

Second Sino-Japanese War

The **Second Sino-Japanese War** (1937-1945) was a major invasion of eastern [China](#) by [Japan](#) preceding and during [World War II](#). It ended with the surrender of Japan in [1945](#). In [Chinese](#), the war is variously known as the **Chinese People's Anti-Japanese War of Resistance**, **Anti-Japanese War of Resistance**, **War of Resistance**, or **Eight Years' War of Resistance**. The war is also known in Japan as **HEI**, the "**C**" **Operation**, **The Chinese Invasion**, or the **Japanese-Chinese War**, *Nitchū Sensō*), which was a Strategic Plan made by the Japanese Army as part of their large-scale plans to control the [Asian](#) mainland. The early manifestations of this plan were commonly known as "China Incidents", since Japan never did formally declare war until [Pearl Harbor](#): [Luokouchiao](#) or [Marco Polo Bridge Incident](#) (for the reason that on this bridge occurred the first provocations that resulted in Japanese invasion); similarly, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria was called the [Mukden Incident](#). To this day certain right-wing individuals in Japan still refer to the invasion as "incidents".

These plans resulted in failure for the Japanese [Armed Branch](#), much like The "[Ohtsu](#)" or The "**B**" Operation (Russian Invasion). Both plans only produced more trouble and grave losses with no real favorable results for the Japanese.

Invasion of China

Most historians place the beginning of the Second Sino-Japanese War on the [Battle of Lugou Bridge](#) ([Marco Polo Bridge Incident](#)) on [July 7, 1937](#). However, Chinese historians place the starting point at the [Mukden Incident](#) of [September 18, 1931](#). Following the Mukden Incident, the Japanese [Guandong Army](#) occupied [Manchuria](#) and established the [puppet](#) state of [Manchukuo](#) (February [1932](#)). Japan pressured China into recognising the independence of Manchukuo. China and Japan did not formally declare war against each other until after the attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) on [December 7 1941](#).

Following the Battle of Lugou Bridge in 1937, the Japanese occupied [Shanghai](#), [Nanjing](#) and Northern [Shanxi](#) as part of campaigns involving approximately 200,000 Japanese soldiers, and considerably more Chinese soldiers. Chinese historians estimated that as many as 300,000 people died in the [Nanjing Massacre](#), after the [fall of Nanjing](#).

This Marco Polo Bridge Incident not only marked the beginning of open, though undeclared, war between China and Japan but also hastened the formal announcement of the second [Kuomintang-Communist Party of China](#) (CPC). The collaboration took place with salutary effects for the beleaguered CPC. The distrust between the two parties, however, was scarcely veiled. The uneasy alliance began to break down after late 1938, despite Japan's steady territorial gains in northern China, the coastal regions, and the rich [Yangtze River](#) Valley in central China. After 1940, conflicts between the Nationalists and Communists became more frequent in the areas not under Japanese control. The Communists expanded their influence wherever opportunities presented themselves through mass organizations, administrative reforms, and the land- and tax-reform

measures favoring the peasants -- while the Nationalists attempted to neutralize the spread of Communist influence.

The Japanese had neither the intention nor the capability of directly administering China. Their goal was to set up friendly puppet governments that would be favorable to Japanese interests. However, the actions of the Japanese army made the governments that they did set up very unpopular, and the Japanese refused to negotiate with either the Kuomintang or the [Communists](#), which could have brought popularity.

Chinese Strategy

Compared to Japan, China was unprepared for war and had little military industrial strength, few mechanized divisions, and virtually no armor support. Up until the mid [1930s](#) China had hoped that the [League of Nations](#) would provide countermeasures to Japan's aggression. In addition, the Kuomintang government was mired in an internal war against the Communists. All these disadvantages forced China to adopt a strategy whose first goal was to preserve its army strength, whereas a full frontal assault on the enemy would often prove to be suicidal. Also, pockets of resistance were to be continued in occupied areas to pester the enemy and make their administration over the vast lands of China difficult. These formed the basis of Chinese strategy during the war, which can be divided into three periods:

- First Period: [7 July 1937](#) (Battle of Lugou Bridge) - [25 October 1938](#) (Fall of [Hankou](#)).
 - In this period, one key concept is the trading of "space for time" ([Chinese:](#)). The Chinese army would put up token fights to delay Japanese advance to northeastern cities, to allow the home front, along with its professionals and key industries, to retreat further west into [Chongqing](#) to build up military strength.
- Second Period: [25 October 1938](#) (Fall of Hankou) - July, 1944
 - During the second period, the Chinese army adopted the concept of "magnetic warfare" to attract advancing Japanese troops to definite points where they were subjected to ambush, flanking attacks, and encirclements in major engagements. The most prominent example of this tactic is the successful defense of [Changsha](#) () numerous times.
- Third Period: July 1944 - [15 August 1945](#)
 - This period employs general full frontal counter-offensive.

The three periods are each divided into finer phases.

Chinese and Japanese equipment

At the commencement of the Chinese-Japanese War the Japanese Army possessed 17 divisions, each composed of approximately 22,000 men, 5,800 horses, 9,500 rifles and sub machine guns, 600 heavy machine guns of assorted types, 108 artillery pieces, and 24

tanks. Special forces were also available. The Japanese Navy displaced a total of 1,9 million tonnes, ranking third in the world, and possessed 2,700 aircraft at the time. Each Japanese division was equal in combat power of three Chinese regular divisions.

The Chinese Forces possessed only 80 Army infantry divisions, 9 separated brigades, 9 cavalry divisions, 2 artillery brigades, 16 regiments and one or two armored divisions. The Chinese Navy displaced a total of 59,000 tonnes and the Chinese Air Force totaled 600 aircraft. In spite of the lopsided military match-up, the Chinese had a size advantage: territory 31 times larger than Japan and a population 5 times that of Japan.

Although Japan possessed significant mobile operational capacity it did not possess capability for maintaining a long sustained war. As a result, Japan adopted a strategy of rapid warfare and conquest. In the first three months the Japanese were successful at making rapid gains in what was dubbed the "China Incident". At this point the Chinese adopted a defensive strategy aimed at weakening Japanese warmaking capabilities. The Chinese goal was to degrade Japanese military strength before resuming an offensive.

Stalemate and foreign aid

By 1940, the fighting had reached a stalemate. While Japan held most of the eastern coastal areas of China, [guerrilla](#) fighting continued in the conquered areas. The Nationalist government of [Chiang Kai-shek](#) struggled on from a provisional capital at [Chongqing City](#); however, realizing that he also faced a threat from [communist](#) forces of [Mao Zedong](#), he mostly tried to preserve the strength of his army and avoid heavy battle with the Japanese in the hopes of defeating the Communists once the Japanese left. Moreover, Chiang could not risk an all-out campaign given the poorly-trained, under-equipped, and unorganized state of his armies and opposition to his leadership both within Kuomintang and in China at large.

Most military analysts predicted that the Chinese could not keep up the fighting with most of the war factories located in the prosperous areas under or near Japanese control. Other global powers were reluctant to provide any support — unless supporting an ulterior motive — because in their opinion the Chinese would eventually lose the war. They expected any support given to China might worsen their own relationship with the Japanese, who taunted the Kuomintang with the prospect of conquest within 3 months.

[Germany](#) and the [Soviet Union](#) did provide support to the Chinese before the war escalated to the Asian theatre of World War II. The Soviet Union was exploiting the Kuomintang government to hinder the Japanese from invading [Siberia](#), thus saving itself from a two-front war. Furthermore, the Soviets expected any major conflict between the Japanese and the Chinese to hamper any Kuomintang effort to remove the [Communist Party of China](#) (CCP) opposition or, in the best case, hoped to install a friendly [Communist](#) government surreptitiously after the dwindling of Kuomintang authority. Soviet technicians upgraded and handled some of the Chinese war-supply transport. Military supplies and advisors arrived, including future Soviet war hero [Georgy Zhukov](#), who witnessed the [battle of Tai er zhuang](#).

Because of Chiang Kai-shek's anti-communist policy and hopes of defeating the CCP, Germany provided the largest proportion of Chinese arms imports. German military advisors modernized and trained the Chinese armies; Chinese officers (including Chiang's second son) were educated in and served in the German army before World War II.

Nevertheless the proposed 30 new divisions equipped with all German arms did not materialize as the Germans sided with the Japanese later in World War II.

Other prominent [powers](#), including the [United States of America](#), [Britain](#) and [France](#), only officially assisted in war supply contracts up to the [attack on Pearl Harbor](#) in late 1941, when major influx of trained military personnel and supplies boosted Chinese chance of keeping up the fighting.

Unofficially, public opinion in the United States was becoming favorable to China. At the start of the 1930's, public opinion in the United States had tended to support the Japanese. However, reports of Japanese brutality added to Japanese actions such as the attack on the [U.S.S. Panay](#) swung public opinion sharply against Japan. By the start of 1941, the United States had begun to sponsor the [American Volunteer Group](#) otherwise known as the [Flying Tigers](#) to boost Chinese air defenses. In addition, the United States began an oil and steel [embargo](#) which made it impossible for Japan to continue operations in China without another source of oil from Southeast Asia. This set the stage for the Japanese attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) on [7 December 1941](#).

The Pacific War

Within a few days of the attack on Pearl Harbor, both the United States and China officially declared war against Japan. Chiang Kai-shek then received great quantities of supplies from the [United States](#), as the Chinese conflict was merged into the [Asian theatre of World War II](#). Chiang was appointed [Allied](#) Commander-in-Chief in the China theater in [1942](#). General [Joseph Stilwell](#) served for a time as Chiang's chief of staff, while commanding US forces in the [China Burma India Theater](#).

However, relations between Stilwell and Chiang soon broke down, due largely to the corruption and inefficiency of the Chinese government. Despite massive amounts of American [lend-lease](#) aid (over US\$5 billion from [1941](#) through [1945](#)), the Nationalist Chinese Army frequently avoided major engagements with the Japanese and was seen as preferring to stockpile material for a later struggle with the communists. Stilwell criticised the Chinese government's conduct of the war in the American [media](#), and to President [Franklin Roosevelt](#). The Allies thus lost confidence in the Chinese ability to conduct offensive operations, and instead concentrated their efforts against the Japanese in the [Pacific Ocean Areas](#) and [South West Pacific Area](#).

Both sides fought to a stalemate after [1941](#), mainly owing to the dispersion of Japanese forces through vast areas of China — Japan could not concentrate its superior armor and firepower. [Guerilla](#) activities behind the [frontlines](#) also meant constantly deploying

stationary Japanese forces in major cities and at road and rail junctions. Control over the countryside and villages gradually swung towards the CCP and Kuomintang.

The United States saw the Chinese theater as a means to tie up a large number of Japanese troops, as well as being a possible location for American airbases. In 1944, as the Japanese position in the Pacific was deteriorating fast, they launched [Operation Ichigo](#) to attack the airbases which had begun to operate. This brought the [Hubei](#), [Henan](#), and [Guangxi](#) provinces under Japanese administration.

Nevertheless the Japanese prospect of transferring their troops to fight the Americans was in vain and they only committed the [Guandong Army](#) from [Manchuria](#) in their "Sho plan", which later facilitated the [Soviet advancement](#) after the Soviet war declaration on [August 8 1945](#).

Number of troops involved

Chinese side

- The KMT Army had approximately 4,300,000 regulars.
- The number of those on the CCP side, due to their guerilla status, is difficult to say, though estimates place the total number of the [Eighth Route Army](#), [New Fourth Army](#), and irregulars at 1,300,000.

See more information of combat effectiveness of 8? and 4? Route Communist Armies and other units of Chinese forces:

- [Combat effectiveness of Chinese armies in the Second Sino-Japanese War](#)

Japanese side

- The IJA had 2,000,000 regulars.
- The Collaborationist Chinese Army formed - approximate 2,100,000, the only collaborationist army in [WW2](#) which outnumbered the invading army.

About Japanese personal observations in very hard life in Chinese combat front see:

- [Observations of Japanese Soldier in Chinese front](#)

Casualties assessment

The conflict lasted for 97 months and 3 days (measured from 1937 to 1945).

Chinese Casualties

- The Kuomintang fought in 22 major engagements, each of which involved at least one hundred thousand troops from both sides, and in just over 40,000 skirmishes.
- The CCP mostly fought guerilla attacks in rural area in North China. It would later give them credence to win them support in the [Chinese Civil War](#).
- The Chinese lost approximately 3.22 million soldiers. 9.13 million civilians died in crossfire, and another 8.4 million as non-military casualties.
- Property loss of the Chinese valued up to 383,301.3 million US dollars according to the currency exchange rate in July 1937, roughly 50 times of the [GDP](#) of Japan at that time (770 million US dollars).
- In addition, the war created ninety-five million refugees.

Japanese Casualties

The Japanese recorded around 1.1 million military casualties, killed, wounded and missing.

Aftermath

As of mid 1945, all sides expected the war to continue for at least another year. However it was suddenly ended by the dropping of the two [atomic bombs](#) on [Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#). Japan capitulated to the allies on [August 14, 1945](#). The Japanese troops in China formally surrendered on [September 9, 1945](#) and by the provisions of the [Cairo Conference](#) of 1943 the lands of [Manchuria](#), [Taiwan](#) and the [Pescadores Islands](#) reverted to China. However, the [Ryukyu](#) islands were maintained as Japanese territory.

In 1945 China emerged from the war nominally a great military power but actually a nation economically prostrate and on the verge of all-out [civil war](#). The economy deteriorated, sapped by the military demands of foreign war and internal strife, by spiraling [inflation](#), and by Nationalist profiteering, speculation, and hoarding. [Starvation](#) came in the wake of the war, and millions were rendered homeless by [floods](#) and the unsettled conditions in many parts of the country. The situation was further complicated by an Allied agreement at the [Yalta Conference](#) in February 1945 that brought Soviet troops into Manchuria to hasten the termination of war against Japan. Although the Chinese had not been present at Yalta, they had been consulted; they had agreed to have the Soviets enter the war in the belief that the Soviet Union would deal only with the Nationalist government. After the war, the Soviet Union, as part of the Yalta agreement's allowing a Soviet sphere of influence in Manchuria, dismantled and removed more than half the industrial equipment left there by the Japanese. The Soviet presence in northeast China enabled the Communists to move in long enough to arm themselves with the equipment surrendered by the withdrawing Japanese army. The problems of rehabilitating the formerly Japanese-occupied areas and of reconstructing the nation from the ravages of a protracted war were staggering, to say the least.

The war left the Nationalists severely weakened and their policies left them unpopular. Meanwhile the war strengthened the Communists, both in popularity and as a viable fighting force. At Yan'an and elsewhere in the "liberated areas," Mao was able to adapt

Marxism-Leninism to Chinese conditions. He taught party cadres to lead the masses by living and working with them, eating their food, and thinking their thoughts. When this failed, however, more repressive forms of coercion, indoctrination and ostracization were also employed. The [Red Army](#) fostered an image of conducting guerrilla warfare in defense of the people. In addition, the CCP was effectively split into "Red" (cadres working in the "liberated" areas) and "White" (cadres working underground in enemy-occupied territory) spheres, a split that would later sow future factionalism within the CCP. Communist troops adapted to changing wartime conditions and became a seasoned fighting force. Mao also began preparing for the establishment of a new China, well away from the front at his base in Yan'an. In 1940 he outlined the program of the Chinese Communists for an eventual seizure of power and began his final push for consolidation of CCP power under his authority. His teachings became the central tenets of the CCP doctrine that came to be formalized as Mao Zedong Thought. A personality cult centered around "Chairman Mao" and the idea of CCP invincibility and infallibility soon followed. With skillful organizational and propaganda work, the Communists increased party membership from 100,000 in 1937 to 1.2 million by 1945. Soon, [all out war](#) broke out between the KMT and CPC, a war that would leave the Nationalists banished to [Taiwan](#) and the Communists victorious on the [mainland](#).