



Viewing the “Fifteen-Year War” Concept from Keiichi Eguchi’s “A Brief History of the Fifteen-Year War”

Danlamu Yang^(✉)

School of Japanese Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, Songjiang 201600,
Shanghai, China
824527080@qq.com

Abstract. Through Keiichi Eguchi’s research on the “Fifteen-Year War” concept and confronting the two significant historical stages of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (i.e. Partial Anti-Aggression War and Nationwide Anti-Aggression War”), a holistic view of history can be unveiled. Moreover, most of Keiichi Eguchi’s research is about the history of the Sino-Japanese War and is characterized by the comprehensive collection of historical information and scientific, objective analysis of details. It does not only provide a new perspective for the study of the history of Japanese aggression, the Japanese modern history and the development of Japanese militarism, but also promotes our in-depth understanding of the history of China and Japan.

First of all, this study clarifies its objective of conducting research mainly on the narrative of the “Fifteen-Year War” viewpoint. Notes are compiled after reading Keiichi Eguchi’s *A Brief History of the Fifteen-Year War* and relevant documentations and literature related to the “Fifteen-Year War” viewpoint are examined and summarized. The publication background and central content of relevant literature are inspected for translation. Based on the main perspectives of the overall framework and content analysis of research reviews and historical materials, this paper fully recognizes and evaluates the main characteristics of the “Fifteen-Year War” to accomplish its research objectives.

Keywords: Sino-Japanese War · Fifteen-Year War · Keiichi Eguchi · September 18 Incident

1 Introduction

Regarding the important issues of the period in which Japan launched the wars of aggression, Keiichi Eguchi published a series of major influential works, such as *A Brief History of the 15-Year War* [1], *The History of Japanese Imperialism: Before and After the Manchurian Incident* [2], *A Brief History of the 15-Year Sino-Japanese War: From September 18 Incident to the Surrender of Japan* [3], *A Study on the History of Japanese Imperialism* [4], and *History Studies of the 15-Year War* [5]. As a Japanese scholar, he adopted unique research methodologies and a scrupulous academic attitude; he always

adhered to the principle of leveraging raw materials as the basis in the face of historical events, providing an in-depth examination of the social context and wrestling of various parties behind the war.

In his *A Brief History of the Fifteen-Year War*, Keiichi Eguchi argued that the Pacific War was the final outcome of Japan's foreign expansion policy since the First Sino-Japanese War. From the perspective of the continuity of temporal trajectory and historical facts, the Pacific War was an extension of the Second Sino-Japanese War, which itself was an extension of the Manchurian Incident. The three events are closely linked and cannot be separated. In fact, it is pointed out that the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression is a historical course from small-scale to large-scale, and local resistance movements to nationwide anti-aggression war.

Keiichi Eguchi regards the process as a continuous state of war, which he called the Fifteen-Years War. On this point, there exists a coincidence not only with the revision of textbooks in China, but also the entire Chinese narrative framework of the war of anti-Japanese aggression. This monumental historical event, being both the onset of the large-scale Japanese invasion of China and the beginning of the heroic Chinese resistance against aggression, has for a long time been dubbed the "September 18 Incident", which is a major failure to respect and restore historical truth.

2 Literature Review

Recent years have witnessed an increasing public attention to Sino-Japanese relations, accompanied with a growing number of research on modern Japanese and Sino-Japanese history. It is found through literature research that domestic and foreign studies on the "Fifteen-Year War" concept proposed by Keiichi Eguchi have been relatively insufficient. In light of this, this article intends to take a further step to enrich the "Fifteen-Year War" concept mainly by reflecting on *A Brief History of the 15-Year War* and forming new perspectives on the basis of historical materials or the combination of historical theories. This study's topic of investigating Keiichi Eguchi's concept is relatively novel and, meanwhile, difficult, in the translation, understanding, and in-depth analysis of selected paragraphs of the original document, and is therefore challenging to a certain extent.

Chinese journals and papers researching perspectives on Keiichi Eguchi's "Fifteen-Year War" are retrieved from various domestic information collection platforms. Many studies can be found on CNKI with keywords, themes, and titles of "Fifteen-Year War", yet few examine the viewpoints of the concept. Among results retrieved on CNKI with the keyword "Keiichi Eguchi", one conference paper is *Several Issues on the Lugou Bridge Incident* [6] by Yasui Miyoshi and Li Qian, which comments on Keiichi Eguchi's research on the Lugou Bridge Incident and further corroborates that the Sino-Japanese War is the concretization and an inevitable product of Japan's "long-deliberated Continental Policy". In other words, they propose the view that the "first shot" is inseparable from the total war, which provides beneficial reference for this paper.

Through retrieving the subject of "Research on Japan's Fifteen-Year War" on the Project MUSE academic journal website and the EBSCO comprehensive subject database, it was noticed that most of the journals discussed issues related to the Sino-Japanese War and concepts and definitions about the "Fifteen-Year War" theory. Very

few works conducted reviews and discussions of Keiichi Eguchi’s *A Brief History of the 15-Year War*. The keyword “Keiichi Eguchi” was also searched on the J-STAGE database. Among the results, works related to this study with enlightening effect include Source: Opium Policy during the Sino-Japanese War: Focusing on the Mengjiang Governance [7]. Through grasping changes in the political, military and cultural context of the society at that time, this work brings the study of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression closer to the historical reality of that period, making the research results more convincing.

3 Method

First, the search scope of literature collection related to Japan’s “Fifteen-Year War” concept and Keiichi Eguchi’s key viewpoints is established, followed by other preparatory work. Next, upon searching relevant literature, key studies are retrieved, translated, and analyzed to form a scientific and objective understanding of the research content. For instance, key relevant materials are gathered from journal and paper websites for sorting out and summarization. Through studying and analyzing literature materials, useful information on the research topic is collected, and further attempts and explorations are made on the basis of previous literature research. Through inspecting collected documents on Japan’s Fifteen-Year War implicit connotations and ideologies embodied in key documents and sections are deduced.

4 The “Fifteen-Year War” Concept and the Creator’s History

4.1 Origin and Establishment

First and foremost, it is made clear that the historical theory of the “15-year aggression against China” theory was first formally proposed by Shunsuke Tsurumi in his article *War Responsibilities of Intellectuals* published in the January issue of *Chuokoron* in 1956, which manifests the holistic historical perspective that progressive Japanese historians possess on the responsibility for the war. The theory was later referred to by perceptive individuals such as Keiichi Eguchi, Akira Fujiwara, and Seiichi Imai on issues related to the Sino-Japanese War. Japanese scholar Junichiro Kisaka mentioned in his book that “The term ‘Fifteen-Year War’ has significant characteristics in historical understanding for the following three points it emphasizes: First, Japan’s aggression against Asia was driven by its consistent intentions;...Third, the Chinese anti-Japanese aggression national liberation movement that lasted for 15 years was the biggest driving force for the linking of these three wars.” Keiichi Eguchi’s *A Brief History of the 15-Year War* presents further arguments and testimonies with the “Fifteen-Year War” theory as its core point of view.

The “Fifteen-Year War” viewpoint refers to the 15-year historical course of changes and upheavals, starting from the outbreak of the Liutiao Lake Incident (the Manchurian Incident as the Japanese called it) on September 18, 1931, and ending at the acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration on August 14, 1945 and the signing of Japanese Instrument of Surrender to the United Nations on September 2, 1945. Meanwhile, the historical stage

of the “Fifteen-Year War” theory is regarded as three parts: the Manchurian Incident initiated on September 18, 1931, the Sino-Japanese war that started with the Lugou Bridge Incident on July 7, 1937, and the Pacific War following Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Malay Peninsula on December 8, 1941. It is further pointed out that this is a war launched by Japan around the contradiction between the two routes of “Coordinationism towards the US and Britain” and the “Monroe Doctrine in Asia” with a close “internal connection”. The duration of this historical process is regarded as 15 years according to its start and end years. Based on a substantial amount of concrete historical facts and evidence, Keiichi Eguchi proposed that Japan’s war with foreign nations after 1931 was “artificially” devised and waged by the Japanese rulers. In the meantime, he also pointed out that in the decision-making process when conducting a specific investigation of regional wars, it can be concluded that the decision-making body was subject to multiplicity and complexity, suggesting that the 15-year Japanese invasion was not a war systematically planned and implemented in advance.

4.2 Conscience and Character of Progressive Scholars

In the field of Japanese historiography, Keiichi Eguchi is highly regarded by the progressive Chinese Japanese historian Jiang Keshi. In China, within the area of research involving the war of aggression against China, Mr. Yang Dongliang authored the book *Progressive Japanese Historian Keiichi Eguchi* published by People’s Publishing House in 2002. In his book, Yang mentioned that Keiichi Eguchi’s understanding of “victimization and persecution” brought about by the war of aggression against China among the Japanese history academia is a touchstone of a scholar’s conscience and righteousness. Yang highly praised Keiichi Eguchi’s profound knowledge and noble character, and paid tribute to the sustained efforts and long-term academic exchanges between China and Japan. Keiichi Eguchi devoted his life to historical material research in fields such as the Lugou Bridge Incident and the Sino-Japanese Opium Policy; in his *A Study on the History of Japanese Imperialism* published by Aoki Shoten, he re-analyzed the framework of Japanese imperialism, its military, politics, and their joint rule, pioneering the history study of modern Japanese people. In a footnote to the 1982 book *History of Japan*, Keiichi Eguchi mentioned for the first time the incident of the Japanese army’s murder of Okinawa residents. Eguchi Keiichi adopted a scientific and rigorous attitude to fully record the actual damage and victimization in the war. This act was opposed by the Ministry of Education, the content was demanded to be deleted. In the end, the original text by Eguchi was retained due to strong resistance of the Okinawa aborigines against the authorities. Through these, the excellent character of Keiichi Eguchi can be vividly manifested; as a Japanese scholar, he did not glorify Japan’s war crimes but instead respected the fact of war.

5 Manchurian Incident: The Forcibly Initiated Exploited Onset

The battles that Japan was involved in during the fifteen-year period were mainly divided into the Manchurian Incident, the Sino-Japanese War, and the Pacific War. The Manchurian Incident, also known as the September 18 Incident, took place on the night

of September 18, 1931, when Imperial Japanese army started their invasion of north-eastern China. On the premise that Japan preserved its special rights and interests of Manchuria and Mongolia centred on the Manchurian Railway, the Kwantung State and the Kwantung Army, Japan’s sphere of influence was forcibly demarcated in southern Manchuria. Driven by the planning and insistence of the Kwantung Army, Imperial Japan started the first phase of the Fifteen-Year War, marked by a sneak attack on China, intending to completely solve the Manchurian and Mongolian issue, that is, to occupy Manchuria and Mongolia (to seize the interests in northeast China (i.e., Manchuria) and Inner Mongolia), which was also the onset of Imperial Japan’s aggression against China.

The Japanese government neglected the fact that there were fundamental contradictions in the Manchurian and Mongolian issue, which became one of the most profound contradictions facing the Japanese government in the 1920s. It led to the bane in the foreign policy dominated by the coordinationism towards the US and Britain, and allowed the “Monroe Doctrine in Asia” to question it, ultimately causing Japan to move towards aggression and expansion. Nevertheless, whether it is the Coordinationism towards the US and Britain or the Monroe Doctrine in Asia, it must be made clear that Japan’s real purpose was to expand outward and gain from its aggression.

6 Conclusions

Keiichi Eguchi’s *The Fifteen-Year War Theory* not only discusses the war from a unique perspective, but, more importantly, also showcases readers the inspection and argument regarding the origin of the war as well as its social and historical milieu. It highlights that “The Fifteen-Year War was a war of aggression.” Meanwhile, Eguchi describes in the final chapter the brutal oppression and massacre of the people in countries under Japan’s colonial rule, pointing out that Emperor Showa should bear the responsibility of the war. It is not difficult to see that Keiichi Eguchi, as a progressive Japanese scholar, possesses the original intention of upholding the truth and a high sense of social responsibility. In *The Fifteen-Year War Theory*, Keiichi Eguchi conducted in-depth textual research on the social context before the Manchurian Incident, the planning process, the inside story of backing the puppet regime in Manchuria, the reality of the Opium War, and Japan’s foreign aggression ambitions. All accounts involving major decisions and events are supported by raw historical materials, which demonstrates his rigorous academic attitude as a progressive scholar. Furthermore, the book can afford important implications and reference value in the study of the Sino-Japanese War and the history of Sino-Japanese relations.

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