

## От Минска до Нанкина: сравнительное исследование памяти о Второй мировой войне в Беларуси и Китае

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### Аннотация

Беларусь и Китай, как две крупнейшие воюющие страны Второй мировой войны, географически располагались на европейском и восточном фронтах глобальной антифашистской войны соответственно. Во временном отношении обе страны пережили годы кровопролитных сражений, сформировав глубокую коллективную военную память. В данной работе в качестве основной исследовательской перспективы используется материальная культура, сравниваются исторические траектории, национальные нарративы памяти и материальные носители двух стран во время Второй мировой войны, чтобы выразить и интерпретировать нарративные функции и механизмы построения памяти, связанные с военными артефактами, музеями и мемориальными залами. Путем сравнительного анализа материальных артефактов, изображающих травму, страдания, сопротивление, героизм и повседневную жизнь, исследование выявляет сходства и различия в нарративах памяти о войне в Беларуси и Китае, а также исследует возможность построения транснациональной перспективы памяти о Второй мировой войне на основе материальной культуры. Это открывает новые академические перспективы для изучения наследования антифашистской памяти и формирования международной памяти о мире.

### Ключевые слова:

Беларусь, Китай, Вторая мировая война, военная память, материальная культура, транснациональная перспектива

The year 2025, which has just passed, marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese Peoples War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union. Eighty years ago, Belarus and the Chinese people fought bloody battles against fascist invaders on their respective territories, paying heavy national sacrifices and composing a magnificent epic of the anti-fascist struggle. Minsk, the capital of Belarus, as the core battlefield of the Great Patriotic War, witnessed the tenacious resistance of the Belarusian people from the first shot of the Brest Fortress to the liberation of their homeland. Nanjing, the ancient capital of China, bears the heavy memory of the Nanjing Massacre and is also an important symbol

## From Minsk to Nanjing: a comparative study of the memory of the World War II in Belarus and China

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### Abstract

Belarus and China, as the two large belligerents of the World War II, were geographically situated on the European and Eastern fronts of the global anti-fascist war, respectively. In terms of time, both countries endured years of bloody battles, forging profound collective war memories. In the work, material culture is used as the main research perspective, comparing the historical trajectories, national memory narratives, and material carriers of the two countries during WWII to express and interpret the narrative functions and memory construction mechanisms of war-related artifacts, museums, and memorial halls. Through a comparative analysis of material artifacts depicting trauma, suffering, resistance, heroism, and everyday life, the study identifies similarities and differences in the war memory narratives in Belarus and China, further exploring the possibility of constructing a transnational perspective on WWII memory based on material culture. This provides new academic perspectives for studying the inheritance of anti-fascist memory and the formation of international peace memory.

### Keywords:

Belarus, China, World War II, war memory, material culture, transnational perspective

of the indomitable resistance of the Chinese people in the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression [3].

As tangible carriers of collective memory, material culture documents the true course of war, witnesses the silent progression of events, and embodies the emotional attachment of a nation, reflecting the core essence of war memory through its unique materiality. The material relics, museums, and memorial halls related to the war between Belarus and China serve not only as physical evidence of historical facts but also as important vehicles for both countries to construct and inherit war memory. From the homemade weapons of Belarusian partisans in the Minsk Museum of the Great Patriotic War to the bullet casings and daily life artifacts unearthed and exhibited at the Memorial Hall of the Victims of

the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders; from the site of the extermination camp in Troshchensk to the "Mass Grave" site at Jiangdongmen, these material carriers transcend time and space, making the abstract and intangible war memory tangible and perceptible.

This paper takes the material culture of World War II between Belarus and China as the research object, with war memory narrative and comparison as the main thread, constructing a research framework from historical background, conceptual foundation, comparative analysis to comprehensive interpretation. Based on the combination and reference of existing academic research achievements in the field, employing the research methods of comparative historiography, cultural studies, and memory studies, and using authentic historical documents, museum collections, and archaeological discoveries as research bases, it attempts to answer the following core questions: What are the historical and academic backgrounds of the construction of war memory between Belarus and China? What are the conceptual connotations and narrative functions of material culture in the construction of war memory? What are the similarities and differences in how the two countries express war memory through material artifacts? What are the internal mechanisms of memory formation in the two countries, and how can a transnational perspective on World War II memory be constructed based on material culture?

The research significance of this paper is reflected in two aspects: On the one hand, from a theoretical perspective, it fills the academic gap in comparative studies of war memories between Belarus and China from the perspective of material culture, enriching the research connotation of the worlds anti-fascist war memory, on the other hand, from a practical perspective, exploring the transnational dissemination path of war memories through material culture as a bridge is of great practical significance for defending the historical truth of World War II, opposing historical nihilism, and promoting the inheritance of anti-fascist memory and international peacebuilding.

The academic research on war memory and material culture between Belarus and China has formed a relatively complete theoretical system and research methods based on the absorption of international academic achievements, and has developed its own academic characteristics according to the historical facts and research needs of the country.

The study of war memory and material culture has been a longstanding focus in international academia, with multiple theoretical schools and research methodologies emerging since the late 20th century. As historical research underwent a "memory turn," scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of material culture in constructing war memory. Ian Hods "interpretive archaeology" theory posits that material remains are not passive reflections of historical facts but active agents capable of constructing and transmitting war memory. Alison Whaleys "epistemological pluralism" provides a philosophical foundation for multidimensional interpretations of war memory, highlighting the subjective, selective, and contextual nature of memories embedded in material remains (sup) [2]. Additionally, European academ-

ic theories like the "memory landscape," American theories such as "material representation," and Asian theories including "objectified memory" have enriched the research on war memory and material culture, offering crucial theoretical references for this study.

Academic research on the Great Patriotic War (World War II) in Belarus primarily draws from historical and museological scholarship, with a focus on preserving and interpreting wartime artifacts. The Minsk Museum of the Great Patriotic War, Belarus foremost institution dedicated to war studies, has amassed a vast collection of wartime relics, archival documents, and oral histories since its establishment in 1942. These materials have enabled in-depth investigations into the Belarusian guerrilla resistance, Nazi war crimes, and the heroic spirit of the Belarusian people. Belarusian scholars emphasize the historical authenticity of artifacts, employing archaeological methods and historical documentation to decode their cultural significance and commemorative value. Their research findings are prominently featured in museum exhibition catalogs, academic monographs, and specialized historical journals.

Chinas academic research on the memory and material culture of the Anti-Japanese War has formed a multidisciplinary research framework primarily based on history, archaeology, cultural studies, and memory studies, achieving fruitful results in recent years. Chinese scholars have absorbed advanced international theoretical achievements and combined them with historical facts in China to propose the "materialized memory" theory, deeply integrating archaeological material analysis with historical memory studies, emphasizing the construction process of memory within specific political and cultural contexts [5]. Archaeological research on Anti-Japanese War sites, represented by the Huangcang Anti-Japanese War Site in Pingyao, has made significant breakthroughs. Through the excavation and study of war material remains such as defensive fortifications, bullet casings, and daily life artifacts, it has revealed the material foundation and memory connotations of the Chinese peoples resistance. Additionally, research on Anti-Japanese War museums and memorial halls, represented by the Nanjing Massacre Memorial Hall of the Japanese Invading Army, has also yielded abundant results, focusing on the narrative function of museums in constructing war memories and the mechanisms of memory dissemination. [4] Chinese scholars also emphasize the defense of historical truth, using material relics as an important academic weapon to oppose historical nihilism and safeguard national cultural security.

The academic research of the two countries has laid a solid theoretical and empirical foundation for the comparative study of war memory and material culture between Belarus and China. At the same time, existing academic research also has certain limitations: the comparative study of war memory and material culture between the two countries is relatively scarce, and the transnational perspective of constructing World War II memory based on material culture needs further exploration. This paper will take this as the research starting point, and on the basis of absorbing existing academic research achievements, conduct an in-depth

comparative study of the war memory and material culture of the two countries [7].

Belarus and China had distinct yet interconnected historical trajectories during World War II. As important battlefields between Europe and the East, both countries made indelible contributions to the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War [9].

As a Soviet republic, Belarus was the first to face the invasion of German fascism. On June 22, 1941, the German army launched Operation Barbarossa, launching a massive invasion of the Soviet Union. The Belarusian people fired the first shots of the Great Patriotic War at the Brest Fortress, demonstrating indomitable resistance. Over the four-year war, Belarus became the core battlefield of the Soviet-German conflict [10, 11]. German fascists imposed brutal colonial rule in Belarus, constructing 250 extermination camps including Trostnitsy, where they carried out mass massacres. Statistics show that over 3 million Belarusian soldiers and civilians perished in the war, accounting for one-third of the population at the time, making it the republic with the heaviest casualties in the Soviet Unions Great Patriotic War. During the war, the Belarusian people waged vigorous guerrilla campaigns and underground resistance. The Belarusian army, as part of the Soviet Red Army, participated in major operations like the Battle of Bagration and the Battle of Berlin, making significant contributions to the Soviet liberation and the ultimate victory of the European Anti-Fascist War.

China was the main Eastern battlefield of the World Anti-Fascist War and the first country to launch and sustain the longest anti-fascist operations. On September 18, 1931, the Japanese army launched the "September 18th Incident," marking the beginning of Japanese militarisms invasion of China and the starting point of the Chinese peoples War of Resistance against Japan. On July 7, 1937, the "Marco Polo Bridge Incident" erupted, ushering China into the stage of nationwide resistance. During the 14-year war of resistance, the Chinese people, with indomitable spirit, engaged in arduous struggles against Japanese fascist invasion [1]. The Communist Party of China, as the backbone of the resistance, proposed and adhered to the comprehensive resistance line and the strategic general principle of protracted warfare, opened and developed rear enemy battlefields, led extensive guerrilla warfare, and established anti-Japanese democratic bases. The Chinese military and civilians paid a heavy price of 35 million casualties and ultimately achieved the great victory of the War of Resistance against Japan in September 1945, securing the first complete victory against foreign invasion in modern Chinese history and making significant contributions to the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War [9].

During World War II, Belarus and the Chinese people supported each other and fought side by side, forging a profound revolutionary friendship with their blood [2]. Many Belarusian pilots joined the Soviet Volunteer Air Force and came to China to participate in the early air battles against Japan during Chinas War of Resistance. After the war in Europe ended, numerous Belarusian soldiers followed the Soviet Red Army to Northeast China, engaging in combat against the Japanese Kwantung Army. The Chinese people also made their own contributions to Belaruss anti-fascist struggle. Comrade

Tang Duo, known as the "Chinese Eagle," flew in the battle to liberate Minsk and was awarded the Order of Lenin. Many Chinese patriots devoted themselves to guerrilla warfare, underground activities, or logistical support for the Belarusian Red Army. The bloody battles on both countries battlefields became an important part of the worlds anti-fascist war and laid the historical foundation for the construction of their shared war memories.

The national memory narrative of Belarus and China about World War II is formed based on historical facts and shaped by the national political system, cultural traditions, and post-war development needs, presenting characteristics of national identity and historical continuity.

Belarus national narrative of the Great Patriotic War centers on the theme of "patriotic resistance and Soviet solidarity," with the sacrifices and struggles of its people as its core. After the war, the Soviet Union integrated the construction of Great Patriotic War memory into its national identity-building efforts, and Belarus, as a Soviet republic, inherited this narrative framework. Following the Soviet Unions dissolution, Belarus has consistently preserved and developed this historical memory, viewing the victory over fascism as a vital symbol of national spirit and identity. The national narrative emphasizes the Belarusian peoples historical resistance against German fascist invasion, celebrates the heroic spirit of martyrs and guerrilla fighters, and highlights the crucial role of Soviet unity in achieving victory. The state has established numerous war museums, memorial halls, and patriotic education bases, such as the Minsk Great Patriotic War Museum and Brest Fortress Memorial Hall, while also creating national commemorative days and organizing memorial activities, making war memory an integral part of the nations spiritual and cultural life [6].

Chinas national memory narrative about the War of Resistance against Japan, with "national salvation and rejuvenation" as its core theme, centers on the entire nations resistance and the great victory of the War of Resistance. After the victory, the Chinese nation regarded the memory of the War of Resistance as a vital driving force for national rejuvenation. Following the founding of the Peoples Republic of China, the state has consistently emphasized the construction and inheritance of the memory of the War of Resistance, incorporating it as a key component of national modern history and national spirit education. The national memory narrative highlights the Communist Party of China as the backbone of the War of Resistance, celebrates the heroism and sacrifice of the Chinese people and military during the war, and underscores the historical significance of the victory for national independence and rejuvenation. In recent years, China has further strengthened the construction of the national memory of the War of Resistance, designating December 13 as the National Memorial Day for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre, including the "Nanjing Massacre Archives" in UN-ESCOS Memory of the World Register, and building numerous museums and memorial halls such as the Memorial Hall for the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders, making the memory of the War of Resistance an integral part of the nations core values.

The national memory narratives of the two countries share the same anti-fascist core connotation, both aiming to defend historical truth, celebrate heroism, and inherit the spirit of peace. At the same time, due to differences in historical background and national conditions, the memory narratives of the two countries also have their own characteristics: Belarus memory narrative is more closely tied to Soviet history, emphasizing the unity and cooperation of the socialist camp; China's memory narrative is more closely linked to the country's modernization process, highlighting the pivotal role of the Communist Party of China and the tremendous strength of the entire nation in the war of resistance.

This study takes the material culture of World War II in Belarus and China as its research object, with war memory narratives as the main thread. By employing research methods such as comparative historiography, cultural studies, and memory studies, it conducts a systematic comparative study of the war memories and material cultures of the two countries from four dimensions: historical context, conceptual foundation, comparative analysis, and comprehensive interpretation [5]. The study reveals the commonalities and differences in the war memory narratives based on material culture between the two countries, analyzes the formation mechanisms of their war memories, and explores the path for constructing a transnational perspective on World War II memory based on material culture.

Research has found that Belarus and China, as the main battlefields of the anti-fascist wars in Europe and Asia, both possess historical evidentiary attributes, memory narrative functions, and cultural spiritual connotations in their World War II material cultural relics, which serve as the core carriers of the national collective memory of the two countries [8]. These material cultural relics can be divided into three major categories: trauma and suffering, resistance struggles, and heroism and daily life. Different types of material relics play distinct narrative roles in the construction of war memory, collectively forming a complete war memory narrative system for both countries. The war memory narratives based on material culture in the two countries share a common anti-fascist core connotation, with the narrative purposes of commemorating war suffering, highlighting the spirit of resistance, and inheriting the value of peace, presenting an emotional expression intertwined with sorrow and pride. At the same time, due to differences in historical background, national conditions, and forms of war, the two countries exhibit significant differences in narrative focus, structure, and expression. Belarus emphasizes the victory and sacrifice memories of collectivism, with a linear narrative structure, while China achieves the unification of suffering memories, resistance memories, and revival memories, with a multidimensional narrative structure.

The formation mechanisms of war memories between Belarus and China both take material culture as the core carrier, exhibiting the basic characteristics of state leadership, social participation, and cultural drive, which are the results of the joint action of historical facts, national will, social needs, and cultural traditions. State leadership is

the core of memory formation, promoting the construction of memory carriers through top-level design, the establishment of statutory memorial days, and the infiltration of national education. Social participation serves as an important support for memory formation, allowing war memories to sink to the grassroots level through diverse folk practices. Cultural drive is the deep-seated power behind memory formation, transforming war memories into national emotional identity through the integration and presentation of diverse cultures. At the same time, the memory formation mechanisms of the two countries differ in terms of power structures, cultural driving forces, and inheritance priorities, reflecting the unique historical development trajectories and cultural cores of each nation [4].

The core focus of this study lies in establishing a transnational perspective on China-Belarus WWII memory through material culture. This framework is grounded in the objectivity and cross-cultural nature of material cultural relics, with bilateral exchanges and cooperation as its foundation. By conducting joint research, co-organizing international exhibitions, and integrating memory narratives across borders, it achieves a progressive shift from material exchange to shared memory and ultimately value consensus. Beyond its academic significance in filling the gap of comparative studies on WWII memory between China and Belarus, this perspective carries profound bilateral and global implications. It not only strengthens cultural identity and bilateral relations but also provides a practical pathway to safeguarding historical truth, combating historical nihilism, and advancing the construction of international peace memory.

The innovation of this study lies in adopting material culture as the core research perspective, breaking away from the previous limitations in China-Belarus WWII studies that focused on historical events and textual sources. It reveals the central role of material culture in constructing war memories. Simultaneously, the study places the WWII memories of China and Belarus within the broader framework of the global anti-fascist war for comparative analysis, establishing a transnational research framework that transcends single-country perspectives. This provides a new academic model for studying global anti-fascist war memories. However, the study still has certain limitations, such as the need for deeper field research on material cultural remains in both countries and insufficient attention to grassroots-level material cultural memory practices in the two nations. These issues require further refinement in subsequent research.

The victory of the World Anti-Fascist War is a shared historical treasure of all humanity, and its memory should not be confined to the perspective of a single nation. As important participants in the World Anti-Fascist War, Belarus and China shoulder the significant mission of preserving the memory of the war and promoting the values of peace. Constructing a transnational perspective on World War II memory through material culture and advancing the global inheritance of anti-fascist memory is not only a tribute to history but also a commitment to the future. Under the backdrop of globalization, China and Belarus should continue to deepen transnational cooperation in material culture and war mem-

ory, ensuring that the anti-fascist friendship forged in blood is passed down through generations and that the spirit of anti-fascism and the values of peace become a common pursuit of all humanity, contributing more strength to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and the promotion of world peace and development.

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