Literature and the Japanese War of Aggression against China:

*Investigations and Criticisms*
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Investigations and Criticisms

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing
Chapter 1 ................................................................................................... 1
The Japanese literary world and the formation of the national policy of aggression against China
Following the Meiji Restoration, the early assumption of the theoretical basis of aggression against China emerged from a group of folk writers and scholars who provided a very important source of thinking for modern fascist theorists such as Ikki Kita and Shumei Okawa. During the peak period of Japanese aggression against China, increasing numbers of people from the Japanese literary world came to work as propagators of the national policy of aggression against China, ultimately exerting a significant influence on this process.

1.1 Yukichi Fukuzawa: “Civilisation over Barbarism”
1.2 Chomin Nakae: The concept behind the “Three Drunkards”
1.3 Tenshin Okakura: “Japan’s Great Privilege”
1.4 Yojuro Yasuda: War – “The Only Spiritual Culture of the Japanese People”
1.5 Saneatsu Mushanokoji: “The Greater East Asia War” is the “Japanese People’s Mission”

Chapter 2 ................................................................................................... 19
Japanese aggression against China, and Japanese literature before the Luguo Bridge Incident (1937)
Japan’s aggression against China before the Luguo Bridge Incident had an impact and influence on Japanese literature. A series of works on the theme of China were successively published in the literary world and were infected with or affected by militarism to a greater or lesser extent. There is no need to mention Sanjugo Naoki, a right-wing writer openly parading fascism. Regardless of being a left-wing anti-war writer, Denji Kuroshima still failed to get rid of the influence of Japanese militarism. “Rome was not built in a day”. These works laid a solid foundation for a large amount of Japanese literature of aggression against China in the days that followed.
2.1 Pride and Prejudice against China
2.2 The “Jinan Massacre” and Militarised Streets
2.3 Wanpaoshan and Japan Shudders: Distorted descriptions and aggressive clamour
2.4 Shanghai and Beijing: Signs before the war

Chapter 3 ........................................................................................................ 42
Japan’s occupation of northeast China and its “Continent Exploitation Literature”

“Continent Exploitation literature” is also known as “Exploitation literature”. It took Japan’s occupation activities in Northeast China as its theme, directly reflected the invasion activities and served the purpose of publicising the invasion. “Continent Exploitation literature” was created to echo the publicity requirements of the Japanese government during its invasion of Northeast China through immigration in order to incite Japanese expeditions in mainland China. It described and sang songs for the “Cause of Exploitation” of the “Pioneers”, which intended to conceal the invasive essence of “Continent Exploitation”, and maliciously slandered the armed resistance of Chinese people in Northeast China.

3.1 Background to “Continent Exploitation Literature”
3.2 Social organisations and the literary ideology of “Continent Exploitation Literature”
3.3 The fabrication of “Continent Exploitation Literature”

Chapter 4 ........................................................................................................ 65
The so-called “Manchurian Literature” of Japanese colonial writers

Manchurian literature refers to the literature created by Japanese colonists during the colonial governance of Northeast China (Manchuria). It acted as a tool for the Japanese to spread their ideological and cultural ideas in “Manchuria”. This literature either incites fanaticism as regards annexing “Manchuria”, preaches “the founding of Manchukuo”, prettifies Manchukuo, or fabricates the myths of “Five Races Under One Union” and the “Union of Manchuria and Japan”. They show different degrees of cultural and racial prejudices of Japanese colonialism and militarism.

4.1 The context of “Manchurian Literature”
4.2 The so-called “Spirit of Establishing Manchukuo” and the “Literature of Founding Manchukuo”
4.3 The reality and myths of the “Concord of Nationalities”
Chapter 5 ................................................................................................................................. 89

The “Pen Corps” and its literature of aggression against China

Shortly after the Luguo Bridge Incident in 1937, Japan sent a special invading force composed of litterateurs in the war of aggression against China, which was known as the “Pen Corps” at that time. The members of the “Pen Corps” used pens as gunfire to support the war of aggression against China. They imposed the responsibility for the war on China, supported and argued for the war, poeticised and glorified the atrocities of the Japanese Army, intensively depicted how brave the “Imperial Army” was, distorted the condition of Japanese-occupied areas, absurdly described the “goodwill” between the Japanese forces and the Chinese people, flaunted how they went through fire and water, and boasted about their experience of war.

5.1 Special writers sent to China’s frontline in the initial stage
5.2 The “Pen Corps” directly organised and dispatched by the Japanese military and government
5.3 The Japanese literature of aggression against China concocted by the “Pen Corps”

Chapter 6 .................................................................................................................................... 116

Japanese “Military Writers” and their literature of aggression against China

In the Japanese army which invaded China, there were several special soldiers. They either had been writing before joining the army or were turned from amateurs into “military writers” after joining the army by fabricating the so-called “war literature”. These so-called “military writers” used their experiences on the battlefield to preach aggression. They wrote in a civilian way with the pen as the sword. By taking the blood of Chinese people as their ink, they brazenly illustrated the “righteousness” of Japan’s invasion of China through “their own experience”.

6.1. The emergence of Japanese “Military Writers” and “Military Literature”
6.2 The frontline battlefield depicted by Shiro Hibino and Hiroshi Muneta
6.3 The occupied area of northern China depicted by Hiroshi Ueda
Japanese poetry on the War of Aggression against China

Japanese poetry on the war of aggression against China refers to poems which have the Japanese invasion of China as their theme and context. During Japan’s invasion of China, there was a huge, even overwhelming, number of such poems. It seemed that the war had injected some kind of exhilaration into Japan’s poetry circle so that poems illustrating Japan’s aggression against China sprouted like toxic mushrooms of all colours after the rain, competing with one another. The entire fields of music, Haiku and poetry of Japan were all in a fit of hysteria.

7.1 The War of Aggression against China as an inspiration for Japanese poetry
7.2 The cacophony of war in the Japanese poetry of aggression against China
7.3 The image of China in the Japanese poetry of aggression against China

Chapter 8............................................................................................................................. 162
“Pacification Operations” carried out by the Japanese Army in the occupied areas of China and “Pacification Literature”

In order to strengthen its control over the occupied areas of China and turn such areas into its rear base, the Japanese army organised a special corps called the “Pacification Squad”. The squad implemented a policy of mollification and tried to woo and deceive Chinese civilians with small favours. They provided propaganda and education to Chinese civilians in the occupied areas and nurtured traitorous organisations to sabotage anti-Japanese activities. The squad, therefore, played an irreplaceable role in the invasion of China. The “pacification literature” illustrates these activities and thus takes a special position in the Japanese literature of aggression against China.

8.1 The so-called “Pacification Operations” and “Pacification Literature”
8.2 A glimpse of the “Pacification Operations” of the Japanese Army in the “Pacification Literature”
8.3 Lies in the “Pacification Literature” and truths behind the “Pacification Operations”
Chapter 9 ......................................................................................................................... 185

The true words and lies of Tatsuzo Ishikawa

The documentary fictional work “Soldiers Alive”, written by Tatsuzo Ishikawa, was a unique work in the Japanese literature of invasion because it truly illustrates the great atrocities that the Japanese army committed in China. But the writer was subject to a “literary inquisition” and was sentenced because of this work. Then he “redeemed himself by good service” in writing fictional works which praised the invasion of China such as the Wuhan Campaign. For a long time, both in Japan and China, judgements on the writer and his works have been confusing. We should have a clear understanding and correct judgement of his true words and lies, as well as the “literary inquisition” he was subjected to and his guilt.

9.1 Soldiers Alive: A true description of the atrocities committed by the Japanese Army
9.2 The “Literary Inquisition” and “Redemption through Good Service”
9.3 The depiction from different angles and Tatsuzo Ishikawa’s basic attitude towards Japan’s aggression against China

Chapter 10 ......................................................................................................................... 205

The “National Hero” – Ashihei Hino who wrote literary works about Japan’s aggression against China

Ashihei Hino was a leading figure in the Japanese literature of invasion. He was praised as a “national hero” by the Japanese military propaganda machine because of his contribution to fabricating the Japanese literature of invasion. His “Trilogy of the Soldiers” (including Wheat and Soldiers, Mud and Soldiers, and Flower and Soldiers), glorifies and praises, from the perspective of militarism, the Japanese Army which invaded China, but uglifies and denigrates the Chinese army and civilians. These works sent one-sided and even wrong information about what was happening on the battlefields in China to millions of Japanese readers and stirred up a thirst for war among the Japanese people. There were more than one million copies published and they were also adapted for film, thus having an extremely negative impact.

10.1 Ashihei Hino who wrote while slaughtering ordinary Chinese civilians
10.2 The glorification of Japanese soldiers in The Trilogy of the Soldiers
10.3 The Chinese Army and civilians in The Trilogy of the Soldiers
10.4 Do Ashihei Hino’s works tend towards “humanitarianism” or “realism”?
Chapter 11 ............................................................................................................................ 228
The Greater East Asia Writers Conference and the interference and penetration of Japan in the literary world of the occupied areas in China

From 1942 to 1944, the cultural institution of Japanese militarism known as the Patriotic Association for Japanese Literature scheduled three successive Greater East Asia Writers Conferences in three years. These three conferences were major actions taken by Japanese militarists to interfere in and penetrate the literary world of the occupied areas of China and were also important attempts to drag Chinese literature into the “Greater East Asia War”. Those Japanese writers indulging in the daydream of “Greater East Asia” and those Chinese writers in the occupied areas who ingratiated Japan echoed each other and boasted about their achievements in the conferences.

11.1 The well-planned first session of the Greater East Asia Writers Conference
11.2 The second session of the conference, “Full of the Smell of Gunpowder”
11.3 The third session of the conference with the same old theme

Chapter 12 ............................................................................................................................ 262
“Pan-Asianism”, “Greater East Asianism” and their preferred literature

Japanese writers had fabricated a large volume of works to propagandise and sell ideas such as “Pan-Asianism”, “Greater East Asianism” and the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere”. Typical works include “The Country of Youth” by Fusao Hayashi, “Children of Asia” by Haruo Sato, “Yangtze Delta” by Yukei Tada, and “A Farewell with Regret” by Osamu Dazai, etc. With China as their context or Chinese people as their leading characters, these works fabricated absurd plots to allude to and distort images of famous figures in China, denigrate anti-Japanese people, glorify traitors, and advertise “pro-Japanese” ideas and “peace”.

12.1 “Pan-Asianism”, “Greater East Asianism” and works by Fusao Hayashi, Haruo Sato and Yukei Tada
12.2 “The Greater East Asia Conference”, Greater East Asia Joint Declaration, and Their propaganda deployment
12.3 A Farewell with Regret: The publicity of “Greater East Asianism” through the distortion of the image of Lu Xun
Chapter 13......................................................................................................................... 289
Does Japan have anti-war literature?

During the ten years from right before the start of the war until Japan’s defeat, the entire Japanese literary world had been militarised and most of the “proletarian writers” who were previously against the war had all changed their attitudes. Anti-war and resistance literature was almost nowhere to be found. Even a few Japanese writers who were seen by Chinese scholars as “anti-war” and “war-resistant” were not actually “against war”. For a fascist, aggressive country, the real “anti-war” literature would emerge during the war. Therefore, it is an overestimation to determine that Japan does possess anti-war literature merely based on what was published before or after the war.

13.1 The anti-war attitude of proletarian writers in Japan
13.2 The so-called “Resistance of the Art”
13.3 The absence of real “anti-war literature”, “resistance literature” and “anti-fascist literature” in Japan

Chapter 14......................................................................................................................... 311
Understanding the aggression against China and responsibility for the war in the postwar Japanese literary circle

During the invasion of China, the majority of Japanese writers were “helpers in the war”. However, after the war, the condemnation of the war and the investigation into the responsibility for the war were soon abandoned. The general attitude of the Japanese literary world after the war was not actually to oppose the invasion but to reject the “defeat”. They did not reflect on what crimes they had committed as regards the Chinese people, but deliberately expressed how Japanese people had become victims. What’s more, many writers resisted the peaceful order established after the war and vented their discontent and sadness about the defeat and surrender of Japan, and even publicly provided excuses for the invasion. There have been just a few writers since the last half-century who have courageously revealed Japan’s crimes in the invasion and express sincere remorse.

14.1 The arguments and investigations into Japanese writers’ responsibility for the war in the early postwar period
14.2 Deviations and the anti-climax in the discussion of the responsibility for the war
14.3 Opposing defeat rather than the War of Aggression
14.4 The rare and valuable Japanese writers who dared to reveal war crimes
Appendix ................................................................................................................................. 338

Postscript 1 ............................................................................................................................ 359

Postscript 2 ............................................................................................................................ 363

References ................................................................................................................................ 366
During its aggression against China, the Japanese military carried out the “General Mobilisation in the Literary World”. With the exception of very few Japanese writers, most actively assisted in the war. Some of them went to the frontline alongside the army as “military writers” and beat the drum for the war; some were enlisted and joined the troops, and many of them joined diverse military and cultural efforts and literary organisations to use the pen as a weapon of war and fabricate the so-called “war literature” to add fuel to the aggressive war. These Japanese writers instigated a national movement against China, justifying the aggression as a “Holy War”. They even attributed the responsibility for the war to China and argued for the righteousness of the invasion. At the same time, they poetised and glorified the atrocity and brutality of the Japanese military troops, glorifying the “allure” and “braveness” of the “Imperial Army”. Conversely, they defamed Chinese people, portraying them as ignorant and barbaric. They even distorted the actual situation in the “occupied area” and invented the amicability of Japanese troops towards the local Chinese people. Furthermore, these writers enacted compulsory educational campaigns targeted at people in the occupied areas of China and manipulated them in a deceptive way.

The above-mentioned examples are what Japanese writers did during the war. These writers were referred to as the “Pen Corps” by the Japanese military propaganda machine. Now, it has become evident that the phrase
“Pen Corps” accurately indicates the function and nature of this special “troop” who used the pen as a weapon. Indeed, the “Pen Corps” not only included the writers who went to the battlegrounds, but also all of the literati who assisted in the war in different ways, such as by writing or joining various militaristic literary activities. During the war, the troop of pens (the literati) and the troop of guns (the army) united and collaborated, establishing a system of war that merged civil and military tactics at the same time. The term “Pen Corps” in the title of this book, *The “Pen Corps” and the Japanese War of Aggression against China*, was adopted in this sense.

Churning out literary works about the Japanese invasion of China (i.e., the so-called “war literature”) was the main achievement of the “Pen Corps” and the main tool that the Japanese literati used to support the war. In light of this, the author’s discussion of the disclosure and criticism of the “Pen Corps” has been developed around their literary works relating to the invasion. The war literature the author refers to, therefore, is the Japanese literature serving the war of aggression against China, which adopted the theme of warfare in both its background and content. It should be noted that, while this literary genre was the key element of Japanese literature serving the invasion during World War II, it was not the only one within this movement.

As is universally known, literary works of history in Japan often downplay the role of literary efforts in the aggression against China. Some Japanese literary bodies and academic researchers have even covered up or distorted the role of these Japanese writers in Japan’s invasion of China. In recent decades, some conscientious scholars in Japan have undertaken research on
those works and published valuable reference books. However, these books generalise the research object as “war literature”, which seems to be an objective concept and thus does not fully convey the militarism and injustice of the Japanese “war literature”. As a result, their value as references should be doubted. In world literature, all works on the theme of war could be called “war literature”, which includes both works of anti-aggression, anti-fascism, and literature advocating aggression and fascism. In the early stages of the war against China, when there was an abundance of literary works related to the invasion, literary critics and researchers in Japan grouped those works under the heading of “war literature” in order to prove that Japanese literature at that time was the same as “war literature” in a global context. After the war, some writers (e.g., Ashihei Hino) even placed themselves on a par with world-renowned classic writers (such as Leo Tolstoy, Remarque, etc.) to provide further support for their claims. It can also be said that “war literature” in Japan is not only a concept, but is also loaded with a particular attitude and opinion as regards the research object. Considering these arguments and the special purpose that Japanese literature served during the war, the author will therefore use the concept of “literature of aggression” rather than the more ambiguous concept of “war literature”.

It might be unacceptable for readers to treat the works created by Japanese litterateurs who served the invasion as “literature” in light of the fact that literature should be true, good and beautiful. In this sense, the Japanese literature of aggression is not only unworthy of being termed “literature”, but can also be seen as an abuse and profanation of literature itself. What this book ultimately aims to highlight to its readers is that propaganda
writings also exist, and may lead the trends of a nation during a certain period. The “Japanese literature of aggression” is a case in point.

The “Pen Corps” and creators of the Japanese literature of aggression were agitators and movers of the invasion of China. They constituted a major part of the so-called “mental war” or the “ideological propaganda war”, and were the main force behind the cultural invasion and permeation during the war against China. They played a unique part and were irreplaceable, for example, they could not be substituted by Japanese military troops. More importantly, the Japanese literature of aggression is ironclad proof of the aggression perpetrated by the Japanese military, and an important carrier of Japanese militaristic thinking. The alleged “war spirit” and “military soul” frequently referred to in Japanese military acts are conveyed in these literary works, in addition to the thinking or “philosophy” regarding the invasion, and the enthusiasm for the war against China. In order to learn about how Japanese militarism started, developed and expanded, it is imperative to study the Japanese literature of aggression. This will also help to establish the deeply rooted cultural notions within the Japanese consciousness, understand their justification for the war, and gain a comprehensive understanding of the history of the invasion. Therefore, the value in investigating the “literature of aggression” has already far exceeded that of simply investigating literature but gone beyond to look at history, politics and other matters.

To date, there has been a dearth of studies on the Japanese literature of aggression in China. For example, in the early 1940s, only The Wartime Japanese Literary World, written by Zhang Shifang, and The Investigation of the Japanese Literary World, compiled by Ouyang Zichuan, were
published. These two pamphlets reveal and criticise the Japanese literature of aggression at that time. However, their research is somewhat incomplete (for example, the total number of words in the two books is only 60-70,000, with some overlapping content between the two). Since then, research on this topic has been scarce, with the exception of a few articles published in recent times. As the “Pen Corps” and the Japanese literature of aggression played such an important role in the war, the research is still far from able to fully reflect the reality of wartime. This book aims to fill this gap, conducting a comprehensive study and criticisms of the Japanese literature of aggression from a modern Chinese perspective.

Japanese literary works on aggression flooded the literary world over a long period, with a significant number of publications. For example, the number of reprints alone exceeded one thousand from 1937 to 1945, let alone the articles published in magazines and newspapers. Studies on the Japanese literature of aggression have to be based on these original documents, which should be fully digested, identified and utilised. However, the aim of the current research is not solely to enumerate the materials but rather, the author will draw on the key points and then link them, constructing a holistic picture of the Japanese literature of aggression and emphasising the most representative and influential writers and works. Additionally, the author will not only deconstruct and critique the works written during the invasion, but will also answer the following questions: how did Japanese writers regard the war? Why did almost all Japanese writers become “war contributors”? What kind of role did Japanese literature and literati play in the development of militarism and the war? What responsibilities for the war did they bear? How did they understand their responsibilities? How
were images of Japanese soldiers, Chinese people and China intentionally shaped in their works? How can we discern the characteristics of Japanese literature in their works? As well as engaging with these questions, the author will also draw a clear outline of how the Japanese literature of aggression developed, integrating “history” and “theory”. Each of the subsequent chapters focuses on a specific topic, while the book collectively presents a whole volume on the Japanese literature of aggression.

The history of the Japanese literature of aggression is the history of Japanese crime. In this respect, the current book presents a “criminal case” against the Japanese literature of aggression. It is arguably of great importance to highlight such a “criminal case”, otherwise the responsibility of those involved might be ignored or even forgotten. As is generally known, Japanese militarism is still a force. After the war, there were many key Japanese people, especially politicians, brazenly evoking once again the spirit of Japanese militarism, covering their crimes or even glorifying the invasion of China. On the one hand, given international public pressure, they have been forced to examine their attitudes. However, on the other hand, they continue paying respect to war criminals every summer, worshipping at temples of militarism, such as the Yasukuni Shrine. In addition, the force of militarism in the Japanese literary world is growing with renewed vigour, as is evident through recent publications such as In Affirmation of the Greater East Asia War by Fusao Hayashi, and the public denial of the Nanking Massacre by Shintaro Ishihara. Moreover, in May 1998, the movie Pride, praising the war criminal Hideki Tojo, hit the big screen. All of these facts indicate that the task of tracing the history of the invasion and having the Japanese authorities confess to war crimes is far
from complete. It is a long-term and arduous task for both Japanese and Chinese people. The research in this book is part of this significant task. As the saying goes, “take history as a mirror”, and as such, the fundamental purpose of this book is to caution people against war crimes by conducting a systematic review of the research on the Japanese literature of aggression.

From a disciplinary perspective, the focus of study in this book is on the relationship between war and literature. From the history of world literature, it can be observed that war and literature are closely related. War has the power to decide or even change the features of the literature of a period, a nation or a race. The relationship between war and literature should, therefore, be an important part of interdisciplinary research within the field of literature. Specifically, in the context of this book, the Japanese literature of aggression has naturally reflected the special relationship between Japanese literature and China from a unique perspective. Thus, in this sense, this book is an attempt to study not only the relationship between war and literature but also that between Japanese literature and China.
CHAPTER 1

THE JAPANESE LITERARY WORLD AND THE FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL POLICY OF AGGRESSION AGAINST CHINA

Following the Meiji Restoration, the early assumptions regarding the theoretical basis of aggression against China emerged from a group of folk writers and scholars who provided a very important source of thinking for modern fascist theorists such as Ikki Kita and Shumei Okawa. During the peak period of Japanese aggression against China, increasing numbers of people from the Japanese literary world came to work as propagators of the national policy of aggression against China, ultimately exerting a significant influence on this process.

1.1 Yukichi Fukuzawa: “Civilisation over Barbarism”

Yukichi Fukuzawa (1834-1901) was a Japanese enlightenment ideologist and litterateur who first highlighted the issue of China after the Meiji Restoration. He presented a unique analysis of Chinese history and the situation at that time. As a litterateur, he made an innovative contribution to the creation of different styles of writing such as commentary, political essay and prose which were simplified and proved ideal for publicity. His analysis of Chinese civilisation and his strong sense of militarism and aggressiveness towards China greatly influenced Japanese people’s views on China, as well as successive Japanese governments’ policies of
aggression against China. His perspective signified an end to the traditional Japanese view of China and set the tone for modern Japanese attitudes towards the country.

In his book *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* (1875), Yukichi Fukuzawa divided the world into three levels, namely, “civilised”, “semi-civilised” and “barbarian”, based on the Western theory of revolution. He said, “With regard to the civilisation level of the modern world, European countries and the USA are the most civilised countries, with Asian countries such as Turkey, China and Japan being semi-civilised, and Africa and Australia being the most barbarian”. Here, China was grouped with Japan as “semi-civilised”, which is in stark contrast to the generally friendly and admiring attitude held by most Japanese literati in ancient times. Until the end of the Opium War, China had provided a good example for Japan’s modern enlightenment. Before Yukichi Fukuzawa, the general popular view at the time held that China was a civilised country. Therefore, Yukichi Fukuzawa had downgraded China from the level of “civilised” in order to lay a foundation for his civilisation theory. He stated that, firstly, Japan should break away from Asian culture centred on Confucianism and align with Western civilised countries by learning from the West, a process that he later called “Leave Asia, Join Europe”. Secondly, he posited that Japan possessed the consciousness and conditions to be “civilised” while China did not; thus, in terms of this key point, Japan was more civilised than China, as illustrated in his words, “Japanese people have rich minds while Chinese people’s minds are barren”. According to his argument in the book, Japan is positioned as a country advocating the use of force and the supremacy of the Mikado coordinated with the authority of the shogun. China, on the other
hand, was seen as a complete authoritarian theocracy, as opposed to Japan as a theocracy backed with force. Thus, he argued that China needed to carry out a thorough reform to catch up with Japan in terms of the level of “civilisation”. Later, he even depicted Japan as an incarnation of “civilisation” and China as a representative of “barbarism”.

Yukichi Fukuzawa denied China’s central position that it had held for thousands of years in Southeast Asia, claiming that Japan would be the next leading country to dominate Asia, given that it was on the way to becoming a “civilised country” in line with Western values. He clearly stated the view that “Japan should be the leader of Asia” in his book, *My Views on Our Relations with Korea*, and proposed the use of military force to transport the so-called “civilisation” of Japan to China and Korea by, for example, intervening in the internal affairs of Korea and making it dependent on Japan, as well as insisting on dividing China using strong Western powers with the occupation of Taiwan and half of the Fujian province. He even proposed a division by drawing the Division Map of China in his book, *Poland of the East*, advocating that Japan should wage a war against the Qing authority. Following Japan’s victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895, he was very animated and wrote in *The Autobiography of Yukichi Fukuzawa* that: “the Sino-Japanese war outcome is a joint victory between the government and the people. […] how happy and grateful I am! I do not know what to say. I am fortunate to live to see this. It is such a pity for our dead comrades to miss the victory. How I wish they could see this! I even shed tears because they missed this victory”. The Sino-Japanese war, in his mind, was a war between the “civilised” and the “barbarians”, which Japan started in the name of civilisation. Therefore, he deemed China’s
capitulation as Japan’s ultimate duty following the trend of world civilisation.

His theory on “civilisation”, “evolution”, and the proposition of waging war against China was an important source for Japanese fascism. Ikki Kita, the leading figure of Japanese fascism, wrote in his notorious work, *An Outline Plan for the Reorganisation of Japan*, that: “the 700 million people in China and India have no way of independence without help and support from Japan”. From his perspective, Japan had the right to start a war to seize the vast land taken illegally by Western countries. Clearly, his line of thinking had close connections with that of Yukichi Fukuzawa.

### 1.2 Chomin Nakae: The concept behind the “Three Drunkards”

Another important Japanese literary figure and follower of didacticism, Chomin Nakae (Tokusuke 1847-1901), expressed the same imperial gangster logic as Yukichi Fukuzawa, albeit in a more literary way. He designed a dramatic plot in his book, *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* (1886). One of the characters, Mr Nanhai, loves nothing more than to drink and discuss politics. One day, he was pleasantly intoxicated after drinking alone and felt as if he were flying through the universe. Two visitors arrived, bringing bottles of foreign wine. One man, wearing a suit and tie, had a handsome face and behaved naturally. He was the eloquent Mr Gentleman. The other man was Mr Champion, who was strong with a dark face with shining eyes. The three men greeted each other and sat down, exchanging toasts and discussing important news.

For his part, Mr Gentleman insisted on building the country peacefully.
Specifically, he held that “equality and democracy” could provide a perfect social system, which would be set up by all countries in the world sooner or later. And for weak countries, it would then be impossible for them to build themselves up through a policy of making the country rich with an efficient military force. Thus, it was better to give up if the military force was only as big as one-thousandth of a strong country’s power and cancel all naval and land armaments. These countries should then devote themselves to “reason”, “academics” and “art” so that the strong countries would rather show respect than invade.

In contrast, Mr Champion greatly praised the war, stating that “conflicts originate from human anger, and war from a country’s anger; all civilised countries must be the powers; throughout history, civilised countries were all skilful in war. Likewise, today’s civilised countries are also battle-hardened nations”. He then went on to say:

Although I am very forgetful, I remember that there is a big country in Asia or Africa with rich resources, but which is very weak. I heard the country has a weak and useless army with millions of soldiers. The system of law only exists in name. Indeed, it is a fatty ox waiting to be served up for many small nations. […] If we occupy a half or a third of its land and make it our territory, we will be a strong and big nation with rich resources and a large population. We can build a city wall and defences, educating the people. Japan will be as strong as Russia or England by training millions in the army and making hundreds of warships.

He further stated the necessity of waging wars from the perspective of Japan’s domestic situation. He held that there were nostalgic elements in
people’s minds which, like malignant tumours, are on the verge of spreading. In his words,

as a result, if a nation declares war, about two or three hundred thousand people would gather together in response to the call of the nation. […] The place in which the ‘tumour’ is to be treated is a big country in Africa or Asia whose name I do not remember. Once our people enter the weak and vast country successfully, we will become its rulers and open the gate of its cancerous society. If not, we will leave death and leave behind our good reputation in that country. We can also remove the tumour for the sake of strengthening our nation.

Given these writings, which country is “the big nation” that Mr Champion referred to? Evidently, it is China, as pointed out by Mr Nanhai, who held a moderate view:

I do not know which country is the one referred to by Mr Champion. If it is a big country in Asia, then we should develop a brotherhood with it and help each other whenever needed.

Starting a war and making innocent people die from bullets would not be a wise decision. If the country is China [a defiant way of referring to China at that time], small Asian countries had better strengthen their relationship with the Chinese people on account of its conventions and customs, style and heritage, geography and topography, rather than bearing hatred for each other. Now, the number and variety of our products are increasing. China, with its large population and land, is indeed a big market which can bring us endless profits.
Given the discussion within these excerpts, it is appropriate to say that the book *A Discourse by Three Drunkards on Government* is about China rather than world affairs as such; more accurately, the book is about how to deal with, plunder and divide China. It seems that the three drunkards had different perspectives on this but they shared the same viewpoint. To be specific, although Mr Champion directly stated his intention to wage war against China and his ambition to conquer the Chinese people, while Mr Gentleman and Mr Nanhai seemed to hold opposing views, the essential nature of their views is the same. According to Mr Gentleman, China is a weak country so it is unnecessary to have an army. He did not clearly state how to deal with the construction of national defence in that context. His underlying meaning was an obvious approval to allow Japanese people to “protect” China. Mr Nanhai insisted on not engaging in warfare with China on the premise that China could become an important resource base and commodity market providing endless wealth for Japan.

So what kind of position, then, does Chomin Nakae himself adopt among the three drunkards? In my opinion, the three drunkards represent the three aspects of his views on China. In other words, the combination of the three drunkards equals Chomin Nakae himself. All in all, in this work, he considered China to be a victim that could be sacrificed to enable Japan’s independence and prosperity.

### 1.3 Tenshin Okakura: “Japan’s Great Privilege”

While Yukichi Fukuzawa and Chomin Nakae expressed their militaristic thinking from the perspective of politics and the economy, Tenshin Okakura discussed the same issue from a cultural perspective. Tenshin Okakura
(1862-1913) was an aesthete and art critic who was the first to systematically study the eastern art of China, India and Japan in the Meiji period. However, his research was not purely academic; rather, it had a strong tendency towards militarism. He had been to China to inspect works of art and for travel. His famous works include *Travel Diary in China, Fine Arts of China, The Ideals of the East* and *The Awakening of Japan*.

In the book *Travel Diary in China*, his main conclusion is that “there is no *China* in *China*”. In particular, he wrote that “Talking about *China*, ‘there is no *China in China*’ first occurred in my mind. Readers may respond with a sneer if I simply say, ‘there is no *China*’. In fact, in other words, it means there is no inner cohesiveness in *China*”. He gave many examples to illustrate that the Northern and Southern parts of China were two different worlds. He tried to prove that there had never been a wholly unified China at any point in history. It is common knowledge that there are differences between China’s South and North, in the same way as there is a discrepancy between Japan’s Hokkaido and Tokyo regions. Therefore, denying the inner cohesiveness of Chinese culture solely based on this reasoning is far from logical. Arguably, the latent meaning in his argument was that, if a united China did not exist, then Japan could rightfully occupy part of it as its own land.

In addition, at the beginning of *The Ideals of the East*, he included the summary that “Asia is an organic whole”. In other words, he was a great proponent of the integration of Asia. This then begs the question that, if he did not consider China to be a unified country, then why should he bother to mention the unification of Asia? This can be explained by his desire to conclude that Asia should be a whole yet, until then, the ideal had not been
realised. So who should be responsible for the achievement of this ideal? Clearly, he intended this to be Japan.

Throughout history, it became clear that Japan was, in fact, the student of China and India. How, then, can Japan be qualified to take on the mission of unifying Asia? As he wrote:

> Japan has the great privilege of achieving unity in a complex situation. Our people carry the blood of India and Tatar, from whom we have absorbed our essence. We can demonstrate the sense of integration in its entirety, which is our heritage and corresponds to our mission to unify Asia. We have the Mikado’s unique blessing and pride ourselves in being a nation which has never been conquered. We have the independence of being able to sacrifice ourselves in the name of efficient development while preserving our ancient thinking and instinct. We can make Japan the true centre of Asian thinking and culture because of this independence. In China, the whole country had been swept along many times due to the collapse of dynasties and the invasion of Tatar, as well as the killing and plunder staged by mobs. Apart from history books and ruins, nothing else remains that can make people remember the glory of the Tang Dynasty and the elegance of the Song. [...] Thus, Japan has become a museum for the Asian civilisation. No, it is far more than a museum because this nation has an incredible nature. It carefully preserves our ancient heritage while also absorbing the new. By inheriting and practising this dynamic spirit, we can still maintain every aspect of our ideals from the past.

Clearly, the core of his theory pertained to Japan’s central role in the unification of Asian culture. On the one hand, he promoted Asian culture as
a whole, emphasising the connections among Asian countries. On the other hand, he placed Asian culture in opposition to European culture, constructing the concept of “glory in Europe, shame on Asia” in his book, *The Awakening of Japan*. His proposition became part of the theoretical basis for modern Japanese fascism. Seemingly, he did not support the invasion of China, but indeed he did provide the theoretical basis for the war. As a result, in the full-scale aggression against China, his theory that “Asia is a whole” became a famous slogan for the government. They even carved the slogan into a stone tablet. Justified as part of this slogan, the plunder and occupation of China were seen as chivalrous deeds in the name of “establishing a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere”. The Japanese aggressors’ Three Alls Policy (Kill all, Burn all, Loot all) became a Holy War in the name of “promoting Asian culture”. The aggression against China was sublimated as the Greater East Asia War,¹ to liberate China from the hands of the UK and the USA. Half a century later, Japanese fascist Shumei Okawa took Tenshin Okakura’s words a stage further in the book *The Establishment of Order in Greater East Asia* (1943). He stated that “the renaissance of Asia not only means independence from the rule of Europe, but also the renaissance of its past glory. Japan is now fighting towards this mission. The precious resources of East Asia may perish in their original countries. But they can be revived in Japan. […] What China and India are taking in now is the spirit of Japan”.

¹ Greater East Asia War (大東亜戦争, Dai Tōa Sensō).