

Attempt to Globalize Japanese Studies: Focusing on Joint Research on the History of the Japanese-Chinese War

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Introduction

During my term as an invited international research fellow at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) from June 2014 to May 2015, I organized a research meeting titled “Japanese Military Strategy and East Asian Society: Focusing on the Period of the Japanese-Chinese War.”

This research meeting aimed to clarify the political, economic, social, intellectual and cultural impacts made by Japan’s war, which involved all of East Asia, on Japan itself and East Asian countries, especially Chinese society.

After I left Kyoto, this joint research relocated its base to the Institute of Modern History (IMH), Academia Sinica, in Taipei, Taiwan, with the support of the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange and resumed as a three-year research project from September 2015 to September 2017 under the changed title of “Steps Towards Reconciliation: The Introspection of the Second Sino-Japanese War.” In addition, to inform the wider academic world of the objectives of this joint research, IMH hosted an international symposium titled “Impacts that the Japanese-Chinese War had on Asia” in December 2015 with the attendance of scholars from 14 countries/regions.

We have thus made efforts to promote research on the history of the Japanese-Chinese War from such an international perspective. What effects have these efforts of ours produced? What meanings can we find in joint research with such a framework? From the perspectives of these questions, this paper reviews the process of the joint research at Nichibunken, Kyoto, and the subsequent project in Taipei as an example.

1. Issues of “Historical Recognition”

Recently, various issues concerning historical recognition have repeatedly occurred between Japan and China. I believe that a breakthrough in this situation will require both countries to focus only on the main points in dispute and begin by discussing the origin of the issues. Difference in the recognition of the Japanese-Chinese War exists not only between Japan and China but also within Japan and between China and Taiwan across the Taiwan Strait. This complex situation is reflected in the point in dispute over history textbooks.

(1) Dispute within Japan

A typical argument of one side in the dispute within Japan is that made in *Atarashī Rekishi Kyōkasho* 新しい歴史教科書 (“New History Textbooks”) (the Fusōsha version, the current Jiyūsha version and the Ikuhōsha version). The textbooks officially approved in 2002 advance a peculiar argument, which challenges conventional history education. For example, the text-books

interpret the “anticommunist policy” and the “argument that the Soviet Union would be a threat to Japan” advocated by the Japanese military during wartime at face value and view the essence of Japan’s war as a “war for liberating Asia, instead of a war of aggression.” The textbooks also point out that the “Tokyo Trial” was “judgement by the winners” and emphasize the aspect of Japan as a victim, allowing little space for Japan as the perpetrator in the invasion of China and the colonization of Taiwan and Korea.

(2) Dispute between China and Taiwan

Such dispute over interpretations of the same historical fact can be also found in textbooks on both sides of the Taiwan Strait.

For example, China and Taiwan have different views on Chiang Kai-shek’s policy of non-resistance, which allowed the Kwantung Army to occupy Northeast China at once during the Mukden Incident. Textbooks in communist China emphasize that the Japanese occupation of Northeast China was the fault of the Nationalist Party, whose leader, Chiang Kai-shek, “ordered” Zhang Xueliang, who had the highest authority over Northeast China, not to resist the Japanese army. Meanwhile, textbooks in Taiwan, where the Nationalist Party was based after the war, maintain that the party at the time of the Mukden Incident judged the Japanese side to be militarily and generally superior to themselves and determined that it would be better to obtain support from the League of Nations than to bring China alone into armed conflict with Japan.

The “*annei rangwai*” 安内攘外 policy (placing higher priority on internal stability to deter the external enemy) advocated by Chiang Kai-shek after the Mukden Incident is also differently evaluated in China and Taiwan. Chinese textbooks point out that the policy was really intended to continue implementing a “reactionary policy,” including a compromise with Japan and a siege on the Red Army. Meanwhile, Taiwanese textbooks argue that the true intention of the policy was to promote internal political reforms by temporarily avoiding armed conflict with Japan and to increase national strength.

China and Taiwan also disagree with each other over who took the leadership in the Anti-Japanese War, which ended in the victory of China. While Chinese textbooks maintain that the victory resulted from the “protracted war” policy pursued by the Mao Zedong-led Communist Party, Taiwanese textbooks emphasize that the victory was the fruit of joint operations between the Chiang Kai-shek-led Nationalist Party, the Chinese people who stirred themselves under the guidance of the Nationalist Party, and the Allied Powers.¹

2. Past Research Trends

To solve the dispute between Japan and China over historical recognition triggered by the above-mentioned textbook issue, a government-level joint research project was launched in December 2006. The research project was implemented under the co-chairmanship of Kitaoka

¹ Kikuchi Kazutaka 菊池一隆 *Higashi Asia Rekishi Kyōkasho Mondai no Kōzu: Nihon, Chūgoku, Taiwan, Kankoku, oyobi Zainichi Chōsenjin Gakkō* 東アジア歴史教科書問題の構図：日本・中国・台湾・韓国、および在日朝鮮人学校, Hōritsu Bunkasha, 2013.

Shin'ichi and Bu Ping, and its achievements were published in 2014 in a two-volume report, one of which was dedicated to ancient, medieval and early-modern history, while the other was dedicated to modern and contemporary history.²

Professor Kawashima Shin, The University of Tokyo, who was a member of this joint research project, states that disagreement between Japan and China has arisen due to the difference in approaches both sides take for historical research. According to Professor Kawashima, the Chinese side takes a result-oriented approach and tries to explain that certain intentions eventually led to the Japanese-Chinese War, so they believe that explanations of individual specific events are just incidental to the intentions or cause. Meanwhile, the Japanese side believes that results are incidental to individual specific events. They place higher importance on the process than on the results, that is, they believe that individual decisions made under various conditions produce historical results.³

The attitude of the Chinese side is symbolized by the naming of the “second Sino-Japanese War.” They recognize that the first Sino-Japanese War in 1894 was connected directly to the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 with the national policy of “expansion to the continent” pursued by successive Japanese governments. As long as the Japanese government advocated this national policy, even the withdrawal of the Chinese army from Korea in response to Japan’s request after the first Sino-Japanese War could have not bring peace between China and Japan. The second Sino-Japanese War was an inevitable military conflict caused by the expansion of the scope of Japan’s “expansion to the continent” policy from the Korean peninsula to mainland China, so the war was the natural consequence of the Japanese policy. The Chinese side does not believe that a period of 43 years between the first and second Sino-Japanese Wars meant Japan’s giving up on the policy of expanding to the continent.

This Chinese attitude toward seeking the essence shows a sharp contrast with the Japanese attitude toward placing importance on case studies. Japanese historians argue that historical facts cannot be revealed without exploring how problems occurred and what progress they made.

From the historical perspective of the Japanese side, there were certainly mutual distrust and hostility between Japan and China for a long time, but a full-scale war between the two countries triggered by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident was neither developed nor expanded by the Japanese government’s intention. The Japanese government itself never did declare war against China and tried implementing various measures for peace even during the war. According to Japanese historians, the Japanese government hoped that armed conflict with China would be resolved early. The subsequent indefinite expansion of the war resulted from a vicious circle of successive accidental conflicts. The Japanese side, therefore, maintains that it is important to reveal the process where the vicious circle of conflicts developed into a full-scale war.

² Kitaoka Shin'ichi & Bu Ping eds. 北岡伸一・歩平 ‘*Nicchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū*’ *Hōkokusho* 『日中歴史共同研究』報告書 Vol. 2 *Kingendaishi-hen* 近現代史篇, Bensei Shuppan, 2014.

³ Kawashima Shin 川島真 “‘*Nicchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū*’ no Mittsu no Isō” 『日中歴史共同研究』の三つの位相 (Kasahara Tokushi 笠原十九司 ed. *Sensō wo Shiranai Kokumin no tameno Nicchū Rekishi Ninshiki: ‘Nicchū Rekishi Kyōdō Kenkyū <Kingendaishi>’ o yomu* 戦争を知らない国民のための日中歴史認識: 『日中歴史共同研究〈近現代史〉』を読む, Bensei Shuppan, 2011), pp. 86–87.

3. New Research Perspectives

As seen above, Japan and China differ not only in historical recognition but also in approaches to historical research, resulting in an unbridgeable gap in their interpretations of the Japanese-Chinese War. In particular, the Chinese side, whose national land was the battlefield, claimed that any research efforts could not lead to reconciliation unless the Japanese side reveals where responsibility for the war lies.

Aiming for reconciliation between the two nations, I will first focus only on the process of the expansion of the war to explore the responsibility of those involved in each incident. In other words, I hope to reexamine what caused the occurrence of successive unfortunate incidents by further developing the Japanese side's research achievements, based on the recognition that the Japanese-Chinese War resulted from a vicious circle of successive incidents, rather than a long-term plan and operation. Furthermore, I also aim not only to explore where responsibility for the war lies but also to reexamine the positioning of Manchukuo in wartime by defining the development of Manchuria as another research focus.

Chinese historians have so far tended to explore the negative aspects of Manchukuo. More specifically, major research themes in the Chinese academic world of history have been how many Chinese people were forced to work or killed and how many resources were plundered. These are all facts. However, discussing Manchuria by the same standards as mainland China may make us fail to grasp the overall picture of history because Manchuria was not a battlefield. By 1936, the public and private sectors of Japan invested a total of three billion yen in Manchuria.⁴ Why did the Japanese invest such a huge amount of money, which exceeded the national budget of Japan in the same year—2.27 billion yen—by 0.7 billion yen? I decided to trace the origin of the Japanese rule of Manchuria and reexamine the positioning of Manchukuo.

At the same time as the founding of Manchukuo in 1932, the first-term plan for Manchuria economic construction began to be implemented in line with the total-war regime under the slogans of the “currency integration project” and the “Japan-Manchuria economic bloc.” Subsequently, the five-year plan for the industrial development of Manchukuo was formulated as the second-term plan. Despite its own national budget of only 2.8 billion yen in 1937, Japan invested 2.6 billion yen in Manchukuo in the period of five years after 1937 to implement this plan. The gigantic plan was aimed at developing Manchuria into a steel production center.⁵

Some then state-of-the-art industries, including the iron industry, were introduced into industrialized Manchuria at almost the same level as in Japan. Given that this area later developed as the most important industrial area in the People's Republic of China, more detailed consideration should be given to achievements of the industrialization of Manchukuo. In addition, taking into account the fact that the industrialization of Manchukuo provided a

⁴ Manshikai 満史會 ed. *Manshū Kaihatsu Yonjūnenshi* 満州開發四十年史, Vol. 1, Manshū Kaihatsu Yonjūnenshi Kankōkai, 1964, p. 120.

⁵ Kobayashi Hideo 小林英夫 *Mantetsu ga Unda Nihongata Keizai System* 満鉄が生んだ日本型経済システム, Kyōiku Hyōronsha, 2012, p. 89.

prototype for the postwar “Japanese-style management system,” where economic growth was promoted in collaboration between government, industry and bureaucracy under the leadership of bureaucrats at the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and other ministries,⁶ the Japanese side also should reexamine the country’s experience in Manchuria. I suppose that the former area of Manchukuo, which developed in parallel with the “Fifteen Years War,” has something that both Japan and China should reevaluate as a legacy. Therefore, revealing how both countries have used this legacy has been added to my research objectives.

4. New Joint Research in Japan (First Stage)

Keeping in mind these perspectives, I conducted joint research divided into two stages—the first in Japan and the second in Taiwan—to reestablish my understanding of all facts concerning the Japanese-Chinese War and relationships between these facts. The first stage was one-year joint research at Nichibunken, whose results were published in a collection of papers titled <*Nicchū-sensō*> *towa Nandattanoka: Fukugan-teki Shiten* 〈日中戦争〉とは何だったのか：複眼的視点 (lit. “What Was the Japanese-Chinese War?: From Multiple Perspectives”) by Minerva Shobo, Kyoto, in September 2017.⁷ This collection of papers written by seven scholars from Japan, five from China, and one from Taiwan comprises three parts— “Before the War,” “During the War” and “From the End of the War to the Postwar Era”—and the papers are arranged in chronological order.

Focusing on “anticommunist alliance,” Part One traces the process of changes in the relationship between Japan and China from friendly relations to hostile ones. In particular, Japanese and Chinese authors reexamine from their own perspectives why the Japanese government did not treat Chiang Kai-shek, who was fighting against the Communist Party from his “anticommunist” position, as its ally despite its anticommunist policy.

Part Two examines the process of the expansion of conflict into a full-scale war triggered by the Marco Polo Bridge Incident from the three perspectives of responsibility for the war, international relations and records of war history. From the perspective of responsibility for the war, the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Navy and public opinion is examined and clarified, while from the perspective of international relations the authors examine and explore what diplomatic policies both the Japanese and Chinese governments pursued during the war. From the perspective of records of war history, using the difference in historical recognition between Japan and China, the research focus is placed on the gap between facts and memories, and the authors propose a new method of dividing “the actions of individuals” from “the actions of a state.”

Part Three argues how the Japanese government became determined to maintain peace after the broadcast of the Emperor’s announcement of Japan’s surrender and the consequent end of the war, and it describes how knowledge about Asia developed through the “war” helped

⁶ Kobayashi Hideo 小林英夫 *Manshū to Jimintō* 満州と自民党, Shinchō Shinsho, 2005, p. 180.

⁷ Huang Tzuchin, Liu Jianhui 黄自進・劉建輝 et al. eds. <*Nicchū-sensō*> *towa Nandattanoka: Fukugan-teki Shiten* 〈日中戦争〉とは何だったのか：複眼的視点, Minerva Shobō, 2017.

Japanese businesspersons conduct business activities in the postwar era. Placing the research focus on the Chinese side, the authors shed new light on the Nationalist Party's plan for peace talks and its failure and Chinese people's complaints against postwar settlement to trace the origin of the postwar dispute between Japan and China. Furthermore, the authors also focus on the establishment process of "Paidan 白團" and examine how Chiang Kai-shek received support from Japanese people as his former enemy to reconstruct the military forces after being defeated in the Chinese Civil War and moving to Taiwan.

It can be said that, despite differences in the recognition of the war history between Japan, Taiwan and China, success in this joint research and the publication of its results may prove that this joint research has helped build a certain consensus between the three parties.

5. Continuation of Research in Taiwan (Second Stage)

The second stage of the joint research was implemented as a three-year research project based in Taiwan from September 2015 to September 2017, under the changed title of "Steps Towards Reconciliation: The Introspection of the Second Sino-Japanese War."

On December 19 and 20, 2015, during this research project, IMH hosted an international symposium titled "Impacts that the Japanese-Chinese War had on Asia." With 59 papers presented, the symposium was attended by scholars from Japan, China, the U.S. and the UK, as well as representatives of Asian countries, such as Myanmar, Vietnam, India, Malaysia, Korea and Taiwan. Their participation helped reveal that there is still room for reexamination of the nature of war. More specifically, some attendees voiced their opposition to the position that the Japanese-Chinese War led directly to the Pacific War. For example, Ranjana Mukho-padhyaya, India, stated that, although people in the Indian political world differ in views on the Japanese-Chinese War, all of them support the position of Japan concerning the Pacific War. The historical recognition that the Pacific War enabled India to become independent is accepted as a mainstream opinion in India.

Kyaw Swe Nyunt agreed with the recognition that the Pacific War was part of the war for liberating Asia. According to him, the Burma Independence Army led by Major General Aung San fought against the British army to support the Japanese military in order to become independent from British rule.

If British rule was recognized as evil, all activities that could help sustain British colonial rule were hostile activities from the perspective of the Burma Independence Army. That is why, when Chinese troops participated in a battle for defending Burma in response to the request of the UK in March 1942, they were treated as enemies by the Burma Independence Army. The conventional historical recognition of the Chinese general public has been that the Pacific War was a war for "protecting existing international order" in the sense of protecting national land from the Japanese. The Chinese troops participated in the operations in Burma based on an extension of such recognition with the aim of cooperating in the anti-fascist united front, never dreaming that they were protecting the existing colonialist regime. The Chinese people never imagined that Chinese troops' participation in operations in Burma was seen by the Burmese people at that time as aimed at protecting the existing colonialist regime.

These exchanges of different views during the symposium made us realize that there would be a wide gap between the history of the Japanese-Chinese War examined from the limited perspective of the relations between the two countries and that examined from the wider perspective of international relations between a larger number of countries. The results of the symposium were published in a collection of 28 papers divided into the five parts of “Wartime social and economic regimes and their changes,” “Multifaceted characteristics of political parties, the military and politics in wartime,” “War and international negotiation,” “Postwar plans for domestic and international conditions and their implementation,” and “War and Asia.” With all papers translated into Chinese, the book was published under the title *Zhongri Zhanzheng yu Dongya Bianju* 中日戰爭與東亞變局 (*The Sino-Japanese War and the Changes in East Asia*) in July 2018 by Daw Shiang Publishing 稻鄉出版社, New Taipei City.⁸

Based on our experience through the symposium, our research group presented 44 papers at our first research meeting in September 2015, 24 papers in our second research meeting in December 2016, and 41 papers at our third research meeting in September 2017. Among these papers, we selected 22 papers to publish a collection of papers titled *Maixiang Hejie zhi Lu: Zhongri Zhanzheng de Zaijiantao* 邁向和解之路：中日戰爭的再檢討 (lit. “Steps Towards Reconciliation: The Introspection of the Second Sino-Japanese War”).

This book comprises the six parts of “Historical Descriptions and Memories,” “Marco Polo Bridge Incident and its Escalation to the Japanese-Chinese War,” “War and Changes in Chinese Domestic Politics,” “War and External Relations,” “War and the Uprising of the Communist Party of China,” and “Construction of the Wartime Economic Regime and its Changes.” After being translated into Chinese, the book will be published in June 2019 by Daw Shiang Publishing, New Taipei City.⁹

Professor Tajima Nobuo, Seijo University, a member of the research group, points out the following two achievements of the joint research.

The first achievement is that the entire process, from the occurrence of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident to subsequent increasing conflicts, was divided into three stages (① the political process leading to the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, ② the three-week process from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident to the expansion of the war at the end of July, and ③ the process of further expansion of the war triggered by the Battle of Shanghai on August 13), each of which was analyzed in detail. The joint research has revealed that, in the entire process, the Japanese government had multiple political choices other than the expansion of the war and total invasion the government actually took. While such research has made no changes to the widely accepted argument that the Marco Polo Bridge Incident triggered the expansion of the Japanese invasion of China, the research has revealed the historical details and enriched our imagination about the process of expansion of the Japanese-Chinese War.

The second achievement is the analyses of relationships between the nation and their leaders, including Chiang Kai-shek, Song Zheyuan and Hirota Kōki. Special attention was

⁸ Huang Tzuchin 黃自進, Pan Kuang-che 潘光哲 et al. eds. *Zhongri Zhanzheng yu Dongya Bianju* 中日戰爭與東亞變局, Daw Shiang Publishing, 2018.

⁹ Huang Tzuchin 黃自進 ed. *Maixiang Hejie zhi Lu: Zhongri Zhanzheng de Zaijiantao* 邁向和解之路：中日戰爭的再檢討, Daw Shiang Publishing, 2019.

paid to two aspects of such relations: the aspect of the activities of politicians, bureaucrats and militaries restricted by nationalistic public opinion and the aspect of politicians, bureaucrats and militaries firing the nation's enthusiasm for war.¹⁰

It is worth noting that looking through the process of the Japanese-Chinese War has made us notice a considerable gap between our initial aims and final results. Specifically, there should be historical recognition that the industrialization of Manchukuo has been a legacy that deserves to be valued by both Japan and China. Although reexamination of Manchuria development was originally a key focus of this joint research, this theme was dealt with only by two papers submitted by Chinese scholars, with no papers on this theme submitted by Japanese participants. This is quite regrettable.

In addition, we initially expected that this joint research would reexamine each of the incidents, including the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, the Shanghai Operation, the occupation of Nanjing, the Battle of Xuzhou, the Battle of Wuhan, and the Canton Operation, explore the responsibility of those involved in each incident, and clarify responsibility for the war on both sides in order to reveal why a vicious circle of accidental incidents expanded into the Japanese-Chinese War. However, three papers dealt with the developmental process, from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident to the Battle of Shanghai, but no papers examined the process of other military operations. I hope that these incidents will be examined later.

Meanwhile, a precious fruit of this joint research is Professor Tobe Ryoichi's excellent paper titled "Nicchū-sensō Shoki ni okeru Konoe Naikaku no Taiō" 日中戦争初期における近衛内閣の対応 (lit. "Response of the Konoe Cabinet in the Early Stage of the Japanese-Chinese War"). The paper concludes: "Special attention should be paid to the fact that Prime Minister Konoe's words at Cabinet meetings were almost unable to be heard, which seems to have decreased the significance of the Cabinet as a decision-making organization for the nation at that time. Konoe may have listened to other Cabinet members in silence and tried to follow the mainstream trend. Konoe's style of politics easily enabled the positions of hardliners to prevail and provided a major cause of the expansion of the Japanese-Chinese War." It can be said that his conclusion marks the first step toward our research on responsibility for the war.

Path Forward: In Place of a Conclusion

The research management style of deepening abroad the foundation for research built at Nichibunken is a new form of international research exchange in East Asia. Although I do not believe that this research project alone can contribute to reconciliation between the two nations, I hope that this joint research project can play a role in "*paozhuan yinyu*" 抛磚引玉 ("tossing out a brick to get a jade gem"), that is, inspiring many more valuable ideas and studies, as the first step toward reconciliation.

I also believe that it has been very significant for me to encounter many fellow scholars

¹⁰ Tajima Nobuo 田嶋信雄 "Kokusai Symposium 'Wakai eno Michi: Nicchū-sensō no Saikentō Sankaki' 国際シンポジウム「和解への道：日中戦争の再検討」参加記, *Kingendai Tōhoku Asia Chiikishi Kenkyūkai* 近現代東北アジア地域史研究会 (*Association for the Modern and Contemporary History of Northeast Asia*), vol. 27, 2015, p. 38.

who share with me aspirations for reconciliation through this joint research project. This trend, for example, has resulted in the project “Towards the Creation of Reconciliation Studies” 和解学の創成：正義ある和解を求めて proposed by Waseda University being selected for AY2017 Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research on Innovative Areas (research in a proposed research area).¹¹ Based on shared historical recognition and human networks, I hope to further develop our joint research on the history of the Japanese-Chinese War in collaboration with Waseda University’s project.

¹¹ Website of Waseda University’s project “Towards the Creation of Reconciliation Studies”: <http://www.prj-wakai.com/>