BRITISH PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY (IJA), 1937-1941

Peter Emerton, UK

INTRODUCTION

I did hear the view expressed by foreign observers…that the Japanese Army as a fighting force cannot be considered a first-class Army, and that, so far as land warfare is concerned, we do not really feel any anxiety in the event of war with Japan. I cannot subscribe to these views…the Japanese Army as it is to-day is a formidable force.
Major G.T. Wards, Assistant Military Attache, Tokyo, 15 December 1937[1].

This article analyses British perceptions of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) between the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War, in July 1937 and the start of the 'War against Japan', in December 1941. With the advent of the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, British and international observers were given an opportunity to observe the IJA undertaking major military operations and campaigns and to form judgements as to its effectiveness as a potential foe. It examines evidence from British military attaches and observers in China and Japan on the performance of the IJA in the field and analyses official records from military and government bodies in London. It throws light on both how the IJA was perceived as an operating army and as a potential opponent of Britain in the future. Whilst the general western view of the IJA's performance in China was a negative one, based on the supposition that the IJA was seemingly unable to beat the lowly-rated Chinese armies of Chiang Kai-Shek, many British military observers visiting or based in China and Japan during this period frequently expressed their respect and even admiration for the IJA. Their conclusions about its potentially effective performance were largely borne out by the manner of the initial IJA attacks on Malaya, Singapore and Burma in 1941-42.

Although Britain's pre-war relations with Japan have been extensively covered in the literature, principally by Ian Nish(Nish, 1982), until the 1980s few studies had been undertaken of British military pre-war perceptions of their Japanese opponents.[2] This may have been because it was viewed as an embarrassing subject to explore given the humiliating nature of the British defeat and surrender to the IJA at Singapore in February 1942(Woodburn-Kirby, 1957). The British Official History of the 'War against Japan' devoted relatively little effort to exploring this issue beyond opining that it was a mystery how British military authorities in Hong Kong and in Malaya had apparently accepted the wishful thought that the IJA were an inferior force, not worth serious investigation.[3] One of the official historians, Colonel (formerly Captain) G. T. Wards, had himself been a pre-war British assistant military attaché in Japan and had written many reports during the 1930s outlining the effectiveness of the IJA, as will be outlined below.[4] In 1984, Peter Lowe examined British assessment of Japan before the eve of World War Two as part of a seminal collection of essays on pre-war intelligence assessments.[5] In 1993, the Canadian historian John Ferris (Ferris, 1993) was the first to argue, in a ground-breaking article using private papers and archive material, that whilst what he called the 'old China hands' (senior British officers based in China, Malaya and Hong Kong) severely underestimated the IJA as a potential enemy, many junior British officers who had observed it, in action in China and in Japan, in the 1930s rated it very highly.[6] With the release of hitherto confidential intelligence records to the Public Record Office (now the National Archives) in the late 1990s,

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diplomatic, military and intelligence historians such as Antony Best, Richard Aldrich, Philip Towle and Douglas Ford have examined the issue of pre-war British views of Japan and the IJA, concentrating on intelligence information.[7] Finally, the third volume of the recent comprehensive Palgrave series, *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000*, has been devoted to military matters concerning both countries, including British views of the IJA to 1941.[8] However these previous studies have not attempted to place British perceptions of the IJA between the world wars in their proper context or considered the impact of 'Orientalist' attitudes by the British as this study aims to do. To fully comprehend British perceptions of the IJA between 1937 and 1941, it is first necessary, by way of background, to examine changing British impressions of Japan and the IJA between 1914 and 1937.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF JAPAN, 1914-1918

Although Japan entered the First World War in 1914 against Germany as Britain's ally and at Britain's request, Britain's perceptions of Japan became steadily more negative during the conflict. This was as much due to suspicions over Japan's real motives for entering the war as to the malign influence of 'Orientalism' outlined in the previous chapter. Whilst Japan's involvement was necessary, in order to take German possessions such as Tsingtao and the South Sea Islands in a theatre where Britain's naval forces were weak, it was resented by the British. The British appear to have assumed that Japan would unselfishly enter the war in the Pacific on their side immediately and without any demands or preconditions, itself perhaps a manifestation of their 'Orientalist' views. Hirama has concluded that "In Britain, there was great distrust and dissatisfaction regarding Japan's role in the war (Hirama, 2003). Japan was perceived as having hesitated to co-operate and seemingly demanding reward for such requests".[9] There were "numerous complaints of Japanese interference and limits placed on British traders resident in China" received by the British Embassies in Japan and China and passed on to the British government.[10] Japan appears to have acted much as a western power would have done, "no more than her allies and opponents" according to David Steeds (Steeds, 2000) in using German peace feelers to increase her influence in China and the Pacific.[11] However, this was perceived by the British in particular as evidence of Japanese untrustworthiness and deviousness. Unflattering views of the Japanese were painted in official reports by officers such as Captain Edward Rymer RN, the naval attaché in Tokyo in 1918:

Japanese basic rules for this war are, first of all pursuing the most economical benefit and next considering international relations after the war…thus support for the allies would be made minimally…Japan was spellbound by money and blinded by the dream of being the leader in the Pacific.[12]

Rymer opined that this was because pernicious German influence in Japan remained so strong despite the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: "Japanese academics, doctors and lawyers learned from Germany and Japanese military was modelled on the German military".[13] In similar terms, 'The Memorandum on Anglo-Japanese Relations' submitted to the Imperial Conference of the leaders of the self-governing member states of the British Empire (Britain, Canada, Newfoundland, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand) held in London in April 1917 revealed that "Japan is an aggressor nation by nature…they were taught the idea of superiority and that they are a more superior race than any other races".[14] The 'Memorandum' also warned that "Japan and Britain are so far apart in terms of morality…Japanese education, commerce, organisation and rules have followed the German system…it is not an exaggeration to say that Japan will become the eastern version of

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Prussia…The Alliance between Britain and Japan is built on sand."[15] This dismissive view of Japanese wartime assistance to Britain was shared by Australian officials. Major E. J. Piesse, the Australian Director of Military Intelligence, wrote in 1920 that, "the view that the Japanese Navy gave any substantial assistance in assuring the safety of Australia during the war is not in accordance with official documents".[16] The Australian Prime Minister, W. M. 'Billy' Hughes wrote in 1916 of his concern that Japan might switch sides to join Germany and Horner has concluded that "hostility towards and fear of Japan increased in Australia during the war".[17] In view of these expressed opinions, it was therefore not surprising that the former First Sea Lord (the professional head of the Royal Navy) Admiral Lord Jellicoe in a formal report of August 1919 on the requirements for the naval defence of Australia referred to "elements of great friction between Japanese policy and the interests of the British Empire", and to Japan as the "potential enemy in the Pacific".[18] His successor as First Sea Lord, Admiral Earl Beattie, subsequently informed the British Cabinet that, "there was reason to believe that if the war had taken a definite turn against us Japan would have thrown us over and associated herself with Germany".[19] These negative views of Japan would help to convince the British government, under pressure from the United States, to terminate the alliance with Japan in 1922 and to develop Singapore as a major naval base to counter a possible Japanese thrust, as will be examined in the next chapter. They would also influence the opinions of a generation of junior British army officers, who would rise to senior positions in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma by 1937, towards the IJA

ALIENATION AND ASSISTANCE, 1918-1931

Yet, just as Britain was officially distancing itself from Japan after World War I links between the hitherto allies remained strong, and parts of the British military and civilian establishment were still keen to assist both Japan and her armed forces. The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) maintained official and unofficial links with its sister service, the Royal Navy after 1918, being especially interested in naval airpower which Britain had pioneered late in World War I with the conversion of the first aircraft carrier, *HMS Argus*, in 1918. The IJN were keen to gain British assistance with naval airpower and formally asked to inspect *Argus*'s sister ship, *HMS Eagle*, being "rebuffed not once but ten times" by the British Admiralty during 1918-1920 thanks to the new antagonism towards Japan outlined above.[20] However, both the British Air Ministry and Foreign Office were in favour of developing foreign naval airpower and valuable arms contracts with Japan, amongst other nations. There was also, as Ferris has identified, an element of dismissive Orientalist views evident in supporting assisting the IJN with naval airpower in British military and government circles.[21] "Physical causes – poor reflexes and sense of balance – and "national psychology", "a temperament that gets easily rattled in the face of emergency" would likely prevent Japanese from being excellent pilots", and no real potential threat to the Royal Navy.[22] It was therefore seen as a no-risk strategy to assist Japan. Consequently, an unofficial civil aviation mission of twenty ex-Royal Naval Air Service personnel, under Colonel Sempill, left for Japan in 1920. The Sempill Mission throws important light on Anglo-Japanese relations at a time of official estrangement between Britain and Japan. Whilst formal relations between the countries were becoming more distant, unofficial relations continued as before. Sempill himself appeared to be the perfect choice to head the mission, being a member of the British establishment (his father was the Scottish aristocrat, Lord Sempill) and a highly-experienced airman, who had transferred from the Royal Flying Corps to the new Royal Naval Air Service in 1916. Sempill's mission importantly both trained the first pilots of the fledgling IJN Air

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Force between 1921 and 1923 and provided wider assistance with "what sort of aircraft they need, what sort of weapons they're being trained in, both level-flight bombing and also the use of torpedoes".[23] Ironically, it appears to have been the British "who gave Japan the know-how to take out Pearl Harbor and capture Singapore" in 1941-1942.[24] With the assistance of the mission, particularly in regard to the construction of its the armoured deck, the IJN began work on its first aircraft carrier, *Honsho* (launched in 1923). The members of the Sempill Mission had mixed views of their initial Japanese trainees, disapproving of the pilots' inefficiency and unwillingness to properly maintain their loaned British aircraft, but approving of the "sound" ground crews and good performance of the Japanese under armament instruction.[25] The IJN were so grateful for Sempill's "almost epoch-making" assistance in initiating the IJN's Air Arm that he received a personal letter of thanks from Japanese Prime Minister Kato Tomosaburo in 1922.[26] Sempill himself held a more favourable view of his Japanese hosts than his mission, forming such a close bond that he was prepared to pass information on his return on future British naval aircraft and weapons to the IJN through the Japanese Naval Attache in London, Captain Toyoda Teijiro, for money.[27] Indeed it appears that Sempill may have even passed valuable information to the Japanese during 1939-1941 when he served as a minister at the Admiralty under Winston Churchill.[28] Sempill was not alone inside the Royal Navy in his affinity with the Japanese, there had developed here "a revolutionary movement almost" according to Richard Aldrich.[29] Former ace Royal Naval Air Service pilot, Frederick Joseph Rutland, squadron leader of *HMS Eagle*, volunteered to go to Japan in 1922 and assist the IJN with both training its naval pilots and designing naval aircraft chassis in the Mitsubishi building in Tokyo.[30] The Japanese government were reportedly so pleased with Rutland's work that they granted him a year's leave in Japan on full pay.[31] As a result of such British assistance, by 1929, "the IJN had become second to none in naval aviation" with three times the size of the pilot pool available to the Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm (the new title for the Royal Naval Air Service from 1924).[32]

The British Army did not possess equivalents to Sempill or Rutland and generally took little interest in its counterpart, the IJA, during the 1920s, with the exception of some journal articles in its in-house publication, *Army Quarterly*, and the *Handbook of the Japanese Army*, published in a revised edition in 1928.[33] To the British army at this time, the IJA represented a little-known, distant and under-regarded force, scarcely conceivable as a future foe. Towle has concluded that the "popular British impression of the Japanese army in the 1920s and early 1930s was created by fading historical memories of the Russo-Japanese War and by occasional newspaper articles".[34] This reflected, in part, the meagre effort given to understand Japan and the Japanese in general and the low priority of information-gathering on Japan by British authorities. On arrival in Tokyo in 1917, Captain Malcolm Kennedy was startled to note the lack of urgency in the British Embassy about gathering information on Japan, recording that "none of our diplomats out here speak Japanese… How can you be a real diplomat if you can't speak the language of the Country you are in?"[35]

As the British army had succeeded in 1918 in matching and besting the German army in the field, British officers naturally assumed that theirs was amongst the best and most modern armies in the world, bolstered by recent experience on the Western Front. By contrast, the IJA had not been involved in a major land war since 1905-05 and had also 'missed' the vital learning curve of World War I. The British Army and the IJA therefore drew opposite lessons on military effectiveness based on their different recent and successful experiences of war. The British Army, from its World War I experience, emphasised the decisive role of heavy firepower and tanks in an assault, whilst "between 1919-32 the IJA clung to the tactics

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of the Russo-Japanese War" in emphasising the importance of morale, speed and manoeuvre in attack.[36] Whilst this was an entirely natural development, it did mean that British army attaches and language officers observing the IJA in Japan and Manchuria tended to view it as a 'backward' force by comparison with their own training and experience. However, even before World War I, British military observers had encountered difficulties in estimating the IJA's true military performance as an ally, as Towle has emphasised.[37] This was because of the particular traditions and training of the British army, which "spent so much time in horse riding and sport that it found it difficult to understand the intense professionalism of the Japanese" army, which had been trained along different, Prussian, lines.[38] Japanese cavalry appeared to be both poorly trained and slovenly to British military eyes. Captain A. R. Steel of 17th Indian Cavalry reported in 1907 that Japanese cavalry uniforms appeared to be "indescribably filthy" and that very few Japanese appeared to like horses, a crime to a British cavalryman.[39]Just as some British army observers underestimated the German army viewed on manoeuvres in 1906 as an, "iron-disciplined, wooden, unthinking fighting automaton", the IJA, employing similar tactics, was equally underestimated.[40] German and Japanese army tactics were felt to reflect their national characteristics, the Japanese slavishly copying the Germans. As the German army had 'lost' World War I to the British, French and Americans, the IJA was apparently doomed to imitate a beaten foe.

There was not one single, 'approved' view of the IJA by British military observers during the 1920s and 1930s, but many, reflecting the number of observers involved. The Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 allowed for the despatch of language officers from the British army to go to Japan, and vice versa, for periods of 2 or 3 years. Some 35 British language officers were formally seconded to the IJA for short periods between 1919 and 1939 to learn Japanese and observe it, as well as a number of visiting military attaches based in Japan and China. Ferris and Towle have emphasised the difficulties encountered by these observers in attempting to estimate actual IJA performance in war from peacetime exercises and manoeuvres, postulating that this limited the observers' effectiveness in reporting.[41] However, problems in viewing complete military preparations and exercises held are common to foreign observers of any army in peacetime. Lieutenant Pender-Cudlipp opined in 1939, after attachment to the Japanese 15th Cavalry Regiment, that the Japanese "secretiveness regarding military matters is a natural result of war-time conditions reinforcing [that] which is a national characteristic."[42] He also concluded that "it is doubtful whether much more would have been shown even to German or Italian officers", Germany and Italy being then allies of Japan.[43] There was still sufficient opportunity and data available to officers like Pender-Cudlipp to form an overall impression of the IJA's effectiveness and several military observers freely praised what they saw of the IJA in reports and diaries.

Some language officers and attaches formed a bond with the Japanese colleagues and grew to admire their military qualities, particularly the spirit of *Bushido*. Following his secondment as a language officer in Japan during the 1920s, Major B.R. Mullaly described *Bushido* in reverent tones as "this wonderful code of ethics on which the greatness of Japan has been built and which is still her inspiration".[44] Lieutenant Stockton of the Royal Artillery, attached to the Japanese Guards regiment from 1926-27, noted his admiration for the hospitality of his hosts and the endurance of Japanese soldiers, "the men proved that they could be excellent fighting material if well led", although he was less impressed by the quality of their equipment.[45] One of the most celebrated British language officers to go to Japan was Captain Malcolm Kennedy, who later became a journalist, writer and prominent member of the Japan Society in London.[46] Kennedy served as a language officer in Japan from November 1917 to November 1920, returning to the country (having been invalided out of the army) as

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the news agency, Reuters', correspondent in Japan from 1925 to 1934. As with other language officers, Kennedy sent back regular reports on the IJA to the War Office, via the British Embassy in Tokyo, and he also kept a detailed diary of his experiences. Kennedy soon developed a close affinity with and affection for his Japanese military hosts, although he could be critical of the IJA's deficiencies. In November 1919, Kennedy observed the annual Japanese Army Grand Manoeuvres outside Osaka where he "watched the assault, which was carried out in great masses. A fine exhilarating sight, but quite impractical under modern conditions."[47] However, he was "much struck by the preferential treatment given to the British officers, the Japanese going out of their way to help us in every way possible."[48] This favourable treatment was not always reciprocated by British attaches and officers towards the Japanese. Captain Richard Bennett, a language officer sent to Japan with Kennedy in 1917, told Kennedy that The Commanding Officer of his regiment in Tokyo asked him recently [December 1919] why it was that Colonel Somerville [the assistant military attaché] was so anti-Japanese and why he sent in anti-Japanese reports to our War Office. Somerville was, of course, very critical of the Japanese at times.[49]

Concerning his own observations of the IJA, Kennedy was able to view, while attached to the Chiba Infantry School during 1920, its early experimental use of tanks. He concluded that "the experiments were something as a failure so far as the passage of shell craters were concerned and [the tanks] got stuck each time!"[50] However, these were obviously early trials with a form of new technology which had taken the British some time to master. Kennedy's positive views of the "soldierly bearing of the Japanese troops and their businesslike appearance" contrasted markedly with that of the Chinese soldiers he observed in the same month on a visit to Mukden in Manchuria, can't say I think much of the Chinese soldiers here, dirty, sloppy-looking beggars with both arms and equipment in a filthy state.[51]

He even expressed his sympathy with the Japanese by concluding, "I don't altogether wonder that the Japanese look down on the Chinks as very much inferior to them. They are cheery-looking rogues, but disgustingly filthy."[52] This view of the Chinese armies as unkempt, badly-organised and ill-equipped was typical of British military observers and contributed, as will be outlined below, to the view held by many from 1937 onwards that the IJA had to be a 'lesser' army if it could not easily beat its Chinese counterpart in combat. By 1928, Kennedy was even more convinced of the effectiveness of the IJA. Attending the Grand Military Review at Yoyogi as Reuters' correspondent, he noted that, 35,000 troops took part, with representative detachments from every unit in the Japanese Army. The outstanding feature, as compared with others I have seen out here in the past, was the large amount of mechanised artillery, tanks, armoured cars etc. and the large number of aircraft.[53]

As Towle has concluded, The [British] military experts on Japan, such as [Captain] Malcolm Kennedy, Major-General F.S.G. Piggott and Colonel G.T. Wards…had a very high appreciation of its army… They were neither racists nor bigots, they often liked their Japanese counterparts, socialised exclusively with them.[54]

Captain (later Colonel) G.T. Wards served at the British Embassy in Tokyo from 1923 to 1928, beings attached to the IJA's 52nd Infantry Regiment at Hirosaki for six months during 1924-25. Wards noted the already anti-British sentiment evident amongst the 52nd Infantry's officers in his report to his superior, Colonel (later Major-General) F.S.G. Piggott, the military attaché in Tokyo, in March 1925 as, "the sympathies of a large proportion of officers…appear to lead towards Russia and Germany rather than to England… Both the divisional commander and the regimental commander…have studied German…and are pro-German."[55] Wards gave a mixed view of his experience with the 52nd Infantry. Whilst Japanese "non-commissioned officers are keen, energetic and well-trained in performing the

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drill and movements…they are, however, often lacking in intelligence and not always smart in their personal appearance and bearing."[56] This theme of Japanese soldiers' apparent scruffiness and lack of military bearing, which Piggott chose to emphasise in his cover letter to the Ambassador, was to become a common one amongst British observers of the IJA and an early indication that they were influenced by appearance to downgrade the IJA in comparison to the more smartly turned-out British army.[57] Wards also regarded, with respect, the efficiency of IJA firepower, Musketry…is carried out continuously throughout the year… All men are expected to become first-class shots and it is the exception for a company to possess second class shots.[58]

However, Wards' admiration for the IJA's shooting ability was tempered by what he observed as a number of weaknesses, which left it behind Western armies in terms of overall efficiency. Regarding military intelligence, Wards noted that the lack of a Regimental Scout Officer in the 52nd Infantry and the absence of "any personnel specially trained as scouts" meant that "no special intelligence personnel forms part of the establishment of the Regiment."[59] Therefore, he concluded that the Japanese did "not seem to conceive the importance of collecting all and every item of information…and forwarding it to the next higher commander", as was standard British army practice.[60] There were also key weaknesses in the IJA's equipment and training evident at this time. The IJA's war establishment "allows for only one machine gun company [of 8 machine-guns] per battalion."[61] Training in the live use of "grenades is not carried out", with only the occasional use of "dummy bombs [dummy grenades]" in the regiment.[62] IJA military exercises appeared to Wards to be both formulaic and ineffective, "there is a distinct tendency to carry out the exercises strictly according to time and syllabus, merely for the sake of the exercises themselves", which left the soldiers bored.[63] Overall, Wards found the IJA infantry "powerful and formidable troops" and that the "powers of endurance and marching of the Japanese infantry are tremendous."[64] Given this, Wards still concluded that, "I do not consider that it [the IJA] would be able to hold its own and do itself justice…[against] a modern army belonging to a first class power", such as the British army.[65] In the mid-1920s, therefore, the IJA appeared to have little to trouble the British army in terms of a threat and it could therefore be disregarded as a potential enemy force. This conclusion was repeated in the *Handbook on the Japanese Army*.

Reports and assessments of British observers, such as Stockton, Kennedy and Wards, were forwarded to the Military Intelligence Department of the War Office in London, which was influenced enough by them to give generally positive reviews of the IJA in its formal reports. The problem for the British authorities, whose scale became truly evident only in December 1941, was that "neither raw reports nor finished assessments [from the War Office regarding the IJA] circulated widely in the British and Indian armies, most of whose officers ignored the topic".[66] Despite the positive and largely unbiased reports filed on the IJA from observers in the field in Japan and China, crude racial prejudice and dismissive 'Orientalist' views were still evident in formal War Office publications during the 1920s, particularly the *Handbook on the Japanese Army*, first issued in 1923 and revised in 1928.[67] The *Handbook* informed its readership amongst British army units that the Japanese were a "race of invaders…[whose] straight black hair, yellow skins, oblique eyes and broad skulls show that Mongol blood is predominant" allegedly with some Malayan blood.[68] According to the *Handbook*, one of the main tendencies of the Japanese was "to imitate rather than create", which made it a lesser foe than more 'original' European armies.[69] However, the *Handbook* did reflect some of the more positive views of British observers in cautioning that it "would

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be a grave error to under-rate the powers of the Japanese infantryman", unimaginative though he might be.[70]

IMPRESSIONS OF THE IJA FROM 1937-1941

Following the IJA's invasion of China proper in July 1937, greater notice was taken in the West, including London and Britain's eastern colonies, of the IJA, its characteristics and capabilities. However, the Second Sino-Japanese War proved to be a puzzling one to Western assessors, not fitting the pattern expected of it, which was a rapid and complete Japanese victory. The British Foreign Office anticipated a brief war in which the defeated Chinese might benefit in terms of consequent enforced modernization of the country.[71] Whilst the IJA achieved initial rapid success as it "poured almost effortlessly over the North China plain", (Gordon, 2006) it became bogged down from 1938 in attritional battles against the Chinese armies.[72] According to Dower(Dower,2012), this meant that "most Westerners found it difficult to take the Japanese really seriously…militarily they also seemed to be performing less than impressively…[apparently] unable to finish off a poorly equipped and poorly trained (and, of course, purely Asian) foe".[73] This underestimation of the IJA was to have grave consequences for both Britain and the United States when the 'War against Japan' began in December 1941, as will be outlined in later chapters. Another consequence of the plodding progress of the IJA in China was that British and international military observers were unable to construct an accurate image of the IJA's true ability, reinforcing their view that "its capabilities need not be taken seriously".[74] The most frequently-praised asset of the IJA, the high morale of its individual soldiers, was noted as deteriorating in the face of dogged Chinese resistance.[75] All this evidence from the Second Sino-Japanese War apparently indicated that the IJA and the Japanese Air Force were 'second-rate' on the 'Orientalist' assumption that an advanced western army, such as the British, would have made short work of the Chinese forces. "[The view that] since the Chinese army was hopelessly inefficient, it followed that the IJA was also in a poor state gained wide acceptance", in (Ford, 2006) Ford's words.[76] Wing Commander Walser, of the British intelligence-gathering Far East Combined Bureau in Hong Kong's, view in 1938 was that, "as we see it…the Japanese have bitten off more than they can chew" by invading China.[77]

John Ferris has forcefully argued that leading British military analysts, when viewing the IJA during the 1930s, did so employing forms of military ethnocentrism, rather than racism as advanced by Dower.[78] First advocated by the American cultural anthropologist, W.G. Sumner, in 1906, ethnocentrism occurs when judging another culture by the standards and values of one's own culture.[79] To Ferris, British analysts in the War Office, particularly what he calls the 'old China hands', officers who had previously served in postings in Asia but not actually observed the IJA in battle, assessed the IJA by reference to two standards, the 'actual' standard and the 'paper' standard.[80] The 'actual' standard was that of the opposing army in China, the Chinese army. The 'paper' standard was the standard, on paper, of a 'first-class' army in Europe, namely the British army, and was therefore an ethnocentric standard. The IJA during the late 1930s clearly failed, argues Ferris, in the eyes of British analysts to come up to the 'paper' standard:

The ideas of the 'paper standard' and the 'first-class power'…married to contempt for Chinese armies led many British observers to folly. They held that a 'first-class' defender fighting from prepared positions in Europe would have smashed such Japanese attacks.[81]

Because the IJA did not seemingly match up to the high 'paper' standard of the British army, and its 'actual' standard was only slightly above the scantly-regarded Chinese

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army, it could not be regarded as a serious threat. There is much in Ferris's argument regarding the ethnocentric view of the IJA held by most British observers, even some of the language officers and attaches who regarded the IJA with respect. Ethnocentric views are natural to an extent in a military context, where the effectiveness of armies and units are frequently competitively compared to each other. Indeed, military ethnocentrism has its positive side, in allowing armies to 'measure' other armies' relative strengths and efficiencies, as Ken Booth has argued.[82] The British cavalry officers' pre-World War I criticism of both IJA and German army cavalry, as not being up to their own standard, has already been noted above. But, as Booth has observed, military ethnocentrism, not least that of the British, has also led to costly blunders.

Crude generalisations based on the idea of national characteristics and how it manifests itself in fighting qualities have caused some of the biggest mistakes in military history. Familiar British illustrations include the underestimation of the Russians in the Crimea [in 1854] and the equally serious dismissal of the Boers in South Africa [in 1899].[83]

The key error in British estimations of the IJA in the 1930s lay in how "British observers treated their own approach to war as the universal means to measure military value".[84] Therefore the IJA was seen as 'backward' by British army standards because it was judged as if it were fighting in Europe against the experienced and well-equipped British army, rather than in Asia. It was also assumed that the British army would fight just as effectively in Asia as would in Europe and readily prevail in both theatres of war against the IJA, a 'lowly', Asian, enemy. In this regard ethnocentric and 'Orientalist' views held within the British army towards the IJA merged. Disparaging British military views of the IJA were therefore not only ethnocentric, as Ferris outlines, but also racist, as can be demonstrated in the language used by some officers. The British Commander-in-Chief, far East, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, reported his first viewing of IJA soldiers across the border from Hong Hong in December 1940 as "various sub-human specimens...which I was informed were Japanese soldiers".[85] Such language would not have been used in relation to describing Western soldiers. This was a particularly dangerous mixture with disastrous consequences for Britain in December 1941- February 1942 when the 'inferior' and 'Asian' IJA attacked and rapidly overran the key British colonies of Malaya and Singapore.

The British army was not alone in its underestimation of its Japanese counterpart during the 1930s. Whilst the British army had sound intelligence on the IJA, gained from its language officers and military attaches, the Royal Air Force's Air Staff took little notice of Japan, appointing its first air attaché only in 1934.[86] Ferris has characterised the Royal Air Force as being particularly burdened by military ethnocentrism towards the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force (IJAAF), which led to the view that "because [Japanese] bases were untidy, units must be incompetent; that where the IJAAF differed from the RAF it must be inferior".[87] Futhermore, there was a clear racial element evident in the dismissive nature of the views of Royal Air Force officers, already outlined in the previous chapter, that the Japanese had bad eyesight, could not fly in the dark, had a poor sense of balance and an easily excitable temperament which made them unsuitable fighter pilots. In addition, as the War Office's *Handbook on the Japanese Army* had affirmed in 1928, the Japanese were dismissed as mere copiers of western designs and technology, so the Royal Air Force assumed that it had nothing to fear from 'obsolete' Japanese military aircraft.[88] This assumption may have been strengthened by the practice of the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force and Naval Air Force in using only older designs of aircraft in action in China until 1939, "reinforcing British belief that they had nothing else."[89] A Joint Intelligence Committee report of 1939 prepared for the British Cabinet came to the comforting conclusion

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that "Japan possessed an aircraft industry which was behind that of other first-class powers", clearly including Britain.[90]

Whilst some serving and former Royal Navy officers, notably Sempill and Rutland, retained links with and affection for the Imperial Japanese Navy during the 1920s and 1930s, others regarded it and the other Japanese armed services with little more than contempt. The captain of *HMS Tamar* based in Hong Kong filed a report for transmission to London in September 1938, including his scathing observations on the Japanese military. He concluded that the British forces in Hong Kong and China would have nothing to fear from the Japanese, whose officers resembled "wooden-headed automatons", because

it appears improbable that they can rank as a first-class fighting power until they have learnt how to educate their people.[91]

As Towle has pointed out, this appears to be a particularly ill-informed comment given the high degree of literacy in Japan at the time.[92] While the Imperial Japanese Navy was, as noted above, perceived by the Admiralty in London to pose a potential threat in the Pacific from the end of World War I, the Royal Navy viewed itself as being superior. The paper 'threat' from the Imperial Japanese Navy was used by the Admiralty to justify its construction of new large ships, such as the 37,000 ton *Nelson* class battleships *HMS Nelson and HMS Rodney* launched in 1925(Maiolo, 2010), but this did not mean that a naval war with Japan was viewed by the Royal Navy as at all likely.[93] The Naval Staff at the Admiralty, as Geoffrey Till has argued(Till, 2021), failed to give particular regard to the Imperial Japanese Navy's performance and did not fully grasp the significant improvement in Japanese naval capability from the mid-1930s, including the construction or conversion of large aircraft carriers, such as the rebuilt *Akagi*, and the huge 71,000 ton *Yamato* class battleships begun in 1937.[94] The development by the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Force of the highly effective and advanced 'Long-Lance' torpedo, for delivery from its torpedo bombers, was also missed by the Royal Navy.[95] These important developments may have been missed by the Admiralty because of the lack of Royal Naval language officers and officers sent on secondment to the Imperial Japanese Navy during the 1920s and 1930s, in stark contrast to the practice of the British army and the Royal Navy's own practice before World War I. As will be examined in the next chapter, the development by the British of a major naval base at Singapore from 1923 was intended as a deterrent to a possible (however unlikely) Japanese advance southwards into British Malaya rather than a reaction to perceived Japanese naval might in the Pacific. The conclusion must be that the Admiralty was strongly influenced until 1941 by ethnocentric and racial views of the 'backwardness' of the Imperial Japanese Navy in comparison to it.

In contrast to the dismissive views of the 'old China hands', a number of British language officers and attaches with experience in China and Japan during the late 1930s who reported that the IJA was a highly effective army. Major (later Colonel) G.T. Wards, who later became one of the official historians compiling the British official history, *The War against Japan*, is one of the best-known of these. Wards served as the assistant military attaché in Tokyo under Major-General F.S.G. Piggott (the long-serving British military attaché to Tokyo) from 1936 to 1940, and regularly visited the front lines in China, observing the IJA in action. A Japanese speaker, Wards had previously served at the embassy in Tokyo from 1923 to 1928 and as a staff officer to the British forces in North China from 1932 to 1936, making him a highly experienced and knowledgeable observer of the IJA. His reports regarding the IJA were copied to the War Office in London via his superior, Piggott, and survive in his private papers and in the National Archives. In November 1937, Wards visited the Shanghai area with other foreign military attaches on an official tour organised by the

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Japanese Ministry of War.[96] Although warned by his host, General Matsui, that "you will not be able to see any actual fighting", Wards concluded admiringly regarding the IJA's amphibious capability that, I do not think that any other nation could have carried out such moves of such large bodies of men so quickly and so efficiently, combined with secrecy and apparently an almost total lack of fuss.[97]

Wards concluded his report by presciently warning, "the Japanese Army as it is to-day is a formidable force, well able to cope with any opposition likely to be met with at the present time in the Far East".[98] He also noted the IJA's regular and successful use of tanks and that "it is fairly clear that there is a tank unit within the division organisation [of each IJA division."[99] During his visit, Wards was concerned to note the "bitter" feelings held by some Japanese senior officers towards their former British allies, apparently arising out of tensions between the British forces in Shanghai and the Japanese Naval Landing party in the city. Rear-Admiral Sugiyama complained to Wards, in an indication of the racist views of some British officers towards the Japanese, that "we have at time been treated as if we were Chinese".[100] However, as with his 1925 report on the 52nd Regiment quoted above, Wards rather qualified his report's conclusions by admitting that, "in some respects the Japanese [Army] is clearly not up to the standard of a first-class power in Europe."[101] This would have come as some comfort and reassurance to the 'old China hands' in London, confirming their view that the IJA only posed a threat to another Asian army, not a leading European one. Piggott, the British military attaché in Tokyo between 1922 and 1930 and again from 1936 to 1940, through whose hands the reports of language officers and assistant attaches passed, was held in London by the late 1930 to have 'gone native' in his pro-Japanese views, to the extent that his favourable reports and covering letters on the IJA were disregarded.[102]

Lieutenant Peter Pender-Cudlipp of the Royal Artillery served as a language officer in Japan between 1937 and 1939, filing formal reports copied to the War Office on his attachments to the IJA's 1st Mountain Artillery Regiment in 1937 and its elite 15th Cavalry Regiment, between April and June 1939. He may have been the last British language officer to receive such a secondment.[103] For his first attachment in 1937, Pender-Cudlipp remarked that he was freely able to observe the 1st Mountain Artillery Regiment's exercises and his Japanese host officers were particularly friendly and accommodating to him.[104] He was struck by the professionalism of the regiment's officers and great enthusiasm of its gunners, if not always impressed by its equipment. However, he observed that the regiment was still limited in its effectiveness by 'Japanese' characteristics of unimaginativeness and slowness of thought.

> It may be said of the Japanese Army...that although its members are generally keen and knowledgeable about their profession, hard-working, conscientious, physically fit and high in morale, by reason of slowness of thought and action (a national characteristic), lack of imagination...it would find itself at a disadvantage if faced by a first-class modern European Army.[105]

Pender-Cudlipp clearly had the British Army in mind as a prime example of such a "first-class modern" force, further consoling readers of his report that "such an eventuality is regarded as so unlikely as hardly to merit consideration."[106] Instead, Japanese military preparations were "mainly directed" at the "menace" of Russia, to which the IJA, he felt, would pose a formidable threat.[107]

Pender-Cudlipp's second secondment, to the IJA's 15th Cavalry Regiment at Narashino, near Tokyo, in the spring of 1939, was "not such a pleasant or profitable attachment" for him.[108] Whilst he was "not explicitly allowed to see very much", Pender-Cudlipp was still able to deduce and observe useful details concerning training, equipment

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and morale.[109] He noted that the cavalry officers in the Regiment, and IJA infantry officers he met, "are more obsessed with the demonstration of "power of command" and the traditional Japanese "military spirit" than those of other arms", namely the artillery he had previously served with.[110] Pender-Cudlipp now detected more hostility to the British than previously, both from the commanding officer of the 15th Cavalry, "who obviously thought very little of the British Army", and his adjutant, who "confirmed this impression of contempt."[111] In general, he noted that the regiment's officers, "in common with the officers of the Army as a whole, are a keen and conscientious body of men whose profession is almost their sole real interest in life... Their instructional ability and power of command...was very good."[112] The regiment's non-commissioned officers were "very keen and efficient...their powers of instruction were very good", and the men particularly fit, undertaking "strenuous" training outdoors.[113] Pender-Cudlipp was impressed enough to modify his earlier preconceived views concerning "the defects which are commonly attributed to Japanese officers, viz. slowness in making up their minds", to report that his "limited acquaintance with them gave no grounds for such a belief."[114] Indeed, he concluded, presciently,

I consider that many people are liable in their appreciation of various aspects of JAPAN, military and economic as well as moral, seriously to underrate her strength and her efficiency.[115]

This latter conclusion was warmly endorsed by the military attaché, Piggott, in his covering letter to the Ambassador, copied to the War Office.[116] It does not appear to have been particularly noted at the War Office, perhaps because Piggott was already viewed as being too sympathetic to the Japanese.

Not all British officers serving in Asia during the late 1930s gave such favourable reports on the IJA. The 'old China hands' amongst them, as has been outlined, were unconvinced that the IJA posed a serious threat to British forces and possessions in the region. The apparently continuing difficulties of the IJA in decisively defeating the Chinese armies after the 1937 invasion led some British officers to conclude that the IJA was an overrated and poorly-managed army. Colonel Noel Irwin, General Staff Officer, Grade 1 for British troops stationed in China, based in Hong Kong, in 1937, observed to a fellow officer, that, one valuable fact seems to have come out of the Sino-Jap war, and that is the inferiority of the Jap soldier. On all sides I hear that he lacks courage, has little tactical knowledge, co-ordination in attack between arms…when all this is over it looks as if he will revert to a very third rate article. He seems a very different man to the Jap. of the Russo-Jap War.[117]

Irwin's views of the IJA are of importance as he rose to command the British Eastern Army in India and Burma fighting against the IJA, from July 1942 to April 1943. As will be explained in Chapter 5, he retained his disdain for the 'third rate' IJA even as his army struggled in vain to match it during the disastrous First Arakan campaign of 1942-43. Irwin therefore helped to influence the dismissive views of a generation of senior British officers towards their future enemy in Asia. Irwin's views were also mistaken. The IJA had not, in fact, gone backwards since 1905 as he implied, but was becoming a modern, well-equipped and highly effective force as was confirmed by the more insightful Malcolm Kennedy. Kennedy, now a writer in London after returning from Tokyo, wrote in 1935 that

mechanisation and modernisation [of the IJA] are being speeded up so as to make the army "as efficient as any Western Power", and increasing importance is attached to tanks and aircraft...the two tank regiments now being organised are expected to provide Japan with about 270 tanks in all.[118]

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Kennedy also admiringly pointed out that the harsh peacetime training undertaken by the IJA which "to the foreign military observer...appear[s] unnecessarily severe", had already proved its considerable efficacy in battle in China,

by the extraordinary feats of endurance performed by Japanese troops during the mid-winter operations in Manchuria of 1931-33. The rapid thrust on Tsitishar in November 1931...and the amazing sweep through the rugged mountain fastnesses of Jehol in February and March 1933...[are] outstanding examples.[119]

He warned that whilst the IJA "in such important matters as equipment and training in modern warfare", the Japanese may be inferior to the land forces of the principal Western Powers, the immense influence exercised by the whole system of *seishin kyoiku* ['training in morale'] is a factor which cannot be ignored.[120]

Finally, Kennedy observed presciently that "rapidity of attack is a marked feature of all her [Japan's] training on land and sea...demoralisation of the enemy is the surest and swiftest way to victory."[121] The IJA he emphasised, "make a point of studying every conceivable contingency that might arise...they are, in fact, something akin to the Germans."[122]

Irwin's contemptuous view of the 'backward' IJA was not a lone one amongst British officers. Major Wards, who had been briefly promoted to military attaché in Tokyo in 1940, was invited to give a talk on the IJA to the British headquarters and officers of the two brigades stationed in Singapore in April 1941. Amongst his audience was the army commander in Malaya and Singapore, Lieutenant-General Sir Lionel Bond. Wards gave a 45-minute lecture, drawing upon his considerable experience, in which he explained that he

rated the Japanese Army very highly and as a first class fighting machine, emphasised their extreme physical fitness and marching ability...[and] their ability to manoeuvre by day or by night and find their way in almost impossible country despite all obstacles.[123]

Inviting questions after his talk, Wards recalled that, "most of the officers present were completely surprised at the high standard I judged the Japanese, being...quite contrary to what they had hitherto been led to believe."[124] Furthermore, to quote only two examples...an officer in the audience flatly contradicted my statement that Japanese infantry are particularly good at night work...and again where an officer suggested in rather a defiant manner that if the Japanese had a General Staff it surely could not be compared in standard, with those of western countries.[125]

Wards was saddened to learn that such misconceived views of the IJA were apparently firmly held by his audience, but worse was to follow. General Bond, who had remained passively seated with his eyes closed, now rose and said, Major Wards has told you, that in his opinion, the Japanese army is a very efficient force and that the Japanese know all about us here in Singapore. This is far from the truth as I know from my information, which I receive from all sorts of sources... I will now tell you something. Every morning, the telegrams which the Japanese Consul General in Singapore sends to his Government in Tokyo are placed on my table and from these I know exactly what the Japanese are up to and just how much, or how little, they know about us. Gentlemen, if this is the best the Japanese can do I do not think much of them, and you can take it from me that we have nothing to fear from the Japanese.[126]

Wards recorded that "these remarks were greeted with accord and general all round satisfaction and relief by all present (except myself)."[127] The views of this audience appear to have been shared by British officers generally in Singapore in 1941. Wards had discovered, since arriving in the city several weeks earlier from Tokyo, the prevalence of "certain notions about the Japanese which it seemed were being passed on from man to man and accepted."[128]

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These "notions" included the old canards that the "Japanese Army never operate at night" and that "the Japanese are poor mechanics and therefore make poor aviators."[129] A third "notion" held was that the IJA was apparently "bogged down in China and cannot beat even the Chinese armies who everyone knows are hopeless at military matters. Why should we be worried about them [the IJA]?"[130]

Disparaging British military views of the IJA before December 1941 were not confined to Singapore and Malaya alone. Lewis Bush, who spent several years as an English teacher in Japan during the 1930s, recalled hearing dismissive opinions of the Japanese voiced in Hong Kong while he was posted there with the Royal Navy in 1940. Whilst "there were certain people like myself who knew full well the potentialities of the Japanese as fighting men", other sailors and soldiers refused to believe them.[131] As Bush described the latter, these were people who were completely with their heads in the sand, completely ignorant, who even expressed the opinion that the Japanese hadn't a hope of taking Hong Kong, or hadn't a hope of fighting a European power...people used to argue with me or other people who had been in Japan and quite frankly it became rather ridiculous. If any one of us just pointed out the power of the Japanese fighting ships or what they were doing in the air, the aircraft they were designing, we were either laughed at or looked upon as being traitors.[132]

In this way, valuable and accurate information from those like Wards and Bush who had intimate knowledge of Japan and the IJA was entirely discounted by the many British officers and men serving in Asia who had no such direct knowledge but who maintained their firm preconceptions of Japanese 'inferiority'.

Information available to British forces on the IJA after 1937 was not limited to the circulation of the reports of language officers and attaches within the War Office. The British combined intelligence organisation, the Far East Combined Bureau (FECB), in Singapore prepared the *Japanese Army Memorandum* in December 1940 to "give regimental officers a general idea of the characteristics, organisation, armament, tactics and training of the Japanese Army".[133] The *Memorandum* and its revised copy of March 1941 had a print run of 1,500 copies, although it may not have been widely read by its target audience of regimental officers in India, Malaya and Hong Kong. Peter Elphick (Elphick, 1998)has claimed that, despite interviewing over 100 British and Commonwealth officer veterans of Malaya and Singapore, he was unable to meet one who recalled seeing the *Memorandum.*[134] Based on intelligence reports from language officers, attaches and wireless intercepts, the 55-page *Memorandum* offered a sober assessment of the IJA, highlighting the "most marked" Japanese military preparations for combined operations and opposed landings and the high quality of its training and equipment.[135] The *Memorandum* warned its readers that "the Japanese Army and its supporters…are a constant threat to the security of the British Empire in the East".[136] In terms of equipment, the *Memorandum* stressed the IJA's use of tanks, "with great effect", in China and noted, correctly, that

It is considered probable that a tank company, including both medium and light tanks, in included in the war organisation of each division. These divisional tank companies consist of about 15 to 17 tanks. In addition, there are independent tank regiments with approximately 80 tanks…their [the tanks'] chief role appears to be direct and close co-operation with infantry on the main field of battle.[137]

As will be outlined in Chapter 4, the IJA's successful use of tanks in support of its infantry assault on the British Jitra defence line in Malaya on 10th -11th December 1941 caused consternation amongst the defending troops of 11th Indian Division, who had not been trained to deal with enemy tanks and were not expected to have to do so. The IJA tactics

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should not have come as a surprise to 11th Indian Division's officers if they had read the *Memorandum*. Concerning tactics, the *Memorandum* explained that "envelopment is therefore used [by the IJA] in all operations…in attack, the principle of envelopment is taught at all stages from the use of large formations to that of the smallest".[138] Furthermore, the IJA was noted to be capable of and experienced in opposed amphibious landings, in which, "the initial landing is usually carried out in the dark, or shortly before daybreak. Periods of rain or stormy weather are chosen for these operations when possible so as to achieve surprise."[139] On 8th December 1941, a regiment of the IJA's 5th Division carried out a successful opposed landing against the British, at Kota Baru in northern Malaya, shortly before 1:00am in stormy, monsoon conditions. Subsequently the IJA in Malaya carried out successfully envelopment after envelopment of British and Commonwealth units during its rapid advance down the length of Malaya, much as the *Memorandum* had predicted the IJA were capable of.

However, favourable comments on the IJA contained in language officers' reports, and reproduced in the *Memorandum*, were made in comparison to other Asian armies, not the 'first-rate' British Army to which it was not seen as a serious contender.[140] The *Memorandum* qualified its praise for the IJA's tactics and equipment by reminding its readers that,

It must be remembered that in these operations Japan was engaged against an inferior enemy…the exaggerated idea of their prowess gained as a result of their victorious advance through China may lead to the Japanese officers and men to feel that similar tactics to those employed on that occasion may succeed against other enemies. This may lead to large initial losses in a future war.[141]

The references to "other enemies" and "large initial losses in a future war" were an obvious link to what was believed to be the outcome of any Japanese attack against 'first-rate' British or United States' forces in Asia. Having highlighted the IJA's advanced amphibious capability, the *Memorandum* similarly tempered this by adding a caveat that, "in Central China the [river] crossings were in some cases insufficiently organised…in the result, heavy casualties were sustained."[142]To British officers reading the *Memorandum*, the message given regarding the IJA's effectiveness was clear. Whilst mighty and advanced by Asian standards, the IJA could not compare to a contemporary western army, in any conflict against which it was expected to founder. In this way, dismissive 'Orientalist' views of the IJA held by British commanders again revealed themselves. Japanese tactics, detailed in the *Memorandum*, were of interest but could not act as lessons for the British army to have to absorb, as the British army was held to be 'superior' to the IJA. The IJA was therefore not taken particularly seriously as a threat by British military commanders, as it should have been.

Domestic public opinion in Britain from mid-1937 onwards swung against Japan, with frequent and hostile newspaper editorials attacking the IJA's brutal conduct of war in China. News of atrocities involving the IJA, such as 'the rape of Nanking' in 1938, brought out the traditional sympathies of the British towards the 'little man', the Chinese in this instance.[143] Malcolm Kennedy registered his strong disapproval of several virulent anti-Japanese editorials, appearing during 1937-38 in *The Times*, in his diary.[144] In particular, on 27th August 1937, regarding coverage of the accidental wounding of the British Ambassador by Japanese bomber aircraft, Kennedy fulminated, it certainly will not help matters to have a responsible paper like "The Times" losing its sense of proportion and going into hysterics about it. Normally I have little use for "The Evening Standard" but in this instance it sets an example of restraint.[145]

The historian of the influential Japan Society has noted that the "pro-Japanese sentiments of [its] members…at this time were out of line with public sentiment in Britain",

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and that the Society entered a period of decline in (Cortazzi, 1859)the late 1930s.[146] However, the Society was still able to give a formal dinner in February 1938 in honour of Viscount Ishii, Japan's special envoy to Europe, at which he assured members that "Japan has no territorial ambitions in China".[147] The prominent socialist intellectuals, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, who had maintained their positive views of Japan and the Japanese since visiting Japan in 1911-12, now recorded their antipathy to the Japanese as a result of the Sino-Japanese War. "Since the Great War she [Japan] has been an evil influence in the world, intensely imperialist, militarist, insincere", they wrote in late 1937.[148] Inevitably, such disparaging and negative views of the Japanese held in Britain coloured the perception of the minds of British military personnel in their image of the IJA(Holmes,1991).

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that the British War Office was particularly well-informed about the capabilities and effectiveness of the IJA both before and after 1937. One lasting benefit of the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902 was that a sizeable number of British army language officers were sent on secondment to IJA units, in addition to the military attaches also posted to Japan and China. The Royal Navy, wholly, and Royal Air Force, partly, passed on this opportunity after World War I and were consequently not as well-informed about their Japanese counterparts. These army officers filed generally favourable reports containing their impressions of the IJA, which were copied to the War Office in London. Language officers and attaches, such as Malcolm Kennedy, G.T. Wards and F.S.G. Piggott, observed the IJA over many years and built up considerable expertise on it. They also retained a lasting admiration and considerable respect for Japanese martial qualities, making their views known widely. Other language officers, such as Peter Pender-Cudlipp, sympathetically revised their previously-held preconceptions of 'Japanese' characteristics, such as slowness of thought and lack of imagination, as a result of their secondments to the IJA. Their views were taken into account in the Military Intelligence Division of the War Office dealing with East Asia and were reflected in the two key official publications circulated to British army units, the *Handbook on the Japanese Army* of 1928, and particularly the *Japanese Army Memorandum* of 1940 which contained much accurate information.

CONCLUSION

However, there was also another, and more influential, school of thought regarding the IJA within the British armed forces, which viewed it (and the Japanese navy and air force) as a second or third-rate force with outdated equipment, poor organisation and as posing no sort of threat to the British army. Ferris has referred to the most hardline of these officers, who had served in China, Malaya and Hong Kong but had seen little of the IJA at close quarters, as 'the old China hands'. The 'old China hands', such as Colonel Noel Irwin and the senior officers in Malaya and Singapore who attended Wards' lecture in April 1941, held fixed, even racist, 'Orientalist' views of the IJA as an inferior potential enemy whose soldiers could not see well in the dark, were irrational by nature and unsuited to fly aircraft or operate machinery. The more sober reflections of the *Handbook on the Japanese Army* and the *Japanese Army Memorandum* held little sway over such officers. Compelling evidence of the IJA's inferiority as a potential foe to the 'old China hands' was the apparent inability of the IJA, after mid-1937, to decisively and rapidly rout the "hopeless" Chinese armies and occupy the whole of China. This view took no account of the considerable practical

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difficulties in occupying such an enormous country as China, and incorrectly presupposed that this had been Japan's intention all along. It was also an 'Orientalist' judgement, concluding that the British army would, in similar circumstances, have made a better and complete job of occupying China than the IJA. The 'old China hands' adopted an ethnocentric outlook, concluding that the British army was naturally superior to the IJA, which did not measure up to it, and added a racial tint. Whilst the IJA was accepted to be an effective force in Asia against an Asian enemy, precisely because it was 'Asian', it followed that the IJA was naturally 'inferior' to a Western army. The 'old China hands were unwilling or unable to adapt or change their dismissively 'Orientalist' views of the Japanese, as outlined in the previous chapter, in a way that language officers such as Pender-Cudlipp were on close contact with IJA regiments. The former may have been influenced by the growing suspicion of Japan which developed in Britain during World War I and, in more recent years, by the anti-Japanese headlines of leading British newspapers regarding Japanese 'atrocities' in China. The 'old China hands' were unwittingly assisted in their contemptuous views of the IJA when officers such as Kennedy, Wards, Piggott and Pender-Cudlipp concluded that the IJA was not a match for an advanced 'first-rate' Western army, such as the British.

This conclusion was mirrored in the official publications, the *Handbook on the Japanese Army* and the *Japanese Army Memorandum*. If the British army officers who knew the IJA best and greatly respected it did not rate it as an equal to their own, it is hardly surprising that most of their fellow-officers dismissed the IJA as a genuine threat to British interests in Asia before December 1941. Perhaps even the sympathetic Kennedy, Wards and Piggott could not entirely escape their 'Orientalist' views of the Japanese. The failure to properly disseminate an accurate picture of the IJA and its true capabilities throughout British forces in Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong and Burma was to have disastrous consequences for Britain in 1941-42.

END NOTES

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[5]P. Lowe, 1984, 'Great Britain's Assessment of Japan before the outbreak of the Pacific War', in E.R. May (ed.), *Knowing One's Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars* (Princeton: Princeton UP), pp.456-476. Philip Towle had earlier examined British estimates of the Japanese armed forces between 1900 and 1914, see: P. Towle, 1982, 'British Estimates of Japanese Military Power, 1900-1914', in P. Towle (ed.), *Estimating Foreign Military Power* (London: Croom Helm).

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[7]See: A. Best, 2002, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan); R. J. Aldrich, 2000, *Intelligence and the War Against Japan: Britain, America and the Politics of Secret Service* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP); P. Towle, 2002, 'The British General Staff and Japan, 1918-41', in D. French and B.H. Reid (eds.), *The British General Staff. Reform and Innovation c.1890-1939* (London: Frank Cass); D. Ford, 2006, *Britain's Secret War against Japan, 1937-1945* (London: Routledge).

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[12]'The present situation of Japan', report by Captain Edward H. Rymer RN in 'Japan at War 1914-1918', British Embassy Tokyo, 21 Feb. 1918, NA FO371/3233. See also: Hirama, 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance', p.61.
[13]*Ibid.*
[14]'Memorandum on Anglo-Japanese Relations', March 1916, reproduced in A. Trotter (ed.), 1991, *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office, Confidential Print Part 3: Form the First to the Second World War Series, E. Asia, 1914-1939* (University Publications of America), pp.127-128.
[15]*Ibid.*
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