bombing to Liangshan, Wanxian on December 19, 1944, the Japanese gathered its air forces from land army and navy to take undifferentiated bombing for as long as six years and 10 months to Chongqing and political, economic, cultural and other central organs in the surrounding areas, as well as markets, schools, shops and residences. This rear city of Chongqing suffered from the ravages of war, and its people withstood the torment of blood and fire of modern war. In the face of Japanese bombing, Chongqing people had no fear but united as one to carry out heroic struggles of anti-bombing, built up an indestructible wall with blood, flesh and spirit, shattered the Japanese's conspiracy of destroying Chinese resistance will, stimulated the patriotism and national enthusiasm, establish a strong international image of Chinese people, and ultimately saved the interests of Chinese nation, and made an indelible contribution for the victory of the anti-Japanese war and the world anti-fascist war.

1. CHONGQING PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE OF ANTI-BOMBING REFLECTS CHINESE PEOPLE'S SPIRIT OF SELF-RELIANCE AND DEFYING BRUTE FORCES

The bombing to Chongqing is an unusual inhuman atrocity in the history of human warfare, especially the mass indiscriminate bombing to Chongqing and its surrounding areas from 1939 to 1941 is even more tragic. In order to completely destroy Chinese people's fighting will, from May 3-4, 1939, the Japanese dispatched a total of 72 aircrafts to take indiscriminate bombing to downtown Chongqing, dropped 292 bombs, killed 3991 people, severely injured 2,313 people, burned 3,686 houses and 1185 rooms, destroyed more than 10 major urban streets into ruins. Houses on dozens of streets were on fire, and the raging fire kept burning for nearly three days (Pan, 2013, pp.117-118). At that time, *Xinhua Daily* published special articles to describe the tragic horrors after the "May 30th" bombing,

As the stretcher team walked by, lines of red drops of blood were left on the blacktop. For the people carried or those who lost leg(s), blood soaked their pants to mix with ashes and sawdust.

¹ *Xinhua Daily*, September 7, 1940.

They had no power to moan, only twitched their facial muscles in pain... A number of houses were burnt down, people came out of flames, holding bedding, dragging their children, wearing one shoe on a foot and the other grasped in hand. Some helpless old women carried heavy suitcases on the back, some women grabbed pots and pans, after all, they had to continue to live. For these people, some had been deported by the Japanese gunfire from Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Hubei to the rear area, but in the rear, they were also driven to the streets by the Japanese fascists. Although the situation is so chaotic, their faces presented a resolute look forged through 22 months of anti-Japanese war, even women and children had no cry but only resentment.²

In 1941 Japan changed the previous large-scale intensive strategic bombing to multi-batches of small-scale long-time exhausting bombing, concentrating on residences, public offices, schools, shops and other densely populated and bustling areas. Within one week from 8th-14th August, Japanese aircrafts took continuous bombings to Chongqing regardless of day and night, in time gaps of no more than 6 hours. 115 aircrafts were dispatched at most and hundreds of bombs were dropped each time, resulting in enormous casualties and property losses (Pan, 2013, pp. 165-170). Under the "exhausting bombing" of Japanese aircrafts, the tragic asphyxia in Jiaochangkou tunnel took place on June 5th which shocked domestic and the world, causing 776 injuries and 1115 deaths.³ At Chaotianmen dock, bodies were piled up in loud crying. Many people lost their whole family with no one escaping. However, though Japanese air strikes were ferocious, Chongqing people were not scared of war and bombing but strengthened their fighting will. When an air raid siren was cleared, factories produced as usual, shops remained opening, schools operated as usual. In disaster relief, the majority of fire police and paramedics "ran under hails of bullets and galloped through flames to rescue at the risk of their lives, so that people's disasters could be reduced and strength of the rear area could be mostly preserved" (Zhou, 1970, p.80). As Lao She said in *Eulogy to Provisional Capital* written during his staying in Chongqing, "This city is the center well known to the world to revitalize the country and fight against aggression. As the warfare is fierce on the Pacific Ocean, Chongqing's fighting spirit is also uplifting. Though the enemy's aircrafts indulge in wanton persecution, our indignation has risen. As long as we meet the enemy, we will gnash our teeth in hatred to beat it. Rescue teams are not afraid of going through fire and blood, not afraid of Japanese atrocities. Although buildings were destroyed, we can reconstruct them, and the beautiful cityscape will reflect our firm dauntless spirit of resistance." (Lao, 1942) In June 1944, the US President Roosevelt sent a special letter to Chongqing people, showing a high praise to their indomitable spirit during the Japanese bombing,

² *Xinhua Daily*, May 4, 1939.

³ *A Statistics of Chongqing Air Defense Command's Investigation on June 5 Japanese Enemy's Air Attack to Chongqing, Casualties and Losses* (June 5, 1941).

I on behalf of the people of United States of America, presents this scroll to express our tribute to your city's dauntless people. Long before the horrible air strikes was known by the world, people in your city kept standing still with perseverance and calm under the brutal aerial bombardment. This glorious attitude proves your freedom-loving spirit which cannot be damaged by any violence. Your faithful advocacy of freedom will enable future generations to feel grateful and be remembered eternally. (Xu & Wang, 2002, pp. 442-443)

After the victory of the war, Chongqing built a "War Victory Monument" in 1947, on which the translation of President Roosevelt's scroll was engraved in the "victory corridor" at the base.

2. CHONGQING PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE OF ANTI-BOMBING REFLECTS CHINESE PEOPLE'S PATRIOTISM OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE COUNTRY

The Japanese attempted to force Chongqing to surrender by taking large-scale indiscriminate bombing, but contrary to their expected, in the face of Japanese bombing Chongqing people's will of fighting did not waver but triggered infinite anger and hatred, and enhanced national consciousness and patriotism. From the beginning of the bombing, men and women, old and young from far apart in Chongqing all put into their money and efforts to compose a heroic patriotic music. For the Chongqing people serving the provisional capital during the wartime, there were not only tens of thousands of workers and peasants who constructed air defense facilities, but also many women and children who donated jewelry and pocket money for the purchase of aircrafts. There were huge propaganda teams for air defense mobilization, as well as tens of thousands of protective teams, relief workers involved in the protection and relief to compatriots wounded by enemy's bombing. During the war, Chongqing people all strove to be the first to serve the country, and lived frugally to respond to the call for donation. Taking Jiangjin Donation Assembly for example, 35,000 people participated in the assembly with donations totaling 130 million Yuan, creating the highest record among other counties in the past. In addition to cash, 130 gold rings, 8 gold bracelets and 10,000 pairs of cloth shoes were also received (Peng, 1995, p.259). Influenced by the national enthusiasm, other businessmen also took actual actions to support the war. At that time, the general manager of Chongqing Electric Power Company Liu Hangchen said: "In any difficult circumstance in the future, power supply for the defense industry and production industry will not be interrupted for a day."⁴ The board chairman of water company Pan Changyou, manager Hu Ziang said:

⁴ *Xinhua Daily*, Aug 30, 1940.

For a variety of materials, such as storage of waterpipe, have been already fully prepared to ensure sufficient use in the future. To say the least, even if the enemy will blow up all water factories, they can not cut off the city's water supply. We can use a suction machine to draw the water from Yangtze River to meet public use.⁵

The spirit of fighting bravely and taking death calmly shown by Chongqing people embodies Chinese people's high sense of national responsibility and lofty spirit of patriotism during the anti-Japanese war. At 1330 Yangtze River workers said in the letter to the National Political Council in 1939,

We do not worry about too little pay and insecure career. For wartime transportation, we have made and are making the best efforts to deliver soldiers and rescue production equipment ... will work regardless of life and death under the enemy's aircraft bombing. Instead of lingering for meager wages, we'd better work for the victory against the Japanese.

Also as the editorial *Fight Calmly to Rescue Suffering Compatriots* published in *National Daily* on August 22, 1940 said,

We think that Chongqing people are the best nationals, which have been fully proved in the repeated bombings: Firstly, Chongqing people take an absolute calm to cope with the current suffering. Under enemy's brutal burning policy, in blood, fire and the ruins of broken tiles, they do not care about the loss of private properties, but endure personal tragedies. They are painful and serious angers, having a staunch confidence to the war. Their voices conveyed to the society are: Take warm blood and loyal service to serve the country. This situation is impressive and reaches the apex of all outstanding nations at all times.⁶

3. CHONGQING PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE OF ANTI-BOMBING REFLECTS CHINESE PEOPLE'S SPIRIT OF FIGHTING TOGETHER WITH ONE HEART

Unity is the strength of the Chinese nation. The victory of Chongqing struggle of anti-bombing can be said to be the result of the common struggle of political parties and groups, all walks of life and the general public, and a microcosm of the history of anti-Japanese war in Chongqing stage. Faced with the frightening "big bombing", Chongqing people of various circles united as close as brothers and sisters to save the country in national crisis, and sublimated the spirit of solidarity. In 1941, a German friend Wang Anna who was at the rear area at the time experienced a Japanese aircraft bombing to Chongqing, which she described in her memoir,

The different kinds of people living here are also what we can not forget. Regardless of wealth and status, we all live the same wartime life in dugout, mutually help and love each other,

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *National Gazette*, Aug 22, 1940.

which is difficult to imagine usually. Riding out the disaster and hardships brings together foreign diplomats, residents of Sichuan Province, intellectuals from coastal areas, illiterate peasants, coolies, as well as conservative politicians from various countries and Chinese communists. (Wang, 1980, p.196).

In adversity, Chongqing people helped each other to overcome the common difficulties.

After each air raid, we always saw some people holding orphans, like holding gentle lambs to go back home, and some other people supporting the elderly to slowly walk into the relief station. There was no class distance or estrangement of closeness, but a pure great flow of mankind loves.

“If wires have not yet repaired in side street alleys, every house would put on a “peace light” at the door to facilitate pedestrians.”⁷ Communist Party of China is also actively involved in the fight of anti-bombing. In order to improve air defense work, *Xinhua Daily* on behalf of CPC repeatedly contributed ideas and exerted efforts to relevant authorities, pointed out the shortcomings of air defense affairs and proposed practical solutions. It severely criticized on the bureaucracy and serious misconducts of the air defense authority, and also maintained the KMT-CPC cooperation by taking into account the overall interests. In addition, although other Chongqing parties, various groups and major media had different political views, class interests and ideas regarding national affairs, they were consistent in opposing to Japanese bombing, exposing Japanese atrocities, conveying air defense guidelines, policies and measures, calling on people to unite in indomitable spirit to crush Japanese’s conspiracy, and winning the final victory of the war. On August 23, 1940, 135 public groups including China National Diplomacy Association, China branch of International Anti-Aggression Movement Association, China International Alliance Comrades, China Labor Association Federation, China Anti-Japanese Association of Literary and Art Circles, Chinese Women Comfort General Association, Chinese Buddha Society and China Association for Wartime Production, etc. jointly published a letter to the whole country to strongly condemn the atrocities of Japanese bombing to Chongqing:

Due to days of mad bombings to the provisional capital, a prosperous city suddenly turned into a scorched earth. The enemy took the brutal terror policy in an attempt to destroy our fighting spirit, but can only destroy our magnificent buildings. Our will of resistance will be more determined with the deepening hatred....Although the enemy’s atrocities are extremely cruel, they will be eventually crushed by our persistent efforts.

The letter also said, “we swear to make joint struggles with our countrymen, and insist the policy of fighting to the end to achieve the final victory.”⁸ Just as the US journalist Bai Xiude who lived in Chongqing during the war described in his *Thunder out of China*, “From 1939 to 1941, the strength of the whole nation beat in the pulse of Chongqing, and it was Chongqing bombing which integrated all kinds of men and women into a whole and made Chongqing a great city.” (Bai & Jia, 1988, p.83)

History is speechless, but spirit is imperishable. Victory of the anti-Japanese war washes the national humiliation of being defeated in the wars against foreign aggression since modern China, opens up an inevitable path of modernization of Chinese national spirit, and provides boundless opportunities for the development of national spirit. As an important part of the anti-Japanese war, Chongqing people’s struggle for anti-bombing defends national dignity, enhances national pride and confidence. The general secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that the victory “has opened up a bright prospect for the great rejuvenation of Chinese nation, opened up a new journey for the ancient China to revive like a Phoenix is reborn from ashes”. Today, we commemorate the victory of Chinese people’s anti-Japanese war and the world anti-fascist war is to better cherish and maintain the hard-won peace, to inherit and carry forward the great spirit of anti-Japanese war from the tragic history, to encourage people of all ethnic groups in China to struggle to promote the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics so as to achieve the great dream of national revival.

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⁷ *Central Daily*, June 14, 1940.

⁸ *Xinhua Daily*, August 23, 1940.