

GENERALISSIMO CHIANG ASSAILS PRINCE KONOE'S STATEMENT

Introduction

In July 1937, Japanese forces, already in possession of Manchuria (which it had renamed Manchukuo), launched a full-scale invasion of the Republic of China (a move that they referred to as "The China Incident"). Chiang Kai-shek's forces collapsed under the pressure of the Japanese invasion. By December 1937, Japanese forces had already inflicted significant defeats on the hapless Nationalist army, and by 1938, Japan controlled the eastern half of China, and Chiang's Nationalist government and armies retreated to the less-developed western provinces, establishing a wartime capital in the city of Chongqing in Sichuan province.

Japanese officials justified their actions in China by presenting Japan as the only force able to drive Western imperialism and Russian Communism out of East Asia, restore China's territorial integrity and social stability, and bring about a new era of mutual peace, cooperation, and development among the countries of East Asia. Prince Fumimaro Konoe (or Konoye, 1891-1945) had made such arguments in his statements of December 22, 1938. The document below is Chiang Kai-shek's response to Prince Konoe's statements at a meeting of December 28, 1938.

Document Excerpts with Questions

From *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection*, edited by Pei-kai Cheng and Michael Lestz, with Jonathan D. Spence (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), 319-324.

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On December 14 Konoye also said: "The ultimate objective of the China Incident lies not merely in achieving military triumph but in a rebirth of China and the erection of a new order in East Asia. ..."

Let all observe that what he meant by a reborn China was that independent China was to perish and in its place an enslaved China created, which would abide by Japan's word from generation to generation. ...

... Japanese periodicals have maintained that the structural relationship of the "East Asian unity" should be vertical with Japan at the summit, and not in any sense horizontal; the system of relationship should be patriarchal, with Japan as patriarch and governor and Manchukuo and China as offspring. ... What is it if it is not the total extinction of China? ...

On our part, the war for a year and a half has laid us a solid foundation for national regeneration. We fear no problems, nor are we concerned over impending dangers. We merely lament the fate of Japan. ... Today, her people are powerless, her throne without prerogative, and her politicians without integrity and knowledge, thus allowing a few hot-headed young militarists to do as they please. ...

**Primary Source Document with Questions (DBQs) on
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China as a state is founded on the principle of not oppressing the undefended, not fearing the aggressive. More particularly, she is not willing to violate pacts or to break faith and thus destroy the righteous principles governing the relations of mankind. ...

Questions:

1. How does Chiang describe Japan, and how does that description compare to his description of China? What might his purposes be in describing or characterizing the two countries as he does here?
2. How accurate is Chiang's description of China as of December 1938? Has the experience of the war, up to that time, indeed laid "a solid foundation for national regeneration"? Why or why not?
3. How might Prince Konoe respond to Chiang's remarks? How might an objective reporter respond to them?