

***War in the Far East, Vol. I: Storm Clouds over the Pacific, 1931–1941*** by Peter Harmsen. Philadelphia: Casemate Publishers, 2018, 288 pp, \$32.95.

One of the challenges of writing about the Second World War in Asia is giving it the proper name. Many Japanese refer to the period 1931–1945 as the Dark Valley. Radical Japanese nationalists, many contemporary Japanese conservatives, and their foreign friends call the war the Greater East Asian War (1931–1945). Chinese, on Taiwan and the mainland, call it the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), while Americans call the conflict the Pacific War (1941–1945). World War II was a global conflict that began on different dates for different countries. It began in 1939 for Poland and the British Empire and Commonwealth and the French Empire. Hostilities started in 1940 for Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands. That war expanded to include the Balkans and the Soviet Union in 1941. Late in 1941 the war truly became a world war as Japan continued its conflict with China and attacked the British Empire and Commonwealth, the Netherlands East Indies, and the United States.

Therefore, China had been fighting Japan for almost two years when the Nazis invaded Poland, for three years when German forces invaded Western Europe and four years when this conflict expanded to include every continent except Antarctica. The Second World War in Asia has not received as much popular interest in the Anglophone world as the wider struggle. As Asia's and China's importance has increased, the war against Japan in East, South, and Southeast Asia is receiving more attention as a more balanced view of the world conflict is emerging in Western historiography. Long the province of specialists, this brief book is an attempt to bring this war to the attention of a wider reading public.

This is Peter Harmsen's third book on this war. The first two, *Shanghai 1937: Stalingrad on the Yangtze* (2013) and *Nanjing 1937: Battle for a Doomed City* (2015) detail the war's opening stages in the lower Yangtze Valley, July–December 1937. This brief book, *Storm Clouds over the Pacific, 1931–1941*, the first of a trilogy covering the entire war, is part of an ongoing reevaluation of the war in what we now refer to as the Indo-Pacific region. In this first volume, Harmsen describes the struggle between China and Japan from the Manchurian or Mukden Incident (aka the 9/18 Incident) through the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the period before the Americans, the British, the Dutch, and the Australians entered the conflict. It introduces the reader to World War II in Asia before it widened; Harmsen concentrates on the military and diplomatic history of the early years of the conflict.

The introductory chapter is less sure-footed than the subsequent chapters. The author posits a long and semi-hostile relationship between China and Japan. In fact, the struggle he refers to did not begin in the seventh century but in the 1860s with the Qing reasserting their imperial oversight role

in Korea and the rivalry between China, Japan, and Russia over influence in Korea through 1905 and the subsequent Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. Japan ended Chinese suzerainty in Korea with the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895), which also began Japan's imperialist role in China and resulted in Japan becoming the foreign power with the most invested in China by 1919.

Harmsen underestimates the disruptive influence of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution. Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, stressing self-determination, gave new impetus to anticolonial movements around the world. The failure of the anticolonial nationalists to sway the imperial powers and the failure of communist revolution in Western and Central Europe resulted in the nationalists' attraction to the anticolonial policies of the Soviet Union—the only foreign power that offered to support their struggles. This was a worldwide phenomenon that saw the birth of anticolonial, nationalist communist parties in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

The 1920s saw three initiatives to restore order and progress in East Asia. The first, an American initiative, arose from the Washington Conference, which resulted in naval arms limitation treaties and the treaties guaranteeing China's territorial integrity. The second, a Soviet initiative, resulted in a short-lived alliance (1923–1927) among the Soviet Union, Sun Yat-sen's Guomindang, and a small communist party. The resulting Northern Expedition (1927–1928) theoretically united the country, purged the Guomindang of communists, and dissolved the Soviet alliance. The third, the resurgent Chinese nationalist initiative frightened the imperial powers. The Guomindang's goals included tariff and customs autonomy, the end of extraterritoriality, as well as eliminating foreign influence. It should be noted most of this program has been a constant in Chinese foreign policy since the 1890s.

Japan, with the largest collection of economic and political assets in China, was the most threatened by Chinese nationalism. Tokyo endeavored to sustain its Chinese clients and did not hesitate to use force to deter the Guomindang in the Jinan Incident, which resulted in the Japanese occupation of that city (May 1928–March 1929) or eliminate a client, Zhang Zuolin the warlord general who controlled Manchuria, when he was perceived to be no longer useful (June 1928). Following this line of reasoning, as the 1930s began, a Japanese initiative took shape.

Beginning with the second chapter, Harmsen provides the reader with a readable and reliable narrative of this war before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Building on a plethora of monographs and articles, he details the steps leading to the Sino-Japanese confrontation on the future of Chinese independence and imperialism. He details Japan's slide from a constitutionalist government to one dominated by a militarist clique, from government by political parties to government by assassination and the Guomindang's efforts

to form a modern unified state while pursuing a continued civil war against various warlord factions and the communists.

Then, year by year, chapter by chapter, he shows the intensification of the Second Sino-Japanese War, detailing the Japanese advances and victories and the bloody war of attrition waged by the Chinese army, beginning with the comedy of errors that began the confrontation near Beijing. Building on his previous work, we see the bloody battles in Shanghai and Nanjing in 1937 and then the bitter struggles over the Wuhan cities the following year. As the Japanese occupation of China became more onerous, he details some of the resistance operations, including espionage and assassination, underwritten by both the Guomindang and the communists. He effortlessly shifts his focus from high politics and strategy in China and Japan to individual stories of foreign witnesses as well as ordinary Chinese and Japanese.

Over the course of the book, Harmsen interweaves the influence of events in Europe and America into this Asian war, thereby placing it in a world historical context. He shows how Germany's role changed from supporting China to a Japanese alliance. He also details the rise of Soviet aid to China as part of the Popular Front strategy, which also explains the forming of a Second United Front by the communists and the Guomindang. His narration of the slow British confrontation with Nazi Germany shows the way it influenced events in China and Japan and the reasons for British reticence in confronting Japanese aggression. He also details the ways in which American sympathy for China did not translate into immediate concrete actions and Nazism's expansion's effect on US foreign policy.

Harmsen explores Japanese policies of war and peace, demonstrating the impracticality of the conflicting Japanese war aims in China. It was not that the Japanese government had a coherent China policy, it was that each governmental entity had its own set of policies. The Japanese could never decide which path to follow—should they promote alternative governments to the Guomindang or should they follow a ruthless policy of economic exploitation. The army's inability to bring the war to a successful conclusion exacerbated this inability to decide on a single policy, as did Japan's decision to wage war against both the Guomindang and the communists. Unlike many authors, Harmsen begins to describe the role of Chinese collaborators with the Japanese occupation.

The Japanese military was divided in its views about the Soviet Union. The army regarded the Soviets as the primary enemy but was deterred from preemptive action by its defeats in 1938 (Khalkhyn Gol) and 1939 (Nomonhan). The former was a skirmish but the latter was a full-scale combined arms battle. However, Nomonhan has been overshadowed by the concurrent signing of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Japanese navy was obsessed with a long-expected conflict with the United States (both sides had been preparing war plans assuming the other would be the primary enemy since 1908) and the need to

expand south to capture the resources in Southeast Asia (rice, rubber, tin, and oil). The expectation increased as the United States increased its economic pressure on Japan as it rearmed.

Given Japan's inability to end its China war, or China Incident, Tokyo continually widened the conflict by taking advantage of events in Europe. The widening war alarmed US policy makers, and the United States began a series of tightening economic sanctions and a naval building program to halt Japanese policy. These measures, combined with Nazi victories in Europe in 1940, emboldened Japanese militarists. With the Soviet Union fighting a Nazi invasion, the stage was set for Japanese expansion into French Indochina. The Japanese decision for war in summer-fall 1941 was posited on the belief that the United States, shocked by a surprise attack on its fleet, would not be able to muster the will to fight a protracted war in the Pacific. It must also be understood that by 1941 Japan had been totally mobilized for four years.

Harmsen has written a brief, readable narrative of the road to war in Asia. It is a model of compression that pays attention to all the decision makers—Japanese, Chinese, Russian, British, French, and American and shifts its narrative focus from government deliberations to the experiences of ordinary people. He explores the various diplomatic and military strategies and the bloody results obtained on the battlefields. Harmsen sheds light on the present conflicted Sino-Japanese relationship and demonstrates to Western audiences that the war in the Pacific lasted more than four years. This book is a counterpoint to the attention paid to the Allies' struggle against Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In fact, second- and third-order effects of the Pacific War are still being worked out and felt by the participants. If this book stimulates a reader's interest in the subject, that reader should consult Harmsen's blog "China in WW2" at <http://www.chinaww2.com>.

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