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Japanese and Chinese Interaction in the Second World War

When it comes to thinking about the Second World War, the primary focus is often made on the European theater of war with nations like Great Britain, France, Germany, and the Soviet Union being the most involved in the conflict. After Pearl Harbor and Japanese expansion in the Pacific, the conflict became global, engulfing the entire world in a bloodshed. However, the historical accounts often fail to mention the degree of sufferings countries like China encountered during World War II. Specifically, there is enough evidence to indicate that precursors of the global conflict occurred in the context of interactions between Japan and China—something that started long before Europe found itself in an open offense. While understanding the interaction between Japanese and Chinese populations during the Second World War, it is essential to explore the path leading to confrontation, the events that defined the clash between the two nations, and the consequences of such an encounter.

An essential thing to grasp is that the traditional perception of the roots of the Second World War as being something that was triggered by Hitler invading Poland in 1939 is only a part of the picture. The author of "China Lost 14 Million People in World War II. Why Is This Forgotten?" argues that in the context of the Chinese, the participation in the global conflict

started when the shooting outside the village of Wanping took place on July 7, 1937. It was the event that triggered a set of further actions that led to a full-blown confrontation between Japan and China during World War II (Todd). However, while it is apparent that the interaction between the Japanese and Chinese during the Second World War was defined by conflict, it was something that did not happen spontaneously. The hatred between Japan and China was brewing for decades. For years, the Japanese engaged in capturing China's territories and committing atrocities against the Chinese (Mitter 17). While propagating the ideology of pan-Asianism, Japan was a nation engaging in extreme nationalism, and any means possible to "give meaning to the national quest for power and glory" (Mitter 48). As a result, the confrontation between Japan and China began with the belief that the Japanese were the most dominant ethnic group. When China stood in Japan's way, the nation engaged in open confrontation against the Chinese for the sake of meeting its ideal of pan-Asianism.

The confrontation between the Japanese and Chinese during the Second World War was defined by a series of events that affected the course of further relations between the nations. At the very beginning of World War II, in September 1939, the Japanese Imperial Army sent 100,000 troops with an objective to capture the central Chinese city of Changsha. As a response, the leader of the Chinese resistance, General Chiang, ordered the city to be burned down for the sake of leaving Japanese troops with nothing to capture in the first place (Mitter 111). With an ongoing conflict, the Chinese population was divided into the block of communists and the block of nationalists. As a result, apart from the external offense on the part of Japan, there was an internal conflict within China (Mitter 210). The case became even worse when Chinese Communists started receiving massive aid from the Soviet Union. Because the USSR and Japan

had a history of conflict—namely, they fought a series of battles in Mongolia in 1939—China found itself in the center of a confrontation between two massive international powers (Todd). In such a context, the clash between the Chinese and Japanese during the Second World War was devastating for China. Millions suffered while the country was torn by political instability. In such regard, fearing infiltration of foreign powers, China's secret policy engaged in a terroristic campaign against its citizens, killing and torturing thousands of Chinese individuals who were suspected of treason (Overy). Therefore, the events mentioned above were devastating for China's civilian population, making people suffer from both the Japanese offense and Chinese authoritarian rule.

Speaking about the relationship between the Japanese and Chinese during the Second World War, one cannot avoid mentioning the consequences of this interaction for both nations. The Sino-Japanese War—the name coined to describe the conflict between China and Japan—left millions dead and entire regions destroyed. Since Japan had a superior military force and the Chinese war effort was not able to match such an opposition, tens of millions of Chinese civilians experienced several atrocities, from mass murder to starvation (Overy). Historians indicate that while China lost approximately 14 million in the Second World War, thousands of Chinese lives were sacrificed to decrease Japan's capacity to fight in the global conflict. As a result, the public should understand that the Sino-Japanese relations were crucial in the context of shaping the world (Todd). After the Second World War, even though Japan was devastated, the nation skyrocketed following the western model of development in terms of renovation and modernization of its infrastructure. In contrast, destroyed and left in ruins, China encountered a harsher path of development after the global war ended. The key mistake the nation made was

aligning with the Soviet Union, while Japan pursued the western model, collaborating with the United States extensively (Graf). Pushing all the western notions from the country, Chinese authorities engaged in enforcing communistic ideas—an experiment that proved unsuccessful. In such regard, the example of relationships between China and Japan shows that history can sometimes be unjust. Specifically, even though it was the Japanese who invaded Chinese and caused all the suffering, in the end, they came out victors from the conflict, setting their nation on a path of development and prosperity.

All in all, the relationship between the Chinese and Japanese during the Second World War was defined by political confrontation along with an open conflict. However, while Japan was the nation that invaded China, it pursued its pan-Asianism ideals. As a result, it came out as a country that adopted a model leading to massive economic and social growth. In contrast, because of the external pressure as well as the fact that China was caught in the middle of a confrontation between Japan and the Soviet Union, the nation suffered from direct invasion on the part of foreign powers and experienced an internal political collision—one defined by the division of Chinese authorities into nationalists and communists. After the conflict with Japan ended, apart from the fact that China lost 14 million people on the way, the nation's government failed to envision the proper future of the country—namely, being aligned with western ideals. Instead, the path of communism was chosen—a system that histrionically proved to be unrealistic to accomplish as well as extremely violent toward people in general.

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