

How China Started the Second Sino-Japanese War: Why Should Japan Apologize to China?

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Introduction

In the so-called "apology issue," which concerns Japan's conduct in China during the Second Sino-Japanese War, there exists two opposing points of view:

"I guess the only thing we can do is to keep on apologizing until China tells us, 'The problems between us may not be settled, but for now you have sufficiently apologized.'" -Murakami Haruki¹

"A grateful China should also pay respect to Yasukuni Shrine." -Ko Bunyu²

Mr. Murakami's opinion is based on the belief that Japan waged an aggressive war against China, a belief shared by many Japanese even if they don't know the reason why. This belief holds that the Japanese should be completely repentant over that act of aggression for the sake of clearing our own conscience.

There are two major problems with this point of view.

First of all, it rests on the conventional wisdom that Japan was guilty of aggression towards China. Many people will perhaps respond to that by saying something like, "What are you talking about? The Japanese Army invaded continental China and waged war there. Surely that constitutes a war of aggression."

¹ Quoted in the column "Sankeisho" (*Sankei Shimbun*, April 25, 2015) from an interview Mr. Murakami gave to Kyodo News on April 17, 2015. Murakami is an internationally known novelist, said to be a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

² Ko Bunyu (Huang Wenxiong) was born in Taiwan in 1938. He is an active commentator on current and historical events and also a visiting professor at Takushoku University. He is the author of more than 300 books.

However, let's imagine the following scenario. What if the Japan Self-Defense Forces launched an unprovoked attack on American military units, which are stationed in Japan in accordance with the provisions of the US-Japan Security Treaty, and a war broke out on Japanese territory? Because the fighting would be taking place in Japan, does that mean that, in this scenario, the US Army is undeniably the aggressor? No matter how distasteful a person might find the US military presence to be, under international law, Japan would be deemed the aggressor here.

Therefore, the most important question we ought to be asking is not "Where did the Second Sino-Japanese War take place," but rather "Which side started the Second Sino-Japanese War?" The present work shall attempt to answer that question, and I hope to demonstrate to the reader that the reality is utterly contrary to the conventional wisdom.

Secondly, this issue is tied into postwar peace treaties. The war between China and Japan was brought to an official conclusion through the Treaty of Taipei, which was signed with the Republic of China, and the Joint Communiqué and Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which were signed with the People's Republic of China. As with any war, it can be expected that each side will have its own grievances, and that some ill feelings will remain. Nevertheless, reopening old wounds time and time again serves only to make it more difficult to rebuild normal relations between two countries after a war. Therefore, I believe that one of the most important lessons we have learned from human history is that conflicts should be settled definitively through peace treaties.

Mr. Murakami's thinking, that Japan should continue to apologize until China is satisfied, flies in the face of the lessons of history. This seems to me to be a very simplistic way of thinking, showing scant concern for anything other than demonstrating an emotional response. I don't think that this will help to clear anyone's conscience.

One might say that, even if a conflict is settled through a peace treaty, ill feelings of certain people will still exist. However, in that case, it won't be a one-sided problem, because there are quite a few Japanese people who personally feel that China's lawless acts during the war were also entirely unforgivable. If we go down that path, there will be no end.

This is all the more true if personal ill feelings become entangled in international level politics. If these matters engulf Japan, rather than stay at the individual level, then the letter and spirit of a peace treaty will be meaningless. Therefore, even if we leave aside the first problem of whether or not Japan waged aggressive war on China, the concept of eternally apologizing would remain, not an act of good conscience, but rather an atavistic principle in defiance of the wisdom acquired through history.

Ko Bunyu's opinion, which comes from the title of an essay he contributed to the magazine *Rekishitsu*,³ might seem extreme, biased, or eccentric on first glance. Nevertheless, this is the conclusion he reached in an essay grounded on sound logic and backed with a wealth of historical facts.

Ko Bunyu wrote the following at the beginning of the essay:

"China has alleged that the Japanese Army was responsible for aggression, massacres, rape, and pillage directed against the Chinese and other Asian peoples, and since the end of the war this is also what people in Japan have generally believed. However, this is not what people think in Taiwan⁴... Thankfully, the people of Taiwan were never indoctrinated by the version of history promoted at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. Because of this, the people of Taiwan lamented that Japan lost the war, and we had no problem in accepting the historical fact that Japan's true objective in fighting the war was to take back Asia and rid it of the invasive colonial powers."⁵

The people of Taiwan were not indoctrinated by the version of history promoted at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. In other words, they were not brainwashed by the War Guilt Information Program⁶ and thus they learned the uncensored historical facts. Ko Bunyu

³ See *Rekishitsu*, special issue of March 2015. An English translation of this article is available at the website of the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact. *A Grateful China Should Also Pay Respect To Yasukuni Shrine*

(<http://www.sdh-fact.com/CL/China-Should-Pay-Respect-To-Yasukuni-.pdf>)

⁴ *A Grateful China*, p.1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1-2.

⁶ The War Guilt Information Program was a propaganda operation put in place by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (General MacArthur) in order to rob Japan of its spirit of independence and implant a war guilt complex in the minds of the Japanese people. For more

asks the question, "what is it exactly about the Second Sino-Japanese War that Japan and the Japanese people are supposed to repent?"⁷

He concludes with, "Stopping the civil war, famine relief and relief for farmers, preventing China's dismemberment by the great powers... No matter how you look at it, China should be thanking the Japanese rather than criticizing them. Accusing Japan of waging a war of aggression on China is nonsense. Instead China should show gratitude to Japan, a country which was burdened by its foolish neighbor."⁸

The part about "stopping the civil war" might make one pause, but as Ko Bunyu explains, tens of millions of Chinese people perished in internal conflicts which continued until 1950. China's state of civil war continued after the Xinhai Revolution,⁹ and, in fact, was stopped only through the intervention of the Japanese Army. Over a seven year period, extending to 1930, internal wars involving the Chinese Nationalist Party, which are barely known to most people today, including the Zhili–Anhui War, the Zhili–Fengtian War, and the Central Plains War, left a total of thirty million people dead according to the estimates of Lin Yutang.¹⁰ Japan's activities in China were not a unilateral intervention in the affairs of a peaceful nation.

Ko Bunyu's assertion that Japan undertook "famine relief and relief for farmers" in China might surprise the reader, but, as he explains, "the Japanese, far from plundering China, instead created agricultural production plans similar to those already implemented in Taiwan, Korea, and Manchukuo. In China, the Japanese guided and supported production, ended oppressive taxation by landlords, protected villages from local bandits, and enthusiastically helped farmers and made their food supplies secure."¹¹

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information, see Sekino Michio's book, "*Nihonjin o Kuruwaseta Senno Kosaku*" [*The Brainwashing Operation that Robbed the Japanese of Their Sanity*](Jiyuu-sha, Tokyo, 2015).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1.

⁹ The Xinhai Revolution of 1911 brought down the Qing Dynasty and resulted in the establishment of the Republic of China by Chinese republicans.

¹⁰ Lin Yutang was a writer, linguist, and commentator of the Republic of China. He was nominated as a candidate for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1940 and 1950.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

One of the leaders providing guidance in farming communities was Ozawa Kaisaku. His son is the famous conductor Ozawa Seiji, whose given name was formed by taking one syllable from the given names of two prominent Japanese army officers, Itagaki Seishiro and Ishiwara Kanji.¹² Ozawa Kaisaku did creditable work in farm relief in Manchukuo and strived to do the same for the farmers of mainland China.

Ko Bunyu's opinion is the product of an honest acceptance of the historical facts, without the propaganda of the victors' view of history promoted by the Tokyo War Crimes Trials. For this reason, I believe that he is right.

That is the premise on which I wrote this book. My focus will be to determine which side provoked the war by examining the circumstances of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident¹³ and the Battle of Shanghai¹⁴ (and the subsequent Battle of Nanking), which are regarded as the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War. That will be the subject of Part 2, the main part of this book.

Still, because the Tokyo War Crimes Trials deemed the Manchurian Incident¹⁵ to be the start of the Japanese invasion, and because China also regards it as the start of the "Fifteen-Year War," I must begin with a concise overview of that as well. The Manchurian Incident will be the subject of Part 1.

¹² Itagaki Seishiro and Ishihara Kanji initiated the Manchurian Incident.

¹³ The Marco Polo Bridge Incident was a clash between the Japanese China Garrison Army and China's 29th Route Army, which took place at Marco Polo Bridge in southwest Beijing on July 7, 1937.

¹⁴ The Battle of Shanghai began on August 13, 1937 when the Chinese Army launched a sudden attack on the Japanese naval landing force which was protecting Japanese residents of the Shanghai concession. On August 14, China called out its air forces as well and launched a full-scale offensive, which led to all-out war between China and Japan.

¹⁵ On September 18, 1931, Japan's Kwantung Army attacked the forces of Zhang Xueliang, which were affiliated with the Republic of China, in response to an explosion along the South Manchuria Railway at Liutiaogou on the north side of the city of Mukden. The Kwantung Army, with a force of a mere 10,000 men, routed Zhang's army and quickly drove it out of Manchuria. In March of the following year, the new nation of Manchukuo was proclaimed.

It needs to be made clear from the outset that Manchuria was the cradle of the Manchu people, who founded the Qing Dynasty, and after the Manchurian Incident it was ruled by Emperor Puyi, who was also the last Qing emperor. Therefore, China has no right to call the Manchurian Incident an act of aggression.

Still, because the Republic of China somehow became internationally recognized as the successor to the Qing Dynasty, China's unjust claims have gone unchallenged. I shall briefly explain the unreasonableness of this position and the misconception that Manchukuo was a Japanese puppet state.

Finally, in Part 3, I want to touch on the subject of Japan's policies toward China at that time, particularly Japan's efforts to resolve the conflict and the peace terms Japan offered.

What I hope that the reader will take from this book is that Japan's war guilt complex, alongside the theory that Japan waged aggressive war on China, are fundamentally wrong and contrary to all facts.

This book will refer to the war between Japan and China as the Second Sino-Japanese War, even though the government of Japan officially named it the "China Incident" following the outbreak of the Battle of Shanghai. I made this decision for two reasons. Firstly, the Chinese government's general mobilization order escalated the conflict beyond the level of a mere "incident". Secondly, I concluded that it was the only appropriate term I could use to refer more generally to the big picture of Sino-Japanese conflict following the Manchurian Incident. It seemed to me that the term "China Incident" referred to a conflict with a more specific span of time.

I would be happy to hear from readers who have further questions about the issues presented in this book.

September 1, 2015

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