

World War II in China (1937-1945)

In Europe, World War II started in 1939. Hitler, the leader of the Nazi Party in Germany, invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, and Great Britain and France declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. The United States of America did not declare war against Japan until 8 December 1941, the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Britain also declared war against Japan at that time, having learned that its territories in the Far East had been attacked by the Japanese. But in China, the war against Japan started earlier. In a sense, it began with the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895, which ended with the cession of Taiwan, and other territories, to the Japanese. After the fall of the Qing dynasty, China's disarray made her very vulnerable to further Japanese aggression. The Mukden Incident occurred in 1931, to be followed by subsequent incursions by Japan into China's northeastern territories (see the chapter 'The Decade of Nationalist Rule in Nanjing (1927(8) – 1937(8))' in this volume). The leader of the Guomindang (Nationalist) government in Nanjing, Chiang Kai-shek, was more interested in eliminating the Communist challenge to his rule, than in defending the country against Japan. Eventually he was kidnapped at Xian in 1936 and forced to agree to cease hostilities against the Communists, led by Mao Zedong, and form a united front with them to fight the Japanese.



Two Chinese men kneeling prior to execution, Nanjing, 1937 (*The China Project*: retrieved on 11 November 2023 from <https://thechinaproject.com/2019/01/21/kuora-the-nanjing-massacre-all-chinese-seemed-marked-out-as-victims/>)

China alone against Japan (1937-1941)

The Marco Polo Bridge (Lugou Bridge) incident

The warring Chinese united to resist Japan by the end of 1936, but neither Chiang Kai-shek nor the Japanese government in Tokyo wanted war. However, Tokyo had difficulty controlling their imperialistic Kwantung and North China armies. Sometimes, even members of the cabinet were not informed of the intentions or plans of their highly independent military authorities. Fiercely anti-Communist, the Japanese considered the Soviet Union, which had amassed 240,000 troops in its Far Eastern provinces by 1935 - compared with Japan's 160,000 in Manchuria - as their only serious enemy in East Asia. Since the Japanese withdrew their forces from the Soviet territories after the Washington Conference in the early 1920s, there was little risk of the Japanese and the Soviet armies clashing with one another accidentally. Although war with the Soviet Union was a possibility, in 1937 Japan was not ready for such a conflict. On the other hand, the presence

of bellicose Japanese troops in north China, poised to fulfil their country's destiny to carve out an empire from their militarily weaker neighbour, presented a volatile situation that could easily lead to an outbreak of violence, should the Japanese move closer to the tense and watchful Chinese forces, who were ready to repel any new Japanese advances into Chinese territory.

On 7 July 1937 a company of Japanese soldiers stationed in Beijing – a privilege granted by the Boxer Protocol in 1901 - decided to conduct a night manoeuvre in the vicinity of the scenic Marco Polo Bridge (Lugou Bridge), located about 10 miles from Beijing. Near this bridge, there were Chinese troops that had been strengthening the defences on the banks of the Yongding River. This area was strategically important because a railway bridge next to the Marco Polo Bridge linked railway lines from the south to the town of Wanping, a key railway junction. The control of Wanping was equivalent to taking Beijing, as railway lines ran through it to Zhangjiakou (historically known to Europeans as Kalgan) in the northwest, Mukden to the northeast, the port of Tianjin to the southeast, and to the south through Shijiazhuang to major southern cities. As the Japanese were acting out mock battles, at around 10:30 pm the Chinese fired some shells into the Japanese position without causing any casualties. The absence of a Japanese soldier at a roll call led the trigger-happy Japanese commander to order an attack on Wanping, which was repulsed by the Chinese. Negotiations at various levels between the military and government officials of the two countries soon followed, but peace was elusive.

The Chinese looked upon the Marco Polo Bridge Incident as yet another Mukden-type occurrence that would lead to another round of Japanese territorial expansion into China. This time, however, Chiang Kai-shek decided to resist. It was clear that if the government of China were to defy an increasingly militaristic Japan primed for conquest, war between the two countries would be inevitable. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1936 therefore marked the beginning of the, thus far undeclared, World War II in China, though some might argue that World War II in China had already begun with the Mukden Incident of 1931.

Without a mature industrial base for armaments and other aspects of modernization, China was no match for Japan in a military show-down. While reinforcements were streaming into northern and central China from Japan, by the end of July the local Japanese forces had captured not only the Marco Polo Bridge, but also the entire region between Beijing and Tianjin. During the next four months, Japanese forces advanced down the railway lines to the south, taking Baoding by late September, Shijiazhuang in October, and Taiyuan in November.

The battle of Shanghai

Having his best German-trained troops stationed around Shanghai, Chiang Kai-shek decided to focus his efforts on driving the less prepared Japanese forces away from Shanghai, to render his capital in Nanjing

more secure. Unfortunately, the attempts of the Italian-trained Chinese to bomb the Japanese fleet anchored off the Shanghai docks during the middle of August missed their targets and hit Shanghai civilians instead. When the Japanese were ready to counter-attack later in September, the Chinese were soon put on the defensive. In addition to the assault from the well-equipped Japanese army corps and marines, the Chinese soldiers had to endure continuous shelling from the heavy guns of the Japanese navy, and also bombing by the Japanese ship-borne and land-based planes, and even some from Japanese-occupied Taiwan. Following Chiang's order to make a firm stand in Shanghai, the Chinese fought heroically, despite an alarming number of casualties. Unable to make much headway for three months, the Japanese sent an amphibious force to Hangzhou to attack the Chinese positions from the rear. Assaulted from both the front and the back, the Chinese positions in Shanghai became unsustainable by 9 November. On 12 November 1937, Shanghai fell to the Japanese. Instead of retreating to the defensive blockhouses in Wuxi, which had been erected in anticipation of just such a contingency, the Chinese soldiers fell back to Nanjing in chaos. It was an unequal contest, pitting Chinese flesh and blood against the overwhelming force of modern firearms. The Battle of Shanghai cost 250,000 Chinese casualties – almost 60% of Chiang's best troops – against some 40,000 on the Japanese side.

The Japanese advance to Nanjing, and Chiang's response

At this point, some Japanese army generals favoured a decisive strike against Nanjing to force the Nationalist government to surrender, but others preferred a more cautious approach, such as consolidating the Japanese positions in a wider area around Shanghai. Through German diplomatic mediation, a brief negotiation took place between Tokyo and Nanjing to settle the Battle of Shanghai in this full-scale, but as yet undeclared, war. The terms were too severe for Chiang, and insufficiently so for the Japanese military. Chiang was aware that, in the long run, Japanese expansion in China would militate against the interests of the great Western trading nations in China, particularly America and Britain, and he hoped that these nations would intervene on China's behalf. However, in the short term, the Sino-Japanese conflict benefited these nations' exports. China needed to purchase military equipment, arms, and ammunition from the industrialized nations. America was a vital source of aviation fuel and scrap metal for Japan. At that point, these Western nations did not want to be involved in the Sino-Japanese conflict. Chiang was disappointed, but his resolve to lead China against Japanese aggression did not waver.

By late November, 50,000 soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army in three parallel lines of advance were racing towards Nanjing. At the same time, aerial bombing of Nanjing, which had started in August, intensified, hastening the exodus of people from the city to safer spots. Infuriated that the Chinese had had the audacity to engage them in battle in Shanghai, where they had sustained a significant number of casualties in an intensive three-months-long combat, the Japanese invaders were ready to avenge

themselves, and to terrorize the Chinese population into submission, once they were out of sight of the large Shanghai Western communities, who might have borne witness to their atrocities.

Was Chiang Kai-shek going to defend his capital, or move his government elsewhere? Chiang held several high-level military conferences on this matter during November. When one of his senior advisers, Tang Shengzhi, made a case for defending Nanjing, Chiang appointed Tang as the Commander-in-Chief for the defence of Nanjing, while he himself retreated westward on 8 December. Shortly before this date, he had moved his government as well as the treasures of the National Palace (Forbidden City) and other museums to cities up the Yangtze River, such as Hangzhou, and Chongqing. When Chiang left, he took with him the small Chinese air force of 300 planes, and sophisticated communications equipment. This put Tang at a grave disadvantage because the different parts of his army could not communicate with each other to coordinate their actions, and he was also thereby denied the ability to gather vital information on the Japanese troop movements from the air. Even though the Chinese air force with 300 planes was very small against their enemies' almost 3,000, having even a tiny number of planes would have been better than none. Notwithstanding these and other handicaps, the weary Chinese soldiers prepared to defend Nanjing.

All along the way to Nanjing, the Japanese troops went on a rampage of plundering, setting fire to houses, and killing indiscriminately. From tiny hamlets to villages, towns, and large cities, little was spared. Consider for example the desolate scene at the city of Songjiang as witnessed by the Australian journalist Harold John Timperley of the *Manchester Guardian*, nine days after the Japanese passed through it. Here is what he wrote:

*'There is hardly a building standing which has not been gutted by fire. ...Smouldering ruins and deserted streets present an eerie spectacle, the only living creatures being dogs unnaturally fattened by feasting on corpses. In the whole of Sungchiang (Songjiang), which should contain a densely packed population of approximately 100,000, I saw only five Chinese, who were old men, hiding in a French mission compound in tears. Not far away, the lovely old city of Suzhou, which once astounded Marco Polo with the rich abundance of its produce and the multitude of its elegant canals and bridges, suffered a similar fate. After the Japanese army lingered there long enough to pillage and murder on a massive scale, its population was reduced from 350,000 to 500.'*¹

On 9 December Japanese airplanes were dropping leaflets from the air, demanding the Chinese to surrender within 24 hours, or suffer the consequences. Although general Tang vowed to fight to the last man in public, privately he agreed to arrange a truce with the Japanese through the help of about a dozen Americans and

¹ Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1988, p. 38 and p. 236, note 38.

Europeans, who had chosen to remain in Nanjing, at the risk of their own lives, in order to set up an International Committee for the establishment of the Nanjing Safety Zone (to be discussed shortly). The plan was to have a three-day cease fire for the Japanese to march into Nanjing peacefully, while the Chinese army withdrew. However, Chiang Kai-shek refused to sanction such a plan. By noon on 10 December, seeing that the Chinese had not surrendered, the Japanese began a ferocious assault on the city. They dropped bombs, pounded the city walls with their heavy artillery, and attacked the Chinese positions fiercely. The Chinese had plenty of ammunition and more soldiers, albeit poorly trained, than the Japanese, but instead of digging in and fighting as determinedly as the Chinese had done for most of their campaign in Shanghai, Chiang ordered Tang to retreat immediately by the afternoon of 11 December. Tang protested that, after the Japanese had already penetrated the Chinese frontlines, retreat in such a situation would lead to a rout. However, under pressure from Chiang, early in the morning on 12 December, Tang gave the order to retreat to those of his subordinates who were able to attend his emergency meetings, and left Nanjing himself as Chiang had directed him to do.

With the Japanese surrounding the city and forcing their way through some of the gates, the only escape route for the panicky retreating army was through the northwest water gate to the harbour, to board the junks waiting there for crossing the Yangtze River. As Tang's black chauffeur-driven car threaded its way along this route to the docks, he witnessed a scene of utter chaos: a mad scramble of thousands of soldiers trying desperately at the eleventh hour to leave the soon to be abandoned city, jettisoning their arms and ammunition along the way. While some made it over to the opposite bank of the river by boat, others died in fighting each other to board the rapidly diminishing number of available boats, or in trying to swim across. Inside the city, large numbers of Chinese soldiers, who had not managed to retreat, and the police, were hurriedly taking off their uniforms and putting on civilian clothes, as the city came under Japanese occupation on 13 December 1937. Battalions of Chinese soldiers, still in their uniform, simply held up white flags and surrendered to the Japanese.

The Rape of Nanjing: the 1937 Nanjing Massacre

The Chinese soldiers who surrendered did not know that an order to kill all prisoners of war (POWs) had already been given by the Japanese high command. Since the number of Chinese soldiers who remained in Nanjing - ninety thousand, according to an estimate - outnumbered the 50,000 plus Japanese troops, their captors made sure that they would not make trouble before their execution. The Japanese promised to treat them well and divided them into small groups to render them docile, and then starved them, before marching them with their hands tied behind them to a convenient spot for mass execution by machine gun fire. The

Japanese soldiers then thrust their bayonets in the fallen bodies to make sure that no one survived. Some were lined up and beheaded with swords. In one case, about 15,000 Chinese POWs were butchered along a riverbank at dusk. The largest single case of mass execution of Chinese soldiers, former soldiers, and civilians, occurred at Mufu Mountain north of Nanjing, where an estimated 57,000 were massacred.

When the Japanese army roared into Nanjing on 13 December with their tanks, trucks, heavy artillery, and columns of marching soldiers, it was a defenceless city of half of a million people. All those who had the strength and the means to leave this doomed city had already left. For a period of six weeks after the Japanese entered Nanjing, its soldiers were let loose to vent their blood lust on these helpless and defenceless people. They went about in groups and shot anyone in sight. The streets were littered with corpses, and many were shot in the back, when they ran from the trigger-happy Japanese. The Japanese searched for and rounded up any men and murdered them with the excuse that they were former soldiers, but old men or even babies were killed without any such excuse. They shot shopkeepers, looting and setting fire to their shops at will.

While these horrors were being perpetrated on men, women suffered an even worse fate. The Japanese soldiers raped girls and women of any age, from preteens to eighty-year-old grandmothers, from any class or professions, even nuns, often by gangs of soldiers, at all hours of the day, in any locations, in their homes, churches, Bible training schools, on dirt roads, or in the middle of a street in front of crowds. Women in advanced stages of pregnancy were not spared. Many women died from abusive and prolonged gang rapes. After the soldiers were sated with sex, they would kill the victims immediately, so as to silence them forever. Mutilation of the victims was not uncommon.

The death toll of the wholesale rape and murder of the Chinese civilians, during just a six-week period after the Japanese entered Nanjing, was estimated by many researchers to be in the range from 260,000 to 340,000. Although the figure was shocking enough, the extreme cruelty and sadism exhibited by the perpetrators of these acts towards their victims was simply beyond human comprehension. Those who died quickly from shooting or beheading were fortunate to have been spared the excruciatingly painful, slow, and gruesome deaths suffered by many others. In many parts of the city, people were being disembowelled, dismembered, nailed to wooden boards to be crushed by tanks, and crucified on trees and used for bayonet practice. Large groups of victims were burned or buried alive. Another diabolical practice was to bury people up to their waists or chests and let them be torn apart by German shepherd dogs, cut to pieces by swords, or run over by horses. The soldiers appeared to kill without compunction or sense of remorse; some even turned killing into a sport. One form of amusement was to douse people - men, women, and children - with fuel and then shoot them, to see them explode into flame. On one occasion teams of Japanese soldiers competed to see which team could behead their captives the fastest.

History has recorded many incidences of largescale war atrocities committed by conquering armies under the orders of cruel tyrants: does the tragedy in Nanjing contain new lessons for us? It occurred in the context of an evil imperialist war of conquest, rendered more vicious by a racist and militaristic ideology, directed by a government which was controlled by ultranationalists and sanctioned by an emperor, who was worshipped like a god. The Japanese soldiers were the tools used to fulfil their national destiny of becoming a great colonial power. To be moulded into a soldier, young teenage boys were systematically brutalized through beatings, combined with other kinds of humiliating and degrading treatment, to render them into compliant instruments of their superior officers, whose authority, being derived from a god-like emperor, required their absolute loyalty and obedience.

In addition to this type of conditioning, they were indoctrinated with racist propaganda that instilled in them a sense of Japanese racial superiority over other peoples, such as the Chinese, whom their government intended to subjugate. They absorbed the idea that the Chinese were inferior subhuman beings, whose murder deserved no more moral consideration than killing pigs or squashing insects. In their training, they were hardened by being made to slaughter and torture POWs or civilians, often *en masse*. After undergoing such training, ordinary young persons were rapidly transformed into psychopathic mass murderers, monsters devoid of any natural human feelings of either sympathy to their victims, or revulsion at cruel and inhuman acts.

The Nanjing Massacre occurred because thousands of young Japanese soldiers, indoctrinated and trained in the manner described, were permitted to exercise unbridled power to prey upon the defenceless people of the city. History has repeatedly shown the danger of giving any man absolute power. Many emperors, kings, and heads of states committed enormous crimes against humanity, when the political institutions of their countries conferred upon them, or let them seize, absolute power. Japan in World War II was a country dominated by a military and imperial elite, who ruled in the name of their absolutist and God-like Emperor Hirohito, from whom the officers and soldiers of the Japanese army derived their power. The Nanjing Massacre, the Holocaust in Europe, and other tragic episodes of genocide and mass rape should teach us to be vigilant about unbridled personal and governmental power. Humanity needs to build and defend institutions that prevent any individual, groups of people, or governments from having absolute and unchecked power.

Another lesson to be distilled from this and other tragic genocidal instances of mass murder in other parts of the world was the evil of cultivating racism, or large-scale propaganda against other groups of human beings, branding them as subhuman beings, or people with irreconcilable differences from one's own group, and then consigning them to maltreatment or even death. The Chinese and Japanese, after all, were not that different as regards racial characteristics, but racism in this case was more a matter of culture, a mental

construction based on perceived differences, rather than simple biological differences. After World War II, although the Japanese society no longer corrupted the minds of their young people with racist propaganda against the Chinese, the government has been, and is still, in denial of the Nanjing Massacre. Such a position sidestepped all questions of apologizing and compensating its victims. In Japan of the twenty-first century, racial discrimination against Koreans still exists. Although a number of advanced societies have enacted legislation to protect their members against racism, many people in these societies are still suffering from its subtle and prevailing influences. In Japan and in many Western countries, including those in South America, more efforts need to be made to eradicate legacies of racism that have become embedded in the cultures and value systems of these societies.

The only ray of light emanating from the dark days of the Nanjing Massacre came from the Nanjing Safety Zone, created by a small band of Westerners. In 1937, Japan was not yet at war with any Western country, and Westerners were regarded by the Japanese as neutrals (apart from the Germans, whose country had become an ally of Japan), and their international concessions at the treaty ports were treated as neutral territories, and so were left alone. However, before the Japanese army reached Nanjing, most foreigners evacuated from the city, to avoid being caught in the crossfire, except for a couple of dozen Europeans and Americans. They were Christian missionaries, YMCA and Red Cross workers, university professors, medical doctors, and business executives, two of whom were Germans who happened to be Nazis. These extremely brave and kind-hearted individuals could not bear to abandon the endangered Chinese to their fate. They chose to stay, risking their own lives, and set up an International Committee for a Nanjing Safety Zone, a neutral territorial zone and safe haven as a shelter for Chinese non-combatants. The members of this committee cordoned off an area of about two and half square miles near the city centre, with its borders lined with white flags and sheets marked with the red cross symbol ringed by a red circle.

By the time the city fell, 250,000 refugees had found their way into the Nanjing Safety Zone, where the members of the International Committee worked indefatigably day and night to provide food and shelter, to ferry the sick and injured to the hospital where their colleagues worked, and to defend their charges = the men from being taken away and killed, and the women from being raped. Thanks to the heroic efforts of these Americans and Europeans, the safety zone saved the lives of up to 300,000 people, which included most of the Chinese who did not perish from rape and massacre during the six to eight weeks of the frenzied Japanese reign of terror. The men and the lone woman - Wilhelmina Vautrin, known as the Goddess of Nanjing - of the International Committee of the Nanjing Safety Zone provided a heart-warming example of human decency, kindness, and courage that transcended ethnic and racial boundaries.

China fragmented

After the fall of Nanjing, some Japanese military leaders had expected Chiang Kai-shek to capitulate, or the Chinese resistance to collapse. Such was not the case. The Japanese hopes for an easy victory in their conquest of China were dashed. Their aim of reducing the whole of China to a supplier of raw materials, and a market for their goods, would have been a big step towards building an even larger empire, which the ultranationalist Japanese had named as 'the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere'. Contrary to their expectation, however, their army was soon bogged down in a long-drawn-out war with China.

Having abandoned his capital, Chiang withdrew his army up the Yangtze River to Wuhan, the triple-city that had sparked the Revolution of 1911, and tried to consolidate his position there in the spring of 1938. While amassing the forces and materials to assault this city, the Japanese continued to advance into central China unchecked, except briefly at the important railway junction around Xuzhou, where General Li Zongren scored a major victory against them in April. Li was a former Guangxi warlord, who sometimes collaborated with Chiang and sometimes joined others to challenge Chiang's monopoly of power. But Li could not block the Japanese advance for long. After taking Xuzhou in May, the Japanese were threatening the ancient city of Kaifeng, from where a railway line would take them south to Wuhan.

To make it difficult for the Japanese to attack Wuhan from the north, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the dikes of the Yellow River to be blown up. This drastic act, though it delayed the Japanese advance for three months, caused immense floods in over 4000 north China villages, and the loss of countless lives among the rural population. It also changed the course of the Yellow River to run through northern Jiangsu to the sea, instead of through the north of the Shandong Peninsula, a route which was itself a consequence of an earlier change of course of this river around 1851.

By late summer of 1938, the Japanese were ready to carry out a two-pronged advance on Wuhan, one from the north by land, and the other coming up from the south through the Yangtze, after sweeping the mines laid by Chinese nationalists in Poyang Lake. At this point Stalin, aroused by the Anti-Comintern Pact between Nazi Germany and imperialist Japan in 1936, came to the aid of China, which shared a long border with Russia. The Russian air force, based in Lanzhou in Gansu, and supplied through the Silk Road by trucks and camels, fought aerial battles against the Japanese in the air, and inflicted serious damage on the Japanese air force. As a result of the Russian aid, the Japanese failed to take Wuhan until 25 October 1938, by which date the Japanese had lost 100 planes and suffered 200,000 casualties, according to a Chinese estimate.

However, preoccupation with events in Europe soon led the Russians to withdraw their 'volunteer pilots' from China. And shortly before the fall of Wuhan, the Japanese navy landed marines and seized the important southern city of Guangzhou, near Hong Kong.

Before Wuhan fell, Chiang Kai-shek had retreated further westward beyond the Yangtze gorges, with his government and the remnants of his army, to make Chongqing (Chungking) in Sichuan province his wartime capital. During the year and a half of war against Japan, from July 1937 to November 1938, Chiang had lost vast stretches of Chinese territory to Japan, along the eastern seaboard, including Guangzhou, and in northern and central China. The battle casualties of Chinese soldiers reached more than a quarter of a million. Beside the huge financial cost of the war to the Nationalist government, the personal and economic loss of the Chinese people caught up in the war was beyond measure. Despite the heavy losses, Chiang was determined to resist Japan and fight a protracted war from a less accessible region of China, where mountains and rapids afforded natural barriers against the enemy's advance.

Notwithstanding the continuation of Chinese resistance by the Nationalists from Chongqing and the Communists from Yan'an, by November 1938 the Japanese army had occupied the most fertile and developed regions of China. The Japanese government declared that the Chinese Nationalist government in Sichuan represented only a local authority, while China, as a part of the Japanese-led 'New Order in East Asia', was to be divided into several puppet regimes, administered by different governments led by Han Chinese, Manchu, or Mongol officials, that were in turn controlled by the separate Japanese army commands. The war therefore resulted in a renewed fragmentation of China.

The Kwantung Army was one such command. It had already taken over China's Dongbei region in 1931, ruling it through the Manchukuo regime that was formed in 1932. After invading north China with the help of troops drawn from Manchukuo and Mongolia between 1936 and 1937, the Kwantung Army founded an Inner Mongolian puppet state. Stirring up Mongolian nationalism, the Japanese secured the cooperation of a Mongol prince to lead the 'Federated Autonomous Government', which they created to rule a mineral-rich region that was 95% Chinese. After the full-scale Japanese invasion in 1937, Japan's North China Army set up its own puppet regime, under the 'Provisional Government of the Republic of China' in Beijing, to rule central China in 1938, while her Central China Army organized the 'Reformed Government' in Nanjing, ruling the region occupied by this army. Having abandoned their hope that Chiang Kai-shek might see the futility of resisting Japan and agree to lead a government of 'united' China under Japanese tutelage, in 1940 the Japanese succeeded in recruiting Wang Jingwei, a pro-Japanese Guomindang leader tired of playing second-fiddle to Chiang, to lead their government in Nanjing. Japanese development companies and banks were founded under these Japanese-controlled colonial regimes, to direct the economic development and resources of these Chinese regions to serve Japan's needs.

To the above Japanese-ruled Chinese territory, one should add Taiwan, a Chinese province taken from Qing China by Japan, after China lost the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. By the 1930s, Taiwan served as a mature example of how Japan organized and developed the economy of this island as her supply base.

Further Japanese assaults on China from 1939 onwards did not lead to such spectacular territorial gains as compared with the periods between 1937 to 1938, and before. Although Japan had succeeded in acquiring the vast natural resource base administered by her puppet regimes in China, she did not reckon on having more than a quarter of a million of her armed forces tied down in China for a protracted war. It was not possible for the Japanese, as they had once hoped, to keep China securely in their orbit by relying on the forces of the puppet regimes alone. While the territory ruled by the Japanese armies and puppet regimes appeared large, outside the major cities and away from the railway lines both the Chinese Nationalist and Communist guerrilla forces did not have too much difficulty infiltrating enemy-occupied countryside.

Outside the territory controlled by the Japanese armies and their puppet regimes, the Guomintang government in Chongqing retained a measure of control of areas that included most of Hunan, large parts of western Hubei and Henan, southern Jiangxi, most of Zhejiang and Fujian, and southern Shaanxi. It also controlled Guangxi, apart from the area between the city of Nanning and the coast, and Guangdong, except for the Pearl Delta around Guangzhou. Obstacles in communication during wartime prevented Chongqing from exercising its authority fully over all the above-mentioned areas. The Guomintang's move to Sichuan made its neighbouring province, Yunnan, a part of its heartland rather than a distant border region. Chiang Kai-shek managed to develop a working relationship with Long Yun, the ethnic Lolo warlord, who had ruled this province as a personal fiefdom since 1927.

As regards Xinjiang and Tibet, the former had existed as a province and the latter as a dependency under the Qing dynasty. Since then, local political or religious authorities ruled these areas autonomously, because there had not been a sufficiently strong Chinese central authority to reclaim its dominance over them.

The Chinese Communist Party with its headquarters in Yan'an constituted a separate Chinese authority in northwest China. As we have seen, Zhang Xueliang's coup in Xi'an, and the threat of full-scale war from Japan, led to the formation of the second united front between the Guomintang and the CCP in 1937, this time for the purpose of waging a national war of resistance against Japan. Had it not been for Japan's aggression that began in 1931, the Guomintang which nominally united China in 1928 under Chiang Kai-shek might well have been able to destroy the CCP regime in Yan'an, and dominate the richest part of China, while eliminating the warlords or keeping the surviving ones in check. The development of the war meant that the Chinese Communists were no longer the target of Chiang's annihilation campaign, and the CCP was given legitimacy by the Nationalist government in Chongqing. Greatly reduced in number and exhausted from the Long March, freedom from Guomintang attacks at this critical point enabled the CCP to recover and gain a new lease of life in northwest China.

The call for national resistance from both the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists led to hundreds of thousands of Chinese from all walks of life - students, teachers, factory workers, and landlords among

others - making the arduous and perilous journey to the base areas controlled by these two Chinese regimes. Tsinghua University in Beijing, and Nankai University in Tianjing, moved with their staff and students to Kunming in Yunnan, to unite as the South-West Associated University during the war. However, most Chinese had little choice other than to remain in Japanese occupied areas.

Chongqing at war

In comparison with Nanjing's favourable situation in the fertile Yangtze Valley, near coasts and the major treaty ports, Chongqing was located in China's less developed interior, far from the major railway networks. After the Japanese closed the Yangtze River to non-Japanese shipping and pressed the French to stop the transport of military supplies by rail from Hanoi in French Indochina (now Vietnam) to Kunming in Yunnan, Chongqing was cut off from the outside world. Yunnan took on a new prominence as, starting in December 1938, Chiang Kai-shek pushed through the arduous undertaking of constructing the Burma Road, a 715-mile earthen track over mountainous terrain (600 miles in China, and 115 in Burma), which enabled the vitally needed gasoline and military supplies to be carried from the British-controlled Rangoon (Yangon) in Burma to Kunming. This road was closed after the Japanese occupied the key Burmese city of Lashio in April 1942. After that time, these supplies had to be airlifted from British India to China, across a dangerous air route known as the 'Hump' over the Himalayas.

Having transferred the machinery and personnel of the Nationalist government from Nanjing via Hangzhou to Chongqing, Chiang Kai-shek enacted a number of measures to consolidate his power and win wider support in this new base. To meet the demands of representative government and to apply the principle of the united front, a People's Political Council was established in 1938. Its 200 members were chosen from a broadly representative spectrum of public figures. The seats on the council were distributed with 80 allotted to the Guomintang members, 70 to independents, and 50 to the Communists and other small parties. However, this council was not a legislative body; it could only offer advice. When some of its independent members criticized the government, Chiang changed the rules in 1942 so that most of its members were from the Guomintang.

In 1939, the Three Principles of the People Youth Corps was set up, to build support for Chiang's leadership among the young. His government founded a Central Training Corps for indoctrinating officers, administrators, professors, and others in responsible positions with the Guomintang ideology, as put forward by Chiang in his book, *China's Destiny*. Attributing China's woes to foreign aggression, Chiang stressed the need for patriotic anti-imperialism. To counter the imported foreign Communist ideology of class struggle, Chiang sought to revive Confucianism, and to reassert the age-old virtues valued by the

Chinese society. Like his fellow dictator, Mao Zedong, he believed in the subordination of the individual to the state. He regarded democracy as unsuitable for China's stage of development. Chiang's drive to root out opium poppy cultivation and smoking in Sichuan was reminiscent of Yuan Shikai, an autocrat of an earlier generation, who had also tried to revive Confucianism and to eliminate opium from the Chinese scene.

The activities of these political institutions were something of a sideshow for a regime preoccupied by the grim exigencies of the war. Chiang dominated the Nationalist party and government through his control of the military. The expanding Military Affairs Commission with Chiang at the top took over increasingly many of the functions of the civil government. There were five million men under arms at times, with half a million officers. The support for this large military establishment, in addition to war expenditures, and a large bureaucracy, together posed a severe strain on the meagre financial resources available to the Nationalist government.

The maritime customs on foreign trade, which had constituted more than 50% of the Nanjing government's revenue, was no longer available to Chongqing, because most of the ports were in Japanese occupied territory. The neutral status of the self-governing foreign concessions of the treaty ports could not prevent the Japanese from doing some arm-twisting of those who managed these enclaves. The foreign customs house officers could not resist the Japanese pressure to deposit the customs collected in their ports in Japanese banks. The Central Bank of China in Chongqing continued to issue notes and raise loans, both foreign and domestic, though it could not raise money as readily as its predecessor in Shanghai. From 1937 to 1939, China's main source of foreign aid was the Soviet Union, which provided \$250 million of credit to China. This sum almost equalled the \$263.5 million of Western credits to China during the four years from 1937 to December 1941, when China and America became allies after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. After the Nationalist government gave up China's traditional silver-based currency in 1933, the United States had been purchasing silver from China. By 1941, China raised \$250.2 million from the export of silver to America.

The Nanjing government had left the land tax to the provincial authorities for their own use. Chongqing had to take back this tax in order to feed its army. The government collected the land tax in kind, and it controlled the price of grain to counter the effect of inflation. To pay the equivalent of their tax assessments in grain, the peasants had the onerous duty of transporting the grain to certain collection points. Fortunately, Sichuan was agriculturally fertile and self-sufficient in grain, except when famine struck. The armies garrisoning or fighting in other provinces were allowed grain as tax themselves, obtained directly from local peasants. Unfortunately, the income from this tax and all other available sources was far from sufficient to cover the growing expenses of the government.

Between 1939 and 1942, the government made an intensive effort to develop industries and transport, with notable results. During this period, the output of coal doubled, the production of electricity increased sevenfold, and 1000 miles of rail tracks were built. However, the circumstances that prevailed in China's backward and isolated wartime base did not allow such developments to be sustained. There was not much taxable income available from the small modern sector to help the government's budgetary deficit.

To cover the shortfall, the government in desperation resorted to printing money. Inflation was the inevitable result. As the gap between income and expenditure widened during the war years, more and more money needed to be printed, and inflation went higher and higher. For example, in 1938 the Nationalist government's income of 1.31 billion yuan was 66% short of its expenditure of 2.18 billion yuan. By 1942, though its income had increased to 6.25 billion yuan, its expenditure reached 26.03 billion yuan, more than 4 times the income. During the same two years, in 1938 the outstanding bank-note issues were 2.7 billion yuan, while in 1942 the figure was a staggering 35.10 billion yuan. The rise in the retail price index was also striking: if January 1937 was taken as 1, the December 1938 figure was 1.76, and in 1942, this index reached 66.2. Between these two years, the value of the Chinese yuan against the U.S. dollar dropped by almost a factor of 10.

Life was a daily struggle in Free China's wartime base. The peasants, already overburdened by taxes and land rents, were pressed into offering their labour for free, in building roads, airports, and other construction projects. Furthermore, many were forcefully conscripted into the army. As inflation cut into the salary of the government officials, many fell either into poverty, or the temptation of corruption. Shortages of gasoline and luxury goods led to a thriving black market. Despite the uncontrollable inflation, those who had the means or connections to tap into state capitalism, such as owning high interest bonds and hoarding certain goods, still managed to do well. The widening gulf between the rich and the poor led to greater social tension.

Tough laws limited democratic freedoms. Strict censorship meant that the Chinese intellectuals with liberal, progressive, or left-wing tendencies had to tread carefully in China's wartime capital, or face harassment, imprisonment or worse, at the hands of Chiang's secret service. As the war dragged on, the situation became more demoralizing. From 1939, the Japanese made life even more miserable for the residents of Chongqing by systematic air raids that killed the defenceless people, until a network of underground shelters was dug into the rocks underneath the city. Partisans behind the Japanese lines were also recruited to use radios to warn the city of impending bombing raids.

To remedy the weakness of lacking air power - in 1940 Chiang's air force had 37 fighters and 31 old Russian bombers - Chiang sent T. V. Soong, assisted by Hu Shih, the Republic of China's ambassador to the United States, to purchase planes from America. Because of the enormous British need, the Roosevelt

administration was only able to ship 100 P-40 fighter planes to China. Although the number of planes was small by comparison with Japan's capacity to deploy over 1,000 planes against the Chinese (968 in China and another 120 in Indochina), the American 'volunteer' pilots, recruited by Claire Lee Chennault, a former U.S. military officer and adviser to Chiang, managed to inflict serious damage on the Japanese in 1941. This corps of flyers in Chiang's informal air force organized by Chennault soon became known as the 'Flying Tigers'

Yan'an at war

In comparison with Chongqing in Sichuan, Yan'an in Shaanxi was even more poor and backward and isolated from the outside world. The aid to China from the Soviet Union was given before 1939 to the Nationalists only. After that time, the Russians were too preoccupied with the developments in Europe to be involved in China, until 1945. The Communist regime had therefore to be entirely self-sufficient and self-reliant. It had also become more independent of the Comintern.

In late 1937, the united front agreement between the Nationalists and the Communists obliged the CCP to give up armed rebellion, abandon the soviet form of autonomous government in Shaanxi, stop confiscating the land of the landlords, and put the Red Army under the Guomindang's nominal command. With the Guomindang's approval, instead of the Shaanxi Soviet, the CCP set up two border region governments: the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia (abbreviated as Shaan-Gan-Ning), and the Shanxi-Chahar-Hebei (abbreviated as Jin-Cha-Ji, the archaic names for these provinces). Yan'an was the capital of the Shaan-Gan-Ning border region. The united front agreement also limited the positions of the Communists in the Yan'an government to one third, while another third was to go to the non-Communist left progressives, and the rest to the non-aligned or even Guomindang members. Mao Zedong believed that, even as a minority block, the cohesion and discipline of the Communists would enable them to dominate the government. To adhere to the united front policy, the leaders of the CCP had to curb the revolutionary zeal of some of their members, preventing them from expropriating landlords' land and redistributing it to the poor and landless peasants. Instead, a more gradualist approach of rent and interest reduction was adopted to help the poor peasants.

Like the Guomindang, the CCP tried to tighten its own organization, as well as the government and the army it led, to survive, fight the Japanese, and expand their base area. It set up party branches in the border regions, and recruited new members among the locals, as well as among the refugees who migrated from Japanese occupied areas. CCP membership increased from about 40,000 in 1937 to an estimated 800,000 in 1940. To render the selected party members into a disciplined force of party functionaries (cadres), who were embedded in the government administrative organizations, the army, and the productive enterprises, and who were to carry out the policies and goals of the centre, the CCP put them through an intense

programme of training and indoctrination. They were required to study subjects such as Marxism, guerrilla warfare, Mao's thoughts, and the policies of the CCP, and to participate in discussions of these. To win the support of the masses of ordinary people, Mao propagated the idea of following the 'mass line'. In Mao's words, the Party was to be like 'fish' in the people's 'water', so as to get to know the people's needs, and to work out what actions to take to satisfy those needs. The CCP was to aim at total solidarity with the people, to promote their interests, and to achieve their goals. This was Mao's answer to Western democracy, or 'bourgeois democracy' as the Communists called it. The Communist cadres were schooled in the mass line idea. The popularity of the Chinese Communist movement would be understandable, if and when this idea was put into practice.

The CCP's regular armed forces consisted of the Eighth Route and the New Fourth Armies, led by Zhu De as Commander-in-Chief and Peng Dehuai as his Deputy. In 1937 these two armies had 92,000 men; by 1940 the total reached 500,000. In addition, there were local forces, which were aided by part-time militia of men and women, aged from 16 to 45, who generally had other occupations. The poorly armed militia performed useful services in intelligence gathering, and in providing logistic support and shelter to the regular troops. The CCP made sure that the officers and soldiers of its armies did not exploit or mistreat the people, for example by not paying for goods, or molesting the women. These well-disciplined troops enabled the Red Army to maintain a good reputation among the people, which would later stand the Party in good stead in the civil war.

Though the Communists tried to develop industry with primitive technology and surplus labour, the taxable income to support their regime had to be derived from agricultural production. Taxes were high and burdensome to the peasants, and the CCP policy of reducing rent and interest to 37.5% benefited most of them, at the expense of the landlords. The CCP's efforts to educate, indoctrinate, mobilize, and organize them for social revolution and patriotic war against Japan must have helped to win their understanding and support. The fact that the leaders dressed, ate, and lived in the same simple style as the common people, probably helped to promote a sense of solidarity and the need to sacrifice for national salvation. While morale was low in Nationalist Chongqing, the opposite was the case in Communist Yan'an, despite the general hardship and shortage of material things. These were the impressions given by Americans who had dealings with both these regimes during World War II.

Ever since the top-level meeting of the CCP in Zunyi during the Long March, Mao Zedong's star in the Chinese Communist movement had been rising, and he clearly dominated the CCP in Yan'an. Mao arrived at this position through having convinced the CCP leaders of the correctness of his strategic vision and his policies, which together saved the CCP from destruction and enabled it to flourish. He produced a large body of writing to establish his ideological leadership. His ideas became the party orthodoxy no one dared

to challenge. He was not just a theoretician, whose 'head was in the clouds'; he also distinguished himself as a military leader, an organizer of party cells and peasant movements. While others were pushing for the doomed urban putsches as directed by the Comintern, he took the unorthodox line of a peasant-based revolution, which bore fruit not only immediately, but also in the long run. The use of guerrilla tactics, favoured by him, had led to the defeat of the better armed and more numerous Nationalist forces which had tried to encircle and destroy their peasant soviet in the early 1930s. But as we have seen, when Mao's colleagues forsook this tactic in 1934, and resorted instead to conventional positional warfare against the Guomindang during its fifth encirclement campaign against the CCP's centre in Jiangxi, the Communists suffered such a severe rout that they were forced to abandon their painstakingly developed base in central China, and embark on the Long March.

Furthermore, Mao claimed credit for insisting on continuing the Long March to their present base, rather than following Zhang Guotao's policy of building another centre in a border area between Sichuan and Xikang in 1935, when the two men and the armies they led met briefly. Zhang failed to establish another viable CCP central organization in competition with Mao. Military setbacks against the Nationalist forces greatly reduced the strength of the army he led by 1936, when he also retreated to Shaanxi. Although Zhang had posed a serious challenge to Mao's leadership of the CCP in the mid-1930s, he could not match Mao's entrenched position in Yan'an. In 1938, Zhang defected to Chiang Kai-shek's side.

Mao's other possible rival for power was Wang Ming, the most powerful of the 'Returned Bolsheviks'. Since 1931, he had represented the CCP in the Comintern in Moscow and had been elected to its governing body. With the Comintern's support, he effectively became the leader of the CCP between 1931 and 1935, when Mao was one among many leading figures of the Jiangxi Soviet. During this period, he and his supporters had enforced the Comintern's line of using the Red Army to seize major urban centres, with disastrous results. From 1935 onwards, he espoused the policy of the united front, which was also the line taken by the Comintern. During the war, he argued that the Red Army should be truly, rather than just nominally, integrated into the Nationalist forces, and be commanded by the Nationalists to fight the Japanese together. For this he was branded as a 'right capitulationist', while his early espousal of urban revolution was criticised as 'left adventurism'. In Yan'an during the 1940s, his colleagues pressed him to admit these errors. Targeted for criticism and humiliation, Wang Ming was in no position to challenge Mao's leadership.

In the war against Japan, from 1937 to 1939, the Communists confined themselves to guerrilla tactics, since the Red Army had a regular armed force of fewer than 100,000 at the start of the war. Faced with an elusive enemy, Japanese used a 'cage policy', which entailed building blockhouses and digging trenches to seal off the Communist-held areas. In 1940, with the Eighth Route Army reaching 400,000 strong, the Yan'an

regime changed to conventional warfare. Under Peng Dehuai's leadership, the Red Army launched a fierce '100 Regiments' offensive against the Japanese that broke the cage and inflicted heavy losses on the Japanese. However, when the much better armed and more numerous Japanese counterattacked, the Eighth Route Army lost about 100,000 men. Harsh Japanese reprisals against the people of the region of northern China under Communist rule devastated enormous areas, wiping out villages and reducing the population there from 44 to 25 million.

Thereafter the Communists reverted to guerrilla tactics, which often required the collaboration of the local Chinese communities in the countryside. To warn the Chinese civilians against helping their Communist compatriots, the Japanese carried out a ruthless policy known as 'Three Alls' which stood for 'kill all, burn all, destroy all'. These atrocities served to drive the peasants into the arms of the Communists, making it easier for the CCP to mobilize them for production and fighting. Significant though the Communists' contribution was, earning them some reputation for leading the nation's patriotic war against Japan, the burden of World War II in China in fact fell largely on the shoulders of the Nationalists.

In the protracted war against Japan, clashes were difficult to avoid as the scattered armies of the Nationalists and Communists in the field competed with one another for favourable niches to expand into, so as to build bases and collect taxes. Some of the Guomindang generals in the rich Yangtze Delta area resented the presence of the Communists' New Fourth Army, which grew out of the Red Army remnants that had been left behind at the start of the Long March, either to protect their base in Jiangxi province, or to carry out guerrilla war. Skirmishes broke out between the two forces, when the Nationalist generals tried to enforce their orders that required the Communist forces to move north. Early in December 1940 Chiang Kai-shek issued an ultimatum, commanding the Communist troops to move to the northern bank of the Yangtze River by the end of January 1941. As the main body of the New Fourth Army delayed their northward journey, some of its units actually veered south. These were trapped in a Nationalist ambush in the mountains, where some 3,000 perished and many more were taken to prison camps. The New Fourth Army did move to the northern bank of the Yangtze and establish itself there in six separate groups. Soon afterwards, it set up a new guerrilla base in roughly the same area it had been previously asked to vacate.

Even though the 'New Fourth Army Incident (South Anhui Incident)' did not lead to the breakup of the united front, the tension between the two parties ran high. After this incident, Chiang Kai-shek enforced an economic blockade on the Shan-Gan-Ning and other border regions, which increased the already serious shortages in the Communist-held area, leading to severe inflation. The people were rewarded with money when they handed in weapons after combing the battlefields. The economic difficulties moved the leaders to introduce peasant cooperatives and other means to improve agricultural production. Even Zhu De, the Commander-in-Chief, led soldiers into the countryside to reclaim wastelands.

Since Japan's full-scale invasion of China, the ultra-nationalistic militarists had gained ascendancy in the Japanese government, and the whole country was put on a war footing, aiming at conquests. This group's expansionist vision did not stop at China, though by the early 1940s, the Sino-Japanese war appeared to have reached a stalemate. While the Japanese had difficulty 'getting off the back of the China tiger they have mounted' (in the words of the Chinese saying *qi hu nan xia*²), they were looking enviously at the rich natural resources of South Asia. The incorporation of this area into their empire would enable the Japanese to achieve the goal of autonomy. However, the territories Japan wanted to annex were all under Western colonial rule: the British had Burma, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaya; the French had Indochina (Vietnam); the Dutch had the East Indies (Indonesia), and the Americans had the Philippines. World War II in Europe, which began in the summer of 1939, changed the situation. Soon France and Holland were under Germany occupation, and Great Britain herself was fighting for survival. While Japan was not ready to go to war at this point with the Western democracies, their collective weakness and American isolationism enabled the Japanese to put pressure on the foreign-managed MCS, and the authorities that ran the international communities at the treaty ports in Japanese occupied areas in China, to comply with Japanese demands.

Japan joins the Axis Powers

In September 1940, Japan joined the Axis powers by signing the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. The Japanese militarists admired the Nazis, with whom they had a lot in common. By signing this treaty, the Japanese were betting on Germany winning the war. If that were the case, they wanted to be assured that the ex-colonies of the Western democracies in the eastern part of the world would become a part of Japan's New Order. Although the Chinese would not surrender, the Japanese, looking at the shortages and spiralling inflation in wartime Sichuan, expected Chiang Kai-shek's government to collapse after a prolonged period without outside help.

At this time Japan was also interested in German assistance to repair her relationship with the Soviet Union, which in 1939 had despatched its air force to China, to fight Japan in support of Chiang Kai-shek, as already mentioned. In addition, from May to September 1939, the Soviet Union and Japan fought a large-scale war, known as the Battles of Khalkhin Gol, in the vicinity of Nomonhan, near the border between Manchuria and Mongolia. The Japanese were afraid that the non-aggression pact concluded in August 1939 between Germany and the Soviet Union would free the Communist country to strengthen its military forces in northeast Asia against themselves. In order not to have to fight on the Manchurian and Mongolian fronts

² Meaning 'to get into a situation where proceeding forward and backing down are both difficult'.

with the Communist giant across the border, before they had expanded into Southeast Asia, the Japanese strongly desired peace with the Soviet Union. Since the threat of Nazi Germany against the Soviet Union was not entirely removed by their non-aggression pact, the Russians also desired peace with Japan, so that they did not have to fight on both fronts. In April 1941, the two countries signed a non-aggression pact.

Another reason for Japan joining the Rome-Berlin Axis was to isolate America. In fact, during the pre-war years, a strong sentiment of isolationism already prevailed in America. That was why the United States, with a small army, and a naval force divided between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, did not prepare for war. Before the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, America kept itself aloof from military involvement, in both Europe and Asia. As regards China, the United States continued to stand for the Open Door Policy, for territorial and administrative integrity of that country, and for non-aggression as the Washington Treaties had stipulated in the early 1920s. Although Japan's aggression towards China, which began with the Mukden Incident in 1931, violated all the principles America stood for, the United States was not willing to go to war to defend these principles, or to aid China militarily. Apart from expressing disapproval of Japan's aggression towards China, the United States maintained a policy of neutrality in the conflict between those two countries, selling equipment and materials essential to the war efforts of both. As American public opinion grew increasingly hostile towards the Axis powers, Japan's close association with this group made her also a target of American animosity.

America joins the war against Japan

The path to Pearl Harbour

With Germany as an ally, Russia neutralized, and the European colonial powers either under German occupation or struggling for survival, the Japanese saw 1940 as an opportune time for them to expand into Southeast Asia virtually unopposed, if the United States, the only power that was free to impede them, continued with its isolationism. For many decades, the Japanese navy had looked upon the American Pacific Fleet with hostility. It posed a potential threat to their expansion into Southeast Asia. The Japanese were keenly aware of the fact that their dependence on American aviation fuel, and scrap iron and steel for making bombs was their Achilles heel. To be free of this dependence on America, Japan needed to acquire the raw material resources of Southeast Asia, such as oil from the Dutch East Indies, as quickly as possible. Was America willing to go to war with Japan to prevent the latter from fulfilling her colonial ambition? The Japanese militarists were not to be thwarted by this possibility. In September 1940, the Japanese army moved to northern French Indochina, ignoring an American warning. In response, the United States placed

an embargo on aviation gasoline, and iron and steel scrap metal. Since the Japanese could process other grades of gasoline to make aviation fuel, the American move was hurtful, but not crippling. Before the end of 1940, the Japanese consolidated their position in northern Indochina, and proceeded to dominate Thailand.

The partial embargo aroused Japanese fear of a total American oil embargo, but it did not stop the Japanese troops from moving further into southern Indochina in July 1941. This time the United States, Britain, and the Dutch East Indies together imposed a total embargo on exports to Japan. The move reduced Japan's oil import to 10% of its previous volume. Alarmed that their limited stockpile of oil might be depleted within a foreseeable time scale, the Japanese militarists felt compelled to take the big step of embarking on the conquest of Southeast Asia, in order to realize their goal of building a self-sufficient empire. Invading the colonial possessions of the Western powers would risk war with Great Britain and the United States.

Although the Japanese believed they could take military action against the British colonies in their stride, war with America, whose involvement in World War II had so far been limited to keeping Britain supplied with shiploads of necessities through the Lend Lease Act, would pose a far more serious challenge to their military-industrial capacity. This did not deter the militant naval staff officers and junior planners of the Japanese navy from preparing for war with the United States. While war remained an option, the Japanese government led by Fumimaro Konoe wanted to explore the possibility of persuading the United States to revoke the oil embargo, in exchange for some concessions from Japan. Since America had no extensive colonial interests to defend in Southeast Asia apart from the Philippines, the 'peace party' hoped that if Japan were to agree to keep to the *status quo* in its expansion, or even to carry out some minor withdrawal, America might be willing to make a peace deal with Japan. Furthermore, Konoe was willing to promise not to go the war on the side of the Axis powers, should the United States' support for the British involve it in war with Germany. If war with the United States could be avoided through diplomacy, Japan might wait until the end of the war in Europe for a settlement on the division of Southeast Asia. In July 1941, the Japanese government led by Konoe started intense negotiations with the Roosevelt administration, to strike a deal for peace. The Japanese leaders also set themselves a deadline of war against America by October, if the negotiations failed to achieve the desired result.

Konoe's proposals, and even the offer of a meeting between him and Roosevelt, attracted the U.S. President but he allowed himself to be persuaded by his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, who dominated the formation of American policy towards the Far East, not to meet with Konoe. Hull distrusted the Japanese peace initiative. He saw the Japanese as aggressors, and striking deals with them would amount to condoning aggression, which in his view was morally wrong. He was also concerned that a drastic change in American policy towards Japan might jeopardize the network of the established relationships between the United

States and Britain, China, Holland, and Australia. In November 1941, Japan made her most sacrificial offer, which was that she would return to the position of June 1941 by withdrawing her troops from southern Indochina, in exchange for an American agreement to stop the oil embargo, and to stay out of China. Hull was far from ready to reach a compromise with Japan. Confident that Japan would not dare to attack the United States, he demanded the Japanese to withdraw their troops from Indochina and China, including Manchuria. His uncompromising stance meant turning the clock back to 1931, before Japan invaded Manchuria.

While Konoe's limited concessions might not have been acceptable to the Japanese military, who were eager to seize the moment to realize their vision of empire, further negotiations on the basis of the American demands were clearly out of the question. By this time, the October deadline of going to war with America set by the Japanese leaders for themselves had already passed, so for Japan war was the only option left on the table. Having prepared themselves in advance for war in the Pacific, the Japanese had already conducted mock attacks on Pearl Harbour for months in Kagoshima Bay in Southern Kyushu, prior to the actual event. On the morning of Sunday 7 December 1941, to the shock of the United States, the Japanese carried out a well-executed bombing attack by aircraft from a carrier, which destroyed or seriously damaged seven battleships, many lesser vessels, and over half of the aircraft on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. It was a crippling blow to America's Pacific Fleet, though three aircraft carriers that were at sea had the good fortune to be spared a similar fate. Although the U.S. ambassador's warning from Japan, together with other tell-tale signs shortly before the attack, should have alerted America to an impending Japanese strike, these were ignored. The Japanese pre-emptive attack on Pearl Harbour shocked the Americans into abandoning their isolationism, and it united them behind their country's decision to enter World War II.

By the end of 1941, without the restraining presence of America's Pacific Fleet, Japan was ready to extend its 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere', which had been envisaged for China and Manchuria in 1938, to include almost all the continental and island territories in Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand, many Pacific islands, and possibly India. The Japanese conquest proceeded at break-neck speed. Having established a dominant position in Indochina and Thailand earlier in 1941, the Japanese attacked Hong Kong, Malaya, the Philippines, and Hawaii on 8 December 1941. From 13 to 25 December, Guam, the Wake Islands, and Hong Kong fell. In January 1942, both Manila and Singapore fell, the latter after a day's fighting and the surrender of the 130,000 British troops garrisoned there. During the same month, Japanese forces landed in the Dutch East Indies. In the first half of 1942, the Japanese proceeded to take over Burma and Malaya by defeating the British stationed in these countries, the Philippines by forcing the U.S. Army

under General Douglas MacArthur to retreat from that country, the East Indies by overpowering the Dutch garrisons, and the Aleutian Islands by landing marines there.

China and America as allies after Pearl Harbour

Chiang Kai-shek's hope of Allied intervention in the Sino-Japanese war finally became a reality after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. China and America became allies, and there was the possibility of using China as a base to attack Japan. American support helped China to join the Anti-Axis Alliance as one of the 'Big Four' Allied powers: the other three being the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. \$500 million worth of loans, and \$650 million worth of lend-lease materials were granted to Chiang's government in 1941. President Roosevelt sent General Joseph Stilwell to China as his liaison with Chiang Kai-shek, to supervise the lend-lease supplies, and to have overall command of the American forces in the 'China-Burma-India' war theatre. With America as an ally, substantial air power became available to fight the Japanese from China. The previously mentioned 'Flying Tigers' joined the Fourteenth U. S. Air Force commanded by Claire Lee Chennault, who was given the rank of general. This air squadron protected Free China's cities from Japanese bombing raids.

Although in 1941 the Nationalist troops blocked a massive Japanese assault on Changsha in Hunan province, both the Chinese and British forces, fighting separately, failed to stop the Japanese advance into Burma from Indochina and Thailand in the spring of 1942. This campaign in Burma was extremely costly to Chiang: he lost many of his irreplaceable German-trained troops, and heavy equipment amounting to one third of his strategic reserves. Japanese occupation of Lashio in Burma once more prevented Free China's war supplies from coming via the Burma Road.

How was this situation to be remedied? And how was Japan to be defeated? Stilwell and Chennault had different answers to these questions. Chennault's answer was to use the air force to airlift supplies over the 'Hump' from India. This plan was immediately feasible, but it had the disadvantage of high cost and low capacity. Furthermore, constructing new airfields and enlarging the air force bases was also costly. Stilwell argued for the development of an effective Chinese ground force. He pointed out that air forces needed troops on the ground to defend them. While he had a high opinion of the Chinese common soldiers, he despised Chiang's commanding officers, and Chiang himself. Chiang's armies struck him as being over-officered, underequipped, and undertrained. Stilwell's answer was to train a limited number of Chinese soldiers to make them into an elite corps. He believed that they would fight well, given proper leadership and equipment. He would use these troops to reconquer northern Burma and reopen the Burma Road to bring back large-scale supplies to Chongqing. Even though Chiang did not warm to his proposal, he

patiently pursued this plan and slowly it achieved the expected results. The retrained Chinese soldiers under his command fought the Japanese with distinction in Burma, and by early 1945 the land route to China was reopened.

Chiang favoured Chenault's proposal, and he put a lot of his resources into building airfields in Hunan and Guizhou provinces, at the periphery of the area he controlled. From early June 1944, American B-29 bombers flew out of these new airfields, dropping tons of bombs on enemy targets, ranging from railway yards in Bangkok in Thailand to the Yawata steel plant and other industrial sites on the island of Kyushu in Japan, and oil refineries in Sumatra, Indonesia. Stilwell had the foresight to see that the Japanese were not going to let this continue. They struck back hard in an operation called '*Ichigo*', or 'Number One' in Japanese, in the summer of 1944. Japanese troops in central China first moved to reinforce their control of the Beijing to Wuhan railway line, and then south along the Xiang River to attack Changsha and Hengyang, where an airfield was located. After capturing these cities, they moved to Guangxi to seize the air bases around Guilin and Liuzhou in that province. From there a couple of columns swerved towards the northwest, threatening the cities of Guiyang and even Chongqing. The *Ichigo* operation was a disaster for Chiang: besides the serious damage to his military forces and the large territorial loss, it lowered the morale of his regime, and the confidence of his American allies in his leadership.

To make more headway against the Japanese forces in China, Roosevelt conveyed to Chiang his wish to make General Stilwell the commander in chief of all Chinese troops, as he particularly pondered the striking contrast in performance between the Chinese troops involved in the *Ichigo* operation and those retained and commanded by Stilwell. This suggestion was totally unacceptable to Chiang, apart from the fact that he and Stilwell had not been on good terms. In October 1944, Stilwell was recalled to the United States and replaced by General Albert Wedemeyer.

Horrified by the brutality of the Nationalist armies' forcible conscription of the peasants, swayed by the propaganda coming out of Yan'an, and impressed with the Red Armies' combat capabilities, high American officials in China even briefly toyed with the idea working with the Chinese Communist regime in Yan'an, in the fight against the Japanese. In December 1944, General Wedemeyer submitted to Chiang a proposal for reorganizing 5,000 regular Communist troops, arming them with American weapons and placing them under an American commander for operations against the Japanese in Guomintang mandated areas. Chiang rejected this plan on the ground that the local Chinese would be too hostile to the Communist soldiers for them to operate effectively. Other proposals involved training and equipping Communist guerrilla forces to carry out sabotage against Japanese installations. By this time, the Guomintang and the CCP were already in a confrontational rather than cooperative mode towards each other, and Chiang would not give his

consent to any American scheme that might help his Chinese Communist enemies. In January 1945, to Yan'an's disappointment, the Americans shelved these plans.

Ideological differences aside, the one-sided U.S. aid to the Chinese Nationalists could be justified by the fact that their regime had been at the forefront of the war of resistance against the Japanese and had borne the greatest losses. The Chinese Communist propaganda nevertheless succeeded in creating a widespread impression that they were more patriotic and effective fighters against the Japanese. Outside the Japanese occupied areas and behind the frontlines, the CCP strove to consolidate its rule and enlarge the area and the population it controlled, in addition to waging guerrilla war against the Japanese. By 1945, the CCP was active over an area of 250,000 square miles, with radio links for quick communication. The Red Army soldiers were trained to befriend the people of the countryside, whose support was vital for guerrilla warfare. The CCP cadres lived and worked among the ninety-five million people of the liberated area, registering their landownership, staffing local administrations, and spreading liberation ideology illustrated by art (typically woodcut prints), literature, and drama adapted to the culture of the masses. By the time of its seventh national party congress in Yan'an in April 1945 (the sixth was at Moscow in 1928), the CCP had 1.2 million party members, and its Eighth Route and New Fourth Armies numbered 900,000.

Mao took on the new post of Chairman of the Central Committee of the CCP. The new constitution buttressed centralized party power and acknowledged the authority of 'Mao Zedong Thought' (Maoism) in guiding the party. Since Mao's ideologies were principles derived from the practical experience, he had gained from working in the countryside, he insisted that Marxist-Leninist theories must be applied with reference to the concrete reality of China's rural society. Mao's idea of testing theory by action was an approach no scientists would object to. His political rivals, the doctrinaire Soviet-trained CCP leaders, and the intellectuals, who had expressed 'unorthodox' ideas, or, in Mao's opinion, had not used their art to serve the masses, were discredited or disgraced through public self-criticism, or other forms of punishments.

The isolation of the Chinese Communists in Yan'an enabled the CCP to develop according to its own lights, and pursue its own policies under Mao's leadership, without Comintern interference. The new party constitution omitted any reference to the Soviet Union or the world Communist revolution. As the united front became less united during the years of the protracted war against the Japanese, the CCP shifted from their liberal policy of modest reform in the countryside, moving increasingly to one of revolutionary land reform, and redistribution of the land of the landlords. The Communist cadres penetrated deeply into the rural society of north China, in areas nominally controlled by the Japanese and China puppet regimes, to register, classify, and analyse the rural households, and to indoctrinate and mobilize the peasants for increasing production of crops, for the war against Japan, and for social revolution. The Yan'an years turned

out to have been a period of growth for the Chinese Communists, allowing the movement to become independent politically and self-reliant economically.

After the United States entered the war against Japan following Pearl Harbour, it became the principal ally of the Chinese Nationalists, whose government represented China. However, during the initial phase of the war American efforts were focused at first on defeating Germany before Japan. While Roosevelt and Churchill cooperated closely, 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell and Chiang Kai-shek were at loggerheads with one another. Even with the aid from America, Chiang's forces failed to turn the tide of war in China against Japan. Nevertheless, the stubborn Chinese resistance tied down two-fifths of all the forces available to Japan, and this remained the major Chinese contribution to the Allied war effort, and its importance should not be underestimated. The altered situation in the Far East and in the world during World War II finally helped the Chinese Nationalist government to secure, in 1943, agreements from the other Allied powers to abolish extraterritoriality. Since China had already gained tariff autonomy and put the foreign-managed MCS under nominal Chinese control from the late 1920s, the abrogation of extraterritoriality ended the unequal treaty system that had exploited and humiliated China for almost 100 years. In December 1943, Chiang Kai-shek joined Roosevelt and Churchill at the Cairo Conference, where a decision was made by the leaders to return Manchuria and Taiwan to China after the war.

The fate of the foreigners after Pearl Harbour

The Japanese ended the special privileges of the foreigners in the foreign concessions of the treaty ports in their occupied territories, although they allowed foreigners who remained there to continue carrying on with their businesses. However, in March 1943, the Japanese gathered the 1500 Westerners, adults and children, in Beijing and transferred them to the Weixian Internment Camp, run by the American Presbyterian Medical Mission in Shandong, where they had to survive on meagre allowances of food, and without medical supplies or amenities of any other kind. The Europeans and Americans in Shanghai were interned under similar condition in central China. The 16,000 Jewish refugees who had escaped to Shanghai from Nazi persecution from Europe were rounded up and put into a ghetto in a poor section of the city, where they endured a regime of hardship and deprivation, and the erratic maltreatment of their Japanese guards.

The war in the Pacific

As the war between the United States and Japan developed, the principal battles between the two countries were fought on islands in the Pacific, bypassing China. Probably for this reason, by 1946 America had provided China lend-lease grants of only \$1.5 billion, which was about 3% of the total of lend-lease aid of \$50 billion given to all countries in World War II. In May 1942, after Japan had acquired the previously mentioned far-flung empire in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, the United States achieved a crucial victory in Midway, an island at the westernmost end of the Hawaiian chain. At the battle of Midway, U.S. planes destroyed a Japanese armada of four aircraft carriers, which was their principal striking force that kept the sea lanes safe for her merchant marines. The loss of these carriers put the Japanese on the defensive.

To isolate Japan from her empire was an important American strategy, which the United States performed successfully through destroying her naval air power, navy, and merchant marines, by using ship-borne artillery and fighters and bombers from the air, and most effectively by using submarines. The U.S. attack sank over eight million tons of the Japanese merchant ships, leaving only 1.8 million tons of small wooden coastal craft by the end of the war. The isolation weakened Japan's economy and made it easier for the forces that opposed her inside and outside her empire to overwhelm her defences, and to roll back her empire.

Having developed new amphibious techniques that combined air superiority with naval barrages, landing crafts, and men, the United States reconquered the Pacific islands, large and small, one by one. The capture of the Marianas (Saipan) in June 1944 brought Japan within the range of Allied bombing. In October 1944, General Douglas MacArthur returned to the Philippines, which fell to the Allied forces after fierce fighting by June 1945. The Allied assault on the Japanese island of Okinawa started in April 1945, and it was captured in June 1945, after bloody Japanese resistance that took 85% of the defenders' lives. Japanese suicide planes called *Kamikaze* ('Divine Winds', referring to the typhoons that destroyed the Mongol invading ships during the thirteenth century) caused one fifth of the 49,100 Allied casualties, through the sinking of 34 ships and damaging 368 others.

From the middle of 1944 onwards, when the war in the Pacific and the Allied campaign in Burma were both making great strides, the Chinese Nationalists suffered a severe blow from the previously mentioned Japanese *Ichigo* operation. Disappointed by the Guomindang defeat, and the inability of the Chinese Nationalists and Communists to work together to make a greater impact on the war against Japan, Roosevelt and Churchill secured Stalin's agreement, at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, for Russia to enter the war against Japan within three months of Germany's surrender. As an incentive, Russia would recover all territory lost to Japan, including Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. Other rewards to Russia would involve giving back her privileges from the unequal treaties made between Qing China and Czarist Russia. One of these would give Russia once more the majority interest in the former Sino-Russian railway in Manchuria.

The other two concerned the great port cities of Lushun and Dalian in Liaoning province: while Lushun would be 'leased' again to Russia, Dalian would become an 'internationalized' city that would also benefit Russia. These future gifts to Russia were at China's expense, without consultation with the Nationalist government which represented China.

The major Allied strategy for the next phase of the war, which started during the second half of 1944, was to conduct massive firebomb raids on the Japanese homeland, aiming at the major cities with their industrial sites and civilian housing. As time went on, a raid could involve over 100 B-29 bombers, flying in parallel and saturating a densely settled city, such as Tokyo, with incendiary bombing that would almost instantly burn down the Japanese houses built with wood and paper, and cause over 100,000 civilian casualties in one day. These raids killed a total of 668,000 civilians and destroyed 2.3 million homes, in addition to laying waste countless infrastructure and production facilities, leading to economic breakdown and shortages of supplies, even many daily necessities, including food.

The terrifying bombing raids did not move the Japanese to accept the ultimatum put forward by a declaration of the three powers (the United States, Great Britain, and China) at their Potsdam Conference in July, which threatened the 'utter devastation of the Japanese homeland' if Allied terms on Japan's unconditional surrender were not met. By the middle of 1945, the United States had successfully developed, through the secret Manhattan Project, the ultimate weapon of the era: atomic bombs, using radioactive materials, uranium-235 and plutonium-239. To avoid the estimated one million American casualties that would result in an invasion of the Japanese home islands, and also to bring the war to a quick end, President Harry S. Truman chose to use these unprecedentedly destructive weapons against Japan. On 6 August 1945, an American B-29 bomber dropped the first atomic device in human history on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. The more than 4-ton bomb, packed with uranium-235, exploded 2,000 feet above the city of 350,000 in a blast that was equivalent to 12-15,000 tons of TNT, destroying 90% of the city, and killing about 80,000 people immediately; tens of thousands more died later from exposure to the high levels of radiation.

Responding to the terms of the Yalta Agreement, on 8 August 1945, three months after Germany's surrender on 7 May, the Soviet Union moved massive forces into Manchuria to attack the Japanese. On 9 August, the United States dropped a second atom bomb, an even more powerful plutonium device, on the smaller Japanese city of Nagasaki, killing between 60,000 and 80,000 people. On 15 August, Japan's unconditional surrender, announced by Emperor Hirohito in a radio address, brought World War II to an end.

With no knowledge of the Yalta Agreement or the secret atomic bomb programme, Chiang and Wedemeyer were working first on improving the quality of thirty-nine specially selected divisions of the Nationalists' troops, and then on a plan to recover Chinese territory from the Japanese little by little, first from the

southeast to recapture Guangzhou, then moving northwards to recover Shanghai. The second leg was reminiscent of the Northern Expedition against Chinese warlords in the late 1920s. Early in August, Chiang's forces captured Guilin shortly before the news of Japan's surrender reached China. As they had expected the war to stretch into an indefinite future, they were not prepared for the sudden coming of peace, and so no plans were made for the challenge of rehabilitating the country, politically, economically, and socially. But before any such rebuilding could occur, the country would descend into civil war.

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