

Outline of the Seminar on the Second Sino-Japanese War Hosted by the Japan Institute of International Affairs

The Japan Institute of International Affairs hosted a public symposium on February 14, 2018 about the Second Sino-Japanese War. This document is a summary of the seminar's proceedings.

I. Part 1 "Truths About the Second Sino-Japanese War"

Part 1 of the seminar, entitled "Truths About the Second Sino-Japanese War," was devoted to presentations and discussions on subjects including reports from battlefields, government finances, and recollections about what transpired. The following opinions were expressed:

- About 190,000 Japanese lost their lives in the battles that were fought in China up until December 1941. While the Chinese casualty figure was considerably higher, at the time, this was the highest death toll suffered by Japan in any conflict since the Meiji Restoration, and was surpassed only by the number of deaths in the Pacific War that started later.
- Japan's military capabilities were taxed and at their limit after the Battle of Wuhan, causing its military to seek a political and diplomatic solution. Japan decided not to expand the size of the territories that it occupied and instead resolved to restore order in the areas under its control. The areas around Wuhan and Guangzhou were designated "campaign zones" and all other areas were designated "safety zones" by Japan's military.
- The Eleventh Army had its headquarters in Wuhan and campaigned in central China. The Eleventh Army had about 200,000 soldiers. But because of manpower shortages, the Eleventh Army was unable to consolidate its victories and occupy for the long term the territories that it conquered. After Japanese withdrawals, the Chinese military sometimes claimed that it had pushed out the Japanese, as part of its media campaign.
- Japanese campaigns were usually brief. Little thought was given to drawing up and carrying out a grand strategy for conquering China.
- Japan's military was tactically victorious on many occasions but was unable to make China submit to its will. China kept up its resistance and did not submit, but was unable to defeat Japan militarily. Before the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941, the situation in China was stalemated, with neither side able to win or lose.
- China's battlefields became significant during the Pacific War for two reasons. China became home to air bases that were used by planes to bomb Japan. In addition, a significant portion of Japan's military ended up being tied down in China, and could not be diverted to other areas, including to Japan itself when it was on the verge of being invaded. However, the significance of these two factors lessened during the end of the conflict.
- While Japan left the League of Nations in 1933 to protest the handling of the Mukden

Incident, this withdrawal did not cause Japan to become internationally isolated.

- The deflation that Japan experienced during Finance Minister Junnosuke Inoue's tenure brought hardships to the citizens of Japan and also provoked a backlash that was reflected in the Japanese media's positive reporting of the Kwangtung Army during the Mukden Incident.
- After the Mukden Incident, the Japanese economy kept on performing well, partly due to Finance Minister Korekiyo Takahashi's success in holding down military expenditures and maintaining stable government finances.
- The coup that occurred on February 26, 1936 did not cause Japan's military to dominate society. A system of military dominance began to take shape after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.
- Japan's zaibatsu capitalists deemed Manchuria to be a risky market, so the foundation of Manchukuo was not an opportunity for stealing resources from a colony. Kanji Ishiwara, the Japanese army officer who provoked the Mukden Incident, sought to develop "Manchuria as Manchuria," and to have Japan and Manchuria prepare to fight an Armageddon-like Final War.
- At a time when cement and textile plants in Japan were cutting back their operations, funds from Japan were being spent in Manchuria on building new cement factories and repairing textile mills. This type of so-called Manchurian business was criticized.
- An increase in military expenditures caused the quality of life for Japan citizens to decline. This was justified by making references to Hitler, who increased German military expenditures after taking power in 1933 while seemingly keeping Germany's economy in good shape. In 1936, when the February 26 coup took place, military expenditures accounted for 5.6% of Japan's GDP. By 1944, 98% of Japan's GDP was devoted to its military.
- To help how we remember the fighting in the Second World War, the conflict can be divided into four wars fought in four different locations. One of them is the war fought between Japan and the United States that began with the attack on Pearl Harbor. The second one is the war fought with Great Britain in Southeast Asia. We also have the Sino-Japanese War that started in 1937 and the war that broke out between Japan and the Soviet Union in the closing days of the Second World War. How people remember the war depends on where the fighting took place.
- The public in post-war Japan widely believes that Japan was overwhelmingly victorious in the Second Sino-Japanese War and was never defeated in the battles and campaigns of that war. The public also tends to believe that Japan ultimately lost because of Anglo-American military prowess. The background to these beliefs include Japan's declaration of surrender, which made no mention of the conflict with China and the Soviet Union; the version of

history spreading by the Allied occupation forces in Japan; and a lack of statements from veterans returning to Japan from China.

- Chiang Kai-shek delivered a speech at the end of the Second World War in which he urged the Chinese to “remember not evil against others” and to “do good to all men.” Japan was also initially inclined to be cooperative and to let overseas Japanese colonists stay where they were. However, China’s international standing declined, and the meaning and goals of the war became less and less clear, which prevented the formation of a clear consensus in Japan about what the Second Sino-Japanese War was like.
- The Nationalist government in China, which was ostensibly the war’s victor, did not make harsh demands against Japan for trying war criminals or for paying war reparations. This was not because of Chiang Kai-shek’s speech which called for leniency, but because of the decline in China’s international standing.
- The lack of a common consensus on what the war was like formed the backdrop to the Japanese government’s decision to duly deal with postwar issues in accordance with the legal frameworks devised by the Treaty of San Francisco—especially with a law-based solution being the only avenue left to Japan. In the talks for normalizing relations between China and Japan, it is worth remembering that Premier Zhou Enlai lodged a protest about war reparations, which had been handled through legal means.
- During the Second Sino-Japanese War, China constantly weighed the course of action that it would take against Japan. Japan was not able to accurately predict what China was thinking or foresee how it would behave.
- The Second Sino-Japanese War was initially fought by Japan to protect its settlers. It later became a punitive war. Still later, the war was fought to overthrow the government of Chiang Kai-shek. The war ended up being fought for its own sake, without a goal.
- The Communist Party, not the Nationalists, ended up taking power in China after the war. This has prevented objective research into the war and has made it impossible to formulate understandings of the conflict that are commonly held.

II. Part 2 “The Second Sino-Japanese War as a Propaganda Conflict”

Part 2 of the seminar, entitled “The Second Sino-Japanese War as a Propaganda Conflict,” was devoted to presentations and discussions on media coverage of China during the Sino-Japanese War, and on the United States and the media during the conflict. The following opinions were expressed:

- Apart from the diplomacy recorded in official papers, reports about diplomatic activity that were broadcast to listeners had a significant impact on inhabitants. Words had meaning on the battlefields of China, making the conflict a “War of the Airwaves” as well.
- Japanese language broadcasts emanating from Chongqing made it clear, for example, that

the Chinese government regarded the Russo-Japanese War earlier in the century as a war of Japanese aggression. Chinese broadcasts also repeatedly proclaimed that the Japanese military occupied only “points and lines.”

- Archives recently made public in Taiwan have made it possible to compare Japanese and Chinese historical documents. For example, when Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression treaty, both Japan and China spread information to the effect that the other side was being pressured.
- War is not limited to combat or the use of military force. Using words to justify the legitimacy of one’s position and to describe the situation led to highly politicized wars. Apart from radio broadcasts, newspapers, magazines and other types of media had ties to war.
- China, which ended up victorious, was unable to disown the propaganda that it had disseminated in the war. Its statements during the conflict ended up shaping the framework of post-war discourse. The words uttered during the conflict had an impact on how the war was viewed, the significance of which cannot be minimized.
- The Battle of Shanghai caused Chang Kai-shek, who had previously proclaimed a policy of “internal pacification before external resistance,” to decide on fighting an all-out war with Japan. This revolutionary decision was taken with the intent to pave the way for intervention by third parties and to maximize publicity.
- Air units of the Japanese navy provided cover for the storming of Shanghai by the army and navy, and facilitated the army’s campaigns in Hangzhou and Nanjing. The Japanese attacks carried out by the navy’s aviation arm were militarily quite successful, but they were criticized on grounds that they had been carried out indiscriminately. Japan ended up being condemned unanimously at the League of Nations—a development that invited its international isolation.
- Foreign media organizations tended to report that Japan was cruel and barbaric, and that China was suffering at the hands of Japan. Criticism of Japanese air raids became mainstream. While such criticism was partially justified, Chinese propaganda tended to exaggerate or even make up events. Chinese aviators were technically unskilled, leading their air force to often drop bombs on the wrong targets. Such mistakes were sometimes reported by the foreign media as being the work of the Japanese. The Chinese made use of photos of the damage caused by the bombing in their media campaigns. Madame Chiang Kai-shek (Soong Mei-ling) made numerous appearances on American media outlets and was able to win the support of the international community.
- The Japanese military believed that so long as it was militarily victorious, it was unnecessary to publicize its victories. Japan public relations work amounted to white propaganda—officially sponsored, censored, formalistic, boring, and slow to the mark. On the other hand,

China conducted black propaganda—of unknown origin, quick on the draw, and splashy.

- Japan was militarily successful but lost on the propaganda front and ended up becoming internationally isolated. It is impossible to overlook the impact that the 1932 Shanghai Incident and the 1937 Battle of Shanghai had on American public perceptions of Japan.
- Japan made a belated attempt to enlist the help of overseas media organizations. It was much too late. Mainstream media organizations declined to cooperate, and Japan was forced to rely on less well-known media to get its message across. Japan was unable to win over the support of local inhabitants, leading to a downward spiral of events in which a poor media message ended up alienating the local population even more.