Asian Shadows: The Hidden History of World War Two in the Pacific

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Table of Contents

Introduction
Arthur Herman, Hudson Institute 3

Japan’s Response to the Global Shifting Order
Sally Paine, U.S. Naval War College 11

The Turning Points of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations
Shin Kawashima, University of Tokyo 21

Japanese Termination of the Pacific War: The Significant and Causal Factors of the “End of War”
Junichiro Shoji, National Institute for Defense Studies, Japan 31

Popular Nationalism and the Rise of Mao as China’s Superhero
Michael Sheng, University of Akron 47

Japan’s Military and Diplomatic Strategy Between the Two World Wars
Edward Drea, Retired, U.S. Army Center of Military History 56

Author Biographies 66
Introduction

Arthur Herman, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

The English historian Frederick Maitland pointed out that it is sometimes difficult to remember that events in the past were once in the future. This is particularly true of World War II in the Pacific and of the epic conflict between Japan and the United States in that war. Most accounts of the Second World War in Asia focus on four short years, from the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 to the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945, and treat it as an episode in the inevitable rise of the United States as a global power. Unfortunately, this perspective ignores that conflict’s place in a long sequence of conflicts that convulsed Asia, particularly East Asia, for almost all of the twentieth century, some of which (it is arguable) are still going on today.

The papers published in this volume reflect the efforts of six distinguished scholars and of the organizers of the conference “Asian Shadows: The Hidden History of the Second World War,” at which the papers were presented in January 2017, to correct this parochial perspective on the conflict that Japanese scholars call the Pacific War. The “shadows” that this conference and these papers intend to dispel are the ones that have hitherto obscured our complete understanding of World War II’s place in the history of twentieth-century Asia, and of Japan’s role in it.

Although these scholars have very different backgrounds and very different approaches to historical scholarship, it became obvious as the conference went on that the best starting point for understanding Japan’s role in Asia in the first half of the twentieth century is not the planning of the attack on Pearl Harbor, or the invasion of China in 1937, or even the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. It is instead the Meiji Revolution of 1868, the restoration of imperial rule that has always been seen a major turning point in Japanese history but also must be seen as a watershed date in the history of Asia.

There is no denying the standard consensus that the Meiji Restoration’s reforms, which included creating Japan’s first representative and constitutional government, laid the foundations of modern Japan. But those reforms did not operate in a vacuum. As Dr. Sarah Paine cogently argues in her paper, which led off the conference, the Meiji reforms arose from an urgent task: how to modernize Japan as quickly as possible, before others could take advantage of two looming geopolitical trends, at Japan’s expense.

The first trend was the decline of China, as that once-mighty empire imploded, spreading instability and chaos across East Asia. The second trend, closely related to the first, was the rise of European colonial empires in Asia—not only Britain, France, and Germany, but particularly Russia. As Professor Kawashima informed the conference audience, Japan’s stance regarding China after the Meiji Restoration closely reflected its concerns about the first trend. Japan’s response to Russia’s occupation of Port Arthur in 1897, however, is a good illustration of how Japan was forced to adapt to the second.

As Dr. Kawashima shows in his illuminating study, the 1871 Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty marks “the ‘starting point’ for modern Sino-Japanese relations.” While granting extra-
territorial rights to the citizens of both countries, the treaty was also deeply deferential toward a Chinese government and society that Japan always admired and on which it had modeled itself for centuries. But growing friction over the fate of the Korean Peninsula, as Chinese rule decayed and Japan stepped in to protect its own interests in Korea, led to the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895). This also signaled a shift in Japan’s relationship with China to one more closely resembling that of Western powers toward China, with a fundamental asymmetry of power to Japan’s advantage. The war was also driven by strong nationalist sentiment among the Japanese public, which was now a factor in politics for the first time in Japan’s history, but by no means the last.

As part of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the Sino-Japanese War, Japan assumed control of the Liaodong Peninsula and its principal city, Port Arthur. But then three European powers intervened—France, Germany, and Russia—and Japan was forced to hand the territory back to China. This was seen as a great humiliation for Japan, the first of several that were to come at the hands of Western powers.

Two years later, in 1897, Russia stepped in and forced China to lease the peninsula to it and to allow a railroad right-of-way connecting the Chinese Eastern Railway to a Russian-built line running from Port Arthur and nearby Dalny (Dalian) to the Chinese city of Harbin. Russia also began fortifying the town and harbor at Port Arthur, turning it into a major Russian naval base. At the same time, the railway from Port Arthur to Harbin helped to secure Russian control of the Chinese Eastern Railway. All in all, it was a hard lesson in international geopolitics that Japan would not soon forget.

Nonetheless, as Professor Paine explains, the victory over China “validated the controversial Westernization program” the Meiji Restoration had initiated. As Japan’s military expanded and continued to modernize, “regionally, Japan replaced China as the dominant power and began empire building,” including taking control of the Pescadores (Penghu) and Taiwan. But Japan’s growing strength aroused Russian fear and jealousy, as “the focus of Russian foreign policy made an unprecedented shift from Europe to Asia” at the dawn of the twentieth century.

Russia’s instrument for extending its hegemony was, as in the case of Liaodong, the railways, in this case the Trans-Siberian Railway. In 1900, Russia unilaterally occupied all of the northern Chinese province of Manchuria—in order to consolidate its empire in East Asia, but also to contain Japan. This was a direct challenge to Japanese interests that Tokyo felt it could not ignore, and so war ensued. First came the war with a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur in 1904—the precursor of another surprise attack on an American fleet in 1941—and then a round of devastating defeats for Russia, including the naval battle in the Tsushima Straits and the Battle of Mukden, at that time the largest single land engagement by modern armies in history.

The defeat of Russia thrust Japan into the international spotlight for the first time. Activists as diverse as Mohandas Gandhi and W. E. B. Dubois were inspired by what they saw as the rise of the first non-white, non-European great power, and Great Britain saw Japan as a desirable ally for protecting India and Singapore, as well as for halting further Russian expansion in East Asia. As Professor Paine lucidly shows, the victory also
triggered a momentous internal debate in Japan itself: Should an island nation with very limited natural resources focus on becoming a great naval and trading power like Britain (Japan’s naval alliance with Britain was signed in 1902), or should it secure the resources it needed by becoming an imperial power like Russia and controlling extensive territories on the Eurasian mainland? As Paine shows, the naval side of the debate was epitomized by Vice Admiral Satō Tetsutarō (1866–1942), while Field Marshal Yamagata Aritomo, army chief of staff during the Russo-Japanese War, summed up the land power side, arguing that Japan’s future depended on maintaining the “absolute lifeline” of Manchuria as a source of necessary raw materials and as a way to maintain Japan’s dominant presence on the mainland of northeast Asia.

In the end, Paine points out, the forces arguing for Japan becoming a land power won out, and set a fateful course for empire—which centered more and more on China.

At the same time, another important factor in shifting Japan’s focus away from trade and alliances with the West and toward imperialism and conquest, was Japan’s entry into World War I. Japan proved itself a useful ally to the Entente Powers. It provided supplies and military aid to Britain and France, including loaning money when those financially strapped nations were at their most desperate. Then, in January 1917, Japan also sent a flotilla of destroyers to help deal with the Austro-German submarine menace. In gratitude, the Entente secretly agreed to let Japan take over German’s treaty rights in the Shantung Peninsula in China—a move that set the stage for a long and dismal future for China as well as for East Asia.

It is worth noting, however, that it was not just Britain and France that agreed to let the Japanese take over. The government of Chinese prime minister General Duan in Peking also signed on, in a deal to allow Japan to maintain a garrison in Shantung in exchange for Japanese support for revising the entire structure of unfair treaties with China. And since Japan had also agreed to President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points for the peace settlement at the end of the war, which promised self-determination for all peoples, Tokyo’s delegates arrived at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 assuming they were in a strong position to get what Japan wanted and also to act as the conscience of Asia in dismantling European colonial control over the subject peoples there.

Instead, Japan’s effort to inject a racial equality clause into the League of Nations Covenant was harshly rebuffed. Although Japan was allowed to keep control of the Shantung Peninsula, that control poisoned relations with China and inspired a growing anti-Japanese Chinese nationalist movement. Meanwhile, the rebuff by Japan’s former allies fueled anti-Western feelings in Japan, as the government decided it would have to blaze its own path to empire in Asia, including increasingly harsh dealings with China.

“Continental powers,” Professor Paine notes, “typically have few friends because theirs is a negative-sum global order based on the domination of territory.” This was increasingly true of Japan after World War I, and it was symbolized and epitomized by Japan’s

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occupation of Manchuria. The notorious Twenty-One Demands it imposed on the Chinese government were part of Tokyo’s effort to consolidate its position in Manchuria and soon became a major source of turmoil, first with China and then with the League of Nations and the international community.

As China’s ability to maintain law and order in Manchuria steadily dissolved and the rest of China descended into anarchy, Japan felt constrained to take matters more and more into its own hands to defend its commercial as well as imperial interests. The first step came in 1928 with the assassination of the Chinese nationalist warlord in Manchuria, followed in 1931 by Japanese occupation of the entire province.

China appealed to the League of Nations for redress. As historian A. J. P. Taylor pointed out in his seminal work *The Origins of the Second World War*, Japan actually had a good case. “The authority of the Chinese central government—nowhere very strong—did not run in Manchuria, which had been for years in a state of lawless confusion. Japanese trading interests had suffered greatly.”

On Japan’s initiative, the League set up an independent commission headed by the British diplomat Lord Lytton to look into Japan’s grievances in Manchuria. The commission found most of Japan’s complaints were justified, but condemned the Japanese government anyway for resorting to force without exhausting all possible peaceful means for a settlement. Affronted, Japan walked out of the League of Nations—at first temporarily, but then permanently, as Tokyo found itself regrouping to deal with a new, or rather revived, threat: Russia, now the Soviet Union.

For a decade and a half after the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia had been a non-factor in international relations, including in Asia. But just as its cool relations with China following the invasion of Manchuria turned into actual war in July 1937 after the notorious Marco Polo Bridge incident (a conflict, scholars now recognize, provoked by China rather than Japan), Stalin’s Soviet Union began to take a new interest in exerting its influence in its Far Eastern empire, especially where it bordered on Japan’s empire in Manchuria (now renamed Manchukuo under complete Japanese rule). In July 1939, fighting broke out between Soviet and Japanese troops on the Manchukuo border and soon flared into a full-scale war. Japan suffered a humiliating defeat, losing more than 20,000 troops before a peace agreement was signed.

This, too, had long-term consequences for Japan’s future imperial hopes. The Japanese army’s grand strategy for securing future resources now shifted away from Siberia, where it had hopes of extending Japanese control as far as Lake Baikal, southward toward Southeast Asia and French Indochina, while the United States replaced Russia as the main object of Japanese war strategy.

How did Japan plan its main strategy prior to the outbreak of World War II? This was the subject of Edward Drea’s highly informative paper. As Drea recounts, after the First World War, Japan’s “revised defense policy posited a future war against a tripartite

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coalition: the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. The fundamental premise was that Japan would fight a short war highlighted by decisive battles on land and at sea, which would quickly end the conflict.”

In order to engage the United States, no fewer than three Japanese fleets would be needed. One would engage and destroy the U.S. Navy operating in Asian waters, while another would convoy Japanese army forces to occupy the Philippines. The third would confront the U.S. Navy’s main battle fleet in a final decisive battle, in the fashion of Japan’s decisive victory over Russia at Tsuchima in 1904. However, since Japan had only two fleets, “the decision to build a third fleet pitted Japan in a naval arms race against the United States,” with fateful consequences—which would culminate in the plan to stage the decisive battle not in Asian waters, but further east at Pearl Harbor, not by battleships this time, but by surprise air attack.

Given the mismatch between U.S. and Japanese industrial strength, this was a naval arms race that Japan was doomed to lose from the start (by the end of World War II, the United States was building sixteen naval vessels to Japan’s one). It also aroused tensions between Tokyo and Washington long before Pearl Harbor, pouring oil on the diplomatic fire already burning thanks to Japan’s war with China. In the end, Japan had adopted a grand strategy for the Second World War it could never carry out.

But as Drea notes in his conclusion, “Were Tokyo’s policies any more disjointed than those of the other great powers? The pre-war order had collapsed, ushering in a tumultuous interwar period characterized by dramatic and continual global shifts in national security policies, international relations, military affairs, ideologies, and weapons development.”

Certainly Japan was not the only great power to experience incoherence in policy and imperial overstretch, especially in Asia. France, Great Britain, and even the United States—given its exposed weakness in the Philippines even as President Roosevelt moved its main battle fleet to Pearl Harbor on the eve of war with insufficient protection and an unclear mission—all provided an opening for Japan to consider all-out war in December 1941, with considerable hope for victory.

Indeed, by the second week in April 1942, Tokyo had accomplished virtually every major objective it had set out to achieve, including capturing Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, Burma, and the Philippines. Yet Japan’s astonishing initial success could not disguise the fact that it lacked the strength to sustain a long war because of the mismatch between its strategic goals and its logistical and industrial base, especially once the full weight of America’s manufacturing might was put into the military balance.

Junichiro Shoji’s fascinating paper reveals how the reality of Japan’s eventual defeat had sunk in as early as 1943. He shows that the debate this realization triggered in Japan’s highest political circles led to termination of the war in a fashion very different from the manner in which Nazi Germany was defeated three months earlier, in May 1945.
According to Dr. Shoji, the search for a negotiated settlement began in the summer of 1943, as did the effort to overthrow the hardline cabinet led by General Tojo. The announcement at the Casablanca Conference that the Allies would demand unconditional surrender from the Axis powers, however, “made the termination of the war far more difficult,” while earlier hopes for a negotiated settlement that would preserve portions of Japan’s land empire or Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere were progressively abandoned. In the end, Japan’s elite decided that there were only two goals that mattered: to “preserve the national polity,” including the emperorship, and “defense of the imperial land,” or integrity of the Home Islands. If Japan had to surrender but could keep these two institutions intact, that would constitute, in Japanese eyes, an acceptable end to the war.

Shoji’s research into the final days of the war also reveals that a last-ditch defense of Japanese territory would have been as unacceptable to the imperial government in Tokyo as it was to the Truman administration in Washington. “Had decisive fighting taken place on the Home Islands, there would have been even greater loss of life for Japan and the United States. Moreover, Japan’s urban areas and countryside would have been devastated, and Japan would likely have been put under direct foreign rule and conceivably been partitioned like Germany”—especially after the Soviet Union entered the Pacific War in August 1945. It would be overstating the case to suggest that the emperor and other politicians were waiting for atomic bombs to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as an excuse to avoid a U.S.-led invasion. “Japan, however, was able to avoid this tragedy by terminating the war more quickly than Germany, that is, before decisive fighting on the Home Islands began.”

Perhaps this is why, Professor Shoji speculates, the Japanese call the end of World War II “the end of war” or “defeat in war,” whereas post-war Germans refer to it as “liberation,” i.e., from the Nazi regime.

In any case, Professor Shoji’s scholarship reinforces the views of scholars such as John Dower and Ronald Spector, that the Japanese people were able to “endure the unendurable” (in Emperor Hirohito’s famous phrase) for their very own special reasons, ones which would enable them to rebuild their country and forge a new post-war identity for Japan.7

That included full democracy as incorporated in the 1946 Japanese Constitution (imposed by the United States but universally accepted by the Japanese people); a renunciation of militarism, including possession of armed forces, except for self-defense; and a formal alliance with Japan’s former adversary the United States. Yet within a few short years the old dynamics of the balance of power in East Asia would reassert themselves, as the revival of China under Mao Zedong and Russia’s emergence as America’s rival superpower under Joseph Stalin transformed Russia and China into formidable allies, who threatened to forge a new Communist-dominated order in Asia with the outbreak of the Korean War at the end of June 1950.

7 John Dower, Embracing Defeat; Ronald Spector, In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia (2007).
Traditional historiography has presented Mao and China’s role in the Korean conflict as primarily defensive, arguing that Mao entered the war because he was alarmed by the U.S. advance to the Yalu River following MacArthur’s landing at Inchon. Michael Sheng’s paper, however, startlingly demonstrates how that intervention sprang from Mao’s “ruthless self-confidence” and “relentless energy” as he built his career by appropriating Chinese popular nationalism in a charismatic guise. Sheng reveals how Mao’s rise as infallible Great Leader began quite early in the Sino-Japanese conflict. “It was not mere coincidence that while the Sino-Japanese conflict was about to explode in 1937,” Sheng writes, “the building of Mao’s personality cult had an official inauguration. In June of that year, for the first time, Mao’s portrait was published in Liberation Daily, his face illuminated by a ray of sun,” while “a collection of Mao’s writings was compiled, and the CCP rank and file studied it devotedly”—a prelude to his famous Little Red Book and the ubiquitous moon-faced portrait that sprang up across Communist China, once the full power of Maoism was unleashed.

That ruthless self-confidence would propel Mao into the Korean conflict, as part of his bid to become the “Lenin of the East,” a revolutionary leader of global proportions. “The combination of national security interest and his own ambition to be leader of the Eastern revolution,” Sheng writes, “propelled Mao to finally send troops into Korea,” even though it would lead to massive slaughter and defeat for China’s People’s Liberation Army. Mao’s insistence on seeing China’s interests and his as one and the same would not only send Mao into Korea but into the Great Leap Forward, in which more than 30 million Chinese would die, and into conflict with the United States over the islands of Kemoy and Matsu in the Taiwan Straits in 1958.

Sheng explains that “Some historians insist that it was Mao’s nationalism that motivated him to fight against American imperialism to preserve China’s territorial integrity. In fact, the opposite was true: to strengthen his charismatic authority, Mao was willing to sacrifice China’s national interest by fighting against both Washington and Moscow” and risking an all-out nuclear war. It was the kind of high-risk brinksmanship other would-be Maos and charismatic Communist leaders would continue to indulge in, like North Korea’s Kim Jong-un, with his ballistic missile tests, and Chinese President Xi Jingping, with his Great Wall of Sand in the South China Sea.

After 1950, a new pattern would emerge in Asia, one that has lasted until today. It would divide the region into two camps, one made up of Communist dictatorships and their authoritarian successors like Vladimir Putin’s Russia, and the other of representative democracies allied with the United States, with Japan at their forefront. It seems a strange outcome in light of the role that Japan and China played in World War II, with the former America’s enemy and the latter’s Nationalist government its ally. Yet perhaps this new pattern is not so strange after all. As early as 1881, Douglas MacArthur’s father, General Arthur MacArthur, predicted in his “Chinese Memorandum” that two political principles would come to dominate Asia: the empire and the republic. One would be ruthless and autocratic, driven by the thirst for military power, wealth, and territory at any cost. The other would be based on democratic self-government and the rule of law, embodying a future based on commerce rather than conquest and military might.
In MacArthur’s mind, the world of empire was epitomized by czarist Russia; the republic, by the United States. In today’s Asia, it is easy to see the same dichotomy between the People’s Republic of China, on one side, and contemporary democratic Japan, on the other.

“It seems inevitable that the Empire and the Republic are destined to meet in Asia,” Douglas MacArthur’s father wrote. “The fate of the world, indeed of freedom, hang in the balance of which principle prevails.”

Which does ultimately prevail depends on many factors, not least the United States. But if past truly is prologue, then uncovering the “hidden history” of twentieth-century Asia holds many clues for understanding the course of events to follow.

In addition to my gratitude to our conference speakers and sponsors, special thanks go to Lewis Libby, my co-organizer and co-convener of the conference for his invaluable advice and assistance in making our enterprise a success, and to Ms. Idalia Friedson for her indispensable help in editing this collection of essays.

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8 MacArthur, American Warrior, 20.
Japan’s Response to the Shifting Global Order*

S.C.M. Paine, William S. Sims Professor of History and Grand Strategy, U.S. Naval War College

How did Japan, the model developing country of the early twentieth century, become the pariah state of Asia by 1945? The Industrial Revolution imposed a choice on Japan: modernization or Westernization. It chose the latter and then fought two sensational wars, the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905), but its leaders drew incorrect lessons. World War I and the Great Depression then destroyed the global political and economic order. Japan’s third war, the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931–1945), was a disaster for all concerned. The tragedy occurred not simply because of the more treacherous international environment, but also because the brilliant leaders of the Meiji period (1868–1912) left incomplete institutions and their successors forsook grand strategy to rely on a single instrument of national power, the military.

The following terminology will be used here: Joint operations entail army-navy coordination. Operational strategy, or the operational level of war, means what takes place on the battlefield. Grand strategy, or the strategic level of war, requires integration of all elements of national power and focuses on achieving national objectives. Military objectives are a means to reach national objectives, never an end in themselves.

Modernization vs. Westernization

The Industrial Revolution overturned the global balance of power. Its technological and institutional innovations—such as the development of steam power, iron smelting, textiles, insurance, banking, railways, telegraphs, steamships, and general staffs—together produced economic growth, something virtually unknown in traditional societies. Over several generations, the differences in wealth between those who industrialized and those who did not became enormous. A new and truly global world order arose, focused on setting the rules for international trade. This was catastrophic for traditional societies. Changes made far away suddenly put traditional societies on an unequal footing with industrialized countries.

When the West started playing gunboat diplomacy in Asia, the Japanese sent numerous fact-finding missions abroad to study the nature of the threat. They concluded that the origin of Western power was not simply military and technological (modernization) but also civilian and institutional (Westernization). They pointed to China’s unsuccessful strategy of resistance as a negative example, concluding that armed resistance would fail and that Japan must Westernize in order to modernize or remain an importer of state-of-the-art technology rather than a producer and ultimately an innovator.

* This chapter represents the thoughts and opinions of the author, not necessarily those of the U.S. government, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Navy Department, or the U.S. Naval War College. It is based on research for The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
The Japanese proposed a strategy based on a thorough net assessment of themselves, their region, and their threats. Since all great powers had large territories, often in the form of empires, they saw no reason why Japan should differ. Geography dictated that its empire would be on the Asian mainland, starting in Korea and encompassing Manchuria. They saw China, beset by internal rebellions and dysfunctional rule, as an emerging power vacuum that Russia appeared likely to fill. In 1891, Russia announced plans to build a Trans-Siberian Railway, which would overturn the regional balance of power when Russia could efficiently deploy troops where no one else could. Therefore, the Japanese concluded, they must preempt Russia in Korea before Russia dashed their plans for empire.

Japan implemented a two-phased grand strategy to become a great power capable of protecting its national security. Phase 1 focused on the Westernization of domestic institutions, while Phase 2 focused on a foreign policy to stake out an empire. Phase 1 included the elimination of feudal domains (1869); the introduction of compulsory elementary education (1872) and universal military conscription (1873); the creation of the army general staff (1878), the Bank of Japan (1882), Imperial Tokyo University (1886), and the Diet (1890); the introduction of a new criminal code (1882), a Western cabinet system under a prime minister (1885), a modern civil service examination (1887), a code of civil procedure (1890), and a reorganized court system (1890); and the promulgation of the Constitution (1889). The reforms eliminated any pretext for Westerners to treat Japan differently from a European power. Treaty revision with the reigning superpower, Britain, followed in 1894, and the other powers followed suit. No longer were Westerners exempt from Japanese law or allowed to set Japan’s tariffs. Prior to World War II, Japan was the only non-Western country that systematically Westernized.

Phase 2 began within ten days of treaty revision, with Japan firing the opening shots of the First Sino-Japanese War. When the Tonghak Rebellion, the largest peasant rebellion in modern Korean history, erupted, Korea called on China for help, and China happily reasserted its traditional suzerain role. Japan, however, used this as a pretext to intervene massively and begin empire building. The First Sino-Japanese War was composed of two pairs of key battles. The first pair occurred in a three-day period in mid-September 1894, when Japan defeated the Chinese at Pyongyang, expelling them from the Korean Peninsula, the original war aim. Meanwhile, Japan defeated the state-of-the-art Chinese navy in the Battle of the Yalu. This resulted in Japanese command of the sea because the Chinese avoided engaging the Japanese navy again. The second pair of battles occurred over the winter of 1894–1895, when Japan targeted the Chinese navy in order to influence the post-war regional balance of power. The Japanese army took the state-of-the-art fortress and naval refitting station at Port Arthur (Lüshun) by land, and the navy blockaded China’s remaining naval base at Weihaiwei, where joint forces destroyed the fleet trapped inside, ending Chinese naval power for the next century.

Domestically, the victory validated the controversial Westernization program and greatly enhanced the prestige of the military, especially the army. Regionally, Japan replaced China as the dominant power and began empire building with the acquisition of the Pescadores and Taiwan. So began the two-China problem. Internationally, Japan became
a recognized great power, as evidenced by its 1902 alliance with Britain. But victory brought Japan to Russia’s attention in a new light—as a rising power on its vulnerable Siberian frontier. An arms race ensued, and the focus of Russian foreign policy made an unprecedented shift from Europe to Asia. Russia decided to run the Trans-Siberian Railway, not along its side of the Amur River as it does today, but straight through Manchuria, in order to save on construction costs, to contain Japan, and to stake its claim to Manchuria.

When the Boxers launched a terror campaign in 1899 to expel Westerners from China, they tore up these railway lines, and Russia responded by deploying over 100,000 troops to defend the investment, occupying all of Manchuria in 1900. After a multinational force had suppressed the Boxer Uprising, Russia alone refused to withdraw its troops. Japan offered to negotiate a spheres-of-influence agreement recognizing Russian preeminence over Manchuria in return for Japanese preeminence over Korea. Russia procrastinated because it wanted Korea, too.

The Japanese responded by starting the Russo-Japanese War with a surprise attack on Port Arthur and a simultaneous troop landing in Korea, followed by a rapid march up the peninsula, crossing the Yalu River to move northwest into Manchuria. Three armies pushed inland. Japanese military strategy called for an annihilating battle, but one army and the navy remained fixed at the siege of Port Arthur to trap the Russian navy in port lest it interfere with sea lines of communication. By the final land battle at Mukden, Japan had run out of soldiers, while Russia kept reinforcing. However, a revolution had erupted in European Russia. In the decisive Battle of Tsushima, Russia lost its navy virtually in toto, and this loss had serious consequences domestically. Thus, exhaustion of different types forced both countries to settle.

Japan, in addition to achieving its original objective of forcing Russia to withdraw from Manchuria and gaining recognition of the Japanese sphere of influence in Korea, also acquired the southern half of Manchuria, with its expensive Russian railway concessions and naval base at Port Arthur, as well as the southern half of Sakhalin Island. The Russo-Japanese War confirmed not only the outcome of the First Sino-Japanese War, which had made Japan the dominant regional power, but also the value of Westernization. The problem of escalating Chinese instability, however, remained unresolved, and Japanese prosperity depended on trade with China.

**Flawed Lessons and Assessments**

Japanese officers drew lessons from their first two wars of Russian containment and applied them to the Second Sino-Japanese War with tragic results. First, they concluded that willpower was the trump card of warfare. How else to explain the victories of resource-poor and population-constrained Japan, first against Asia’s largest land power, then against Europe’s? The Japanese focused on how their soldiers’ indomitable willpower enabled them to overcome obstacles, such as Port Arthur’s fortifications in the Russo-Japanese War, rather than on the terrible costs of sending infantry up against barbed wire, entrenchments, and oncoming machine-gun fire—the hallmarks of the world war to come. The unsustainable cost of such assaults was the real lesson to be gleaned.
Faith in willpower led the Japanese to overlook the weapons systems they could not afford, to exaggerate the qualitative superiority of their personnel, to minimize the logistical problems associated with large theaters, and to discount the will of their enemy.

The Japanese drew even more dangerous false strategic lessons. First, they failed to appreciate the diplomacy necessary to transform battlefield success into strategic success, overlooking alliances, mediation for war termination, war loans, intelligence campaigns, public diplomacy, or careful adherence to international law to avoid triggering a third-party intervention. Instead, officers and citizens attributed their country’s strategic success exclusively to their military’s operational success. They credited their generals with winning the wars and their diplomats with losing the peace by not securing adequate post-war gains: the Liaodong Peninsula in the first conflict and an indemnity in the second.

Second, the Japanese did not perceive that China and Russia had been cooperative adversaries; that is, neither had capitalized on its own strengths, particularly its manpower and material superiority or its strategic depth, and both had employed flawed military strategies that failed to target Japanese weaknesses. Japan’s vulnerabilities included its essential sea lines of communication, relative manpower shortage, and increasingly over-extended landlines. Neither adversary deliberately contested river crossings or mountain passes to attrite Japan’s forces, nor did they deliberately draw the Japanese inland to fight on extended logistical lines. The Japanese failed to perceive these sins of omission—what the enemy had failed to do. They also missed the domestic problems overwhelming their adversaries—rotting imperial institutions and a growing revolutionary movement that constrained both. If either had studied the lessons of these wars—as defeated countries commonly do—then Japan could have expected much more competent enemy strategists in the future.

Japanese leaders also made an irretrievable error in self-assessment that produced a cascade of undesired and undesirable consequences. At issue was whether Japan was a maritime or a continental power. Vice Admiral Satō Tetsutarō (1866–1942), president of the Naval War College, whose published lectures made him among Japan’s most influential naval officers, wrote: “Among the Powers in the world, there are only three countries that can defend themselves primarily with navies. They are the UK and the US and Japan.” He believed that given Japan’s gift of geography, its status as an island state, it should not maintain a large, expensive army. Field Marshal Yamagata Aritomo, army chief of staff during the Russo-Japanese War and president of the Privy Council thereafter, disagreed. He coined the term “absolute lifeline” to describe Manchuria’s vital security relationship to Japan. With the outbreak of World War I, these visions for empire expanded into an Asian Monroe Doctrine, outlined by General Terauchi Masatake (1852–1919), then governor general of Korea. Just as U.S. President James Monroe had informed the great powers in 1823 that they had better stay clear of Latin America, increasing numbers of Japanese favored making East Asia their exclusive preserve.

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In 1927, Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929) called for Manchuria’s and Mongolia’s detachment from China, guaranteeing Chinese hostility. General Tanaka, formerly Japan’s war minister, argued fatefuly that Japan should “free itself from previous conditions of being an island and develop its national future as a continental power.” He did not consider the advantages of being an island defended by nature from attack with an oceanic moat. Nor did he examine his country’s economy, which depended on trade. Trade required peace, not war. Japan could not even feed itself.

Admiral Katō Tomosaburō (1861–1923), who served as navy minister (1915–1923) and prime minister (1922–1923), perceived the economic prerequisites for military power. He had argued that “national defense is not a monopoly that belongs to military men . . . no war can be fought without money.” He saw the United States as Japan’s only potential adversary, but warned against war. “Even if we would match the U.S. in terms of military power . . . where would we get the money? The U.S. is the only country from which Japan can borrow money . . . Thus, war with the U.S. is simply impossible.” In the fall of 1941, Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi (1889–1975), head of the Naval Aviation Bureau, circulated a memo explaining that war with the United States was unwinnable: Japan lacked the capacity to occupy the U.S. capital, let alone the country’s expansive territory, or to blockade its long coastlines, while the United States could do all this to Japan. Admirals Satō, Katō, and Inoue were on the losing side of the army-navy debate as well as the losing side of the debate within the navy.

The navy’s Fleet Faction and the army’s continental-power futurists won the political debate through strategic assassinations. The Fleet Faction rejected attempts to economize on its budget, sign naval arms-limitation treaties, or compromise with China, so its supporters assassinated accordingly: Prime ministers Hamaguchi Osachi (1931) and Inukai Tsuyoshi (1932); Admiral Saitō Makoto (1936); and finance ministers Inoue Junnosuke (1932) and Takahashi Korekiyo (1936), both of whom had dared to suggest that the army’s preferred plans were financially unfeasible.

Officers in the 1930s misidentified their country as a continental power. Continental and maritime powers face different security problems that have far-reaching military, economic, and political ramifications. Continental powers border on their historic enemies and most dangerous threats, so they require large standing armies, which they often deploy preemptively to garrison surrounding buffer zones. Large standing armies can have a palpable presence in the capital, where they frequently exercise great political influence in favor of economic policies that fund the army, produce conscripts, efficiently exploit buffer zones for military purposes, and therefore gravitate toward state planning. These preoccupations can lead to an operational focus for national strategy.

Maritime powers have an oceanic moat, precluding an easy invasion. Therefore, they do not need large standing armies. Instead, their comparative security allows them to focus on trade, wealth accumulation, and economic growth. Those with political influence often favor institutions that promote wealth creation, which then funds a large navy to prevent

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2 Cited ibid., 304–5.
3 Cited ibid., 221–22.
invasion in the event of war and to protect the sea lines of communication necessary for the wealth-producing trade. The linkages among trade, wealth, and navies make such countries gravitate toward grand strategy.

A maritime national security strategy rests not on fighting on the main front but on outlasting the continental adversary, which cannot avoid the main front, often located on its territory, where it fights at great cost to its army and economy. A maritime power leverages its geographic and naval strengths to deny continental enemies world markets through naval blockade and commerce raiding. A maritime power also leverages its economic strength to fund continental allies, forced by geography to fight on the main front. Sanctuary at home and access to global markets puts time on the side of maritime coalitions, whose economies grow, while those of their continental rivals suffer.

In modern times, maritime powers have tended to have many allies. This is because the maritime global order favored by sea powers is a positive-sum order focusing on the pursuit of economic growth, which all members can share. It is based on freedom of navigation, free trade, and a growing body of international law and set of international institutions to regulate the communications, transportation, and diplomacy that trade requires.

In contrast, continental powers typically have few friends because theirs is a negative-sum global order based on the domination of territory. Traditionally, continental powers have sought national security through the destabilization, partition, domination, and absorption of neighbors and have promoted a world order based on exclusive spheres of influence. Wealth came from territorial confiscation, but the fighting damaged the disputed territory so that the loser’s loss exceeded the winner’s gain, producing a negative sum. Continental empires were highly effective until the Industrial Revolution made wealth creation far more lucrative than territorial confiscation, and the advent of nationalism made local peoples much more resistant to outside domination.

The decision to follow the army’s inclination to act as if Japan were a continental power was a gross strategic error. Japan’s officers soon lost sight of grand strategy and tried to conduct foreign policy through a single instrument of national power: the military. Before long, they equated operational success with strategic success, with disastrous consequences.

**Implosion of the Regional and Global Order**

The army-navy debate occurred in the context of a collapsing global order resulting from World War I and the Great Depression. World War I eliminated entire nations and gravely weakened most survivors. The resulting Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, bringing the Communists to power, added an ideological dimension to Japan’s rivalry with Russia. Japan feared the spread of Communism, which appealed to its own intellectuals and workers and also to neighboring China and Korea. The Bolsheviks immediately funded Communist parties all along their border as well as a number of parties and warlords in China. The Japanese could not see how their country could prosper if China remained wracked with civil war, let alone if it went Communist.
China had been a failed state since the 1911 Revolution overthrew its last dynasty and ushered in a half century of civil war. Three revolutions followed in rapid succession, in 1911–1912, 1913, and 1916. The warlords of North China then eviscerated each other in a series of coalition wars (1920, 1922, 1924, 1925, and 1925–1926). This opened an opportunity for the reunification of China from the south when General Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist armies launched the Northern Expedition (1926–1928). But his unification was only nominal, and he faced repeated coup attempts (1929, 1931, 1933, and 1936) and a major war (1930) within the Nationalist coalition. He also faced a growing Communist challenge and launched repeated encirclement campaigns (1930, 1931, 1932–1933, and 1933–1934) that finally expelled Communist forces from south China on the Long March to the desolate north. The endemic warfare created a national security problem for Japan because of fears concerning which foreign state might fill the power vacuum and fears about the debilitating effects on Japanese investment and trade.

The regional environment became treacherous in other ways. In World War I, Japan had taken over the Asian markets vacated by the warring European powers. Its economy had boomed at the cost of severe inflation, producing rice riots in 1918. At war’s end, European demand for Japanese goods disappeared, and the Europeans reclaimed their Asian markets, triggering a depression in Japan a full decade before the Great Depression. In 1923, the great Tokyo earthquake destroyed the capital.

A key lesson of the Great Depression was never to let the global economy collapse because war will follow when the poor become desperate. With the U.S. stock market crash, the West erected trade barriers to favor domestic producers, but instead caused trade to implode globally. The collapsing regional and global order left Japan in dire straits. Its investments were concentrated in Korea and China, its two most hostile neighbors, where Russian Communism had far more appeal than Japanese imperialism. Protectionism undermined the rationale for Japan’s long-standing cooperation with the West. The military took over with a program of self-sufficiency through expanded empire. The army falsely accused China of blowing up tracks of Japan’s Manchurian railway system as a pretext for invading Manchuria on September 18, 1931, then rapidly occupying the entire region, whose area exceeded that of France and Germany combined.

The Chinese lacked the conventional forces to resist and employed a combined guerrilla warfare, economic, and diplomatic strategy. Those living in occupied areas waged an insurgency, while citizens throughout the country boycotted Japanese goods, costing Japan its most important market. The anti-Japanese movement centered in Shanghai, which Japan soon attacked. Meanwhile, the Chinese government petitioned the League of Nations, which ordered Japan to withdraw, but Japan instead withdrew from the League and the world order that went with it to pursue an Asian Monroe Doctrine. The United States declared Japan in violation of international law, resulting in a U.S.-Japanese Cold War.

Japan rapidly transformed Manchuria into an essential source of war materiel by establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo, turning chaos into order, and making enormous infrastructure investments. The Japanese economy recovered, while the non-
fascist West lingered in the Depression and the rest of China churned in the endless civil war. The army credited its strategy of empire with engendering Japan’s economic success and so kept invading southward, fueling a countervailing Chinese nationalism. In August 1940, Japan made the program regional by declaring a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, ostensibly to free Asia from the Western powers.

Japan’s economic recovery and return to full employment and capacity in 1935–1936 came a full decade ahead of the U.S. recovery. It coincided with the final term of Takahashi Korekiyo (1854–1936) as finance minister from 1931–1936. The success of his reforms has led some to call him Japan’s John Maynard Keynes after the renowned British economist who devised expansionary fiscal policies to counter the Great Depression. Takahashi abandoned the gold standard, devalued the yen to foster exports, expanded the money supply and deficit spending to fuel domestic consumption and government spending, funded public works projects, tried to limit military spending, favored cooperation with the West, opposed the dismemberment of China, and promoted Chinese economic development.

He also warned that continued army interference in diplomatic and economic decision-making precluded grand strategy and cautioned the army against empire and futile attempts at self-sufficiency. In 1935, he predicted that there would be debilitating inflation if it tried. Concerning Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, he asked, “If a country increases its empire and puts money into it, how big a profit is it going to have?” and added: “Until the profits come in, the home country has to carry [the colony].”4 After restoring the economy to prosperity, he tried to cap military budget increases. Although military spending remained steady at 6.55 percent of GNP from 1933–1935, it grew from 27 percent of the government budget in 1931 to 46 percent in 1936.5 Takahashi resisted this trend and was one of the last civilian policymakers to speak truth to power.

On February 26, 1936, soldiers assassinated him as part of the largest army uprising in modern Japanese history, the so-called Young Officers’ Revolt. The rebels occupied key government buildings and also assassinated the inspector general of military education and the lord keeper of the privy seal. Henceforth, the army ruled Japan, and it soon changed the limited policy objective in China of requiring official recognition of the puppet state of Manchukuo to the unlimited policy objective of regime change for Chiang Kai-shek.

Events in Europe were also spiraling out of control. Japan’s successful development of Manchuria posed a problem for Russia that became acute with Adolf Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. Joseph Stalin suddenly faced virulent anti-Communists on two fronts where he wanted others to fight for him. On November 24, 1936, Japan and Germany signed their Anti-Comintern Pact to combine forces against Russia. The Comintern, short for Communist International, was the Soviet organization promoting Communist parties globally. For several years, both the Chinese Communists and Nationalists had secretly

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5 Ibid., 268, 274, 294.
requested military aid from Stalin to fight Japan. Russia, however, had not been interested until the Anti-Comintern Pact caused a rapid change of heart.

Within the month, Russia brokered a truce in the long Chinese Civil War so that the Communists and Nationalists would join forces against Japan, which promised massive retaliation if they did so. All sides made good their promises at the next skirmish, on July 7, 1937, which rapidly escalated into a war engulfing central and south China. Stalin’s script worked beautifully in Asia, where the Chinese bogged down Japan so that a Japanese-German two-front war on Russia never materialized. Both the Chinese Communists and the Nationalists had expected Russia to send troops as well as military aid, but it did not. Once they were in, Russia was out.

**Incomplete Institution Building**

In the 1930s, Japan faced a far more difficult international environment than the Meiji generation had: the cooperative adversaries were gone, the neighbors were angry, the new fascist friends were preoccupied, the economy was crumbling, and a brilliant generation of leaders had died. During the Meiji period, approximately nine key leaders set policy. They were the founding fathers of modern Japan, known as the genrō (or original elders). Despite their successes, they disagreed on institutionalizing their status in the Constitution, and as a result, it did not mention them. It also lacked articles specifying the jurisdictions of the cabinet or the prime minister, which gave them flexibility while they lived but left a void after they died. As they succumbed to mortality—half died within a decade of the Russo-Japanese War—they could not bequeath their prestige to their successors to manage this system.

Prince Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) was the preeminent civil leader and Marshal Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922) the foremost military leader of the Meiji generation. Itō authored the Constitution, while Yamagata established the army. They repeatedly disagreed over strategy but compromised. Yamagata outlived Itō by fourteen years and used those years to infiltrate the government with his protégés. Itō and his followers favored civilian control over the military, party prime ministers, foreign policy in cooperation with Britain and the United States, and a constitutional monarchy ruling through the House of Representatives. The military favored military rule on the basis of imperial prerogatives, non-party cabinets, eventually cooperation with the Axis, national economic mobilization, and day-to-day rule through the War Ministry.

By the time of Yamagata’s death, his consistent appointments over a lifetime had skewed government institutions in favor of army domination and the narrow perspective of the next generation of officers, who unlike Yamagata, had neither broad educations nor broad career experience in non-military institutions. Itō had always focused on the economic underpinnings of power: Japan required stable, productive neighbors both to further trade and to prevent a hostile power from invading. The army fixated on the operational means of military occupation and operational ends of killing those who resisted, with ever less understanding that these operational ends and means fueled Chinese and Korean hatred, making it impossible to achieve the strategic end of protecting national security.
Yamagata’s institutional legacy left the military accountable only to one man, a figurehead emperor isolated in his palace and under the thumb of the Imperial Household Ministry.

The passing of the genrō had far-reaching implications. The Meiji generation left no institutional mechanism to force civil and military leaders to integrate all instruments of national power, the numerous non-military prerequisites for and consequences of military operations: finance, production, commerce, and diplomacy. Officers marginalized civilians. In addition, there was no institutional mechanism to force army-navy coordination. Victories in the First Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars had depended on joint operations. Army and navy leaders had understood the critical needs and capabilities of the other. Personal contacts had made joint operations possible. In the straitened economic environment of the 1920s, the two services became bitter enemies in the struggle for the largest share of the budget and lost sight of the essential fact that the military is a means for national policy and not an end.

In the post-genrō era, each ministry had an internal career path closed to outsiders. The most narrowly focused career track was that of officers. Over time, army officers increasingly dominated cabinet positions, closing down the diversity of the stovepipes. The simultaneous appointment of General Tōjō Hideki (1884–1948) as prime minister (1941–1944), war minister (1940–1944), home minister (1941–1942), foreign minister (1942), education minister (1943), and industry minister (1943) exemplified process stovepipe. The army owned it all.

When the genius generation died, grand strategy died too. Japan was down to one instrument of national power, the military, and the false belief that operational success equals strategic success. The bad math had tragic consequences for Japan’s neighbors, who still have neither forgotten nor forgiven those who invaded their homelands. One-quarter of China’s population (94.5 million) became refugees.6 Millions died. Millions more starved across Asia. Without the Great Depression, Japan’s institutions might have had the time to mature. As it was, they were insufficient for the far more challenging post-Meiji international environment. As Japan’s experience shows, foreign policy requires grand strategy. Those who rely on a single instrument of national power court disaster.

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The Turning Points of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations

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Abe’s 2015 Statement Marking the End of World War II

In 2015, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe issued a statement marking seventy years since the end of World War II. He noted that the Manchurian incident was an important turning point in modern Japanese history. After the incident, Japan changed for the worse and challenged the anti-war and anti-colonial approach of the Western powers. Abe’s statement read as follows:

With the Manchurian Incident, followed by the withdrawal from the League of Nations, Japan gradually transformed itself into a challenger to the new international order that the international community sought to establish after tremendous sacrifices. Japan took the wrong course and advanced along the road to war.

Such recognition of Japanese history was not seen in the 1995 statement by Prime Minister Murayama marking fifty years since the end of World War II or the 2005 statement by Prime Minister Koizumi marking sixty years, which recognize 1945 as the crucial turning point in Japanese history. In those statements, Japanese history after 1945 appears to be viewed positively and associated with peace and economic development, but modern Japanese history before 1945 is evaluated negatively and associated with aggression and war. Abe’s statement does not deny the history of Japanese aggression and expresses remorse, but it sets the turning point of 1931 in modern history. Actually, the report of the Advisory Panel on the History of the 20th Century and on Japan’s Role and the World Order in the 21st Century, the advisory board for Abe’s statements, suggested that the turning point of Japanese modern history should be set in 1931.

In the context of modern East Asian history, 1931 is indeed one of the most important turning points. However, for Koreans, Japan’s 1910 annexation of Korea is the most important turning point in modern Korean history, and thus the South Korean media strongly criticized Abe’s statement. For Taiwan, 1895, 1945, and 1947 are crucial points, as 1895 and 1945 are the starting and ending years of Japanese rule, and 1947 is the year that the 228 incident took place. In this incident, so many Taiwanese intellectuals were killed by the Guomindang (GMD, or Chinese Nationalist Party) that this has come to symbolize the split between the Taiwanese and the Chinese who came to Taiwan with the GMD.

Historical Turning Points of Modern Sino-Japanese Relations

What about relations between China and Japan? It is true that 1931, the year the Manchurian incident took place, is one of the most crucial turning points for Sino-Japanese relations. Some scholars see it as the starting point of a fifteen-year war (some say fourteen) between Japan and China. The starting point of the Second Sino-Japanese War is generally considered to be 1937, when the Marco Polo Bridge incident took place. In addition to 1931 and 1937, there was a series of crucial turning points in modern Japan-China relations that involved colonial Korean and Taiwanese history.

The starting point for modern Sino-Japanese relations is 1871. In that year, the Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty was concluded, and this bilateral relationship was defined by a modern treaty.

The First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Treaty of Shimonoseki in 1895 are also an important turning point. The treaty changed Chinese-Japanese bilateral relations from equal to unequal, and it is a symbol of the start of a power shift in East Asia. It is so important to modern Japanese history because it made Japan into a colonial empire. For the Qing dynasty, losing the war stimulated intellectuals and officials to feel the dynasty’s crisis.

In addition to the Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty in 1871, the two Sino-Japanese wars, and the Manchurian incident in 1931, Sino-Japanese relations had a crucial turning point in the 1910s. After World War I broke out, Japan joined the war and together with Britain, attacked Germany’s naval base at Qingdao, China. Japan also made the so-called twenty-one demands of Yuan Shikai, president of the Republic of China (Beijing government), in order to keep and expand its special interests in Manchuria, along with other interests. Japan’s behavior, including its aggression and the twenty-one demands, aroused Chinese nationalist sentiment so strongly that anti-Japanese movements became widespread in China. This was the turning point in creating a much more negative view of Japan among the Chinese.

This paper describes the turning points in modern Sino-Japanese relations and explores the reasons for and results of the changes in each historical context in order to consider historical issues, including differing memories of events in Japan and China.

1871: The Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty

In the 1860s, the Tokugawa shogunate started negotiations with the Qing dynasty to open up trade and open a consulate general in Shanghai. Two ships, the Senzaimaru and the

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12 Recently, the Chinese government changed the description of the war in history textbooks for elementary and junior high schools. Originally, the textbooks said that 1937 was the start of the war, but the new description has the war starting in 1931 and also adds six years to it length, changing it from eight to fourteen. Javie C. Hernández, “China, Fanning Patriotism, Adds 6 Years to War with Japan in History Books,” New York Times, January 11, 2017.

Kenjunmaru, took Japanese envoys from Nagasaki and Hakodate to Shanghai. At that time, the Tokugawa shogunate was faced with a new problem with international trade and finance. It had received a number of interests in the Nagasaki monopoly trade under its management and control before opening the ports at Nagasaki, Yokohama, Kobe, and Hakodate in 1859, but then the trade monopoly was ended, and Western and Chinese traders received trade interests as well. Chinese merchants in particular had direct access to the product region, Ezochi (Hokkaido), for dry seafood, and transported goods to Shanghai directly. As a result of the negotiations, the Qing government permitted Japan to trade and to open the consulate general in Shanghai at last. However, the Tokugawa shogunate was defeated in the Meiji Restoration.

After the Meiji Restoration, in 1871, Japan concluded the Sino-Japanese Amity Treaty at the initiative of Li Hongzhang. This treaty, the starting point of modern Sino-Japanese relations, was the first “equal” treaty for Japan and China, enabling each to enjoy extraterritorial rights in the other. Qing’s consuls also enjoyed consular jurisdiction in Japan.

However, this “equality” must be interpreted in historical context. First of all, during negotiations for the treaty, Qing took the initiative, so most of Japan’s proposals were not accepted. This showed Qing’s real superiority over Japan. Secondly, while the treaty was seemingly equal, the sixth article stated that traffic documents had to be written in Chinese or Japanese with Chinese translation. This showed that Chinese was the main language for traffic between Japan and China. Thirdly, the Qing government did not believe it was giving any benefits to Japan. On tribute relations, Qing provided some privileges with tribute countries in exchange for their tribute polite on the ceremony. On the other hand, Western countries enjoyed some special rights, such as extraterritorial rights, in China, which were determined by treaties, but Japan did not. Thus, Japan received no privileges from the Qing government, and its status was at a low point from Qing’s point of view.

In the 1870s and 1880s, Chinese and Korean intellectuals and officials did not have a favorable view of the Meiji Restoration. They recognized that Japan had adopted a policy of hasty Westernization, and that a series of problems, like samurai rebellions and budget issues, had occurred. In the 1880s, Matsukata’s financial reform and other policies made the situation more stable, but Japan was still struggling to build a modern state.

In 1880, Qing retained its superiority over Japan in the Korean Peninsula. It remade relations with Korea, keeping the tribute principle, but concluding a new “agreement” that changed the trade system in a way that opened Chinese concessions in Korea and allowed China to enjoy extraterritorial rights there. Korea did not have such privileges in China, so these relations were interpreted not only as tribute relations, but also as unequal relations in the context of modern international relations. In Japan, Fukuzawa Yukichi or his student wrote “Datsu-A Ron” in 1885, arguing that Japan had to “leave Asia.” This text

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was recognized as a symbol of Japanese imperialism, but recently it has been reinterpreted as a symbol of Japan’s inferiority in the Korean Peninsula.\footnote{On Fukuzawa’s “Datsu-A Ron” see Yo Hirayama, \textit{Fukuzawa Yukichi no Shinijitsu} (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2004).}

At that time the Beiyang Fleet, the Qing’s navy, was superior to the Japanese navy. The Nagasaki incident, an 1886 riot involving Qing soldiers from the fleet, showed China and Japan’s unequal military status. Japan was unable to effectively oppose Qing, even though Japanese policemen were killed and injured by Qing’s sailors. This incident strongly aroused Japanese public opinion. It is actually difficult to say that Qing was the old, corrupt empire, while Japan was a Westernized, modern state. Qing also enhanced its power and adopted a “modern” foreign and military policy.

1895: The First Sino-Japanese War and the Shimonoseki Treaty

In the Meiji period, Japan sought to become a Westernized country and enacted several western-styled laws and the Imperial Constitution in 1889. The Imperial Diet met for the first time in 1890. Through state building, Japan intended to revise unequal treaties with Western countries. China, on the other hand, basically recognized that tribute relations were the main arena of foreign relations.

Japan built a modern army and navy based on officers and conscripted soldiers starting in the 1870s, as a replacement for the samurai. The Japanese army adopted the divisional system in 1888 to replace the domestic security system. In addition, the navy increased the number of vessels in its possession and enhanced their capabilities in the 1880s and 1890s.

The First Sino-Japanese War began in August 1894, caused by friction on the Korean issue and by a Japanese attack on the Korean royal palace on July 23, 1894.\footnote{Charles Denby, U.S. minister to Qing, said that he could not find a specific reason for the timing of Japan and China’s war. Charles Denby, \textit{China and Her People: Being the Observations, Reminiscences, and Conclusions of an American Diplomat}, Vol. I (Boston: L. C. Page, 1906), 122–126.} Qing declared war before Japan, on August 1\textsuperscript{st}, in 1894. But Japanese navy had already made a surprise attack on Qing’s navy at offing of Fengdao Island. The Liaodong Peninsula, Yellow Sea, and Bo Sea were the main battlefields, and Japan sent its navy to the Pescadores (Penghu) Islands in 1895, when Japan and China were planning to negotiate a peace treaty. The treaty was concluded at Shimonoseki in April 1895.

After the treaty was concluded, Sino-Japanese relations became unequal. Japan was allowed to enjoy some of the same privileges as Western countries in China, such as extraterritorial rights, tariff autonomy, and most-favored nation treatment. Before the war, Japan had successfully revised the unequal treaty with Britain on extraterritorial rights. From Japan’s point of view, it was very important to become a colonial empire. Japan began ruling Taiwan and the Pescadores and adopted an autonomous system of rule. The governor-general of Taiwan had supreme power over military, administrative, and judicial matters. From China’s perspective, this was an important tuning point, since it meant that China and Taiwan experienced different modern histories. This was also the
origin of Taiwan’s split from China in 1949. For Taiwan, it laid the foundation for an identity based on a specific historical experience different from the Chinese experience.

The result of the war spurred Chinese intellectuals and officials to create a strong, modern state. After the war, China was faced with a crisis of division by western powers establishing leased territories and spheres of influence. Social evolution theory was very popular in China at that time. In 1898, younger officials and the Guangxu Emperor instituted the Wuxu bianfa, meaning reforms. However, the reform movement lasted for only three months because Xi Taihou and other high-ranking officials opposed such hasty reform.

The Boxer Rebellion in 1900–1901 and the Beijing Protocol in 1901 were both very significant turning points in modern Chinese history, because Qing adopted a policy of modernization and started building a modern state. The powers had a common policy of retaining Chinese independence and unification, supporting China’s policy of modernization, and abandoning unilateralism on getting any interests in China. In this sense, Japanese policy toward China was similar. Though Japan won the war in 1895, this did not herald the start of a split with China.

During the 1900s and final 10 years of the Qing dynasty, more than 10,000 Chinese students studied law, politics, and other subjects in Japan. They experienced modernity and absorbed a series of concepts that had been translated from Western languages into Japanese. Then Chiang Kai-shek and several hundred students studied at the Japanese army’s preparatory schools and military academy. Chinese students were conscious of nationalism, and Tokyo became an important base for Asian political activists like Sun Yat-sen. In that decade, the concept of the Middle Kingdom (zhongguo) as a sovereign state was formed gradually, which was different from the concept of Qing as a dynasty. In that sense, Japan provided some examples of modernity to young Chinese intellectuals and for them, and also became their original image of a modern state.

In the period between the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, Japanese nationalism emerged strongly. Sentiment toward Russia in particular was negative because of Russia’s opposition to Japanese rule in the Liaodong Peninsula, which began in 1895. Japan returned the peninsula to China under pressure from Russia, Germany, and France. After the Beijing Protocol in 1901, the powers basically withdrew their troops from China, but Russia failed to withdraw them from Manchuria. Russian policy on Manchuria aroused nationalist sentiment in Britain, Japan, and China. Russia was opposed to cooperative relations among the powers in China. Japan made an alliance with Britain in 1902.

In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War broke out, and most Chinese officials and intellectuals supported Japan’s efforts to recover Manchuria. However, Japan then replaced Russia as the occupier. Japan was dominant in the war, so it did not receive an indemnity in the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. It took pride in its victory, as Asia’s representative to the West and as the representative of a constitutional country to a despotism, yet the result was deeply traumatic for the Japanese, especially the army, which later was unable to relinquish the Manchurian interest acquired by heavy sacrifices in the war.
At the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan became more aggressive toward Korea in an attempt to receive diplomatic rights, and in 1910, annexed it. Through victory in the Sino-Japanese War and the First Russo-Japanese War, Japan became a colonial empire, and the Meiji Restoration was also viewed positively by neighboring countries.

1915: Japan’s Twenty-One Demands of China

In the 1911 Revolution, several political groups in China, including a revolutionary party, were active. Some of groups were supported by Japanese. The Japanese government maintained a policy of cooperation with the other powers both before and after the revolution and gave financial support to the Yuan Shikai government in Beijing. Japan recognized the Beijing government in 1913, and the ROC government succeeded in treaties that Qing had concluded. From the diplomatic point of view, then, the 1911 Revolution was not actually a revolution, but a government transition.

After World War I broke out in 1914, Japan joined the Entente powers, using the Anglo-Japanese alliance as a pretext, and attacked German territories and the German military base in Qingdao. China claimed neutrality in the war, which meant that it did not go to war with either side and that Chinese territory was a neutral area for both sides. Japan, however, negotiated with China to set the battlefield in the Shandong Peninsula, and accessed it in the war with Germany. Before the attack on Qingdao, Japan told China that its purpose was only to return Qingdao and other German interests to China. This, however, was a false assurance.

In January 1915, the Japanese government made twenty-one demands of President Yuan in order to consolidate the Manchurian interests Japan had acquired in the Russo-Japanese War and retain the Shandong interests if possible. These demands were the symbol of the new Japanese policy toward China. Firstly, the Japanese acted unilaterally and did not consult with the other powers about some of the articles in the demands. This violated the principle of shared action by the powers on China after 1901. As a result, Japan lost credibility among the powers. Secondly, from the Chinese perspective, Japan became the symbol of foreign aggression against China and a hostile target of Chinese nationalism. The May Fourth movement was one of the most typical trends of the time.

The Japanese government, feeling the pressure of Chinese nationalism, supported Duan Qirui through the Nishihara loans and other means. The powers, however, did not commit to these policies. On issues to do with China, the powers did not agree with Japanese unilateralism, but Britain and France also had a series of sensitive issues in the Middle East and other regions, so they could not be entirely critical of Japan.

However, Prime Minister Takashi Hara (1918–1921) and Minister of Foreign Affairs Kijuro Shidehara (1924–1927) adopted a modest and cooperative policy with the powers, especially Britain and the United States, abandoned unilateralism on China, and

17 In the process of the Xinhai Revolution, Britain played a very important role in getting the northern and southern governments to compromise. However, Japan did not know this, though it was an ally of Britain. At that time, Japan also started to explore its own independent policy toward China.
relinquished the Shandong interest in 1922. They did not use military power in China and intended to expand Japan’s economic commitment to the country, particularly in the spinning industry. In 1923, when the Great Kanto Earthquake occurred, significant donations were sent from China, but some Chinese laborers in Japan were killed on the pretext of maintaining security.

The Washington system was also formed through Hara and Shidehara’s diplomacy. In Japanese domestic politics, liberalism gradually prevailed under Taisho democracy. Generally speaking, the policy adopted by Prime Minister Shigenobu Okuma in 1915 was different from Hara and Shidehara’s cooperative diplomacy. On the other hand, from the Chinese point of view, Japanese aggression continued from the 1910s to the 1920s, although Okuma’s military aggression and Hara’s economic aggression were different. Chinese academia does not hold a positive view of Taisho democracy.

In the 1920s, Chinese provincialism was strong. The Beijing central government was bankrupt in 1922–1923, and the GMD held its first national congress in Guangzhou in 1924 with CCP members. Sun Yatsen died in 1925, and in 1926, Chiang Kai-shek started the Northern Expedition. The Japanese government adopted an approach of watchful waiting. In 1927, during the Northern Expedition, the Nanjing incident occurred, and Japanese diplomats and their families were assaulted. The incident aroused Japanese public opinion and conservative groups, and the news was exaggerated by the Japanese media. Partly as a result, Shidehara’s policy was strongly criticized. The new prime minister, Gi’ichi Tanaka, then adopted a more aggressive policy toward China, and on three occasions Japan sent troops to disrupt the Northern Expedition. Chiang started writing “clear shame” at the beginning of each day’s diary entry. Japanese interference with the Northern Expedition, along with the Jinan incident, in which Japanese troops killed a number of Chinese, including officials, symbolized Japanese aggression to the Chinese.

1931: The Manchurian Incident

Chiang Kai-shek successfully completed the Northern Expedition and attacked Beijing, unifying China in 1928. Marshal Zhang, the final leader of the Beijing government, left Beijing for his base in Fengtian (Mukden) in Manchuria, but was killed by the Kwantung Army, which intended to control the region. However, Zhang Xueliang, Marshal Zhang’s son, supported Chiang at the end of 1928.

Chiang’s slogan of “revolutionary diplomacy” under the Northern Expedition exerted strong pressure on Japanese interests in China, especially in Manchuria, as well as on the Soviet Union. Actually, the GMD government succeeded in recovering tariff autonomy

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18 In the late 1910s, the Japanese spinning industry, faced with a series of problems such as increasing wages, moved to China and opened factories there. The Japanese spinning industry in China was called zaikabo (“spinning industry in China” in Japanese). The May 30 incident in Shanghai in 1925 took place in a zaikabo factory. The Chinese labor movement’s strike there was the beginning of the incident.

19 The phrase of “clear shame(xuechi in Chinese)” means that China defeat Japan and recover its negative history. Chiang’s diaries are available at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. See the China Times, June 23, 2016, http://www.chinatimes.com/realtimenews/20160623004545-260417.
and protected Chinese enterprises that supported it, but it basically accepted to the treaties and agreements that Qing and the Beijing government of the Republic of China had concluded. “Revolutionary diplomacy” was just a slogan for the new government, but it was so attractive for Chinese nationalism that Japan felt strong pressure from it. In addition, the development of Stalin’s Soviet Union was a threat to the Kwantung Army and to Japan’s Manchurian interests.

In 1930, when the Great Depression affected the Japanese economy, the problem of violation of the emperor’s Supreme Command in Japan arose. After that, the Japanese Diet could not touch military budgets. In 1931, the Kwantung Army suddenly occupied all of Manchuria along the railway, and in 1932 it built Manchukuo. Chiang did not resist Japan militarily, but he did criticize Japan in the diplomatic arena: China claimed that Japan had violated the articles of the Nine-Power Treaty of 1922; Japan violated the League of Nations charter. At that time, China was a non-permanent member of the League of Nations Council and claimed it. The League of Nations decided to send the Lytton Commission to East Asia. After the Lytton Report was submitted to the League, the representatives discussed this matter and came to the conclusion that China had sovereignty over Manchuria, which meant that Manchukuo had to be dismantled. This did not please Japan, which decided to withdraw from the League of Nations. Some scholars have pointed out that this was the symbol of Japanese isolation in the world, but others say that Japan’s action was intended to prevent the problem from expanding. At that time, many countries left the League of Nations with the reason of some issues. In the same month in which Japan decided to withdraw from the League, Japan and China concluded the Tanggu Truce, which brought the Manchurian incident to an end.

After the Tanggu Truce, Japan expanded to northern China militarily, so Japanese aggression did not end in 1933. However, Chiang had a strategy of giving priority to sweeping the CCP and local war lords in order to prepare a war against Japan.

In Japan, there are two kinds of explanations of the process of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Some scholars propose the concept of a “fifteen-year war,” meaning that Japan made war on China, the United States, and others from 1931 to 1945. Such scholars criticize the idea of a “Pacific war” —that Japan waged war against the United States, Britain, and others from 1941 to 1945. Other scholars emphasize the importance of the Tanggu Truce, which ended the Manchurian incident, and deny that the war continued from 1931 to 1945. It is true that the truce ended the Manchurian incident, but Japanese aggression toward northern China continued after 1933.

From 1933 to 1937, Japan and China explored peace, but neither could find reliable negotiation partners. After the Xi’an incident in 1936, Chiang was requested to start a war with Japan by Zhang and CCP. On July 7, 1937, the so-called Marco Polo Bridge incident took place, but neither China nor Japan recognized that this was the start of war. However, a series of small conflicts took place around Beijing after the incident. Japan

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20 Shunsuke Tsurumi was the first scholar to propose the concept of “the fifteen-year war.” Shunsuke Tsurumi, “Chishikijin no senso sekinin” [The war responsibility of intellectuals],” Chuo Koron, January 1956.
mobilized its army, and China attacked Japanese residents and Japan’s navy at Shanghai on August 13.

Japan underestimated the Chinese army and had a difficult fight. It took four months for Japan’s army and navy to reach Nanjing. The Nanjing massacre is now the symbol of the Sino-Japanese history problem. The Chinese government asserts that more than 300,000 were killed, but the Japanese government says merely that “many” people died. Most textbooks introduce this incident and the controversies around it, or just say “many” people died.

After the Japanese occupation of Nanjing, the GMD government moved to Chongqing via Wuhan to continue the war against Japan, but neither Japan nor China made a declaration of war, partly because neither liked the application of the U.S. Neutrality Act. Japan explored the possibility of peace and created puppet states as a device to conduct negotiations with China. In 1938, Prime Minister Konoe gave it up to explore the chance to negotiate with China for peace. He built the new central government of the Republic of China in Nanjing, which was organized by Wang Jing-wei. Japan conceived of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and did not declare war against China until the end of the war.

In 1939, World War II began in Europe. Japan was worried about a linkage between the Sino-Japanese War and World War II, but Chiang desired it. However, Japanese aggression toward French Indochina in 1940, intended to cut off supply lines to Chiang in Chongqing, created a linkage to World War II. The Allies supported Chiang from Burma and provided him with a loan. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and declared war on the United States and Great Britain, and on the next day, Chiang declared war on Japan. That apparently showed the linkage between the two wars. Chiang’s China joined the Allies and Chiang attended the Cairo Conference as the top Asian leader.

**Turning Points and Historical Memories**

Generally speaking, Japanese historians place importance on many choices at those times. At each turning point, decisions were made under some conditions at that time. On the other hand, Chinese historians tend to see history as the result of inevitability. From their point of view, Japanese aggressions against China were a historical inevitability because Japan is small and its resources limited. Sino-Japanese history is illustrated as a single track in China, with no choices.

It is understandable that such historiography has prevailed because China won the Sino-Japanese war, which strengthens its legitimacy on the subject of the war. Japan was the loser, so the Japanese find it necessary to consider and analyze each turning point of the history. The historical narrative of Sino-Japanese relations differs greatly between Japan and China, but there are amounts of academic exchanges for exploring common history.
The dialogues among historians are actually quite fruitful, but it is very difficult to have dialogue among societies and governments.\footnote{The report from a joint Chinese-Japanese historical study undertaken from 2006 to 2009 was incomplete, and thus media articles pointed out the differences between Japan and China. See Shin Kawashima, “The Three Phases of Japan-China Joint-History Research: What Was the Challenge?,” trans. Haruna Minoura, \textit{Asian Perspective} 34, no. 4 (2010): 19–43. The papers from the joint study can be viewed at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/pdfs/jcjhrr_mch_en1.pdf.}
Japanese Termination of the Pacific War: The Significant Causal Factors of the "End of War"

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In World War II, the principle of unconditional surrender, declared in January 1943 at the Casablanca Conference, made termination of the war far more difficult. Indeed, Germany kept on fighting until Berlin fell and it truly had to surrender unconditionally. In contrast, Japan laid down its arms by accepting the Potsdam Declaration before the “decisive battle for the Home Islands” began.

As epitomized by the title of a Japanese TV program, “The End of War: Why Couldn’t It Have Been Decided Earlier?” (NHK special, aired on August 15, 2012), previous studies in Japan have mainly focused on analyzing what delayed Japan’s surrender, even after it was clearly militarily defeated. Analysts have attributed the delay to political leaders’ belief that a more favorable peace could be attained if the enemy could be dealt one final blow, or to political leaders’ expectations of Soviet mediation, as well as to problems with Japan’s political system. There is heated debate to this day on the primary cause of the war’s termination: Was it the dropping of the atomic bombs, the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, or both?22

In order to address the question of why Japan took an approach quite different from Germany’s toward termination of its war, this paper shall examine the background and factors that brought about Japan’s political surrender, while taking into consideration recent studies. It analyzes: 1) Japan’s war objectives; 2) Japan-U.S. relations; and 3) the military factor, specifically, the gap between Japanese and American perceptions of an American invasion of the Japanese Home Islands.

Japan’s War Objectives

The imperial conference convened on June 8, 1945, approved the “Basic Policy for the Future Direction of the War.” The Japanese army’s original draft, reflecting its hardline policy of resisting to the very end, stated that “the Japanese Empire will prosecute the war to the end in order to preserve the national polity and protect the imperial land (the Home Islands), and thereby secure the foundations for the further development of the race.”23

The basic policy adopted read as follows: “With the belief in giving seven lives for the country as its inspiration and based on the strength of its advantageous geographical

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23 Jun Eto, Ken Kurihara, and Sumio Hatano, eds., Shusen Kosaku no Kiroku (Ge) [The records of the engineering of the termination of the war (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Kodansha Bunko, 1986), 140–41.
position and the unity of its people, the Japanese Empire will prosecute the war to the end in order to preserve the national polity and defend the imperial land, and thereby, accomplish the objective of the military expedition.” The first half took into account domestic considerations for the upcoming convocation of the Imperial Diet, while bearing in mind the wishes of the army. Nevertheless, the basic policy was undeniably a major disappointment for peace advocates.

As a compromise measure, the cabinet inserted the following clause into the basic policy: “to preserve the national polity and defend the imperial land, and thereby accomplish the objective of the military expedition.” As a result, Japan’s war objectives, which until then were “self-sufficiency and self-defense” and “building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” were limited to “preservation of the national polity” and “defense of the imperial land.” This had two important meanings for Japan’s approach to termination of the war. First, it came to be understood within the cabinet that Japan would attain its war objectives if the “national polity” and “imperial land” were preserved, especially the former, and that the war would have been fought to its completion. Prime Minister Kantaro Suzuki later stated, “This had considerable implications. I believed that the policy enabled the first steps to be made in our efforts towards the termination of the war.”

This understanding was echoed by Hisatsune Sakomizu, chief cabinet secretary, who was behind the drafting of the basic policy. He later wrote, “The cabinet interpreted it to mean ‘if the national polity is preserved and the imperial land is defended, then the objective of the military expedition would be achieved.’ The cabinet understood the basic policy as providing an orientation towards the end of the war.”

The army, while agreeing to limit Japan’s war objectives, had a different notion from that of the cabinet. For example, an army officer and aide to Army Minister Korechika Anami wrote that attaining “one blow, certain victory” in a battle for the Home Islands was the optimum means for actively achieving the major objective of “preservation of the national polity,” which was at the heart of concluding the war. He went on to say that “the key to achieving peace lies in whether or not the national polity is preserved.” Whereas Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo and others intended to ensure “preservation of the national polity” through diplomatic negotiations before the Home Islands were invaded, the army felt that it could be ensured only by dealing one major blow and attaining certain victory in a battle for the Home Islands.

Strategic Surrender: The Politics of Victory and Defeat is a classic work on the termination of war by Paul Kecskemeti of the RAND Corporation, published in 1958. The book undertakes theoretical analyses of the forms of war termination, comparing the experiences of Japan, Germany, and Italy. Kecskemeti notes that “the loser may decide to quit because he feels that his core values will not suffer, even if the winner has his way.

24 Ibid., 170.
26 Hisatsune Sakomizu, Shusen no Shinso [The truth of the end of the war] (Self-published, 1955), 34–35.
completely and permanently.” Because Japanese leaders arrived at a shared understanding that Japan’s core value, preservation of the “national polity,” was a war objective, guidelines for realizing the termination of the war became clearer. The question was how to achieve this objective—through military force or negotiations?

Secondly, the principle of “building the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” underscored at the Greater East Asia Conference in 1943, was eliminated from Japan’s list of war objectives, and this served to further facilitate termination of the war. In other words, as long as a principle such as the building of a co-prosperity sphere was a war objective, compromise between the two sides was difficult, and therefore, it was likely that the war would be fought to the bitter end.

A basic policy with such landmark significance was approved in the following circumstances. First, Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. This absolved Japan from the need to continue showing good faith towards Germany by observing the Axis Pact and refraining from a separate peace that had been used as an argument against such a separate peace with the Allies. Second, as it became increasingly apparent that Japan was losing the battle in Okinawa, for which expectations had been high, there was growing momentum for pursuing an immediate peace rather than making peace after striking the enemy a severe blow.

For example, according to the recently declassified Showa Tenno Jitsuroku [Annals of Emperor Showa], which is the biography of former Emperor Showa compiled by the Imperial Household Agency, Foreign Minister Togo reported on April 30, 1945, on measures that Japan would take following Germany’s collapse, and in response, the emperor expressed his “hopes for an early end to the war.”

Germany’s war was of a different nature from Japan’s. It was a “war of annihilation” (Vernichtungskrieg) in which the survival of the race and an ideology was at stake. Because it was founded on a powerful principle, or ideology, it was a war of victory or destruction, and peace through compromise was out of the question.

This kind of ideology surfaced in an extreme way in the last stage of the war. In March 1945, with defeat imminent, Adolf Hitler issued his famous Nero Decree and adopted a scorched earth policy involving the destruction of all assets in German territory. In Hitler’s words, “If the war is lost then the nation will be lost also . . . because this nation has shown itself the weaker. The future belongs exclusively to the stronger nation from the East.” In other words, Hitler felt that the weaker race did not deserve to exist any

31 For a recent work discussing the characteristics of Nazism and war, see Richard Bessel, Nachisu no Senso 1918–1949: Minzoku to Jinshu no Tatakai [Nazism and war], trans. Akira Oyama (Tokyo: Chuko-Shinsho, 2015).
longer and should suffer the same fate as the defeated nation itself. Hitler’s desire for
death and destruction was ultimately directed at Germany itself, that is, at the
annihilation of Germany.\textsuperscript{32}

Incidentally, in the emperor’s second “imperial decision,” made during a meeting of the
Supreme Council for the Direction of the War on August 14, 1945, he stated: “Continuing
the war will result in the whole nation being reduced to ashes. I cannot endure the thought
of letting my people suffer any longer... Compared to the result of losing Japan
completely, we can at least hope for reconstruction as long as some seeds remain.”\textsuperscript{33} This
decision is symbolic of the differences between the Japanese and German political
situation and political leaders at the time.

**Japan-U.S. Relations**

Second, I focus on the factors underlying Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration,
namely, the so-called “moderates” in Japan and the United States, as well as the
“relationship of trust” that existed between Japan and the United States even when they
were adversaries.

In Japan, certain groups sought peace between their country and the United States from
early in the war. For example, on the very day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, former prime
minister Konoe Fumimaro said to his aide, “We will lose this war. I order you to study
how Japan shall lose. It is the job of politicians to conduct this study.”\textsuperscript{34} In January of the
following year, 1942, Konoe stressed to Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal Koichi Kido that the
timing of the termination of the war should be considered as quickly as possible. On
February 5 of that year, Kido advised the emperor that “the Great East Asia War will not
be terminated easily. Ultimately, the quickest way to peace will be to fight the war to the
end, including constructive efforts. Meanwhile, it will be necessary to grasp any
opportunity to achieve peace as quickly as possible.” On February 12, the emperor stated
to Prime Minister Hideki Tojo, “While I realize that adequate considerations are being
paid not to lose the opportunity of terminating the war, for the sake of humanity and
peace we should not prolong the war and needlessly increase the heavy damage
inflicted.”\textsuperscript{35}

The tide of the war subsequently turned against Japan. Thus, from around the summer of
1943, key figures came together to promote efforts to end the war, under the leadership
of a number of former prime ministers, including Konoe and Keisuke Okada. Other
persons involved included navy officers, such as Mitsumasa Yonai and Sokichi Takagi;
army officers from the Imperial Way faction; and Shigeru Yoshida, a diplomat. This

\textsuperscript{32} Sebastian Haffner, *Hitora toua Nanika* [The meaning of Hitler], trans. Tatsuo Akabane (Tokyo:

\textsuperscript{33} Kainan Shimomura, *Shusen Hishi* [The secret history of the end of war] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu
Bunko, 1985), 140.

\textsuperscript{34} Kataritsugu Showashi: Gekido no Hanseiki (3) [Stories of the history of the Showa period: A
tumultuous half century (3)] (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1976), 304.

\textsuperscript{35} Kido Nikki Kenkyukai, ed., *Kido Koichi Kankei Bunsho* [Documentation relating to Koichi Kido]
movement first evolved as a campaign to overthrow the Tojo cabinet and resulted in the entire cabinet’s resignation.

In addition, recent research indicates that even among mainstream army officers, whose views had been seen as monolithic, there were groups that aimed to achieve peace quickly. Many of these officers were assigned to the War Direction Section of the general staff.\(^{36}\)

In Germany there was sporadic resistance, including the July 20, 1944, assassination attempt against Hitler. However, partly because many anti-Nazi Germans were in exile, such as Willy Brandt, who later became prime minister, Germany lacked a wide range of groups or movements in the political mainstream that explored ways of achieving peace to avoid a catastrophe, as occurred in Japan. Nor was there a movement within the German army that attempted to forestall the ultimate defeat. At the same time, the United States continued to refuse all German requests for a partial or localized surrender and repeatedly demanded a complete and immediate unconditional surrender.\(^{37}\)

As for the Americans, the so-called “pro-Japanese” officials played a significant role. An example is State Department official Joseph C. Grew, who formerly served as under secretary of state. In speeches delivered across the United States, Grew explained that “moderates” or “liberals” existed in Japan, and that if the militarist clique were overthrown and the moderates or liberals placed in charge of the government, Japan could be rebuilt into a country that collaborates with the international community. Grew argued that the emperor was on the side of moderates and liberals and defended the imperial system. Furthermore, Henry L. Stimson, secretary of war, lauded Kijuro Shidehara, Reijiro Wakatsuki, and others as progressive politicians who had stood up to the militarist clique and promoted the sound development of Japan.\(^{38}\)

During the war, these officials had an enormous impact on policymaking and moderated U.S. policies toward Japan. An example is a memo titled “Conditions for Japanese Surrender” adopted by the Post-War Programs Committee of the State Department in November 1944. The memo essentially stated that according to the terms of surrender, support would be provided to democratic and moderate persons who remained in Japan and that the occupation forces would stand ready to assist with the country’s democratization. This varied significantly from the hardline stance in the United States that sought severe measures, including eradication of the imperial system. The pro-Japanese judged that it would be preferable to occupy Japan while collaborating with and making use of the moderates who remained in the country, and that an occupation would be more in line with American national interests.\(^{39}\)


\(^{38}\) For the activities of the pro-Japanese officials, see, for example, Makoto Iokibe, Nichibei Senso to Sengo Nihon [Japan–U.S. war and post-war Japan] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gakujutsu Bunko, 2005) and Akira Iriye, Nichibei Senso [Japan–U.S. war] (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Sha, 1978).

\(^{39}\) Iriye, Nichibei Senso, 261–63.
Furthermore, these people were heavily involved in drafting the Potsdam Declaration, and as a result, paragraph 10 states, “The Japanese Government shall remove all obstacles to the revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies among the Japanese people. Freedom of speech, of religion, and of thought, as well as respect for the fundamental human rights shall be established.” The words “revival and strengthening of democratic tendencies” reflected the perception of the pro-Japanese officials.

Diplomatic historian Makoto Iokibe has called the extensive efforts made by these pro-Japanese officials “good fortune in the midst of defeat,” bestowed on Japan unexpectedly. Kecskemeti notes, “There were well-informed and intelligent people in policymaking positions whose knowledge of Japanese conditions enabled them to hit upon the right approach. Thus American surrender policy avoided what would have been the worst of the disasters towards which the cult of ‘unconditional surrender’ was pressing.”

While no direct channels of negotiation existed between Japan and the United States, information on the activities of the moderates and others in the United States reached Japan. For example, Konoe, in his famous statement to the emperor in February 1945, wrote: “To date public opinion in Great Britain and United States has not gone so far as to favor a change of the national polity. (Of course, a part of public opinion is radical, and it is difficult to predict how opinion will change in the future.)” Asked what he thought about the army chief of general staff’s view that the United States would demand the elimination of the imperial family, Konoe responded that the Americans’ goal was to overthrow the militarist clique of Japan, and that “it seems the United States would not go that far, based on the views of Grew and the American leadership.” It was intelligence collected by the Public Affairs Bureau and other branches of the Foreign Ministry that formed the basis of this view.

This sort of Japanese intelligence significantly influenced Japan’s acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration. In response to the declaration, issued on July 26, 1945, and followed by the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, the Suzuki cabinet issued an emergency telegram on August 10. It stated that the cabinet accepts the declaration “with the understanding that the said declaration does not comprise any demand which prejudices the prerogatives of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler.”

The United States issued the following reply by Secretary of State James Byrnes: “The authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied powers.” Japan received this reply on August 10, and opinion within the government was divided over how to interpret it and how to respond: accept the terms, ask for further clarification, or continue with the war.

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40 Iokibe, Nichibei Senso to Sengo Nihon, 189.
41 Kecskemeti, Strategic Surrender, 210.
A recent study has revealed that at this critical time, intelligence from neutral countries, including Sweden and especially Switzerland, played an important role in communications between senior Japanese and U.S. officials regarding “preservation of the national polity.”

For example, the study notes that the report titled ‘Potsudamu’ Sangoku Sengen ni kansuru Kansatsu [observations concerning the trilateral “Potsdam” Declaration], prepared based on European intelligence and submitted to Foreign Minister Togo, recognized that the declaration affirmed Japanese sovereignty, used the phrase “unconditional surrender” in relation to the Japanese military, and did not refer to the imperial family and the national polity. On this basis, the report contended that the declaration had taken into consideration maintaining Japan’s honor and adopted a stance considerably different from that taken toward Germany.

Furthermore, the study refers to the telegram from the minister to Sweden, Suemasu Okamoto, which arrived in Japan on August 13. The telegram described local news reports claiming that the United States had won an “American diplomatic victory” by successfully overriding opposition from the Soviet Union and other countries and forcing them to accept continuation of the imperial system. Based on his analysis of these news reports, Okamoto concluded that the essence of Japan’s terms had been accepted. The study notes that this was also communicated to the emperor and Prime Minister Suzuki and affected subsequent developments.

Shunichi Matsumoto, vice minister of foreign affairs, had the following notion: “As we had imagined, the United States took our request, and, despite considerable opposition, considered and indirectly approved it by wording it differently.” The vice minister handed the telegram to Suzuki and requested its immediate acceptance. At a time when opinion was divided over the response to Byrnes’s reply and Suzuki himself was wavering, the effect of such information was not negligible.

In any event, as a result of these developments, the emperor, in his second decision issued to the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, commented that “while it is natural that we have some concerns about our counterpart’s attitude, I do not want to doubt it.”

Before and after making this comment, the emperor attempted to assuage the strong concerns expressed by Army Minister Anami about the American reply, saying: “Do not worry, Anami, I have conclusive proof” (August 12), and “Anami, I fully understand your concerns.”

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43 Tetsuo Arima, “Suisu Chohomo” no Nichibei Shusen Kosaku: Potsudamu Sengenwa Naze Ukeirarentanoka [Japan-U.S. end of war efforts relating to the “Swiss espionage network”: Why was the Potsdam Declaration accepted?] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2015).
44 Ibid., 251–54 and 273–76.
46 Shimomura, Shusen Hishi, 140.
feelings, but I am confident that I can preserve the national polity” (August 14). These remarks suggest that the emperor had obtained some evidence through intelligence and other sources.

Moreover, it cannot be ignored that the emperor and Suzuki had a certain amount of trust in the United States, and therefore, interpreted the information they had acquired positively. At the cabinet meeting on August 13, Suzuki stated in regard to Byrnes’s reply: “From rereading it over and over, I sense that the United States did not write it with evil intent. We have different national situations. We also have different views. I believe that it will not essentially change the Emperor system. We should not object to the wording.” Suzuki’s stance “in effect signified his trust in the ‘good intentions’ of the American leaders in regard to the preservation of the national polity.”

In his second decision issued to the Supreme Council, the emperor stated, “I understand that there are various doubts regarding the issue of national polity. However, based on the meaning of the text of this reply, I take it that our counterpart has good intentions.” A historian has noted that indeed, “The judgments of Suzuki and the Emperor were strongly supported by a simple trust in the United States and Americans.”

A well-known example of Japan’s trust in the United States is the country’s reaction to the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Suzuki expressed his condolences, saying, “I must admit that Roosevelt’s leadership has been very effective and has been responsible for the Americans’ advantageous position today.” The prime minister went on to say, “For that reason I can easily understand the great loss his passing means to the American people and my profound sympathy goes to them.” In contrast, Suzuki did not send a congratulatory telegram five days later on the fifty-sixth birthday of Hitler, the leader of Germany, Japan’s ally.

The Nazi leadership, on the other hand, was delighted to hear the news of Roosevelt’s death, believing that it would bring about a turning point in the war. Hitler is said to have issued a statement asserting that “fate has taken from us Roosevelt, the greatest war criminal in history.” Thomas Mann, a German writer in exile in the United States at the time, wrote, “Japan is now at war with the United States with life and death at stake . . . In that oriental country, there still exists a spirit of chivalry and a sensitivity to human dignity. It still reveres a person who has died and reveres a person of great character. These are the differences between Germany and Japan.”

This episode illuminates the differences between the Japan-U.S. relationship of trust and the German-U.S. relationship at the time. Diplomatic historian Akira Iriye writes in the

49 Shimomura, Shusen Hishi, 128.
51 Shimomura, Shusen Hishi, 140.
52 Hatano, Saisho Suzuki Kantaro no Ketsudan, 224.
54 Ibid., 149–50.
conclusion to his book about the Pacific War, *Nichibei Senso* (the Japan-U.S. War, translated as *Power and Culture*): “Since the 19th century, Japan and the United States had similar fundamental postures and roles. For that very reason, notwithstanding the fact that the two countries were in an extreme adversarial wartime relationship, the transition to the postwar Japan-U.S. relationship was made relatively smooth by returning to the previous form.”

By the way, the preamble to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty refers to a desire “to strengthen the bonds of peace and friendship traditionally existing” between Japan and the United States.


Third, I consider the contrasting Japanese and American perceptions of the military significance of the “decisive battle for the Japanese Home Islands,” codenamed Operation Ketsu by the Japanese and Operation Downfall by the Americans. From around spring of 1945, about the time Germany was defeated, the emperor began to show great interest in a battle for the Home Islands. For example, the *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* records that on May 9, after listening for more than an hour to a report from the army’s chief of general staff, Yoshijiro Umezu, the emperor “communicated the Imperial General Headquarters Army Order (to the relevant commanders) to the effect that they shall facilitate the execution of the Battle for the Home Islands.”

Although the emperor inquired about the actual state of preparations for defending the Home Islands, he failed to receive a clear-cut explanation from the army. He thus actively attempted to grasp the situation by a number of means, including by sending his aides-de-camp to inspect Togane and Katakai, the beaches in the vicinity of Kujukurihama, on June 3 and 4.

On June 9, Umezu returned from an inspection of Manchuria and gave a pessimistic report to the emperor: Japan’s troop strength in Manchuria was only equivalent to eight U.S. divisions, and Japan had only enough ammunition for a single battle. On hearing this report, the emperor began to believe that “as the forces in the homeland are far less well equipped than the forces in Manchuria and China, there is no way they could fight.”

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56 For a study that analyzes the relationship between the emperor and the end of war in the context of the decisive battle for the Home Islands, see Tamon Suzuki, “Showa Tenno to Nihon no ‘Shusen’” [Emperor Showa and Japan’s “end of war”], in *Kokusai Kankyo no Henyo to Seigun Kankei* [Transformation of the international situation and civil-military relations], ed. Shinichi Kitaoka, (Tokyo: Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2013).
57 The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* (9), 663.
The report therefore became one of the factors heightening the emperor’s anxieties regarding the end of the war.\(^59\)

Admiral Kiyoshi Hasegawa, who had been sent to strategic areas in Japan as a special inspector general of fighting power assets, briefed the emperor on June 12. Hasegawa reported that because of a lack of weapons, shortage of equipment, and inadequate training, the forces at the anticipated fronts could not possibly fight a battle for the Home Islands. As an example, Hasegawa explained that the small boats that were to be utilized as suicide attack weapons were hastily built, installed with used car engines, and operated by inadequately trained personnel. The emperor was astonished and commented, “I can fully imagine.”\(^60\)

At around the same time, Prince Morihiro Higashikuni informed the emperor that not only the coastal defense forces, but also the combat divisions, were insufficiently supplied with weapons, and that shovels were being made with iron salvaged from bombs dropped by the enemy. Based on this information, the emperor “confirmed that war was impossible.”\(^61\)

On June 13, the emperor was notified of the “honorable death” of the navy’s garrison in Okinawa, and on June 14 and 15, he fell ill and did not make any public appearances.

According to the *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku*, on June 20, the emperor told Foreign Minister Togo “that he desired an early termination of the war.”\(^62\) On this occasion, the emperor stated that “based on the recent reports of the Chief of the Army General Staff, Chief of the Naval General Staff, and Admiral Hasegawa, it has become clear that our operational readiness in China and in the Japanese homeland is inadequate for a war,” adding, “Please proceed to terminate the war as quickly as possible.”\(^63\)

On June 22, at a meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War convened by the emperor, he once again requested that peace be made swiftly, stating, “A decision regarding the directing of the war was examined by the Imperial Conference that was held earlier. I desire that concrete plans to end the war, unhampered by existing policy, be speedily studied and that efforts be made to implement them.”\(^64\)

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\(^{59}\) Takashi Ito, ed., *Sokichi Takagi Nikki to Joho* (Ge) [Sokichi Takagi: Diary and information (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobo, 2000), 885–86.

\(^{60}\) Statement by Kiyoshi Hasegawa in Motoei Sato and Fumitaka Kurosawa, eds., *GHQ Rekishika Chinjutsuroku: Shusenshi Shiryo* (Ge) [GHQ History Division’s deposition records: End of war archive (Vol. II)] (Tokyo: Hara Shobo, 2002), 569–70.


\(^{62}\) The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* (9), 705.


The series of reports on a battle for the Home Islands had a significant influence on the emperor’s perception. Many historians note that these reports led him to abandon the idea of making peace after dealing the enemy a severe blow and to shift instead to pursuing a swift peace.65

Meanwhile, the army continued to call for the “honorable death of 100 million” and with continued confidence, insisted on a “battle for the Japanese Home Islands.” At the meeting of the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War held on August 9, shortly after the atomic bombings and the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, Togo asked, “Are you confident that you can prevent the enemy from landing in the Japanese homeland?” Umezu responded, “If it goes extremely well, we can even repel the enemy. Because it is a war, however, it is hard to conceive that it will definitely go well. While we will concede some landings, I am confident that we can inflict severe casualties on the enemy during their invasion.”66 The army, while recognizing that ultimate victory was impossible, continued to hang on to a thread of hope.

Nevertheless, in his first decision issued to the Supreme Council, on the same day, the emperor stated, “You keep talking about decisive fighting for the Home Islands, but the defenses at the most important area, Kujukurihama, have yet to be completed. In addition, the divisions that will be involved in this battle are inadequately equipped, and it is said that their equipment will not be complete until after mid-September... Your plans are never executed. Given that, how can we win the war?”67 The emperor thus mentioned the incomplete preparations for the battle for the Home Islands, and not the atomic bombings or the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War, as reasons for accepting the Potsdam Declaration. He added, “What would happen if we were to plunge into the Battle for the Home Islands in this condition? I am very worried. I think to myself, will this mean that all the Japanese people will have to die? If so, how can we leave this nation, Japan, to posterity?”68 Incidentally, the Showa Tenno Jitsuroku records the following comment by the emperor: “I often hear that the Army is confident of securing victory. But plans are not matched by their execution, and with the insufficient state of defenses and weapons, there is no prospect that we will win against the U.S. and British forces that boast mechanical strength.”69

This comment caused Army Major General Tatsuhiko Takashima, chief of staff of the Twelfth Area Army and the Eastern Command Headquarters, who was entrusted with defense of the Kanto area, to feel responsible for the reference to the Twelfth Area Army’s “biggest shortcoming,” in other words, the lack of defensive preparations at Kujukurihama. He responded: “The Battle for the Home Islands is just a ‘house of cards,’

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66 Togo, Jidai no Ichimen, 357.
67 Kidô, Kido Koichi Nikki (Gekan), 1223–24.
69 The Imperial Household Agency, Showa Tenno Jitsuroku (9), 754.
as is symbolized by the defensive positions at Kujukurihama.” Conversely, the army general staff frequently inspected the defenses in various areas in preparation for the battle for the Home Islands. According to its reports, not only were the fortifications, supplies, training, and logistics supplies inadequate, but even the spirit of decisive fighting was lacking. Thus, in reality, the general staff also recognized the difficult situation.

It is noteworthy that in this decision issued to the Supreme Council, as noted above, the emperor expressed his distrust of the military, stating that the actions of the army and navy commands were not in line with their plans, and giving as an example the preparations for defending the Home Islands. Additionally, the emperor noted that since the outbreak of the war, there had been significant discrepancies between the “plans and results” of both the army and the navy. With regard to the defense of Kujukuri, the emperor said, “In fact, what my aides-de-camp later told me after seeing the site is very different from what the Chief of the Army General Staff told me. I understand that most of the defenses are incomplete.”

These remarks sent shock waves through the army leadership. Torashiro Kawabe, deputy chief of staff of the army, wrote in his diary, “The imperial decision was issued. In short, His Majesty has no expectations for Japan’s future operations.” Kawabe went on to say,

I am afraid His Majesty did not arrive at this view as a result of the debates during the Imperial Conference. That is to say, His Majesty has no expectations for Japan’s future operations. In other words, His Majesty has no trust in the military... It was an expression of his increasing distrust in the military. This distrust was directly expressed by His Imperial Highness the Emperor.

Shuichi Miyazaki, chief of the First Bureau, General Staff Office, wrote in his diary, “A day of great misfortune. What humiliation.”

In effect, the emperor’s distrust of the army, which he made explicit for the first time in connection with preparations to defend the Home Islands, was one of the reasons he accepted the Potsdam Declaration. This had a greater effect than military reasons in encouraging the army, especially its general staff, to give up on the war. While admitting that Japan was defeated militarily, the army had asked for an opportunity to strike the enemy somehow. However, the emperor’s distrust severed all hope.

71 See, for example, War History Office, Senshi Sosho Daihoney Rikugunbu <10>, 247–53, 310–16, 376–77.
72 Sakomizu, Dainihon Teikoku Saigo no Yonkagetsu, 207–8.
74 War History Office, Senshi Sosho Daihoney Rikugunbu <10>, 453.
Incidentally, according to the *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku*, shortly before the emperor issued his second decision to the Supreme Council on August 14, he summoned army marshals Hajime Sugiyama and Shunroku Hata as well as navy marshal Admiral Osami Nagano and asked for their views. Hata opined that regrettably, there was no guarantee that Japan could repel the enemy, and that acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration was inevitable. Both Sugiyama and Nagano responded, “The military still has strength remaining, and its morale is strong. Based on these, it should be able to resist and resolutely repel the invading U.S. Forces.”

This shows that the idea of resisting to the very end was deeply ingrained in the military. Consequently, the looming reality of the battle for the Home Islands and the divergent views of the emperor and the army decisively influenced the process of war termination, in a manner similar to the shock of the atomic bombings and the Soviet Union’s entry into the Pacific War.

On August 12, the emperor called the entire imperial family to the Imperial Palace and explained the reasons for his first decision issued to the Supreme Council: the depletion of national strength from the prolonged war, successive defeats, aerial bombings, and “circumstances that do not lead me to believe that the military would be victorious in the Battle for the Home Islands.”

For the United States, on the other hand, despite Japan’s poor and incomplete preparations for a battle for the Home Islands, potential human losses presented a major issue as the launch of Operation Downfall approached. In other words, Japan’s residual force and anticipated suicidal attacks were threats to the United States. Furthermore, the severity of the battles for Iwo Jima and Okinawa and the cost to the United States due to Japanese military resistance—the death or injury of an estimated 35 percent of the American forces committed—provided a significant disincentive to proceeding with the invasion.

On June 18, 1945, President Harry S. Truman convened a meeting at the White House to consider Operation Downfall and its expected casualties. At the meeting, opinion was divided, especially regarding the estimated number of deaths and injuries. William D. Leahy, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and others noted that nearly 35 percent died or were injured in the Battle for Okinawa, and forecasted that Operation Downfall would result in a similar death toll. Accordingly, they were reluctant to undertake the operation and advocated easing the terms of unconditional surrender to minimize casualties. Meanwhile, George C. Marshall, army chief of staff, was more optimistic. In the end, the meeting approved Operation Olympic (an invasion of Kyushu) one of the operations planned under Downfall, and decided to put on hold Operation Coronet (an invasion of the Kanto Plain), the other operations under Downfall for the time being.

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75 The Imperial Household Agency, *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku* (9), 765.
On July 2, Secretary of War Stimson submitted a memorandum to President Truman to explain the purpose of the draft Potsdam Declaration. Referring to the fierce fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, he noted, “If we once land on one of the main islands and begin a forceful occupation of Japan, we shall probably have cast the die of last ditch resistance.” For this reason, Stimson advised that the United States should strive for the prompt and economical achievement of its objectives, by presenting conditions to Japan.78

Of course, at the time, the various U.S. government departments each had their own widely varying projections of the number of deaths and injuries from Operation Downfall. A number of recent studies based on newly released historical records have higher casualty estimates.79

For example, Edward J. Drea states that because of ULTRA, the cryptographic intelligence on the Japanese military, American forces were aware of the Japanese military’s reinforcements in southern Kyushu. Drea notes that this led to a sharp rise in the U.S. estimate of the number of American deaths and injuries, raising concerns about the operation among U.S. authorities.

Richard B. Frank asserts that on a monthly basis, the U.S. forces would have incurred record high numbers of war casualties from invading Kyushu.

In any case, U.S. concern about the military cost of an invasion of the Japanese Home Islands led the United States to reconsider its demand for Japan’s unconditional surrender, and ultimately, the war ended with Japan accepting the Potsdam Declaration.

Kecskemeti writes, “Our theoretical analysis implies that strong residual capabilities on the losing side are apt to produce a substantial ‘disarming’ effect on the winning side by inclining the winner to make political concessions to the loser as incentives for surrender.” Kecskemeti notes that potential battles in Japan that would reflect Japan’s geographical advantages as an island country, the Japanese military’s residual capabilities, and Japan’s extreme will to resist were regarded as grave threats by the United States, which was unlike the situation in Germany and Italy in the final stage of the war. He believes that these things thus served as valuable assets for Japan to obtain political concessions from the United States in the transactions and negotiations on its surrender.80

Military historian John Ferris notes that Japanese assets and combat that caused heavy casualties to U.S. forces in the Pacific theater “did achieve some political objectives. [Japan’s] defeat achieved a victory of a kind.”81

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78 Iokibe, Beikoku no Nihon Senryo Seisaku (Ge), 192.
80 Kecskemeti, Strategic Surrender, 158, 210, 220.
Aside from these military considerations of cost-effectiveness, other factors served as incentives for reconsidering Operation Downfall. They included war weariness in the United States stemming from the defeat of Germany, the primary enemy, and the resulting termination of the war in Europe; and remorse over the destruction brought about by the final stage of the war against Germany, where the German homeland became the battlefield.

**Conclusion**

Had decisive fighting taken place on the Home Islands, there would have been even greater loss of life for Japan and the United States. Moreover, Japan’s urban areas and countryside would have been devastated, and Japan would likely have been put under direct foreign rule and conceivably been partitioned like Germany. Japan, however, was able to avoid this tragedy by terminating the war more quickly than Germany, that is, before decisive fighting on the Home Islands began. This is perhaps the reason why Japan calls the termination of the war the “end of war” or “defeat in war,” while postwar Germany refers to the end of its war as “liberation” (from Nazism) or “defeat” (collapse).

Incidentally, the notion that Germany was “liberated” was introduced by German president Richard von Weizsäcker in his famous address to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the war’s end. The president identified May 8, 1945, as the day of “liberation” from Nazism, and this view has now become widespread.  

For Japan, on the other hand, termination of the war literally signified the “end of war.” The war was terminated through military “defeat,” accompanied by difficulties and sacrifice, even though Japan had agreed to the disadvantageous unconditional surrender. The Potsdam Declaration stated that the representatives of the United States, China, and Great Britain “have conferred and agree that Japan shall be given an opportunity to end this war.”

Of course, in the war against Germany in the European theater, there was a complex interaction among the military objectives and interests of many countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, but Japan’s situation was more favorable than Germany’s. As noted by diplomatic historian Sumio Hatano, “The war to be concluded was not a war staged in China or Asia; it was the Japan-U.S. war that came down to a contest of military strength.”  

As this paper has discussed, the limiting of war objectives, the existence of a relationship of trust, and the considerations concerning a battle for the Home Islands were all matters that concerned only Japan and the United States. This prevented the political situation from being further complicated and made termination of

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the war relatively easy. Furthermore, there were pro-Japanese officials in the United States (and moderates that could support them in Japan). In addition, even others, including U.S. policymakers and military personnel, had to factor in the human cost of war, having seen the fierce resistance of the Japanese military in the last stages of the war. In turn, the United States called for revisions to the policy of unconditional surrender from the perspective of both “trust” and reasonableness.
Popular Nationalism and the Rise of Mao as China’s Superhero*

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This paper attempts to search for the linkage between popular nationalism, arguably one of the most important foundational trends in twentieth-century Chinese politics, and the emergence of Mao Zedong as China’s charismatic leader, who ruled the country single-handedly for a quarter century. According to the most popular song in China during the Mao years, “The East is red, the sun is rising; From China comes Mao Zedong, he strives for people’s happiness, he is people’s great savior.” In the late 1950s, in order to divine the Chairman’s next political move so that the apparatus of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) could follow him closely, the politburo decided to bug his private train and residence. When Mao discovered this, no one was severely punished; Mao actually liked that his political unpredictability enhanced his mystique. How did a peasant son of rural China become the demigod whose personality cult almost destroyed the Chinese Communist Party state during the Cultural Revolution? Did rising Chinese nationalist sentiment during the War of Resistance against Japan (1931–1945) provide the background and enable Mao to rise as China’s superstar? Mao is even back today in Chinese social media, and his statue was (allegedly) erected on the White House lawn!

Popular Nationalism

Chalmers Johnson argued that the secret of the CCP’s success was “peasant nationalism.” Johnson noted that his study “employs a functional definition of nationalism—in other words, one which identifies specific physical pressures that by acting upon given political environments give rise to nationalist movements.” The critics called Johnson’s thesis too one-sided and argued that it ignored peasant economic interest and class exploitation, among other local-specific variables. Both Johnson and his critics missed the point, however. There was nothing wrong in emphasizing nationalism; the question is how to define and understand nationalism’s functioning. With China facing Japanese invasion and the invaders’ brutality, was there an overarching theme of nationalism or patriotism in Chinese political dialogue? Given the prevailing empirical evidence, the answer is “of course.” After the Manchurian incident of 1931, anti-Japanese nationalist sentiment was boiling up all over China and across class lines as well. Students took to the street demanding that the government of the Guomindang (GMD, or Chinese Nationalist Party) actively resist Japan. The business community, led by various chambers of commerce, organized a boycott against Japanese merchandise. Political and cultural notables

* I would like to express my gratitude to the Faculty Summer Fellowship (2016) of the University of Akron, which made it possible for me to conduct research in China for more than a month. Part of the research that went into this paper was from that trip.

85 This is fake news that went viral in Chinese social media, with a fake photo showing President Obama and the First Lady paying homage to Mao’s statue. See http://www.360doc25.net/imagemlist.aspx?versionid=43172478&pagenum=1, accessed January 12, 2017.
organized an Association for Saving China.\textsuperscript{87} When police shot student demonstrators, public opinion turned against the government under Chiang Kai-shek, which culminated in his kidnapping by his deputy, Marshal Zhang, in late 1936.

The point is that in my functional definition, popular nationalism is not a full-blown ideology, such as capitalism or socialism, with well-developed programs or strategies for a set of well-defined goals. Instead, it merely denotes a nationalist/anti-Japanese sentiment that was pervasive in Chinese political dialogue and was shared by almost every Chinese at the time, so that even Wang Jing-wei’s collaborationist regime in Nanjing called its program “曲线救国” (saving China with a curve ball). Everyone in China wanted to “save China”; the question was how.

Popular nationalism functioned much like a shell that different political groupings could fill with their own programs. Even within the CCP elite, there was intense debate about how to deal with the crisis in 1937. The majority of politburo members advocated maximum mobilization and wished to send all three CCP divisions to the front to fight the Japanese, alongside government troops. Mao, however, insisted on fighting an independent guerrilla war and not consuming the CCP’s limited military assets. After all, political power derives from the barrel of a gun, as Mao put it. Without a viable military force, the CCP could not get anywhere. But Mao also understood in 1937 that it was important to appear to be actively fighting the enemy. Therefore, he ordered CCP troops to move to the front in North China, but slowly, advancing twenty-five kilometers a day and pausing for one day every three days.\textsuperscript{88} Eventually, Mao ordered that all three divisions be reorganized into small units to fight dispersed guerrilla warfare in the mountainous area with the aim of controlling the villages. With real control over villages, the CCP guerrilla forces could operate behind enemy lines to implement their policies, such as the rent-interest-reduction program, to win popular support and build party-controlled local government. Popular nationalism could go hand in hand with the CCP’s socioeconomic agenda; the two were not mutually exclusive.

Mao then further defined the CCP’s wartime military strategy as “killing time” (磨时间), letting the Nationalists deal with the Japanese while the CCP concentrated its energy on building its revolutionary base area. Soon the government’s military operation became passive in fighting the Japanese; after Pearl Harbor, the government preferred to have the Americans deal with the Japanese and preserve its forces to deal with the Communists later. American officers in the India-China-Burma Theater such as Joe Stilwell found this very frustrating.\textsuperscript{89} At the same time, Yan’an, the CCP’s wartime headquarters, attracted thousands of students and intellectuals who believed it was the most progressive and patriotic place in China, while Chongqing, the GMD’s wartime capital, was in their view full of police brutality, corruption, and incompetence. American diplomats, such as John Davis and John Service, reached the same conclusion. They informed Washington that

\textsuperscript{87}盛慕真 (Michael Sheng), “评“救国会”抗日救国的政治主张,”《上海师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版)》1985年第02期。

\textsuperscript{88} For further discussion, see Michael Sheng, \textit{Battling Western Imperialism: Mao, Stalin, and the United States} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
the Chinese Communists were really nationalists or agrarian reformers, even stating that “the Communist political program is simple democracy. This is more American than Russian in form and spirit.” Of course, there were youthful Americans like Edgar Snow and Agnes Smedley who helped to spread the myth of Yan’an. The reality of Yan’an could not have been more different from these romantic portraits by outsiders. An example is the case of “Wild Lily,” which dared to expose the dark side of Yan’an and whose author, Wang Shiwei, a writer in the city, was imprisoned and eventually beheaded. The CCP successfully sold its political programs in the bottle of popular nationalism; the confusion of contemporary American observers foreshadowed the confusion of American scholars such as Chalmers Johnson.

Scholars have been overanalyzing nationalism for decades, presumably because the post–World War II period was an anticolonial and decolonizing era. Nationalism was thought to be good because it was opposed to imperialism and colonialism. Yes, nationalism could inspire a fight for freedom and against foreign domination, but it could inspire blind hatred and xenophobia as well, even ethnic cleansing, as we saw in the Balkan conflict in the post–Cold War era. Historically, nationalism and imperialism went hand in hand. Ferdinand and Isabella decided to conquer the New World because they wanted to consolidate their victory over the Moors and to build a strong nation-state. Mercantilist wars among European nation-states drove each of them to grab more colonies so that they could survive and grow in the jungle of imperialism. Was it not true that Japan’s rising nationalist inspiration was behind its desire to conquer Korea and China? And did not “Nazism” mean “national socialism”?

What did Chinese popular nationalism really create in Yan’an and China during World War II and beyond? A charismatic regime with Mao’s personality cult at the center, I would argue. Early in the twentieth century, Max Weber gave his famous lecture on “Politics as a Vocation,” in which he defined the state as “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” Weber then continued:

The state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be. When and why do men obey? Upon what inner justifications and upon what external means does this domination rest?

He answered his questions by articulating three different types of state authorities that successfully justified their domination over the ruled: the “traditional authority,” the “charismatic authority,” and the “legalistic authority.” The traditional authority based its power of domination on “ancient recognition and habitual orientation to conform,” so a king could justify his rule on the basis that his ancestors were kings. The legalistic

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91 See Gao Hua, *红太阳是怎样升起的* [How did the red sun rise?] (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000).

authority rested on the “virtue of the belief in the validity of legal statute and functional ‘competence’ based on rationally created rules,” as is the case in the United States and Western European nations, for example. The authority of charisma, on the other hand, was based on “the extraordinary and personal gift of grace (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership.” To clarify his point further, Weber continued: “‘Charisma’ shall be understood to refer to an extraordinary quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. ‘Charismatic authority,’ hence, shall refer to a rule over men. . . . to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific person.”93 If this Weberian definition of charismatic authority ever existed in human history, Mao’s regime in Yan’an and China during and after World War II would be it.94

Because of the centrality of one man in charismatic authority, we must understand who Mao was before we can understand how he built such a regime. There are many Mao biographies, and opinions about him have naturally varied. Are there commonly accepted ideas about what personal qualities Mao possessed that made him the ultimate ruler of China? Jonathan Spence opened his short biography by stating that “Mao’s beginnings were commonplace, his education episodic, his talents unexceptional; yet he possessed a relentless energy and a ruthless self-confidence that led him to become one of the world’s most powerful rulers.”95 We can easily understand what “relentless energy” means: Mao was extremely hard working; many of his instructions, telegrams, and marginal comments in reports were written early in the morning, and he slept very little. Mao had “a ruthless self-confidence” is certainly an interesting description that requires more exploration.

Self-confidence, or the ability to project self-confidence, is one of the most important qualities a leader needs to rally and inspire followers. Mao certainly exhibited superb self-confidence in the decisions he made, even when signs indicated that his policy was deadly wrong. If that is what Spence meant by “ruthless self-confidence,” he is absolutely correct. Because Mao was overly self-confident, he often underestimated his enemies and thus set unrealistic goals and appeared too radical in his policy approach. For instance, when Marshal Zhang kidnapped Chiang Kai-shek, Mao was elated. He planned to put Chiang on public trial, then execute him, despite the apparent danger of igniting a civil war with the Nanjing government in the face of Japanese aggression. Stalin’s interference stopped Mao, and the CCP and GMD formed the Second United Front. Mao at the time conducted self-criticism and admitted that the CCP policy of “resist Japan and oppose Chiang” was

93 Ibid., 79–80.
94 The best work in the field is Charles Lindholm’s Charisma (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), which explicates Weber’s thesis in relation to other thinkers on social behavior and human nature, such as Mill, Nietzsche, Durkheim, Mesmer, and Freud. The latter half of the book is case studies on Hitler, Charles Manson, and Jim Jones. Efforts have been made to apply the concept of charisma to the CCP phenomenon. For instance, in his New World Disorder, the Leninist Extinction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), Ken Jowitt argues that the CCP experience was another example of “charismatic impersonality,” in which the focus is “on the unit designated as having extraordinary powers and being ‘worthy’ of loyalty and sacrifice.” This unit was the party, not the leader. Jowitt’s argument in relation to the CCP is by and large based on outdated studies, published in the 1960s. See especially 1, 21–22.
incorrect. A few years later, however, Mao insisted that Wang Ming, Zhou Enlai, and others were too enthusiastic about cooperating with the GMD, which was the rightist deviation, and they had to conduct self-criticism.\(^{96}\)

Another instance of Mao’s self-confidence was evident in 1945, when Japan was forced to surrender unconditionally. Mao planned to attack and take over Shanghai, Nanjing, and other major cities, which would certainly have ignited civil war with the GMD right after the end of a long war with Japan. Had Mao’s plan gone forward, the CCP would not only have lost the military battle to the GMD, but would have suffered a political setback as well. A few months later, after the CCP received a massive quantity of Japanese weapons turned over by the Soviets, CCP forces in Manchuria were badly defeated by the GMD, which suggest that Mao’s military plan to take over major cities in September was unrealistic. It was Stalin again who sent three telegrams to Mao urging him to abandon the planned military action against major cities and go to Chongqing to talk peace with the GMD. That bought the CCP more time, and political advantage as well. Yet after Stalin’s death, Mao joined the de-Stalinization choir, and one of his attacks on Stalin was that Stalin prohibited the Chinese from making revolution in 1945. Mao was “always correct” (永远正确), as the CCP propaganda claimed during the Cultural Revolution.\(^{97}\)

One might assume that such “ruthless self-confidence” would have disqualified Mao from a leadership role, or at least reduced his appeal to his followers. Ironically, the opposite was true. The more assertively Mao claimed to be correct, the more convinced his followers became of his genius. Zhou Enlai used to be the party boss above Mao. Before 1945, however, he not only admitted that his earlier policy line was wrong and Mao’s was correct, he also devotionally began to promote Mao’s personality cult. After Stalin’s death and de-Stalinization, Mao started his own quest for ultimate leadership in the worldwide Communist movement, and the Sino-Soviet alliance began to unravel. Nevertheless, the entire CCP elite followed Mao closely and unquestioningly.\(^{98}\)

Mao’s ruthless self-confidence could not have taken him very far if he had not had a matching talent for ruthless self-promotion. Mao believed that the best way to promote himself was to attack the “erroneous” policies and ways of thinking of others. At the CCP’s Zunyi Conference in 1935, thanks to the military defeat in Jiangxi, Mao was recognized as having the “correct military line” and replaced Bo Gu and Otto Braun with the power to direct the CCP’s military operation. To consolidate this gain, Mao finished his pamphlet, *On the Strategy of Chinese Revolutionary War*, an analysis of the CCP’s military experience in the previous years, to reconfirm that the military line (*junshi luxian*) before his rise at Zunyi was wrong, and that he was correct.\(^{99}\) Mao knew that directing military operations might be seen as a technicality and that what was fundamental was what he called the “ideological line” (*sixiang luxian*). Behind the “incorrect military line” was the

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\(^{96}\) Sheng, *Battling Western Imperialism*, chapter 2.

\(^{97}\) Ibid., chapter 5.


\(^{99}\) For Mao’s pamphlet, see *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Selected works of Mao Zedong, hereafter *xuanji*], vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1991), 170–244.
“erroneous way of thinking,” i.e., the “erroneous ideological line,” while Mao’s “correct ideological line” laid the foundations for his victorious military line. To demonstrate that he represented the correct ideological line in the party, Mao set out to lay the philosophical foundations of what was later known as “Mao Zedong Thought.” Between November 1936 and April 1937, Mao read three Soviet philosophical books, particularly the third edition of the Chinese translation of The Textbook on Dialectic Materialism, which he read three or four times. While reading, he wrote some 12,000 words of marginal comments in the books. The result was the publication of two philosophical essays, On Contradiction and On Practice, which cemented his credentials as the party’s leading theoretician and the guardian of the CCP “ideological line.”

At the same time, Mao created a host of terminologies to identify the “erroneous ideologies” that were behind the policy mistakes of the CCP’s past, such as “subjectism” (主觀主義), “empiricism” (經驗主義), “dogmatism” (教條主義), “liberalism” (自由主義), and “mechanicalism” (機械主義). These categories would be used in the “redemptive discourse” (borrowing from Apter and Saich) of what Mao called the study campaign (学習运动), which evolved into the rectification campaign (整风运动), to conduct self-criticism and criticize others to achieve “ideological unity” (思想統一) under Mao Zedong Thought. As the editor of Mao’s Selected Works states, Mao’s essays were aimed at “erroneous ideological lines” in the party, so-called “dogmatism,” on the one hand, and “empiricism,” on the other, both of which were responsible for the failure of the previous decade.

Philosophically speaking, Mao’s writings were obviously crude. However, they were practical as guidelines for reviewing and rewriting CCP history and for conducting the intraparty “contradictions”—the study campaign and the rectification campaign.

It was not mere coincidence that while the Sino-Japanese conflict was about to explode in 1937 and Chinese popular nationalism was reaching its height, the building of Mao’s personality cult had an official inauguration. In June of that year, for the first time, Mao’s portrait was published in Liberation Daily, his face illuminated by a ray of sun, and his call for the liberation of the Chinese nation and Chinese society was printed under the picture. At the same time, a collection of Mao’s writings was compiled, and the CCP rank and file studied it devotedly. When Mao was done with the study and rectification campaign, he established total control over the party, whose seventh congress in 1945 officially approved Mao Zedong Thought as the CCP’s guiding principles. Mao was now not only the party’s chief theologian, but the Pope as well. It would not be a total surprise that within about thirty years, millions of Mao badges and copies of The Little Red Book would spread across the world during the Cultural Revolution.

If the CCP regime under Mao was a charismatic authority and its bedrock was his followers’ belief in his extraordinary personal qualities and infallibility, preservation and strengthening of this belief had to be one of the prime concerns to affect the regime’s

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101 Xuanji, vol. 1, 282, 299.
102 Spence, Mao Zedong, 93.
decision-making processes. To illustrate the point, let us look at the Korean War and the Taiwan Strait crises.

After McArthur’s brilliant Inchon landing, North Korea’s military collapsed, and a UN force was approaching the Manchurian border while the Beijing regime celebrated its first anniversary on October 1, 1950. Stalin tried to persuade Mao to send Chinese troops to rescue Kim’s regime, but Mao would not make a commitment, in spite of Stalin’s offer of Soviet military assistance and air cover. Without Chinese troops entering the war, North Korea was doomed, and Stalin ordered Kim to prepare for evacuation to Siberia or Manchuria. At the last minute, Mao changed his mind and decided to send troops to Korea. What was behind this change of heart?

Before the Inchon landing, Mao was strongly supportive of Kim’s plan to use force to unify Korea. He once told Kim that the Chinese and Koreans looked alike and that Chinese soldiers could easily disguise themselves as Korean troops. Zhou Enlai had already asked Kim to provide a sample of the North Korean military uniform so that the Chinese could disguise their troops sent into Korea. This happened while Mao was pursuing leadership of the Eastern revolution. Early in 1949, Stalin told Liu Shaoqi, Mao’s emissary, that the center of world revolution was shifting to the east, and that the Chinese Communist Party should take more responsibility in directing the revolution in the Asia-Pacific region. Mao saw the opportunity to promote himself not only as the paramount leader of China, but also of the worldwide Communist movement. To institutionalize his newly acquired status, he pushed for the establishment of the Eastern Cominform, telling Mikoyan, Stalin’s envoy, that “the Communist parties of Siam and Indochina spoke out in favor of creation of such a bureau. It could be expedient to create at first a bureau from the representatives of Communist parties of not all but several Asian countries, for example, from the representatives of the Chinese, Korean, Indochinese and Philippine Communist parties.”

As leader of the Eastern revolution, Mao had to support Kim’s ambition to liberate the entire Korean Peninsula, and he did so until the Inchon landing. The quick collapse of Kim’s force worried Mao deeply; he told Stalin that the Chinese troops were ill-equipped and ill-trained and could suffer the same fate. When Stalin finally ordered Kim to evacuate, Mao had to face the real consequences: the hostile forces would be right across the Yalu River, and he could forget about his dream to be the “Lenin of the East.” The combination of national security interest and his own ambition to be leader of the Eastern revolution propelled Mao to finally send troops into Korea. With charismatic authority, the interest of the regime/state and the interest of the charismatic leader are one and the same.

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103 This material is also available in http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113239.pdf?v=4e17600210e7bd610c300c7b759b3a0f, accessed March 8, 2017.

104 For more discussion on Mao and the Korean War, see Michael Sheng, “Mao’s Role in the Korean Conflict: A Revision,” Twentieth Century China (October 2014): 269–90. It was ironic that while Mao aspired to become the “Lenin of the East,” Dean Acheson was hoping that he was the “Tito of the East.”
In 1958, Mao ordered artillery bombardment against two offshore islands occupied by the Nationalists, triggering a major international crisis. The Eisenhower administration started to prepare the American people for the possible use of tactical nuclear weapons to deter Mao from “liberating Taiwan,” while the Kremlin reasserted the Sino-Soviet alliance treaty. President Eisenhower was so frustrated that two little islands might trigger a nuclear war that he wished they would sink into the ocean and disappear. However, Mao had no intention of doing battle with the Americans. When the U.S. Navy started to escort Taiwan’s supply shipments, General Ye, the Chinese commander, asked Mao if he should engage the U.S. Navy. Mao gave an order not to shoot at U.S. ships. When General Ye asked again what to do if the U.S. Navy fired on the Chinese, Mao told him not to fire back. Why, then, did Mao start this campaign to “liberate Taiwan” in the first place? It was really just Mao’s political statement against Moscow’s doctrine of “peaceful coexistence” and his desire to direct the international Communist movement. This intention he made clear at the end of 1957, when he was in Moscow for the international Meeting of Communist and Workers’ Parties, and he and the Chinese delegation attempted to dominate the agenda and the draft of the conference declaration. Nevertheless, some historians insist that it was Mao’s nationalism that motivated him to fight against American imperialism to preserve China’s territorial integrity. In fact, the opposite was true: to strengthen his charismatic authority, Mao was willing to sacrifice China’s national interest by fighting both Washington and Moscow. The demise of a seemingly powerful and monolithic Communist movement was in fact caused by Mao’s pursuit of leadership status in the international revolutionary movements.

Ultimately, it was the Chinese people who worshipped Mao as their great savior who would suffer the consequences of his one-man dictatorship. At the Moscow conference in 1957, Mao set the goals for economic development in the Communist world: The USSR would surpass the United States in fifteen years, and China would surpass the UK at the same time. In reality, Mao wanted to find a new economic development path so that China could catch up to the Soviet Union and he could claim leadership of the worldwide Communist revolution. The entire nation followed the Chairman’s call, smashing kitchenware to melt it in the backyard furnace to produce more iron and steel and attempting to seed rice paddies densely so that they could produce more grain. My favorite activity was the war on sparrows, when people everywhere in China were called upon to annihilate sparrows, which were believed to eat grains. The result was the opposite: without sparrows, other insect infestations occurred next year that destroyed more grain than sparrows could ever consume. The euphoric frenzy of mass mobilization failed tragically: the dark nuggets coming out of backyard furnaces were useless, while dense planting resulted in crop failure. At the same time, village officials continued to boost their production of grain, so the government took more grain from the villagers, who had little left to eat. Mao sensed the reality in 1959 and called the Lushan Conference to cool down the temperature. However, when Peng Dehuai criticized the Great Leap Forward (GLF) as petty bourgeois leftism, Mao not only sacked Peng and his associates, but doubled down on the failed policy, and the GLF continued. As a result, at the end of the so-called “three years of natural disaster,” 30 million people had died of starvation.

105 For more discussion on Mao and the Taiwan Strait crises, see M. Sheng, “Mao and China’s Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: The Taiwan Strait Crises Revisited,” Modern China (October 2008): 477–507.
Yet Qian Xuesen an American-trained rocket scientist, went public three times with his “scientific calculation” proving that it was possible to produce 5,000 kilograms of rice per mu (600 some square meters) because Mao said so!\textsuperscript{106}

Charismatic authority did not exist in human history before World War I, so Max Weber did not have an example to analyze. That also left room for him to entertain the possibility of great-man-centered politics, which could be more exciting than legalistic or traditional authority. The thesis could help us to understand personality cults, the nature of regimes, and state-society relationships in the post–World War I world. However, much more theoretical and historical research is needed before we can truly understand the formation and functioning of a charismatic authority. I am particularly intrigued by the parallel between the growing impotence of mass politics/mass media on the one hand, and the emergence of charismatic authority in the post–World War I world, on the other. Now, the ghost of Mao has come back in Chinese social media. Could another charismatic authority figure rise again in China?

\textsuperscript{106} See Sheng, “Mao Zedong’s Narcissistic Personality Disorder.” For more on the GLF, see Frank Dikötter, \textit{Mao’s Great Famine} (London: Walker Publishing, 2010).
My paper discusses Japan’s national military strategy and alliance politics during the interval between the world wars of the twentieth century. Japan’s military services prepared imperial defense policy independently of each other and without civilian oversight or review. The imperial army’s continental strategy measured itself against imperial Russia or later, the Soviet Union, the northern threat, while the imperial navy’s maritime strategy measured itself against the United States, the southern threat. This contradiction plagued military strategy formulation throughout the interwar era.

In mid-1918, Japanese military authorities revised imperial defense policy to respond to the World War I cataclysm. Imperial Russia was no more, replaced by a revolutionary regime with uncertain prospects. The United States was engaged in a massive naval expansion program that Japan could not match.

The revised defense policy posited a future war against a tripartite coalition: the United States, the Soviet Union, and China. The fundamental premise was that Japan would fight a short war highlighted by decisive battles on land and at sea, which would quickly end the conflict. The army’s major initiative would seize Siberia as far west as Lake Baikal. Smaller forces would capture U.S. naval bases in the Philippines. The navy would eliminate American naval forces in Asian waters and destroy the U.S. battle fleet in a decisive main force surface engagement. This required three fleets: one to destroy the U.S. Navy in Asian waters; another to convoy army forces to the Philippines; and a third that would be the main fleet for the decisive battle. Japan had just two fleets, and the decision to build a third fleet pitted Japan in a naval arms race against the United States.

The immediate post–World War I era witnessed the not-very-successful efforts of the Versailles Conference to address the collapse of four wartime empires—Romanoff, Hohenzollern, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman—as well as Chinese demands for suzerainty and Japanese demands for racial equality. In exchange for Japan’s dropping its claims to equality, the major Western powers recognized Japan’s rights in China and Tokyo’s mandate over Germany’s former Pacific Island holdings.

The postwar mood of anti-militarism, anti-nationalism, and anti-great power alliances encouraged hopes for international disarmament and collective peaceful solutions to international issues. But in northeast Asia, Japan faced resurgent Chinese nationalism; renewed commercial competition from Britain and the United States for China markets; and a civil war in Siberia that led to a Japanese Siberian expedition that dragged on into 1922.

In this new international arena, the cornerstone Anglo-Japanese alliance was not renewed in 1921. It had admittedly been of declining importance for both nations during
Asian Shadows: The Hidden History of World War Two in the Pacific

the previous decade, and there is no evidence that the imperial Japanese army or the imperial Japanese navy strongly resisted the loss of its ally. Fierce commercial rivalry between Japan and Britain in China and differences over naval expansion were more evident than cooperation between the former allies. Moreover, the League of Nations, which Japan joined, presaged a new international system relying on multinational treaty agreements, not bilateral alliances. It was in these circumstances that the Washington Naval Conference convened in 1921.

Japan could not compete with the United States in the renewed naval arms race. The navy’s efforts to create a third fleet had already diverted one-third of the 1921 national budget to the branch, and the postwar depression left the cabinet in retrenchment mode. Willing to accept naval limitations by formal treaty, navy admirals demanded supremacy over a U.S. main fleet in Japanese home waters. Instead, U.S. Secretary of State Charles Hughes opened the Washington Conference in 1921 with a comprehensive, and unexpected, proposal for naval limitations that would result in a 10:10:6 ratio in capital ships for Britain, the United States, and Japan, respectively. He based these ratios on American and British admirals assertions that because of the great distances involved, a force attacking Japan needed 2:1 superiority (twice the strength of the defending fleet). The Washington Naval Treaty’s imposition of a 10:6 ratio of US to Japanese capital ships would thus limit any U.S. Navy thrust against Japan’s home islands. Japanese admirals opposed to the Washington Naval Treaty insisted, based on earlier staff studies, that the force level required to win naval war with the United States was a 10:7 ratio and that 10:6 cut the margin of victory too fine.

The resulting treaty established a 10:6 ratio, but only for capital ships; the conference did not set limits for auxiliary vessels, particularly heavy cruisers. Furthermore, Japanese negotiators gained approval for a non-fortification clause that restricted the Pacific powers from building or improving fortifications or naval bases on any of their island possessions, except for Singapore, Hawaii, and Japan’s home islands. A recent study contends that this was Japan’s main objective all along because it left the Americans without access to secure advance bases. Japan’s admirals conjectured that if their auxiliary vessels could reduce an approaching U.S. battle fleet by 10 percent, then Japan’s capital ships could annihilate the weakened survivors. Shipbuilding shifted from capital ships to auxiliary vessels, particularly heavy cruisers, in a new naval arms race.

Meanwhile, the Japanese army, with less than one-fifth of the national budget, struggled with the implications of force modernization in depressed economic times. The War Minister’s 1922 reforms reduced personnel to pay for modern weapons and equipment. But army opponents of the reforms claimed that a large standing army was necessary to win the first battle of the next war that in turn was the key to victory in Japan’s short war strategy. Furthermore, the army could identify no likely opponent. The nascent USSR, the threat from the north, was weak and in turmoil, and China was falling into warlordism.

Because the army lacked a viable opponent, the revised 1923 imperial defense policy identified the United States as a common enemy for both services, the only time this happened in the history of the document. The United States was a default opponent because the withdrawal of British naval power from Asian waters left no one except the
United States as a hypothetical enemy. But Japan also had legitimate grievances. Washington had criticized Japan’s Siberian intervention, insisted on greater commercial rights in Manchuria, imposed naval limitations, and legislated exclusionary immigration policies. The navy, adapting to its new attrition tactics, shifted the anticipated site of the decisive battle eastward, from Japanese home waters to somewhere between the Ryukyus and the Bonins, where battleship divisions would slug it out for naval supremacy in the western Pacific.

To ensure a short, decisive naval war, Japan also had to eliminate U.S. bases on Guam and the Philippines at the opening of conflict. The 10:6 ratio, however, rendered Japan unable to project its naval offensive power that far into the western Pacific. Navy hawks again demanded a 10:7 ratio. As for the army, imperial defense policy relegated it to capturing Guam and the Philippines, at most a three- or four-division operation. Faced with a depressed economy, declining budgets, and the lack of a major opponent, the army inactivated four divisions in 1925 to fund modernization.

Within a few years, however, the military situation in northeast Asia had dramatically shifted. A stronger USSR was strengthening its military forces in Siberia while in China, the Nationalists’ unification campaign was moving steadily northward toward Japanese spheres of influence. Two Japanese military interventions in China, one in 1927 and the other in 1928, along with a resurgent Soviet military presence in Siberia, put pressure on the cabinet to put “boots on the ground” to protect Japan’s interests in China and Manchuria against irredentist Chinese nationalism, Soviet Communism, and American meddling and interference. The army general staff now had two threats on the Asian continent that justified larger forces.

Toward the end of the 1920s, the cruiser race fostered an international dispute about further naval arms limitations. In 1930, the London Naval Conference convened from January 21 to April 22 to discuss naval disarmament. Although Tokyo was ahead in heavy cruisers, it feared the 1929 U.S. cruiser construction program would quickly overtake its efforts. The imperial navy split over its response.

A pro-treaty faction regarded limits as the way to avoid a protracted war with the United States that Japan could never win. This fundamentally defensive strategy relied on attrition tactics to compensate for an inferior main fleet. It argued that within treaty limitations, the navy could still control the sea lanes north of the Taiwan Straits by making optimum use of land bases and improved technology and innovative use of auxiliary vessels, now including aircraft carriers and submarines.

A fleet faction, championed by Admiral Suetsugu Nobumasa, the hawkish vice chief of naval operations, foresaw an inevitable clash of cultures between Japanese and American values. He insisted on a larger fleet because the 10:7 ratio in offensive striking power underpinned the navy’s short-war strategy. The pro-treaty faction dismissed a short-war scenario because the then-fashionable concept of total war dictated attritional warfare, with Japan adopting the strategic defensive to protect the home islands. The London Conference’s agreement to the 10:6 ratio for heavy cruisers became a bitter pill for the naval general staff because it forced the navy to halt further construction of these cruisers.
In the immediate aftermath of the London negotiations, the press, along with fleet faction members, condemned the agreement as a betrayal of national security because it violated the principle of supreme command vested solely in the military. Ineffective and corrupt politicians had failed to rescue Japan from its deep economic depression and appeared more concerned about petty self-interests than the national polity. The controversy weakened the ruling political party and party rule in general. The naval general staff pressured a new cabinet to withdraw from the treaty. Amidst growing economic hardship and social unrest, the army offered its solution: overseas expansion into the wide-open spaces of Manchuria.

The September 1931 Manchurian incident, a conspiracy engineered by mid-level Japanese army officers, soon led to the takeover of China’s three northeast provinces and the creation of the new nation of Manchukuo. Despite, or because of, criticism by the Western powers, Japanese public opinion enthusiastically supported the army’s unilateral action as a much-needed corrective for weak-kneed diplomats, corrupt politicians, and ineffective bureaucrats. Soon after the incident, the catchphrase “Manchuria, Japan’s lifeline” entered the popular lexicon. It was shorthand to mean that with Manchuria’s natural resources, Japan was no longer helpless against Western bullying.

Japan became Asia’s champion against Anglo-Saxon domination. Colonel Ishiwara Kanji, the army mastermind of the 1931 Manchurian incident, wrote and lectured on the final decisive war between Japan, champion of Asia, and the United States, the paladin of the West, which he expected to erupt around 1950.

When the League of Nations formally condemned Japan’s use of military force in Manchuria in early 1933, Japanese representatives walked out of the League in protest. Matsuoka Yosuke, Tokyo’s flamboyant League representative, led the dramatic departure, captured forever on film. But Matsuoka had never intended to leave the League or resort to crisis diplomacy. He had advised Tokyo that while small nations were sympathetic to China, the big powers did not want to alienate Japan, and he recommended conciliation. The foreign minister, playing to domestic opinion, opted for confrontation. “Even if the country is turned into scorched earth,” he had previously declared, “it will not shake our recognition of Manchukuo.” Matsuoka deliberately delayed his return to Japan by three months because he feared popular reaction against his walkout. When crowds of flag-waving Japanese greeted his train at Tokyo station, he questioned their sanity. In truth, the national unity cabinet’s fixation with recognition of Manchukuo drove policy. Matsuoka’s walkout from the League, the status of Manchukuo, further army meddling in North China, and the possibility of another naval arms race left Japan increasingly adrift in the international arena.

Manchukuo also was essential for Colonel Ishiwara’s preparations for the final war. The Japanese army carved out buffer zones in North China to shield Manchukuo and along Manchukuo’s borders, carefully monitored the Soviet army’s steady deployments, expected to peak in 1936. The imperial navy would also enter the non-treaty era in 1936. This “crisis of ’36” mentality infected the fleet faction, which insisted on a larger navy to
control the South China Sea. It proposed to neutralize American bases in the Philippines by extending the decisive fleet engagement east of the Philippines. Facing the non-treaty era, even the moderate pro-treaty faction backed a naval buildup, fearing that otherwise the army would get too large a share of the budget.

While the navy advocated required a buildup against the Americans, the Soviets’ continuing reinforcement of the Soviet Far East mandated an army buildup. In these circumstances, Ishiwara met with his navy counterpart to discuss the requirements for a future war, whether short or protracted; who the likely opponents would be; and the direction of Japan’s strategic axis, north or south. Army strategists envisaged a protracted ground war on the northeast Asian continent that necessitated immediate preparations. Initial operations would quickly take out Soviet air power in eastern Siberia, enabling ground forces to destroy Soviet units east of Lake Baikal. In this scenario, the navy’s marginal role would be to assist the army in seizing Vladivostok.

The navy identified the United States as the major threat and envisaged a short, decisive naval campaign. The army’s marginal role would be to seize the Philippines. A triad of battleships, carriers, and land-based naval aircraft would weaken and ultimately destroy the approaching American battle fleet in waters east of Luzon, Philippines. The emphasis was on battleships, and big-gun proponents cheered when the keels of the super battleships Yamato and Musashi were laid in 1937.

Put differently, the army would advance north against the Soviet Union and defend the south; the navy would defend the north and advance south against the U.S. Navy. Both services were intent not only on expanding force structure but also on implementing enormously expensive programs to modernize weapons and equipment. The 1936 version of the imperial defense policy was supposed to resolve these contradictory military strategies. Instead, the service-oriented continental and maritime strategies emerged intact.

The June 1936 revision had something for everyone. It stated that the objective was a short war but allowed that a conflict might become protracted. The main enemies were the United States and the Soviet Union, but might include China and Great Britain as well. Though the two services acknowledged the possibility of fighting against a coalition, they continued to gauge their requirements against their two primary and different opponents, defining strategy in terms of operational planning.

A few weeks later, the army issued its national military policy to modernize the force in order to drive Western influence from Asia. The defeat of the Soviet Union would be the first step. This became the basis for an expensive five-year rearmament plan to overhaul the army and modernize its weaponry and equipment for war with the Soviets, which was expected to occur in 1942. The plan called for peacetime establishment of 27 divisions (41 during wartime) and 142 air squadrons, an increase of 10 divisions and 88 squadrons over the existing force structure. The same day, the five ministers’ conference endorsed the navy’s southward advance strategy, in effect justifying a massive naval rearmament program to be completed in early 1942, when the fleet would be organized around 12 capital ships, 10 aircraft carriers, and 28 heavy cruisers. In other words, by mid-1942, the
Japanese navy would reach its peak strength relative to the United States Navy, after which Japan’s naval strength would steadily decline.

How was such an expensive rearmament possible for a relatively poor agrarian country? Even the Japanese emperor asked that question. As late as 1930, half of Japanese lived in rural areas, dependent on agriculture for a livelihood, and dramatic population growth since 1910 (from 51 to 60 million) had outstripped food supply. Light industry dominated manufacturing, with cotton and silk the leading exports until the collapse of the silk market during the late 1920s.

Japan, though, had recovered more quickly from the world Depression by devaluing its currency in 1931, thus making exports cheaper, and through Finance Ministry deficit-spending policies, which financed major construction projects in Japan and Korea. Japan’s colonies of Korea and Taiwan were no longer regarded as the source of local profits and stability; instead, Tokyo would mobilize their human and material resources to support Japan’s expanding empire. In 1931, the governor general of Korea instituted new polices to provide raw materials for Japanese industry and encourage Japanese investment and control of strategic materials on the peninsula. Similarly, in 1936, Tokyo established the Taiwan Development Company to exploit the island’s agricultural output. The state and the military likewise encouraged industrial development in Manchukuo to support Japanese heavy industry. The so-called new zaibatsu (financial conglomerates) worked with the army to create special industrial zones to manufacture steel, cement, bricks, electric power, and so forth. The Japanese government also adopted central planning, regulating key industries such as electric power and encouraging cartels in order to streamline controls. In 1937, the army and the bureaucracy produced five-year plans identifying specific strategic industries for growth. Ishiwara was a visionary, but his hard-headed approach to preparations for war in 1942 was no pipe dream.

In August 1936, the Foreign Ministry approved Fundamentals of National Policy, a diplomacy designed to neutralize the USSR and underwrite a peaceful advance into Asia’s southern regions. It was intended to simultaneously strengthen the army in Manchuria to win the first battle and expand the navy to control the western Pacific, thereby endorsing both massive military buildups. It also gave the green light for Anti-Comintern Pact negotiations with Germany.

That October, the cabinet approved the Anti-Comintern Pact concluded between Germany and Japan. Tokyo’s original intent was to create a broad network of nations to contain the USSR while freeing Japan from diplomatic isolation. Japanese diplomats sought to enlist British, Dutch, and Italian participation and also discussed the encirclement idea with Polish officials, among others. When nothing came of these overtures, the foreign minister questioned the wisdom of a bilateral pact with Germany. A pact appealed to army leaders, who anticipated the benefits of German neutrality in any Japanese-Soviet confrontation. The navy offered no objections. The Foreign Ministry highlighted the idea that the pact would deprive China of German military assistance. In the larger context, the pact backfired because it identified Japan with Nazi Germany, increasing Tokyo’s estrangement from the other major Western powers, especially the United States.
The outbreak of the undeclared Sino-Japanese War in July 1937 threw the previous year’s strategic and diplomatic compromises into disarray. The army’s rampage through China turned world opinion against Japan, leaving the nation even more isolated. As the war expanded, the army occupied Guangzhou (Canton) in south China in October 1938. The navy promptly pressured the government for approval, granted on November 25, to seize Hainan Island, ostensibly to close the southern end of the China blockade, but actually to control the South China Sea, neutralize the Philippines, and ultimately be used as a base to project naval power beyond the Philippines and into the western Pacific.

In September 1939, Europe went to war, and two months later, the naval general staff requested permission to start the first stage of fleet mobilization, aimed at doubling its personnel by late 1941. By this time the imperial army had 1.2 million men under arms, the majority deployed in Manchukuo or the fighting fronts in China. Army leaders still remained committed to a war against the Soviets, despite their sobering defeat by the Red Army at Nomonhan/Khalkhin Gol in the summer of 1939, accompanied by erstwhile ally Germany’s duplicitous signing of a non-aggression pact with the USSR in the midst of the Nomonhan battles.

Army leaders also wanted to end the war in China, but not at any price. In late March 1940, strategists decided that if military force could not settle the China incident during the year, then the following year, Tokyo would commence large-scale troop withdrawals from China. Within two years, Japan would consolidate forces in a large triangular area bordered by Shanghai, stretching into North China, and encompassing Manchukuo. The withdrawal of approximately 350,000 troops would offset the costs of the revised 1936 arms replenishment plan. The amended 1940 program, based on the escalated manpower requirements for China and the tactical and operational lessons of the Nomonhan campaign, would field a wartime force of 65 divisions (up from 41) and 160 air squadrons (up from 142) by 1944.

The Nazi victories in France and the Low Countries during May and June 1940 seemingly gave Japan a once-in-a-lifetime chance to isolate China from Western military aid running overland through Burma and French Indochina since Chinese ports were closed by Japanese blockade. The European colonies in Asia were also isolated and ripe for the picking, “like rice cakes off the shelf.” The catchphrase “don’t miss the bus” summed up the urgency to take advantage of the opportunity. The confidential diary of imperial general headquarters recorded the enthusiasm for a southern advance that marked a 180-degree turn in the army’s thinking.

In late July, Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro announced the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, which would create a new order in East Asia to end American and British domination of the region. Washington equated it to the Nazi’s New Order, with all the odious implications that carried. The next day an Imperial Headquarters liaison conference agreed to settle the China incident quickly, and, if the opportunity presented itself, simultaneously resolve the Southern Region issues.
The strategy hinged on preventing outside aid from reaching the Chongqing government so as to bring about China’s collapse. Japanese occupation of air and military bases in French Indochina would deter the British from further assistance and prevent United States interference. It would also provide operating bases to prepare for a southern advance.

Both services sought to exploit the opportunities presented by the Nazi triumphs in Europe to create a self-sufficient zone in Asia, the so-called Southern Region. The army was willing to use force to occupy the region and then exploit its resources to prepare for war against either the United States or the USSR. The navy, however, favored peaceful expansion, likely as a result of war games played against the United States in mid-May that ended with the navy unable to protect the sea lines back to Japan. Navy Minister Admiral Yoshida Zengo concluded that it was pointless to attack the Netherlands East Indies unless its resources could be transported intact back to Japan. Still, if necessary, the fleet was prepared to use force, and on June 20, 1940, the naval general staff began detailed contingency planning for a southern advance. In late August, the army general staff began drafting plans for a Malaya operation as part of an overall campaign that also included the Philippines and Netherlands East Indies.

Meanwhile, the British, under German air bombardment and threat of invasion, gave in to Japanese pressure and closed the Burma Road in July 1940. Franco-Japanese discussions over basing rights in French Indochina went nowhere, and on September 23, Japanese troops occupied northern Indochina. The army’s thinking had shifted from ending the China war quickly in order to move south to moving south to end the China war. No one had seriously considered Western reaction: The United States embargoed scrap metal shipments to Japan and in October, the British reopened the Burma Road. Once again, Japanese aggression produced unanticipated reactions.

What added to Tokyo’s isolation was that four days after Japanese troops entered French Indochina, Foreign Minister Matsuoka signed the Tripartite Pact in Berlin. Prime Minister Konoe’s original concept was to prevent the United States from entering a war against Japan and to maintain neutral relations with the USSR, in effect defending the north and advancing south. Matsuoka had hoped to enlist the USSR in a four-power commercial pact (an idea in Japan’s Foreign Ministry circles dating from the 1920s), but by this time, relations between Germany and the Soviet Union had worsened, making it impossible. Within the navy, political maneuvering promoted a new navy minister sympathetic to the pact, swayed further by promises of larger budgets and assurances that it contained no clause requiring automatic participation in the event of a German-American war.

The Tripartite Pact was clearly aimed at the United States. Berlin’s purpose was to use the threat of a two-ocean war to prevent the United States from entering the war against Germany. Matsuoka believed that signing the pact would display Japan’s determined resolution, isolate the United States, and deter Washington from war. When asked about American economic retaliation, Matsuoka, who prided himself on his American expertise, acknowledged that Japanese-American relations were very bad, yet argued that caving in to U.S. demands would not improve them. Matsuoka explained to the emperor that the
pact would not upset the American people because half of them were of German ancestry, but in fact, it provoked a strong negative reaction, which he never expected. The pact further antagonized the United States, which supplied the bulk of the Japanese navy’s strategic materials, and tied Japan to allies thousands of miles away with resource needs of their own.

The fall of 1940 found Japan more isolated internationally. Germany had failed to defeat Britain, and Tokyo’s year-long peace overture to Chongqing had failed, leaving the China war no closer to a solution. Internally, the army was divided over future strategy. The general staff’s Operations Division sought simultaneous preparations for war north or south; the War Ministry’s Military Affairs Bureau wanted to move south.

On October 15, 1940, the navy ordered second-stage mobilization to begin, with full mobilization to be completed by mid-November 1941. Furthermore, Japanese strategists determined in late 1940 that the Japanese fleet probably could not afford to wait for the American fleet to come to it. With uncertainty about the Americans risking a crossing through the Mandates, the decisive battle was expected to be fought far into the western Pacific, somewhere in the area east of the Marianas or the Carolines.

As the services modified strategic and operational plans, in early 1941 Konoe and Matsuoka considered adding the USSR to the Tripartite Pact. Soviet participation would end Moscow’s military assistance to China, providing Japan with leverage to end that war and strengthen Tokyo’s hand against the United States and Britain. The Germans were not interested. Instead, that March, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop railed that “if the USSR is not smashed, the root of all evil will not be removed from Europe” and harangued Matsuoka to immediately attack Singapore.

While Matsuoka was in Berlin, Germany invaded the Balkans. He thought that this would force the Soviet Union to stabilize its relations with Japan to avoid an eastern threat so that Moscow might coordinate its energies in the west. Accordingly, Matsuoka next traveled to Moscow, where a last-minute, unexpected intervention by Soviet premier Joseph Stalin led to the signing of a neutrality pact on April 13. Matsuoka believed that securing Japan’s northern flank improved its negotiating position with the United States, but Washington, of course, regarded it as yet another example of Japan’s preparations to move in Southeast Asia. The Japanese army, especially the general staff, doubted the pact protected Japan’s northern flank and judged that it neither contributed to a military solution in Southeast Asia nor avoided war with the United States. At most, it bought time for the army to prepare for the impending showdown with the Soviet Union. Two months later, Germany invaded the USSR, throwing Japanese military strategy and diplomacy into disarray.

The army was divided; the Operations Division demanded an immediate strike north, but others took a wait-and-see attitude, willing to attack only if the USSR was in danger of imminent collapse. Preparations went forward to advance north and south. A massive, secret mobilization ultimately marshaled more than 750,000 troops in Manchukuo, poised to invade the Soviet Union. The navy simultaneously saw the chance to move south. An imperial conference on July 2, 1941, endorsed the advance south, even at the
risk of war with Britain and the United States, but with a caveat that favorable conditions might allow an advance north.

Two weeks later, Imperial General Headquarters ordered the Twenty-Fifth Army in south China to occupy southern Indochina. Japanese forces moved in on July 23. To the surprise of Japanese military planners, who predicted that the occupation would not provoke a drastic American reaction, the United States promptly froze Japanese assets and on August 1, embargoed export of oil.

On the northern front, by late July, the expected large withdrawals of Soviet units from the Far East had not materialized, and on August 9, the army, constrained by a tight operational timetable for an attack on the USSR, shifted its operational planning to a southern advance. Plans were to be completed by October 1941, one month before the anticipated opening of hostilities.

A five-day joint-planning session opened on September 20. The army wanted to attack Singapore first, while the navy wanted to strike the Philippines first, then the Netherlands East Indies, and Malaya last. A compromise approved near-simultaneous attacks on the Philippines and Malaya plus the release of two new carriers to support southern operations, an army demand. Following this agreement, naval authorities approved Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku's Pearl Harbor operation, a completely separate and compartmented planning effort, of which army planners (and most of their navy counterparts) were unaware. On November 8, the chiefs of staff of the army (General Sugiyama Hajime) and the navy (Admiral Nagano Osami) briefed Emperor Hirohito for the first time about the attack on Pearl Harbor and told him that they expected to “sink two or three battleships or carriers at anchor.” One week later, Hirohito was shown the full war plan, in all its details. The December 1 imperial conference formalized the decision to fight. Japan would go south—to war against the West.

To conclude: I had been planning to pontificate about the failure of Japan’s interwar security and diplomatic efforts. There was no strategic military consensus, and the Washington treaty was the only pact that had any benefits for Japan. But actually, were Tokyo’s policies any more disjointed than those of the other great powers? The pre-war order had collapsed, ushering in a tumultuous interwar period characterized by dramatic and continual global shifts in national security policies, international relations, military affairs, ideologies, and weapons development. Consider Britain’s ten-year rule—its haphazard approach to the construction of fortress Singapore, the supposed linchpin of London’s military strategy in Asia, and appeasement diplomacy. Did American isolationism, anti-Japanese racism, and economic protectionism promote international stability? The Soviet Union’s expedient neutralism opened the gates for war in Europe, and Nazi Germany, the destabilizing continental power since the mid-1930s, took full advantage. In this larger context, Japan’s interwar diplomatic and military strategies were perhaps about all that could have been expected.
Author Biographies

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