Wars can be viewed as processes. Individuals and even entire societies are “processed” by war and emerge from the experience changed. As this well-researched book illustrates, an excellent example of this phenomenon is what happened to Chinese society and Chinese intellectuals as a result of the Sino-Japanese War of 1937-1945. Dr. Zhu’s description of the wartime culture that developed in the southwestern city of Guilin shows how the thousands of Chinese intellectuals who took refuge there after being driven from their homes put their individual talents to use in the new, common cause of national defense. Motivated by a deep sense of nationalism, these intellectuals produced a wide variety of works intended to mobilize popular support for the struggle against the Japanese invaders. Prior to the war, Guilin was an ordinary provincial city far removed from the major modern cities and cultural centers of China. This situation changed completely during the years 1938-1944. Guilin became a major cultural center, the location of what the author describes as a “unique cultural phenomenon ... unparalleled in other wartime centers in China during the war” (208). Dr. Zhu does an excellent job of describing and analyzing the origins of this “unique cultural phenomenon,” its different elements and its lasting effects. The result is a better understanding of the war itself and the tensions within Chinese society at the time, tensions so deep that even a strong sense of patriotism and the power of nationalism could not eliminate them.

What was unique about Guilin’s wartime culture? The author explains that during the war China was basically divided into three areas politically: the areas occupied by the Japanese, the areas controlled by the Nationalist-Party-run government under Chiang Kai-shek, and the regions controlled by the Communists under Mao Zedong. Within each area, freedom of expression and cultural life was controlled to varying degree by the ruling authorities in order to avoid criticism of their rule. Guilin was within the Nationalist controlled area and, if the censorship rules Chiang had instituted in his wartime capital Chongqing and other areas had been applied there, Guilin’s wartime culture would not have blossomed. But the Nationalist leaders of Guangxi province, Li Zongren and Bai Chongxi, had policy differences with Chiang and, since they possessed their own significant regional power base, they did not feel bound to strictly follow Chiang’s policies and rules. This led to a relatively relaxed political environment, the ability of intellectuals from different political
persuasions (left and right) to coexist, and a lack of pressure to ignore artistic quality in the production of political propaganda.

The first two chapters of the book explain in detail the role played by the Guangxi warlords in establishing Guilin’s wartime culture. The first chapter is entitled “The Guangxi Warlords and the Guangxi System at Work.” Here the author discusses the differences between Chiang’s vision for Chinese development and those of Li and Bai. She also describes their distrust of Chiang and their efforts to thwart Chiang’s attempts to penetrate Guangxi government circles.

The second chapter, “The Guangxi Warlords and the Chinese Communist Party: Political Culture in China” examines another important aspect of Chinese politics at the time, namely, the efforts of the CCP to utilize differences within the Nationalist Party and warlord ranks to split the Nationalists and weaken them. In 1937 the CCP had used the Guangxi warlords to pressure Chiang into agreeing to a genuine united front against the Japanese. Li and Bai had good relations with Zhou Enlai and in late 1938 the Communist 8th Route Army established a liaison office in Guilin. Dr. Zhu emphasizes that the relatively open attitude of the Guangxi warlords toward the Communists was due primarily to their resentment of Chiang, not to a sympathy for Communist ideology.

Chapter three, “War in Fiction and Poetry,” and chapter four, “Paper Bullets Can Also Annihilate the Enemy: Journals, Newspapers, and Plays,” contain discussions of the works created by intellectuals in Guilin during the 1938-1944 period and the lives of the writers, poets, playwrights, journalists, and correspondents who produced them. The number of works mentioned is enormous and shows the breadth of the creative activity that was occurring. Some of the descriptions are quite detailed and show the complicated mixture of factors that can motivate humans to act. For some writers, the need to find a way to mobilize the masses to support the war effort was sufficient reason to popularize literature and the performing arts. Others had been interested in popularizing literature before the war and saw the war crisis as an opportunity to further their agenda. The author’s style of giving extended space to selected individuals makes for interesting reading. For example, approximately five pages are devoted to the Vietnamese Communist leader Ho Chi Minh and his Guilin connection.

Chapter five presents the international connections that enriched the Guilin cultural scene. Foreign visitors and war correspondents passed through. The U.S. Embassy in Chongqing established an Information Services Department branch office there. There was a concerted effort among certain writers to translate and publish foreign literature. Japanese and Korean defectors organized