

Lesson Plan 2: The Fifteen Year War and the Challenge to Anglo-American Dominance, 1931-45

Objective: To enable students to interpret the transformation of Japanese policies towards Asia and the Anglo-American powers, the rise of Pan-Asian ideology, and the consequences of Japanese expansionism during the Fifteen Year War era, 1931-45.

Suggested reading for instructors:

James B. Crowley, "A New Deal for Japan and East Asia: One Road to Pearl Harbor," in *Modern East Asia: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. James B. Crowley (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970), 235-63 (pdf included)

For a provocative primary source, see Y. Matsuoka, "The New Order in East Asia," *Contemporary Japan* 8, no. 1 (March 1939): 1-9 (pdf included)

Background reading for students:

Students should have been assigned a textbook or supplemental reading that introduces the history of Japan in the early twentieth century.

Lesson outline:

I. Instructor's presentation:

Recapitulate textbook points regarding Japan's international position in the early twentieth century, as well as the changing political conditions within Japan that led to increasingly militarist policies after 1931.

II. Exercises: Analyzing the rhetoric and images of Japanese wartime imperialism (Can be done as a class or in small groups, with each group writing down its thoughts and reporting back to the class.)

Note: I have provided two arrangements of materials. You may use either one, both, or combine them as you see fit. The images are all in one slide show.

A. Japan and China

Images: Manchukuo propaganda; "Oriental Lullaby" (1938)

c. Video clip: "China in Revolution, 1911-1949" Episode 2, 2'20"-9'45" (Marco Polo Bridge Incident through Nanjing Massacre, Japanese advances)

B. Japan and Southeast Asia

Reading: Tokutomi Ichirō, Commentary on the Imperial Declaration of War, 1941 (excerpt)

Images: cartoons from John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986)

Discussion questions:

- What were Japan's objectives in (greater) East Asia? How did Japan justify its actions? What did Asian "brotherhood" or "community" mean to Japanese champions of this ideal?
- How do these arguments and images differ from (or resemble) those presented by Japanese elites in the Meiji era? What accounts for the transformation of Japan's policies from the early twentieth century to the 1930s and 1940s?
- How do you think other Asian peoples would have responded to Japan's appeals? Why might Chinese reactions have been different from, say, Burmese or Indonesian responses? (Here you

should consider the fact that Southeast Asia had long been colonized by the Euro-American powers.)

- How did rhetoric and reality relate? Was the rhetoric simply a cover for Japanese aggression, or do you think Japan's intentions were genuine?
- To what factors would you attribute the harsher aspects of Japanese occupation? Was Japan racist in its approach to other Asians?

III. Topics for homework/reflection:

- Japan's effort to reshape Asia is by no means the only instance in modern history in which a powerful nation or empire has attempted to remake a region in the pursuit of both practical interests and lofty ideals. Can you think of other examples where such a project has been or is being pursued? What are the problems inherent in such approaches?