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# **The Japanese Empire at War, 1931–1945**

**Steven Lee**

In the decade after 1931 Japan undertook a series of military campaigns across Asia which resulted in a conquest of the region unrivalled since the rise of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century. The war began in the autumn of 1931 when the Japanese government allowed the Guandong (Kwantung) army to expand the empire throughout Manchuria, China's north-east region; Chinese government resistance after the summer of 1937 resulted in a significant escalation of the fighting south of the Great Wall. The Nazi invasion of Poland and the onset of the European war in 1939 transformed Asia's devastating regional conflict into a war of global dimensions, even before American participation in the fighting. By 1940, at the time of the signing of the Tripartite Pact, Japanese and German officials shared the goal of overpowering the tottering liberal-capitalist international system and replacing it with an anti-Communist, anti-liberal, militaristic world characterized by insatiable colonial expansion and mass violence towards subject peoples. The reckless policies of the two regimes, combined with Allied resistance, especially in the Soviet Union and China, led to the eventual ruin of both empires, but not before the murderous policies of the Axis powers wrought a tremendous toll of suffering and dislocation around the world. China and eastern Europe were the two most ravaged areas of Eurasia, though the violence shattered social and familial relations across the globe. Recent estimates of the war's impact on the world's most populous country point out that up to twenty

million Chinese perished and that almost 100 million became refugees, figures which are comparable or surpass the impact of the German invasion of the Soviet Union. The Second Sino-Japanese War was more protracted than the Russo-German war, lasting from 1931 to 1945, with its most intense, cataclysmic phase enduring a little more than eight years, from July 1937 to August 1945. Although the war lasted longer in China than other parts of Asia, the struggle had profound impacts on people throughout the continent. Perhaps even more than in Europe, the war in Asia destroyed the old political order. Indeed, the Second World War played a major role in overturning almost all of the continent's pre-war political systems (exceptions include Thailand, Malaya, and Hong Kong, though each was profoundly impacted by Japan's invasion of South-East Asia, and Mongolia) and brought to power a generation of politicians whose ideas and policies in most cases were opposed to the imperial or indigenous rulers who had previously controlled the destinies of colonies and countries that made up about half of the world's population. Unlike most of Europe after 1945, in Asia the war ignited further conflict, as revolutionaries and nationalists battled each other, challenged returning colonial troops, and replaced retreating imperial systems with newly established states. The Second World War was thus a crucial staging point for a long trajectory of wars in Asia, a number of which have remained unresolved to this day, and whose consequences are very much part of our twenty-first-century world.

## **Japan's Empire and the Roots of the Second World War in Asia, 1877–1931**

The relationship between the two world wars is a significant theme in the historiography of the origins of the Second World War. From the point of view of Japan's war against China and the Japanese empire's 1940 alliance with Germany and Italy, <02.01> the 1914–18 war left an ambiguous legacy. On one hand, the First World War seemed to highlight underlying differences between Germany and Japan. Diplomatically, for much of the early twentieth century, Japan had co-operated closely with Britain, the world's pre-eminent liberal empire. Japanese politicians were attracted to the alliance partly because it implicitly sanctioned Meiji diplomatic and military expansion since 1877 into areas previously under the suzerainty or control of the Qing dynasty: Okinawa and other Ryukyu islands, the Choson dynasty (Korea), and Taiwan. The 1902 alliance also provided Japan with the security to limit Russian power in North-East Asia. Indeed, a case can be made that the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–5, more than the First World War, was a critical turning point for understanding the roots of Japan's war against China after 1931. In addition to occupying the southern half of Sakhalin island and establishing a Japanese protectorate over the Choson dynasty in 1905, the war with Russia led to Japan's acquisition of Russian holdings in Manchuria. The key strategic interests inherited by Japan, instrumental in understanding the origins of the Second World War in Asia, were the Russian naval base at Lushun (Port Arthur) and the nearby treaty port at Dalian (Dairen). The base and city were linked by the South Manchurian railway line, also acquired by Japan from Russia, which connected Port Arthur with Harbin in northern Manchuria.

The Anglo-Japanese alliance also meant that Germany and Japan were rivals during the Great War, when Japan forcibly incorporated Germany's Asian holdings into its imperial domains. By the war's end, Japan's new territories included the Marshall, Caroline, Palau, and

Mariana islands in the South Pacific (minus Guam, which the Spanish ceded to America in the Spanish–American War of 1898), as well as the former German treaty port in Shandong province, Qingdao (Tsingdao). For more than a decade after the end of the war, Japan remained aligned to the Anglo-American powers, after 1922 through the series of naval arms limitation treaties agreed to at the 1921–2 Washington conference. In great contrast to Germany, which lost its empire in 1919, in the First World War Japan expanded its colonial empire. In this sense, the roots of Japan’s involvement in the Second World War are, unlike the case of Germany, tied to the country’s continuous history of empire and colonial expansion.

Imperial Germany, however, was a crucial political and military model for the Meiji oligarchs. The Japanese Prime Minister at the time of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, Katsura Taro, was an influential military figure who had studied German military bureaucracy and served as Japan’s military attaché in Berlin in the latter 1870s. The First World War also heightened tensions between Japan and China, and China’s self-appointed ally in the international system, the United States. These frictions were somewhat concealed by the Washington System treaties of 1921–2, but the war left a legacy of suspicion and conflict and established some of the reasons behind Japan’s turn toward a more aggressive authoritarianism in the 1930s.

The Chinese government had also supported the Allied war effort in the Great War, and its leaders wanted to regain sovereignty over Shandong as well as access to that province’s valuable economic resources. The warlord government in Beijing, however, was fractured and controlled only part of northern China. Warlords ran other areas of the country, and competed with each other for power and resources, with the result that China had no effective national government. Japan took advantage of this weakness in 1915 in putting forward its infamous ‘twenty-one

demands' to President Yuan Shih-kai, who rejected the most insidious of Japan's imperial claims on China. After the Treaty of Versailles confirmed Japan's new Asian holdings, a major nationalist protest, the May Fourth Movement, erupted in China against Japan. The importance of the First World War in the wider history of the Second World War in Asia, then, partly lies in the nationalist movement it sparked in the republic.

The First World War also sharpened the ideological and material tensions between Japan and the USA. President Wilson's liberalism and the promise of democracy and self-determination especially irked more aggressive-minded Japanese officials like the vice-chief of the general staff, Tanaka Giichi, and the senior leader of Japan's militarist oligarchy, Yamagata Aritomo. Yet both governments joined European states after the war in regulating potential conflicts over Asia. At Washington, in December 1921, the big powers negotiated a series of naval arms limitations treaties and spheres of influence accords for Asia. Japan's top-ranking diplomats and naval commanders attending the conference, including its ambassador to the United States, Keijiro Shidehara, and Admiral Kato Tomosaburo, argued Japan's international position would be secured through co-operation with the European states and America. Particularly important was the perceived need to maintain the US market for Japanese goods and to access American investment and funds for post-war Japanese economic growth. The Washington System treaties replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance while permitting Japan to retain its naval supremacy in the western Pacific and preventing the other powers from gaining additional exclusive spheres of influence in China. Japan agreed to respect China's sovereignty and all representatives acceded to a de facto open door in that country.

The Washington treaties were successful in maintaining the political status quo only as long as the Chinese political system remained fractured and divided. Japanese leaders' alienation from the agreements increased in the second half of the 1920s as the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) of Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang (GMD) Party, based in the southern province of Guangdong, unified large parts of the country in a series of military offensives known as the northern expedition. <02.02> The Japanese government, and the military in particular, interpreted the offensives as a threat to the empire's strategic and economic interests. Key segments of army opinion, both in Manchuria and Tokyo, adhered to a total war ideology which posited that to win future conflicts Japan required access to substantial resources not available in the home islands. This group of army officers, influenced by studies of Germany's defeat in the First World War, coveted China's north-eastern region as the vital source of power needed to fuel their total mobilization strategies.

With the success of the northern expedition, long-held Chinese grievances found expression in sentiments of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and xenophobia. Foreign concessions came under condemnation and attack, for example, by striking workers, Guomindang supporters, and Communists. Japanese militarists responded by demanding more aggressive policies from the government in Tokyo. In late March 1927, after warlord and NRA troops attacked and looted international concessions in Nanjing, top-ranking Japanese military officers cited assaults against Japanese as evidence of the failure of Foreign Minister Shidehara's 'weak' diplomacy and the need for a more militarily aggressive China policy. The Nanjing 'incident' contributed to the fall of the Japanese government and led to the appointment of Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi, a retired general who, in his role as vice-chief of staff during the First World War, was the person

most closely associated with the notion of separating Manchuria from the rest of China. In the spring of 1928, anticipating the entry of the NRA into Shandong, Prime Minister Tanaka sent 5,000 Japanese troops from the Sixth Division to Qingdao, ostensibly to protect Japanese civilians and holdings in the province, but also as a symbol of Japan's determination to preserve its spheres of influence across China. The commander of the force unilaterally ordered his soldiers to the provincial capital, Jinan, where clashes occurred between the NRA and the Japanese infantry. On 1 May local time, Japanese shelling of the city caused hundreds of civilian casualties. President Chiang was very concerned about an expanded military engagement with the Japanese, for while the 100,000 men under his command in the area could have won a tactical fight against imperial forces, the pressure on Japan to escalate the conflict might have been irresistible. Chiang had recently initiated a bloody purge of his Communist allies and, placing his goal of unifying China ahead of fighting Japan, ordered most of his troops out of Jinan. Even so, several days later the Japanese attacked the remaining NRA troops. By the time the fighting ended, in a foreshadowing of the mass violence to come, Japanese soldiers had killed as many as 11,000 soldiers and civilians.

## **Japan's Invasion of Manchuria: Starting the Fifteen-Year War**

The clash between Nationalist and Japanese troops in Jinan highlighted the agency of army officers to initiate military action of their own, in contravention of government policy. This

tendency within the army reflected a weakness of Japan's 1889 constitution, Article 11 of which made the Emperor supreme commander of the Japanese military, thereby circumventing the Japanese Prime Minister and his cabinet. In the 1920s and 1930s, army officers learned to conceal aggressive militarism behind the formal constitutional authority of the Emperor. Unilateral army initiatives destabilized government and facilitated the rise of military officials within cabinet, their power checked mainly by factionalism within the army and navy establishments. Ultimately, however, Japanese governments themselves sanctioned the actions of insubordinate military officers, just as Tanaka had done in 1928. The most critical of these early decisions to support local military actions occurred in the late summer and autumn of 1931, when several officers of the Japanese Guandong army carried out a plot to expand Japan's sphere of influence in China's north-east to include all of Manchuria. Japanese soldiers secretly planted a bomb along a railway track in Shenyang (Mukden) located near barracks of the regional Chinese warlord's army. The Japanese military blamed the attack on Chinese 'bandits' and attacked the warlord soldiers. By early 1932 the Guandong army incorporated most of Manchuria into its zone of operations, and had established a regime called Manzhouguo (Manchukuo), or 'Manzhou State', nominally headed by the last Emperor of the Qing dynasty, Pu Yi. In the 1930s and 1940s the Soviet Union, right-wing and Fascist governments in Europe, and other puppet governments in China, recognized Manzhouguo. The invasion created an international crisis and led to Japan's exit from the League of Nations in March 1933, six months ahead of Germany's decision to leave the international body. The invasion of Manchuria represented the first major step, not yet irrevocable, in breaking with the Anglo-American liberal world order.



The 1931 conflict was essentially a colonial war over China's north-east, with Japanese troops fighting guerrilla and warlord armies. In Japan, public opinion strongly supported the Manchurian war. Popular media promoted what Louise Young calls 'war fever' among the population, laying the groundwork for the empire's further expansion in the latter 1930s. Newspaper companies used a novel technology, newsreels, to propagate the victories of the Japanese forces in Manchuria. These popular film shorts were shown not only in packed cinemas, but also in parks, department stores, and schools across the country. Live radio broadcasts included several dozen shows from the Yasukuni shrine, the Shinto place of worship for Japanese war dead. <02.03> Magazines, books, postcards, roving exhibits, plays, public lectures, music, and song created new war heroes and eulogized past ones, in the process often sensationalizing the links between death and sacrifice. Films included *The First Step into Fengtian—South Manchuria Glitters Under the Rising Sun*, *Ah! Major Kuramoto and the Blood-Stained Flag*, and *The Yamato Spirit*, while jingoist songs such as 'Arise Countrymen', 'The Imperial Army Marches Off', and 'Attack Plane' played on the airways and in clubs and public places. According to one Japanese writer, as a result of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese conflicts, Japan had 'buried 100,000 souls in the Manchurian plain, and risked the fate of the nation to gain the rights and interests we now hold'. The 'victory prizes' had been 'won with the priceless blood and sweat of the Japanese race'. By the mid-1930s, Japanese civil society groups targeted Manchuria as a vast Japanese settlement colony, one which could help resolve long-term problems of poverty and dislocation in the domestic countryside. As a result of these groups' initiatives the Japanese government accelerated its public campaigns to populate Manchuria with Japanese citizens and drew up plans to settle some 20 per cent of Japan's farmers—one million

people—in north-east China. Though the war with China eventually interfered with the project, about 300,000 Japanese had settled in the region by 1945. <02.04>

The initial stages of the Manchurian conflict led to relatively easy Japanese victories but, by 1932, up to 300,000 guerrillas and volunteers fought against the incursion. The resistance included former warlord troops, peasants, members of secret societies, and members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In Manchuria, many guerrilla fighters within the CCP were ethnically Korean, including the future leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung. South of the Great Wall, Chinese businessmen, students, and civil society organizations like the Shanghai Anti-Japanese National Salvation Association also organized acts of resistance through street marches and successful boycotts of Japanese goods.

Japanese army officers in China countered the Chinese activists through covert actions designed to portray Japanese as victims of Chinese aggression. In late January 1932, in the aftermath of one staged incident in Shanghai that incited civilian violence, and despite efforts by Chiang to meet the ensuing Japanese ultimatum, Japanese troops engaged Chinese soldiers north of the international zone. The fighting soon escalated into a major conflict involving about 70,000 Japanese soldiers facing 60,000 Chinese troops. The six-week conflict, often poorly dubbed the Shanghai ‘Incident’, witnessed the aerial bombing of civilians and the flight of 230,000 refugees from the city. Chinese and Japanese casualties have been estimated at 11,000 and 9,000, respectively. Growing anti-Japanese sentiment in China had forced a reluctant Chiang to send reinforcements, but the Chinese leader wanted a diplomatic settlement, as did some key figures in the Japanese government who were concerned about the impact the conflict would have on the Japanese stock market and sales of Japanese bonds in the United States. Key

members of the Japanese government had not yet given up on working out a means of accommodating the western powers to the new imperium. By March 1932, Chinese and Japanese officials had agreed to a truce and the fighting subsided.

The fighting ended in Shanghai, but between 1933 and 1937 the Guandong army, backed by the Japanese government, expanded its military operations into Inner Mongolia, and even north China south of the Great Wall. Chiang acquiesced to demands which permitted the Japanese to increase their sphere of influence, assert their sovereignty over Chinese territory, remove Chinese governors and mayors from power, and eject Chinese military forces from whole provinces. While some Chinese soldiers fought against Japanese advances, Chiang quelled the popular unrest which his policies helped to create. Instead of resisting the Japanese he dedicated China's military resources to defeating the Communists in the five encirclement campaigns against Mao Zedong's Jiangxi Soviet between 1930 and 1934. Military offensives against other Soviets around the country effectively decimated the Communist movement by 1935. The Communists in Jiangxi fled on the Long March, but with devastating consequences, as only about 7,000 of the 100,000 who had started the trek survived continuous Nationalist attacks, hunger, cold, and disease. In 1935 the exhausted revolutionaries created a new base in impoverished Yanan in Shaanxi province and brought together several Communist fighting forces to establish a small army of 20,000 soldiers.

On 1 August 1935, just prior to Mao Zedong's arrival in Yanan, the Communist International, backed by the Soviet Union, proclaimed a new strategy of establishing local anti-Fascist coalitions to fight the menace posed by Hitler, Mussolini, and their global allies. The policy came several months before the German and Japanese governments agreed to the Anti-

Comintern Pact. For the CCP, the change in Soviet policy entailed a renewal of their 1924–7 united front with the GMD. Though Chiang went ahead with his plans to crush the Communists, he showed a willingness to negotiate a settlement with them, provided the agreement was along terms that placed the CCP army under the command of the GMD's Military Council.

Representatives of the CCP and GMD reached a tentative agreement for an alliance but, without knowledge of these discussions, Manchurian warlord Feng Yuxiang kidnapped Chiang and attempted to convince him to end the civil conflict and create a government of national salvation to prosecute the war against Japan. The CCP leadership, which had previously co-operated with Feng in the kidnapping plot, received a communication from Stalin who reiterated to Mao that Chiang was crucial to the new united front. With this information, Feng released the GMD President, who had confirmed his commitment to the alliance as long as he retained his captors' military allegiance. While the second United Front broke down by 1941, Chiang, for the first time, committed Republican China to marshalling its human resources against Japan's imperial armies.

## **The War of Resistance**

The Second Sino-Japanese War began in 1931, but Chiang's decision to confront Japanese militarism represented a turning point in the history of the conflict. In July 1937, Japanese troops stationed around the city of Beijing clashed with Chinese soldiers near Lugouqiao, at the Marco Polo Bridge. Local commanders reached a settlement but Chiang refused to endorse it and ordered four divisions of his soldiers to Hebei province. In Tokyo, the government of Prince

Konoe Fumimaro escalated the conflict by demanding an apology from the Nationalists for their anti-Japanese activities. Believing that a military engagement with the Chinese would end quickly and teach the Republican government a lesson, Konoe ordered three divisions to China. On 28 July intensive fighting broke out in Beijing. These clashes began what the Chinese call the War of Resistance. After the Chinese President ordered 100,000 troops into the demilitarized area around Shanghai, Konoe publicly announced his decision to deal decisively with the 'atrocious Chinese army'. By the middle of August both sides had become engaged in a full-scale war.

Even more so than the First World War, the second global conflict of the twentieth century was a 'total war', involving the mobilization of hundreds of millions of the world's citizens and colonial subjects. The populations of northern and central China and eastern Europe were at the centre of the fighting, victims of genocidal actions carried out by Japanese and German military units in the war. Cities were particular targets of attack and destruction, as they represented centres of power, wealth, and culture which the Japanese and German invaders wanted to defeat, eradicate, or subjugate. In Shanghai, where the fighting lasted three months, between 500,000 and 700,000 Chinese soldiers confronted a smaller but better equipped Japanese force, supported by naval and air units. At the start of the fighting about 600,000 people fled the non-concession areas of the city. <02.05> Half sought refuge in the international concessions, but neither the city authorities nor the 175 refugee camps could begin to provide services for them. By the start of 1938 over 100,000 people had died on the streets of Shanghai as a result of starvation, disease, or exposure. The retreat of the Chinese army from Shanghai opened a path for the Japanese to

march into the capital city of Nanjing. Along the way, the Japanese military committed atrocities against civilians, including the murder of eighty men, women, and children at Changzhou.

In November 1937 Nanjing's elite residents left, along with many others. Those with wealth could hire a boat to carry them upstream to Wuhan or Chongqing, the path pursued by the fleeing Nationalist government officials into China's interior. Japanese soldiers surrounded and shelled the city in mid-November. By this time, Chiang had started to receive shipments of weapons from the Soviet Union, and Russian pilots even flew some disguised Soviet fighter planes in an effort to defend the capital. The city's defences collapsed, however, and Japanese armies assailed the civilian population on 13 December, launching the infamous 'Rape of Nanjing', a six-week rampage of torture, rape, and slaughter. Conservative accounts of the deaths number about 50,000, based on German diplomat John Rabe's estimate of civilians who survived in the International Settlement Zone, while contemporary Chinese sources claim 300,000 deaths.

<02.06> The larger numbers do not indicate a massacre of 'worse' character. Events in Nanjing can be understood in the broader context of Japanese psychological warfare: to induce terror into local populations as a means of subjugating China and the Chinese. The massacres of civilians in Nanjing and elsewhere in China left indelible psychological scars on the population. By the spring of 1938 Nanjing and its people, or what was left of them, survived in a tortured land. About 80 per cent of the pre-war residents had fled the city, and of those that remained an equivalent percentage had no income. Many were widows, trying to feed their children. This kind of scene was repeated throughout eastern and central China in this era, but early in the resistance war many Chinese remained defiant and resilient.

The Japanese Central China Army next attacked communities upstream along the Yangtze, and to the north of Nanjing. About 300 kilometres north of the city, between the Yangtze and the Yellow Rivers, lay the city of Xuzhou, the site of a major five-month battle between Japanese and Chinese armies in the winter and spring of 1938. The fighting joined Japanese forces in north and central China for the first time, and was meant as a prelude to an offensive against the tri-city area of Wuhan. Nationalist armies were comprised of soldiers from warlord armies and their commanders, as well as troops whose primary loyalty rested with Chiang. Communist troops numbered approximately 100,000 at this stage of the war, but played only a minor role in the battles for control over central China.

In trying to stem the Japanese advance, Chinese military officials pursued a scorched earth strategy, one which resulted in a tremendous loss of life. In June 1938 Chiang ordered his army to break the dyke of the Yellow River in a desperate effort to prevent a Japanese army advance on the latest capital, Wuhan, and to allow 200,000 Chinese troops to escape to the south-west. The breaching of the dyke created another human disaster, flooding a huge area of flat land, and drowning and killing, by official accounts, some 800,000 people. At the height of the harvest season, the water destroyed crops, animals, homes, and caused millions to flee everywhere except eastwards, towards the Japanese. The war in central China in 1937 and 1938 resulted in the loss of one million Chinese soldiers, including injuries, and as late as 1945 there were still six million refugees living beyond the flood plain.

The population of Wuhan, like that of Nanjing and other cities located in the wake of the attacks, had grown significantly as a result of people fleeing the flood and the brutality of the violence. By July there were about 430,000 refugees in Wuhan; about 65,000 found a place in the

city's 100-plus shelters, sponsored by the Chinese state, merchants' associations, missionary relief efforts, and the International Red Cross. Many of the refugees were child orphans—one orphanage in Wuhan included several hundred children who had fled Xuzhou—and special attention was paid to them by a group of prominent women in the city, including Song Meiling, Chiang Kai-shek's American-educated wife, and Shi Liang, one of China's first female lawyers and a prominent public defender in Wuhan in the 1930s. Politically active, Shi had been arrested and jailed in 1936 by Chiang's government for publicly advocating war with Japan. In the winter of 1938 these two women helped establish the non-partisan organization, Warfare Child Welfare Committee. Shi also created an organization dedicated to mobilizing women for the war effort and providing assistance to refugees. Lack of trained medical personnel was a major problem for soldiers and civilians alike, and malaria was rife amongst women and children, and a constant scourge to all soldiers in the war. Wuhan's relief system served as a model for the development of refugee and health services across the nation, and, later, for the social welfare systems of both the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China in Taiwan.

The breaching of the dyke did not prevent the Japanese advance on Wuhan, which they overran in October 1938, thus exacerbating China's refugee and human crisis, as millions continued to flee the war zone. Many refugees went further into the interior of the country, including Chongqing, the new wartime capital. Many people, however, continued to hope that the invading armies would be defeated and turned back. Civil society organizations immediately countered the invasion with efforts to mobilize the population against the invaders. Through newspaper stories, movies, travelling drama troupes, songs, and cartoons China's population attempted to create a national movement of resistance. For the first time in modern China,



politics touched all areas of the country's cultural life. From Shanghai, groups of actors went to rural areas to mobilize the population. By the early 1940s there were some 2,500 such groups performing a wide range of street, commemorative, puppet, and teahouse plays in the interior of the country. By the late 1930s, the performers transformed a 1931 play entitled *Lay down Your Whip*, from one criticizing Chinese governmental corruption to an attack of the onslaught of Japanese imperialism and occupation. As one of the protagonists recounted: 'If we do not unite quickly to defend ourselves against Japanese aggression, we will soon meet the same fate as our countrymen in Manchuria'.

The emergence of Chinese resistance undermined Japan's ability to project violence, but after occupying Wuhan the Japanese advance slowed significantly, partly because the soldiers came up against the country's natural geographical barriers. Japanese armies did not pursue Chiang upstream along the Yangtze. Instead, they focused on establishing wartime governments in north and central China to displace Nationalist authority. The colonial dimensions of Japan's occupation policy were brought out most prominently through the search for Chinese collaborators and the creation of puppet regimes. These experiments failed, however, as Chinese collaborators, not surprisingly, failed to gain the support of the local population. Japanese control over rural areas, weak to begin with because of the violence of the conquest and racism towards the Chinese, became even more tenuous when guerrillas began to operate in the eastern provinces. Within the confines of urban areas like Shanghai, small bands of guerrilla groups with ties to rural-based resistance movements conducted sabotage and assassinated collaborators and Japanese officials.

Between 1937 and 1940 the Communists rebuilt their armies. The Chinese Red Army, known after 1937 as the Eighth Route Army, expanded significantly in north China, especially in areas where the North China Area Army and the puppet Chinese soldiers had repeatedly attacked in so-called ‘mopping up’ terrorist operations, leaving the peasantry open to mobilization by Communist cadres. The high point of Communist military activity was the Hundred Regiments Campaign, undertaken in the autumn of 1940, when 400,000 troops of the Eighth Route Army attacked targets across five provinces, aiming especially at railway and mining infrastructure. The attacks achieved some limited short-term goals but resulted in 100,000 casualties, a significant Communist defeat. In central China, the war resulted in the creation in 1937 of a new Communist army, the New Fourth Army, ostensibly part of the NRA, but formally controlled by Communist leaders. The GMD attempted to limit the size of the Communist armies and to control their movements, while the Communists tried also to limit the expansion of Nationalist armies in central China. The Communist–Nationalist rivalry resulted in significant conflict, one underlined by the New Fourth Army Incident in January 1941 when Nationalist troops encircled a 9,000-person New Fourth Army unit and killed most of its soldiers, thus effectively putting an end to the Second United Front.

## **Military Authoritarianism in Japan**

Japanese political and military elites shared a number of ideological predispositions with German Fascists, including anti-liberalism and anti-Communism. Like Germany, the Japanese government pursued a foreign policy of conquering neighbouring continental lands. Some

Japanese policymakers studied the evolution of fascism in Europe, particularly Germany, and refined elements of Japan's state-society relations based on Fascist models. A number of state-based organizations, such as youth and women's groups, existed in Japan prior to the onset of the Sino-Japanese War, but in the 1930s, emulating Nazi models, the Japanese government expanded their size and made participation in them compulsory.

The substitution of autonomous organizations for ones controlled by the state was a characteristic of mass organizations in Germany, Italy, and Japan. In wartime Japan, but also colonial areas like Korea, these bodies were responsible for distributing food, employment, and other resources to the civil populations, so failure to join them would result in significant hardship. The organizations were anti-democratic, for they mobilized the population for state ends without allowing citizen input into policy. By pre-empting a civil society from developing, the regime reinforced the authoritarian character of the political system. The development of state-directed mass organizations was closely linked to German and Japanese efforts to establish an 'organic' or 'living corporate' society which would act according to objectives articulated by the state. In his book *Germany on the Rise* (1938), Japanese Minister of Commerce and Railways Admiral Godo Takuo praised Nazi labour laws for overcoming class conflict through their adherence to 'racial spirit'. Since both countries shared an anti-Communist mission, he argued, Germany's labour legislation could provide a model for Japan as long as that model focused on the 'absolutist Japanese spirit'.

An important difference between the German and Japanese imperiums was that while the National Socialist party played a leading role in Germany, political parties almost ceased functioning in wartime Japan. The coercive power of the state was also different. In Japan there

existed ‘thought police’, but not the kind of institutionalized and systematic state-perpetrated violence as occurred in Hitler’s Germany. There were strong parallels between Japanese treatment of Koreans and Chinese, on the one hand, and German policies towards Poles and East Europeans on the other, but Japan did not create death factories like German concentration camps. It did, however, pursue chemical warfare research and deadly biological experiments, especially through Force 731, located mainly in buildings across Manchuria. In 1936 the Japanese forced Chinese labourers to build a huge complex near Harbin for secret research into the effects of bacteriological agents on human captives, mostly Chinese, many of whom were Communists, but also Russians, Koreans, and other nationalities. <02.07> A crematorium built at the site disposed of the bodies of the thousands of victims killed in the experiments. Another biological warfare station in Nanjing produced large amounts of chemicals used to poison wells and spread murderous diseases in central China. In the early 1940s, the Japanese established other bacteriological warfare facilities in South-East Asia.

Charismatic leadership was a defining characteristic of European fascism. Unlike Germany after the First World War, however, Japan retained its monarchy, embodied in Emperors Yoshihito and Hirohito. Ultimate political authority in Japan rested—in theory if not in fact—in a dynastic ruler who claimed to be descended from a sun goddess. For many of the ruling elite, the *kokutai*—the concept of national polity, based on the perceived cultural and political legitimacy of the Emperor—was the essence of Japanese politics. The cultural underpinnings of Hitler’s public leadership were demonstrably different from Hirohito, whom the Japanese public never saw and whose voice was not heard until he announced Japan’s surrender over the radio in 1945. In Japan, there was also no equivalent to the position of the Führer or *Il Duce*. Day-to-day

decision-making authority was not centred in the power of one individual but in the collective decisions of the Japanese cabinet, the military, and bureaucracy. There were fifteen Japanese Prime Ministers during the Sino-Japanese War, and none came close to accumulating the power and authority of Hitler. Even one of the more powerful Japanese Prime Ministers of the period, the militarist general Tojo Hideki, was constrained by existing constitutional practices, especially the ‘independent supreme command’. While the Nazis built the Third Reich on the ashes of Weimar and the Second Reich, Japanese politicians did not re-design the Meiji political system. Rather, they bolstered the existing political order with appeals linked to semi-religious mythologies of pre-modern Japanese history. A document produced by the government’s cabinet planning board pointed out that ‘since the founding of our country, Japan has had an unparalleled totalitarianism . . . an ideal totalitarianism is manifest in our national polity. . . . Germany’s totalitarianism has existed for only eight years, but Japanese [totalitarianism] has shone through 3000 years of ageless tradition’.

Japanese political thought was imbued with religious significance, especially in relation to Shintoism. By the time of the War of Resistance, government propaganda was closely linked to ultranationalist Shintoism, which affirmed Japanese purity and encouraged the belief that war helped to maintain a pure society. A 1937 publication of the Ministry of Education pointed out that Japan was unique in the world insofar as ‘our country is a divine country governed by an Emperor who is a deity incarnate’. Since non-Japanese could never reach Japan’s superior cultural level, ‘justice’ entailed the subordination of the colonial subjects and Chinese to their Japanese political masters. Similarly, ‘stability’ required the creation of an enduring hierarchy of authority based on inegalitarian and colonial or semi-colonial structures of power in which all

subjects would find their 'proper place'. These ideas were critical starting points for Japan's so-called 'New Order in East Asia', announced by Prince Konoe in November 1938. The empire's concept of 'peace' was therefore closely tied to notions of subjugation.

The idea of purity reinforced the notion that the Japanese were also the leading race, not only of Asia, but around the globe. Yet the Japanese were also conscious of Western racism against Asians, which encouraged the official tendency to criticize the contradictions of liberalism and yet also to look to Asia as a 'natural' Japanese sphere of influence. Thus Japanese propaganda in China emphasized that 'to liberate Asia from the white man's prison is the natural duty of every Asiatic! All of you Asiatics who have groaned under the yoke of the white man unite!' The propagandists accepted as natural the racism of their own rhetoric.

The idea that the Japanese were a morally superior race may have fuelled a sense of Japanese disillusionment with their Nazi allies. Some of the empire's soldiers viewed Germans as allies of convenience, to be tolerated, useful for battling Communists on the eastern front or for fighting the liberal European powers in Western Europe. Similarly, Japanese copies of *Mein Kampf* were heavily censored, with critical comments on the Japanese expunged from the book. In Germany, Hitler complained of his Japanese ally: 'The Emperor is a companion piece of the later Czars. Weak, cowardly, irresolute, he may fall before a revolution. My association with Japan was never popular. . . . Let us think of ourselves as masters and consider these people at best as lacquered half-monkeys, who need to feel the knout.' With both sides believing that their 'pure' race embodied the superior global culture, it is hardly surprising that Japan and Germany were unable to foster close collaborative policies during the war. For many Japanese leaders, however, the presence of a like-minded violent and revisionist power in Europe facilitated the

goal of ridding the globe of Communism and the hegemony of the liberal Anglo-American powers.

## **Japan, the United States, and the Start of the Pacific War, 1940–1941**

Like German empire-builders, Japanese planners sought to build an autarkic empire in territories contiguous to their homeland. This was part of an ideology of ‘total war’ advocated by a faction of army planners who demanded that Japan have under its direct territorial control the resources needed to prosecute war. This project, however, was complicated by Japan’s perceived need for strategic materials from the United States and South-East Asia, which can also be viewed as the problem of managing enemies on land and at sea. Even as late as 1940 the Japanese government headed by Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa (1880–1948) kept open the possibility of diplomatic co-operation with Britain and America; but hope for a *modus vivendi* was wishful thinking, given the entrenched positions of army officers in the government. By establishing Wang Jingwei’s collaborationist puppet regime in north China in March 1940, the Yonai government further alienated those in the United States who demanded that Japan abandon its war against China. A Japanese offensive against Ichang in southern China in the spring further demonstrated the Chinese military’s determination to continue the War of Resistance. The success of German armies in Western Europe in the spring of 1940 led the Yonai government successfully to pressure Britain and the new authoritarian Vichy regime in France to end their assistance to

China through the Burma Road and across the Sino-Vietnamese border. As an army official observed on 4 July, 'we are aiming to put an end to seventy years' dependence on Britain and America commercially and economically'.

In the early summer of 1940 the Japanese army demanded a closer relationship with Germany, and forced Yonai, who had expressed reservations about a German alliance, to resign. Konoe Fumimaro returned to power, convinced of the need to overturn Anglo-American dominance in the international system. In Asia, an alliance with Germany would facilitate the expansion of the 'New Order', now to include South-East Asia. In the 'Tripartite Pact', signed in September, Japan, Germany, and Italy agreed to support each other in a war with another power not yet at war, the only exception being a conflict which engaged either Germany or Japan with the Soviet Union. Government officials, including Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka, hoped the alliance would either deter the Americans or fortify Japan's position against the Anglo-American powers should a trans-Pacific war become a reality. Later that month, the Japanese government threatened Vichy into allowing Japan's armies to occupy northern Vietnam. To acquire the resources needed to become relatively self-sufficient in wartime, including oil, tin, rubber, copper, and rice, the army now planned to invade and occupy all of South-East Asia. The logic of untrammelled territorial expansion soon led to war with West European colonial powers and America.

The European war remained at the forefront of President Roosevelt's strategic concerns, but South-East Asia blurred the distinction between the two theatres, as the British, French, and Dutch had substantial colonial interests in Malaya, Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma, Indochina, and Indonesia. South-East Asia was vital for American and European capitalism, and the



prospect of a Japanese invasion of the region provided another reason for the Roosevelt administration to collaborate more closely with Britain. By late 1940 key US planners believed holding Singapore was critical, for the British naval control of those strategic seas kept South and South-East Asian resources open to liberal capitalist America. To deter the Japanese from advancing on the region, in the spring of 1940 Roosevelt ordered most of the US Fleet, after completing annual exercises in the Pacific, to remain in the territory of Hawaii instead of returning to the west coast or being re-positioned in the Atlantic.

The Japanese economy between 1931 and 1941 had become increasingly dependent on America's precision tools, scrap iron, metals, and oil to fuel its weapons of war. American policymakers recognized Japan's need for US goods as a strategic weakness, and responded to the period bounded by Japan's expansion into the South China Sea and the tripartite pact—1938 to 1940—by imposing a series of economic restrictions and sanctions on the empire. These included airplanes and their parts, aviation fuel, and scrap iron and metal. Japanese officials criticized the sanctions, claiming US proclamations of maintaining an 'open door' hid America's own imperialist agenda. There was an element of truth in these accusations: the United States sought to assert its own sphere of influence in China and South-East Asia, thousands of miles from its western shores. The issue for the USA, however, was not the extension of trade or capitalism to Asia, but the manner in which the big powers negotiated this process, and leading figures in the Roosevelt administration, including Secretary of State Cordell Hull, China Hand Stanley Hornbeck, and Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Harold Stark, did not want to allow Japan exclusive control over the resources of South-East Asia. Thus while Roosevelt believed that planning for war in Europe should take precedence over Asia, key officials were prepared to

use force to stop the Japanese from expanding their New Order further into the South China Sea region. The military-economic rivalry between the Japanese empire and the liberal-imperialism of the Americans led to war in just over one year.

In late July 1941, in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the Konoe government succeeded in pressuring Vichy to allow Japanese troops to occupy southern Indochina. This increased threat to British, Dutch, and American colonial territory was designed to force the Dutch Indies to increase Japanese access to its raw resources, especially oil. In making the decision to foster the 'Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere', the Japanese government privately decreed that 'our Empire will not be deterred by the possibility of being involved in a war with Great Britain and the United States'. Imperial Japan now fully extended the notion of a New Order into the European and American colonial regions of South-East Asia. In early August the Japanese government issued an educational pamphlet entitled 'The Way of Subjects' which stated that 'An old order that has been placing humanity under individualism, liberalism and materialism for several hundred years since the early period of the epoch of modern history is now crumbling.' Japanese subjects were told to embrace the 'new order' that was 'in the making amid unprecedented world changes'. Roosevelt responded to the Japanese initiative against the Dutch Indies by freezing Japanese assets in the USA and embargoing Japanese access to aviation fuel. In the Department of the Treasury, Dean Acheson enforced the embargo with zeal, and succeeded in banning the export of all oil to Japan.

Even as Japan positioned itself to invade South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, Konoe hoped to avoid war with the USA. An earlier round of talks between Japanese ambassador to the US, Nomura Kichisaburo, and Secretary of State Hull had ended in failure in June, but Konoe

hoped for one last effort in the late summer. He agreed to prepare for war with the USA if the initiative failed. Neither side, however, would compromise. The USA demanded a Japanese withdrawal from Indochina and China. The Atlantic Charter, issued by Churchill and Roosevelt in August 1941, went further. The two leaders proclaimed that all peoples had the right to determine their government, a position which anticipated the eventual dismantling of Japan's overseas empire in 1945. Efforts to negotiate a *modus vivendi* only underlined the differences between the two empires. Konoe's failure led to a new government under Tojo Hideki, but it too failed to reach a compromise with America. By the end of November 1941, US Secretary of War Henry Stimson recorded that the US government needed to figure out how to manoeuvre Japan 'into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves'.

On 1 December 1941 Tojo Hideki's cabinet, meeting with the Emperor at an Imperial Conference, made the fateful decision to attack South-East Asia and the Western Pacific, including the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. During the discussions, the President of the Privy Council praised Japan's empire, noting that agreeing to American terms would have involved the loss 'in one stroke not only our gains in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars, but also the benefits of the Manchurian incident'. Japan's existence was threatened and 'the great achievements of the Emperor Meiji would all come to nought, and . . . there is nothing else we can do. . . . This is indeed the greatest undertaking since the opening of our country in the 19th century.' The subsequent Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December, far from causing the USA to think about suing for peace, ignited the most momentous big power war in history.

## War and Occupation: South-East Asia

In late 1941, in conjunction with the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese government ordered simultaneous assaults on Malaya, the Philippines, and Indonesia. By 6 May 1942, with the fall of Corregidor in the Philippines, the Japanese military controlled a huge swathe of land and sea as far west as the Burma–India border and the Andaman and Nicobar islands, south to Indonesia, the northern part of Papua and the Gilbert Islands, and northwards to Wake Island and some of the Aleutian chain. <02.09a><02.09b> To the delight of Admiral Yamamoto Isakuru, the planner of the offensives, the territory had been acquired without the loss of a single Japanese battleship or carrier. The Japanese empire seemed to be on the edge of an immense victory against the Western powers.

The occupation of South-East Asia, while permitting Japan access to large quantities of natural resources, also extended the manpower of its empire to its limit. After December 1941, the Japanese shelved preparatory plans for an invasion of the Soviet Union. Some areas, like Vietnam, were occupied by a relatively small number of troops (30,000). Resistance to Japanese imperial rule, however, appeared in numerous areas, especially the Philippines, which attracted hundreds of thousands of guerrilla fighters. <02.10> In Malaya, the pro-Communist Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army carried out attacks on the Japanese. During the Japanese invasion of Singapore, volunteers formed the Singapore Overseas Chinese Army, which included women recruits. In New Guinea, local populations worked with Australian and American soldiers, and in Burma the Anti-Fascist Organization (later the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League) gained popularity in 1944 and 1945. In 1941 Ho Chi Minh travelled from the Soviet Union to Vietnam,

stopping over at the CCP camp in Yen-an before creating his own base along the Sino-Vietnamese border. The small Indochinese Communist Party sponsored the Viet Minh, an organization designed to attract widespread popular support, though it was also riddled with intrigue and dissension. Resistance groups sought and received aid from Force 136 of the British Special Operations Executive, as well as from the precursor body of America's Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of Strategic Services.

The Japanese ruled the region using South-East Asian politicians who had been active before the war. Many of those who collaborated—including lower level administrators or security forces—read like a *Who's Who* of post-Second World War political leaders: Phibun Songkhram, Sukarno, Suharto, Dato Onn, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Ne Win, U Nu, and Aung San. In declaring war against the United States and Britain on 25 January 1941 President Phibun of Thailand predicted: 'it is about time to declare war with the winner'. After 1943, as Japanese authority in Asia became more precarious, local leaders removed collaborators like Phibun from positions of authority, participated in acts of moral resistance (Tunku Abdul Rahman), or switched allegiance (Aung San). The Japanese were careful to circumscribe the power of indigenous politicians and strictly controlled civil society organizations operating in urban centres. Prior to granting Burma a semblance of independence in August 1943, for example, the Japanese authorities demobilized the collaborationist Burma Independence Army, cutting its size from 23,000 recruits to 5,000 and renaming it the Burma Defence Army. <02.11>

Most of South-East Asia suffered greatly under the grossly misnamed Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The initial Japanese invasion, involving ground offensives, heavy shelling, and aerial bombing, had produced tremendous dislocation, fear, shock, and desperation. As in

China, the Japanese military designed plans to induce terror into the population. In the week before Singapore fell, Japanese airmen dropped bombs filled with scrap metal, sulphur, and oil. After Singapore's defences collapsed, the occupiers ordered all men and boys between 8 and 50 to report to the Japanese police, the *Kempetei*. People were arbitrarily chosen for execution. Over three weeks in February and March 1942 tens of thousands of Chinese Singaporeans were killed in the infamous Sook Chin, or purification massacres, an example of ethnic cleansing.

POWs were similarly brutalized and murdered. In the Philippines, after the defeat of American commander Douglas MacArthur's troops in April 1942 on the Bataan peninsula west of Manila, the Japanese military force-marched American and Filipino POWs towards their prison camp. Abused, beaten, starved, and killed, thousands of Filipinos and hundreds of American soldiers died before arriving at the camp. The treatment of enemy soldiers was an extension of the abuses committed by the Japanese in China. Indeed, amongst the divisions serving Japanese Commander Homma Masaharu's Fourteenth Army in the Philippines, the Sixteenth had participated in the attacks on Nanjing, Xuzhou, and Wuhan. During the attack on Nanjing, the Sixteenth Division's then commander, Lieutenant General Nakajima Kesago, had written in his diary that the policy of the army was to kill all POWs upon capture. By 1941, the policy, it seems, was designed to extend their suffering. Bataan was infamous, but executions occurred in many areas across Asia. In Parit Sulong, Jahore, for example, during the Battle of Malaya in January 1942, the Japanese army committed summary executions of 150 Indian and Australian troops.

Hunger, disease, political persecution, arbitrary violence, forced labour, and exorbitant demands for resources characterized most areas of Japanese rule. Even so, the legacies of

European colonialism produced collaborators willing to fight alongside Japanese soldiers. In February 1942 the Japanese began to recruit, amongst the 70,000 South Asian POWs captured in the Malayan and Singaporean campaigns, for the so-called Indian National Army (INA), created to subvert British rule in South Asia. The army was formed too late, however, to participate in the Japanese advance into Burma, which began with bombing runs in late December 1941, followed up by a land invasion at the end of January 1942. Burmese society was too disillusioned with British colonialism to put up much resistance to the invading armies. British armies retreated quickly, along with hundreds of thousands of refugees, many despairing for the safety of Assam or, even, Calcutta. <02.12> By the spring of 1942 the Japanese controlled Burma, had cut off supplies going to China from the Burma road, and had begun to bomb Calcutta. Their navy, having destroyed the British ships *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* during the Battle of Malaya, easily ventured into the Bay of Bengal, their mobility limited only by America's strategic success during the Battle of the Coral Sea, which left Port Moresby and an important approach to Australia in Allied hands.

## **The Politics of Food in Wartime China and Vietnam**

The war in Asia seriously disrupted food supplies and significantly exacerbated shortages caused by natural disasters. Famines are treated in Chapter 11 in the context of unnatural deaths caused by the war, but they are also an integral part of the political history of warfare in Asia, especially the growth of Communism in Vietnam and, to a lesser extent, China.

Famine struck China, most notably impoverished Henan province in 1942–3. The region had been cut off from transport networks by the Japanese army, which occupied forty-four of the province's 110 counties. The GMD controlled the western region of the province, the area hit hardest by the famine. Lack of rain and a locust attack in 1942 destroyed crops, and the province lacked the support systems, available in normal times, to assist the beleaguered population. The Japanese seized and held on to the grain, distributing only small, inadequate amounts to the Chinese. The Nationalist government also seized grain, and their relief efforts were hampered by a lack of political will, intransigent commanders, and corruption. Family members sold other family members into slavery, exchanged land for money or food, and turned to prostitution. Instances of murder and cannibalism occurred. The combined impact of starvation and warfare forced the Chinese population to turn to survival tactics. The social tragedy of war had consequences far beyond the Sino-Japanese conflict. In this context the CCP, offering an ideology of collective action as a means to live through the wreckage of societal norms, drew support from villagers. In East Henan the New Fourth Route Army fared poorly in 1942–3, but gained momentum following the partial withdrawal of Japanese troops from the region in the spring of 1944. Though the CCP also confiscated foodstuffs, an important factor in the growth of Communism in the area was Communists' ability to defend grain supplies from puppet and GMD troops. Communist cadres also encouraged peasants to return to homes lost to flooding, loaned seed to farmers, and facilitated the cultivation of foodstuffs. The mobilization of the peasantry resulted in the nurturing of Communist-nationalist sentiment and a peasant political consciousness absent prior to the onset of the war. Ongoing conflicts between the Nationalists and Communists, however, limited the expansion of the New Fourth Route Army in central



China, especially compared to the successes of the Eighth Route Army in north China. By 1945 the latter's army contained over a million soldiers who controlled an area comprised of almost 100 million people living across 800,000 square kilometres of land, while the former army grew to 310,000 in an area of 250,000 square kilometres inhabited by 34 million persons. In general, throughout the conflict Communist armies engaged in small-scale guerrilla warfare which resulted in comparatively few casualties.

The creation of local collaborating regimes, the growth of Communist base areas, and the failure of the Nationalists to stem Japanese expansion highlighted the complicated character of politics in China during the Second World War. There was effectively no national government as the territory which had comprised Republican China was occupied by warlords, Japanese and puppet troops, and Nationalist and Communist armies. These developments set the context for the Chinese civil war in the aftermath of the Japanese defeat in 1945. The Japanese war achieved exactly what the Japanese military sought to prevent: the rise of Communism in China.

In the northern part of the French protectorate of Tonkin, in Indochina, a famine that began in late 1943 and killed one million peasants was instrumental in the coming to power of the Vietnamese Communists. The Japanese ruled Indochina through Vichy bureaucrats for most of the war, though anti-Western feelings persisted. In July 1943, for example, Matsui Iwane, the former Commander of the Japanese Shanghai Expeditionary Force that had been responsible for massacres in Nanjing, told Vietnamese reporters in Saigon that the Japanese would liberate Asians from their British, American, and French colonizers. As elsewhere in Asia, and, to some extent, following the French colonial example in Indochina, the Japanese ruthlessly exploited the population, forcing them to switch rice production to industrial fibres like hemp or jute. After

1940, the French demanded that newly created emergency granaries be filled with rice at set prices. The policy resulted in the impoverishment of tenant farmers, setting the stage for their radicalization. At the same time that Matsui spoke in Saigon, Japanese soldiers established new bases in the north, forcing villagers to sell them rice at prices lower than market value. To meet Japanese demands, Vietnamese peasants sold their lands, bought rice on the market, and sold it back to the Japanese at one third the price. In this way, French and Japanese economic policies facilitated the onset of famine.

The fall of Paris in August 1944 and the defeat of Vichy France, combined with US aerial bombing against Japanese ships and transport systems in the South China Sea and mainland South-East Asia, placed significant pressure on Franco-Japanese relations. In 1944, French officials told the Japanese that they could no longer sustain Japan's demand for foodstuffs. Though the two sides subsequently worked out a rice-purchasing compact, in March 1945 the Japanese overthrew the French colonial regime, arresting Governor General Jean Decoux during the ceremony to sign the food agreement. Japanese officials released only small amounts of stored grain to the starving population and continued forcefully to take foodstuffs from Tonkinese peasants. The famine played a critical role in mobilizing support for the Communists, who seized the stored grain for the dying population. The new pro-Japan Vietnamese government, headed by Emperor Bao Dai and Premier Tran Trong Kim, a classical scholar unsuited for the position, fell quickly to the Vietnamese August 1945 Revolution.

## **Conscription, Forced Labour, and Slavery in the Japanese Empire**

From 1942 onwards, to meet the strategic demands of an over-extended empire, Japanese politicians accelerated recruitment into the armed forces. The army, not including reserves, grew from just over one million soldiers in 1941 and 1942 to over 2.4 million by 1945. Although conscription had existed in Japan since 1873, in December 1943 the government lowered the draft age from 20 to 19 and extended the age of those serving from 40 to 45. The empire also targeted colonial subjects, especially Koreans and Taiwanese. In May 1942 authorities in Chosen (Korea) announced that conscription would be enforced in August 1943, with the first inductees integrated into existing imperial units in late 1944. Between 1938 and 1943, based on a voluntary system of recruitment, the colonial regime accepted 25,000 Koreans into military service, about a quarter of those who applied. In 1944 and 1945 another 110,000 Koreans were inducted into Japan's imperial army and navy. Most were stationed in Korea, Japan, and China. Korean colonial elites publicly supported conscription, but by the end of the war popular opinion tended to be cynical about the mobilization process, and evasion and desertion were means of resisting this coercive dimension of empire-building. In Formosa (Taiwan) the voluntary system, begun in 1942, generated several hundred thousand applications and some 4,500 recruits. Conscription, enforced in 1945, led to over 200,000 more enlistments, with almost half of the soldiers stationed beyond the borders of the island-colony. During the conflict, about 30,000 Koreans and at least 2,100 Formosans died.

The increased production of military goods in Japan, combined with the huge expansion of the area under Japanese control and the growth of the armed forces after 1942, led to worker shortages throughout the empire. Japanese government officials and agents managed manpower shortages partly through forced labour schemes. In north China, coerced labour mainly came from Chinese POWs, homeless people in cities, war refugees, and civilians captured during battle. The North China Area Army, for example, in its efforts to defeat Communist soldiers of the Eighth Route Army, captured about 100,000 civilians and sent them in the summer of 1942 to work in Manchuria. In various parts of north China, after destroying villages, the army forced former inhabitants to work in Japanese factories. Japanese soldiers even established a refugee camp in China in order to conscript its inhabitants. Between January 1941 and the end of the war in August 1945, three million workers laboured in factories and mines in north China while another 2.6 million were sent to work in other areas of the empire, including Manchuria and central China. During this time, one million Chinese laboured for the North China Area Army, building barriers, trenches, huts, and roads.

In South-East Asia, perhaps the most notorious instance of forced labour was the terrible suffering Asians and Allied POWs experienced in building the Thai–Burma Railway. Japanese soldiers beat, starved, and murdered the workers and thousands died of cholera and malaria. In June 1943, Japanese troops ordered that 250 victims of disease—men, women, and children—be burned alive in their living quarters. Of the 78,000 Malays who worked on the railway, almost 30,000 died. Recruiting initially involved deception and, later, force. As in China, conscripts included the homeless and refugees. In 1943 and 1944 up to 150,000 people died building the

railway, which Allied planes began to bomb in the summer of 1944. Once the railway was completed, many of the POWs were sent to work in Japan.

Within the empire, about one million Koreans were also recruited or forced to work as labourers or sexual slaves for the Japanese war machine. Between 1939 and 1945, 724,000 Koreans, male and female, went to Japan to work. They took on positions in a wide variety of industries, including chemical, textile, metal, and construction, but the majority were miners. In 1939 Koreans accounted for 6 per cent of Japanese miners, but by the end of the war the 128,000 Korean miners in Japan represented about one-third of the industry's labourers. On the northern island of Hokkaido, where Koreans made up over 40 per cent of mining employees, they earned wages far below their Japanese counterparts, toiled under slave-like conditions, experienced beatings, lynchings, and torture for running away, working slowly, or even not understanding employers' demands. One guard at a Hokkaido mining company argued that 'bond labourers and Koreans are not human beings. Even if one or two of them die, there is no time for funerals for them. Make them work hard and quickly.' Koreans who were caught fleeing the mine were 'flogged with a hide whip or were hung from a beam and a fire lit under them so that they choked from the smoke until they lost consciousness'.

Korean women were also lured from the peninsula under false pretences and forced to provide sex for the imperial troops serving throughout Asia. The so-called 'comfort women', a euphemism for sexual slavery, came from many parts of the wartime empire, including mainland China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia.<02.13> The majority of the roughly 90,000 women forced into prostitution were ethnic Koreans. Many of the women who ended up working in camps alongside the Japanese Imperial Army were tricked into believing that they

would work in Japan or overseas for good wages and in good working conditions. Some were literally kidnapped by soldiers and shipped overseas. In some cases, girls were sold by families desperate for money to buy food or to pay debts. By the end of 1942, 280 of the 400 Japanese sex stations were located in China, but 100 were scattered around South-East Asia, with ten in the Pacific theatre and another ten in Sakhalin. The women often found out about their inhuman living environment only when they arrived at a 'comfort station'. In one case, a girl was tricked into leaving Korea for work in a brush factory in Japan. She ended up in the South Pacific on an island in the Palau chain, where she initially resisted being raped, but was beaten and bayoneted into submission.

These forms of violence were linked to the racism underpinning Japanese colonialism in Asia and to notions of masculinity which degraded women and treated them as sexual slaves. That these stations were part of the military's policies throughout Asia reflects how abuse was institutionalized within the military setting, and how little concern there was for the means and conditions under which the women were forced to serve soldiers. As with other forms of exploitation and torture during the war, the horrific experience left lifelong scars on its victims.

## **The Oceanic War, 1942–1945**

American naval assaults on Japanese-held territory came from two directions. In the south-west Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur, based in Australia, directed his forces into New Guinea, the Philippines, the Ryukyus, and southern Japan. From Hawaii, Admiral Chester Nimitz's fleet crossed the central Pacific from Wake Island to Saipan and Iwo Jima. Heading north, they met

with MacArthur's forces at Okinawa in the Ryukyus, where they were to co-ordinate the invasion of the home islands, beginning with Kyushu.

The strategic and military history of the Pacific War is described in greater detail in Chapter 6. This section will focus on the cultural and racial dimensions of the conflict, for the struggles for the Pacific islands were characterized by an intense hatred between the Japanese and Americans, fuelled by racism on both sides. Between 1942 and 1945 the American media portrayed the Japanese as unique in the scale of their brutality and desire to kill. Japanese wartime atrocities received significant attention in the news and radio, and the public became particularly incensed over Japanese killings of American POWs, including the pilots who had participated in the 'Doolittle' air raid against Tokyo in the spring of 1942. Only when the public learned of the horror of the Nazi concentration camps in the spring of 1945 did they come to recognize the scale of German atrocities in Europe. Public opinion polls in the USA indicated that about 10 per cent of Americans believed the Japanese should be exterminated or annihilated. Such genocidal attitudes were encouraged by officials like Admiral William Halsey, commander of American forces in the South Pacific, who infamously encouraged his troops to 'Kill Japs, kill Japs, kill more Japs'. In a 1945 poll, 25 per cent of US soldiers fighting in the Pacific stated their main goal was to kill as many Japanese as they could. Another poll taken by a US magazine in December 1945 suggested that almost a quarter of all Americans had wanted to use many more atomic bombs against Japanese targets. <02.14>

In Japan, the state paid some lip service to its alliance with Germany, telling its propaganda officers not to depict the war with the United States in racial terms. At the same time, the government continued to tie the creation of the new world order to a holy 'total war', the goal of

which was to create ‘eternal world peace’, one linked to Emperor Jimmu’s creation of Japan almost three millennia earlier. A document produced in 1943 by the Ministry of Health and Welfare outlined a colonization scheme that would have seen 14 per cent of the Japanese population permanently living overseas as settlers of the new imperium. At times the report accepted German war aims, including Nazi policies towards Jews, but in other places suggested that Japan aimed at global cultural and racial hegemony. The Japanese empire would take on a ‘leading position in the creation of a new world order’ and under Japanese authority ‘all peoples of the world’ would assume their ‘proper place’. The ‘cooperative body’ to be forged in war ‘would place the whole world under one roof’.

Such policies were formulated even as the Allied powers began to penetrate the empire’s defences. The Japanese began to lose control over their oceanic empire after the battle of Midway in June 1942 and the start of the struggle over Guadalcanal in August. In Japan, the population felt increasing material deprivation, now interpreted by some commentators as an ‘emaciated endurance’, something that could be experienced as a virtue. By 1943, driven to desperation, Japanese propaganda encouraged the population to become more tough, as sacrifice, war, and mass death became seen as a way to further purify, not only the nation, but the world. It was in this context that the military formed suicide squads of pilots, whose missions involved the purging of pollution and impurity. By contrast, the Anglo-American enemy became associated with demons, monsters, and bestial devils. A popular magazine in 1944 ran a headline labelled ‘This is the Enemy! The Bestial American People . . . Beat the Americans to Death.’ Americans in particular were depicted as without humanity, only interested in base instincts like sex and conquest. News reports highlighted US racism against Japanese and African-Americans and



described acts of Americans killing babies, intent on destroying ‘the divine state of Japan’ (Dower, 1986: 242-3).

## **Final Offensives: China and South-East Asia, 1944–1945**

In the spring of 1945 Japan’s armies in Burma initiated a major military offensive in northern Burma against British forces in Kohima and Imphal. The main goal of the *U-Go* (Operation C) campaign was to invade India, and, with the assistance of the Indian National Army of 40,000 soldiers, trigger an uprising against British rule. A successful operation against the British would also create a base in north-western Burma which could be used for a possible invasion of Yunnan province. The military planning for the *U-Go* offensive originated in an imperial conference in September 1943 in Tokyo which called for a strategy of local offensives against the Allies in India and China and significant naval victories over the United States in the Pacific. The overall objective was to force the USA into peace negotiations while driving India and China out of the war altogether. Such a plan was highly unrealistic, given the growing military and economic capacity of the Allies against Japan. By 1945 the USA had effectively abandoned China as a major theatre of operations and concentrated its aerial attacks on Japanese targets from Pacific Ocean bases, especially those acquired in the Marianas in 1943. Japan’s determination to continue fighting had devastating consequences, not only for Japanese society, but also for millions of others in Asia who remained under its ‘New Order’.

The Japanese commander of *U-Go*, Lieutenant-General Mutaguchi Renya, had led the regiment at the Marco Polo Bridge fighting in 1937 that began the War of Resistance. In 1944, he

wrote in his diary that, if I could now ‘exercise a decisive influence’ on the war, I ‘will have justified myself in the eyes of our nation’. By this time, however, the Japanese and Indian armies were significantly weakened by disease and shortages of food and medicine. They lacked mechanized transport and attack vehicles. Though the Japanese almost overran Kohima, the British armies were huge, now numbering almost two million men across the region. Hundreds of thousands of others played critical supporting roles as labourers. <02.15>Some of those who died in the fighting were later buried at the Commonwealth War Memorial Cemetery in Kandy, Ceylon, not far from where Lord Mountbatten had moved his South -East Asia Command Headquarters in April 1944. Minority groups were hired as labourers—some 200,000 Nagas, for example, worked as porters in Assam—but later they also alerted the British armies to Japanese encampments and defensive strongholds in Burma. At Kohima, British tanks played a decisive role, and key support from Indian and Nepalese troops (Punjabis and Gurkhas) turned the conflict in favour of the British. The battles were as grim and infused with racist violence as those in the Pacific war. One British Commander recalled: ‘We had experienced fighting the Japs in the Arakan, [with them] bayoneting the wounded and prisoners. . . . They had renounced any right to be regarded as human, and we thought of them as vermin to be exterminated. That was important—we are pacific in our nature, but when aroused we fight quite well’.

Collectively, the battles at Imphal and Kohima in the spring of 1944 were the most devastating for the Japanese during the entire war in their toll on troops. Of the 85,000 Japanese who participated in the battles, 30,000 died, half of these of disease and starvation. Soon Chinese, Burmese (Kachin), and American soldiers began their own offensive in the north, and by August 1944 Japanese power in northern Burma had collapsed. The Allies controlled the skies

and their air forces bombed Japanese positions throughout the country. The air raids killed many civilians and destroyed towns and cities, including Rangoon, which British armies occupied in early May 1945.

As Allied offensives ravaged Burma, Japanese armies continued to devastate large parts of China. The *Ichigo* (Number One) operation, launched in conjunction with the offensives in Burma, was the biggest military action ever undertaken by the Japanese army, and brought much of southern and central China under Japanese control by February 1945. The military offensive was designed to establish a rail and land corridor between North-East and South-East Asia in the event of oceanic communications between those regions being lost to the Americans, to defeat Chiang's armies, and to destroy American air bases in southern China which had launched attacks on the empire in South-East Asia and the East China Sea. For these purposes, the China Expeditionary Army mobilized 500,000 soldiers in early 1944 and carried out two major campaigns which lasted into early 1945. Although the Japanese soldiers captured US air bases throughout southern China, the American Fourteenth Air Force relocated further inland and replaced medium-range bombers with B-29 long-range bombers capable of flying over 5,000 miles. From Chengdu, for example, as early as June 1944, B-29s started to attack the southern home island of Kyushu.

The *Ichigo* offensive had a tremendous social and political impact on China. <02.16> The initial attacks in central China occurred while the population still suffered from famine. Chinese soldiers were poorly fed and paid. Shortages of food and medicine led to malnutrition, disease, and death. Poor transport systems resulted in devastating losses. A Red Cross survey indicated that because of lack of food and transport, 80 or 90 per cent of new recruits perished before even

reaching their military unit. The *Ichi-Go* battles also resulted in significant battlefield losses for the Chinese army, which suffered some 750,000 casualties in nine months of fighting. These factors seriously impacted the post-war ability of Chiang's armies to defeat the Communists in the Chinese Civil War.

The Japanese military co-ordinated the *Ichi-Go* offensives with operations in South-East Asia, specifically Operation *Sho-Go* (Victory) in the Philippines. The broader and unrealistic purpose of *Ichi-Go* was to enable the Japanese to launch an offensive from the southern Philippines in 1946 with the intention of taking back the initiative in the Pacific War and forcing the USA into a negotiated peace. In October 1944, as General MacArthur's forces landed on Leyte island in the Philippines, the Japanese navy lured Admiral Halsey's Third Fleet northward in a desperate attempt to defeat the Seventh Fleet near the Philippines. The ensuing Battle of Leyte Gulf on 23–25 October, the largest ever naval engagement, decimated the Japanese fleet, which lost four aircraft carriers, effectively eliminating it as a significant strategic factor for the remainder of the war.

Despite America's successes at sea, the struggle for the Philippines continued until the Japanese surrender in August. One of the most devastating battles for the islands occurred in Manila, which American soldiers began to reach in early February 1945. The local Japanese naval commander refused to recognize an order from the army allowing Manila to be a 'free city' and told his 17,000 soldiers to fight Americans and Filipino guerrillas inside the city. In the ensuing battle, much of Manila was razed to the ground, with Japanese soldiers blowing up buildings and shooting, bayonetting, and raping Filipinos. American artillery attacks showed a complete lack of concern for civilians. For every six deaths caused by Japanese assaults, another

four were caused by American artillery, used indiscriminately in the capital. The commander of the 37th Infantry Division that was largely responsible for the shelling, Robert S. Beightler, stated that his soldiers ‘plastered the Walled City until it was a mess’, creating a ‘churned up pile of dust and scrap’ out of stately government buildings. America’s bombers had also done ‘some pretty fine alteration work on the appearance of Berlin and Tokyo’, and he wished ‘they could see what we did with our little artillery on the Jap strongholds of Manila’. Beightler viewed his actions in terms of saving US soldiers’ lives, a position which helped to create another battered, decimated, and broken population, with as many as 100,000 deaths in a city of 700,000 inhabitants. <02.18>

## **The End of the War with Japan**

American and Allied racism and feelings of retribution against Japan and Germany played a fundamental role in shaping the policy of unrestricted bombing that occurred in Europe and Asia. At the beginning of the War of Resistance, President Roosevelt articulated the horror he felt about Japanese bombings of Chinese cities. In the autumn of 1937 the Department of State criticized Japan on the basis that ‘any general bombing of an extensive area wherein there resides a large population engaged in peaceful pursuits is unwarranted and contrary to principles of law and of humanity’. In the UK, the British Air Force began its incendiary bombings of Germany in 1941. By the summer of 1943 the British Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, asserted that the allies would ‘bomb, burn and ruthlessly destroy’ Germany and Japan. Though the United States Air Force initially practised ‘precision’ bombing in both Europe and Asia, they abandoned

the practice in early March 1945, when Curtis LeMay's XXI Bomber Command, based in the Marianas, used napalm and incendiaries to firebomb Tokyo. The raid on the night of 9–10 March killed over 80,000 civilians and destroyed over a quarter of a million buildings. The bombing raids continued to the end of the war. <02.18> To destroy the enemy the Anglo-American political and military leadership had come to believe they needed to commit mass killings.

The Japanese reluctance to surrender was indicative of the military's insensitivity to the suffering going on throughout the empire. Roger Dower has suggested that by 1944 and 1945 elements of Japanese military and society were prepared to expose the population to the 'supreme sacrifice' of extermination in order to preserve the state's honour and purify the collective body. The unwillingness of some of the military to negotiate peace can be gleaned from the diary of the deputy chief of staff, Kawabe Torashiro, the planner of Japan's defence of the homelands, Operation *Ketsu-Go* (Decisive). On 9 August 1945, several days after the explosion of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima, and upon learning of the Soviet entry into the war, Kawabe wrote that 'we should not consider seeking peace'. In order 'to save the honor of the Yamato race, there is no other way but to keep fighting. . . I don't like to think about peace and surrender. Whatever the outcome we have no choice but to try'.

As the single most devastating weapon to be used in the Second World War, the atomic bomb has often been considered the central factor in getting the Japanese government to surrender unconditionally to the Allies. Historian Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, however, has argued that the entry of the Soviet Union in the war against Japan, and not the explosion of atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, was decisive in convincing the Emperor and military to accept unconditional surrender. Although the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima had had a

significant impact on Hirohito, the Emperor had been especially conscious of the Soviet threat to his power. In February 1945 former Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro wrote to the Emperor that Japan should not be worried by a defeat by the Anglo-American powers since ‘public opinion in America and England has not gone far enough to destroy the *kokutai*’. Instead, Japan should be concerned about ‘a Communist revolution that might accompany defeat’. Saving the *kokutai*, argued Konoe, required the Emperor’s active intervention to contain the military. The danger of external threat and domestic upheaval significantly shaped the Emperor’s ideas, as he manoeuvred until the very last to preserve as much of his authority as possible. On 9 August the Emperor told his closest advisor that because of the Soviet entry into the conflict in Asia ‘it is necessary to study and decide on the termination of the war’. As Hasegawa has pointed out, preserving the Emperor’s position now involved blaming the military for the war. Fear of a Soviet political role in the post-war occupation of Japan, however, now led much of the military leadership reluctantly to agree to the American government’s terms for ending the conflict. On 14 August, the Emperor told the Japanese cabinet of his decision to accept unconditional surrender, and the next day a recording of his surrender speech was played at noon to the Japanese public.

The dropping of the two atomic bombs were war atrocities, committed by a liberal empire and by a President bent on retribution against the Japanese. As Hasegawa and others have argued, the sense of victimization that has accompanied Japanese understandings of the war has also prevented the government from accepting full responsibility for its own actions in the conflict. The destruction of Japan and Germany at the end of the war was brought on by the

American and Allied war machines, but, even more, by the Japanese and German leaderships themselves.