

Japanese Intelligence and Counterinsurgency during the Sino-Japanese War: North China in the 1940s

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【要約】

本稿は 1940 年代に日本陸軍が中国華北地方で実施した治安戦について、情報戦と対ゲリラ戦の側面から検討したものである。第 1 節では盧溝橋事件から 1939 年にいたる華北における戦況を概観し、第 2 節では 1940 年前後の華北における日中両軍の状況を紹介する。第 3・4 節では中国側のゲリラ戦とそれに対する日本側の弱点について考察し、第 5 節において日本側の対策を論じる。

1. Introduction

A skirmish erupted on the night of 7 July 1937 near the Marco Polo Bridge. It led to a full-scale war between Japan and China that went on for the following eight years. The IJA (Imperial Japanese Army) tried to localize the confrontation at first, but the idea to solve political problems between Japan and China by a decisive victory in combat gradually came to dominate the Army leadership. Finally the IJA launched an all-out attack on the Chinese troops in North China on 28 July. Following the fall of Beijing, major cities in North China, such as Shijiazhuang (Hebei) and Taiyuan (Shanxi), also fell to the IJA in a short period of time.

The resistance of the KMT (Kuomintang) forces in North China was badly coordinated. However, the KMT were determined to engage with the Japanese forces at Shanghai. Chiang Kai-shek, who intended to attract international interest by making a stand against the Japanese offensive at Shanghai, stationed his elite troops there. These troops did put up a stubborn resistance.

The IJA had to commit its main forces for the military operation to overthrow the KMT forces which were going to evacuate to the hinterland while resisting. Therefore, the main mission for the IJA in North China was to preserve regional security with scarce military power until the end of the war in 1945.

2. The Situation in North China

Although the IJA occupied the major cities of North China by early 1938, it "only ruled over points and lines, covering districts along traffic lines and major cities" as Col. Muto, who was in

charge of the NCA (North China Army) deputy chief of staff, recalled¹. The KMT forces, on the other hand, withdrew from North China with only a small force remaining in southern Shanxi. The limited and partial occupation by the IJA and the withdrawal of the KMT forces created a power vacuum in North China. According to the judgment of the IJA, the military situation at the end of 1938 was as follows:

"The KMT's regular army already showed loss of momentum and tended to take advantage of weak points in the IJA while organizing guerrilla units. However, judging from a break of its logistics line from southeastern China, the regular army was going to lose its fighting power in the near future"².

Therefore, the main mission for the IJA in North China was to stabilize and preserve regional security by combating any remaining "bandits". The area occupied by the IJA was 600,000 square km, and its population reached 100 million at the time.

The Japanese North China Army deployed 250,000 soldiers, including 9 divisions and 12 independent mixed brigades. These forces shared the occupied area with the Mongolian Garrison Army, the Japanese First Army, the Japanese Twelfth Army and other army troops that were under command. Since areas without garrisons were very likely to fall to the CCP (Chinese Communist Party), the IJA tried to dispose garrisons in county capitals (approx. 500 in North China) as much as possible³. In reality, however, the total number of soldiers per square kilometer was 0.37 and the Japanese garrisons were dispersed in only 200 places. Thus, the IJA had no influence on the locals in occupied areas except near county capitals and major traffic lines⁴.

Meanwhile, according to the Japanese estimation as of May 1939, the size of the Chinese Army reached 900,000 soldiers. These forces included: 380,000 KMT regular army; 240,000 KMT affiliated guerrillas; 120,000 CCP regular army; and 160,000 CCP affiliated guerrillas⁵.

¹ Akira Muto, "Muto Akira Taisa Kaiso-roku" (Memoirs of Col. Muto Akira), National Institute for Defense Studies Military Archives, Japan (hereafter NIDSMA).

² Kitashina Homen Gun, "Senji Geppo Shiryo, Showa 13 nen 10 gatsu" (NCA Headquarters, Monthly Wartime Report, Oct. 1938), NIDSMA.

³ "Gun Senryo Chiiki Chian Jisshi Yoryo" (Operating Procedure on Security in Occupied Area 12. Dec.1937), in Rikugunsho, *Showa 13 Nen Riku Shi Mitsu Dai-nikki 15 go* (Ministry of War, *Highly Confidential Daily Reports on China*, 1939 No.15) NIDSMA, Joji Shimanuki, "Hokushi no Taikyosen" (Anti-CCP Warfare in North China), NIDSMA.

⁴ Boeicho Boei Kenkyusho Senshi-shistu, *Shinajihen Rikugun Sakusen*, (National Institute for Defense Studies Military History Department, *Army Operations during War in China*), Asagumo, 1975, Vol. 3, pp. 255-256.

⁵ Kitashina Homengun Shireibu, "Kitashina Homen Senkyo Chiikinai Heiryoku" (NCA Headquarters, Reports on Military Forces in Occupied Area in North China), Kitashina Homengun Shireibu, *Chugoku Kyosan Undo*

The IJA's policy for North China was to ensure public order in the vicinity of military garrisons and main traffic lines, and to extend the security to the whole area gradually. The IJA give priority on combating communist guerrillas and bandits. Specifically, they stationed troops at strategic points, and built a network of roads connecting these points. Besides, a guard force would work together with a roving unit to suppress guerrillas very quickly and decisively within the area, and tried not to give any bases to the enemy⁶. The lesson learned at an early stage was as follows. "Gather information as quickly as possible, and put the raid first"⁷.

At the time, the IJA thought of the CCP as no more than bandits and expected it would be extinct soon, even while recognizing it as a constant menace⁸. Col. Kane Yoshihara who was in charge of G2 as senior staff officer of NCA, recalls it as follows.

"We had only a superficial understanding of the CCP as a menace or destabilizing factor in the region, and the CCP was taken as bandits or stragglers of the KMT Army. We did not recognize the CCP had strengthened their ability through political activities and guerrilla warfare in North China"⁹.

It was not until the summer of 1940, when the CCP carried out large-scale maneuver warfare, that the IJA came to recognize the CCP as a real threat¹⁰. However it took a certain period of time for the IJA to share that recognition even after the attack in the summer of 1940.

3. The CCP Army's guerrilla warfare tactics

The CCP's regular army possessed two or three mountain guns or trench mortars, five or six light machine guns, and some communication devices per regular regiment (around 3,000 soldiers). The CCP's guerrilla warfare was well-organized, and they basically combined tactics according to

⁵ *no Kaisetsu* (NCA Headquarters, *Commentary on Movement of CCP*), Feb. 1941, p. 32.

⁶ Tada Butai Honbu, *Chian Kosaku Keiken Shuroku* (NCA Headquarters, *Gleaning from Experiences on Security Operation*) Vol. 1, pp. 1-2, NIDSMA.

⁷ Masanobu Tazoe, "Jinchu Tsuisoroku" (Reminiscences on the Field), p. 65, NIDSMA.

⁸ "Joho kiroku" (NCA Intelligence Records), Nov. 1938, NIDSMA.

⁹ Kane Yoshihara, "Yoshihara Taisa no Kaiso" (Reminiscence of Former G1 Senior Officer of NCA, Kane Yoshihara) in Boeicho Boei Kenkyusho Senshi-shistu, *Hokushi no Chian Sen*, (National Institute for Defense Studies Military History Department, *Counterinsurgency in North China*), War History Series, 1968, Vol. 1, p. 128.

¹⁰ Kitashina homengun Shireibu, "Kitashina Homen Kyosan Seiryoku ni taisuru Kansatsu" (NCA Headquarters, Observations on the Influence of the CCP in North China), Oct. 1940, NIDSMA.

circumstances¹¹. The patterns of combat behavior by the CCP Army based on the lessons learnt by the IJA can be listed as follows¹².

1. If the CCP Army was facing only a small IJA contingent, they put up a brave challenge.
2. When the CCP Army tried a surprise attack, they selected a battlefield that would enable an easy retreat. The CCP Army was good at prompt actions in mountain areas, since it kept away from main roads as much as it could while selecting paths on the mountainside.
3. The CCP Army often hid in the mountain villages far away from main traffic lines.
4. The CCP Army avoided large villages, and they dispersed in the mountains when they billeted.
5. In case of retreat, the rear guard of the CCP forces would usually evacuate deliberately in a direction opposite to that of the main force.

These actions could not be fulfilled without the support of local inhabitants. In this sense, political activities aimed at the support of locals were the essence of the CCP's power¹³.

As described above, the CCP avoided battle with the Japanese forces as much as possible and was eager to conduct political activities to consolidate their power. Although they were weak in terms of equipment indeed, they were well-disciplined and well-organized. Besides, it is worth pointing out that they were very good at telecommunications¹⁴.

4. Limitations of the IJA

Due to the series of combat with the IJA which was superior to the KMT Army in equipment and discipline, the KMT Army had been wiped out one by one. On the other hand, since the CCP Army invested their energy to enlarge their sphere of influence, they gradually built up intensity in North China¹⁵. With the growth of the CCP, the IJA came to face some difficulties. These are summarized in two points. First, the information gathering system was inadequate. Being different

¹¹ Sanbo Honbu, "Jikyoku-ho Shi-96 go: Yugeki Senjyutsu" (Army General Staff, Report on Current Affairs (China), No. 96: On Guerrilla Tactics), 1937, pp. 4-10, NIDSMA.

¹² Kitashina Homengun Shireibu, "Joho Kankei Shorui" (NCA Headquarters, Intelligence Documents), Apr. 1941, pp. 5-7, NIDSMA.

¹³ Kitashina Homengun Shireibu, "Chukyo-gun no Senryoku ni taisuru Kansatsu" (NCA Headquarters, Observations on the Fighting Power of the CCP), NIDSMA.

¹⁴ Kitashina homengun Shireibu, "Kitashina Homen Kyosan Seiryoku ni taisuru Kansatsu" (NCA Headquarters, Observations on the Influence of the CCP in North China), Oct. 1940, NIDSMA.

¹⁵ Ibid.

from ordinary military forces, the CCP Army was well versed in underground activities, and kept a tight lid on information. Thus, the IJA could hardly locate their position¹⁶. In this sense, “it was not a matter of fighting power but intelligence. What was important was how to capture them”¹⁷. In some cases, the IJA could not find even a single soldier¹⁸.

On the contrary, the CCP was good at gathering information, and even grasped where the commander of Guard Unit of the IJA slept and how much he drunk at night¹⁹. As the IJA evaluated, “the communication technique of the CCP progressed remarkably in comparison with those of the KMT”²⁰.

Second, the IJA’s equipment and organization were inappropriate. Since the IJA had designed for regular combat, it was so heavily armed that it hardly captured the CCP’s force which moved very quickly with rifles only. As Maj. Kanda pointed out, it is useless to deploy powerful forces if there are no sufficient troops to fully repress the occupied area. And to bring an occupied area fully under control with small troop strength, it was crucial for troops to dispose mobile units and signal communication units²¹.

5. Measure to overcome deficiencies

The first step taken by the IJA to overcome these deficiencies was the renovation and reinforcement of its system for gathering intelligence in support of its counter insurgency efforts against the CCP. As the NCA chief of staff sighed, “[w]hereas the CCP’s espionage network cuts deep into the IJA, Japanese efforts to obtain and analyze information have not yet been up to scratch”²². In some cases, the IJA had no information on the CCP during an operation, so they had to try to subdue the enemy without knowing about its position, as Col. Yoshiitsu Kangawa, the

¹⁶ Kensuke Okabe, “Shinsatsuki Henku Shukusei Sakusen Kankeisya Kaiso Siryo” (Memoirs of Pacification in Jin-Cha-Ji Base), NIDSMA.

¹⁷ Yoshiitsu Kangawa, “Hokushi no Kaiso” (Reminiscence of North China), NIDSMA, Masanori Nozoe “Nozoe Chujo Nisshi” (Diary of Lt. Gen Nozoe), NIDSMA.

¹⁸ Hiraku Suzuki, “Chukyogun to tatakatta gonendan” (Five Years of Fighting against the CCP), NIDSMA.

¹⁹ “Sakata Sanbo no Kyojutsu” (Witness of Staff Officer Sakata), in “Shinsatsuki Henku Shukusei Sakusen Kankeisya Kaiso Siryo” (Memoirs of Pacification in Jin-Cha-Ji Base), NIDSMA.

²⁰ Kitashina homengun Shireibu, “Kitashina Homen Kyosan Seiryoku ni taisuru Kansatsu” (NCA Headquarters, Observations on the Influence of the CCP in North China), Oct. 1940, NIDSMA.

²¹ Kazuo Kanda, “Hokushi Kankei Keireki-to ni kansuru Siryo Chosahyo tsuzuri” (Reminiscence of Former Staff of the First Army Maj. Kazuo Kanda, in File on Questionnaires Related to Occupation in North China), NIDSMA.

²² Hokushi Homengun Shireibu, “Kitashina Homengun Heidanchō Kaidan ni kansuru Shorui” (NCA Headquarters, Materials Presented at the Meeting with Commanders of NCA Corps), Oct. 1941, NIDSMA.

former NCA staff officer, witnessed²³.

In order to overcome these limitations, two steps were taken. The first step was to improve its means for collecting intelligence. Since the IJA had been getting low-accuracy intelligence through agents in the past, it tried to concentrate its efforts on improving SIGINT and COMINT in order to get high-accuracy intelligence on the CCP. Intelligence produced by code breaking was very effective for keeping informed on the activities of the CCP indeed, but the CCP increased its cipher strength by using random digits since the end of the 1940²⁴. Although the IJA had difficulty with code breaking, it managed after a few grueling months to decipher several codes, used in the Jizhong (central Hebei) area headquarters, with the help of the Special Intelligence Section. In addition to the Special Intelligence Section, the IJA established a Radio Intercept Section and a Radio Goniometric Station. According to the Japanese investigation, the CCP's headquarters never stayed in the same area for more than three days. It was absolutely critical for the IJA to correctly understand whether the CCP army was staying in the operation area or not, though details were rarely known²⁵.

In addition to this, the IJA established the special intelligence committee, which aimed at a total understanding of the CCP. Based on past experiences, the IJA ordered the committee to conduct field surveys in the CCP's guerrilla base to understand the actual conditions of the area. The IJA also appointed converts from communism to the Committee to understand the CCP from its doctrinal foundation²⁶. As a result, the IJA came to realize the value of intelligence for security, which had had no direct relationship with operations until that time²⁷.

The second step was to build the NCSGU (North China Special Guard Unit), which was specialized for anti-communist activities. The Japanese defects, as had often been pointed out, was that the IJA's equipment was not suitable for guerrilla warfare, and lacked effective intelligence for collecting the CCP's information at the unit level.

The main mission for the NCSGU, formed in 1943, was to spy on the CCP while fighting against its guerrilla force. Unlike ordinary military police, one of the missions of the Japanese

²³ Yoshiitsu Kangawa, "Hokushi no Kaiso" (Reminiscence of North China), NIDSMA.

²⁴ Yukio Yokoyama, "Tokusyu Joho Kaisoki" (Memories of Special Intelligence), NIDSMA, Zongcanmoubu Jiyaoju, *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefangjun Jiyao Gongzuo Lishi Jianbian, Kangri Zhanzheng Shiqi: Zonghe Ce* (People's Liberation Army General Staff Confidential Bureau, *Brief History of Secret Operations of the People's Liberation Army*: General Volume, Anti-Japanese War period), 1995, pp. 9-11.

²⁵ Hideo Kubota, "Koku Tokusyu Joho Senshi" (War History on Special Air Intelligence), NIDSMA, Yukio Yokoyama, "Tokusyu Joho Kaisoki" (Memories of Special Intelligence), NIDSMA.

²⁶ Ryoichi Misaki, "Hokushigun no Taikyo Chosa" (Anti-CCP Research by the NCA), NIDSMA.

²⁷ Ko-1420 Unit, "Sanko Joho: Chian Joho no Kaisetsu" (NCSGU, Reference Information: Introduction to Intelligence on Security), Jan. 1945.

military police (*kenpeitai*) was to preserve regional security, so they had the authority to investigate, arrest, and interrogate the locals. They were responsible for public order in the occupied areas.

To organize counter-espionage units with fighting strength, the NCSGU combined an officer of the military police with light armed infantry. The NCA appropriated officers of military police for all battalion commanders, 80% of company commanders, 50% of platoon commanders, and 10% of noncommissioned officers. The NCSGU—a unit of multiple functions including a Counter Communist Research Section, Scientific Intelligence Unit, and Special intelligent Unit—was deployed in areas overlapping with regular forces²⁸.

The NCSGU's performance met the Japanese military's expectations in the early stages. However, as the war situation deteriorated, the war potential of the NCSGU had become weakened with the extraction of powerful corps to South China, and with the activation of new units to compensate for the shortage of manpower. In addition, with the progress of the war with the United States, North China, which had rich strategic resources, had become a supply base for the Japanese mainland. Then the NCA could merely secure resource areas and main traffic lines. The deterioration of the war situation deprived the IJA of the power to appease locals and stabilize matters. Thus, the NCA lost the support of locals, which resulted in the destabilization of the occupied areas.

Although the main reason of the NCSGU's failure was a shortage of manpower, there were some other significant problems that the NCSGU had to deal with.

The first problem was the frequent redeployment of troops. In order to optimize intelligence activities, it was required for a unit to stay in the same defense perimeter collecting and analyzing information for a minimum of half a year.

The second problem was that the combined arms did not function well. On the one hand, soldiers from the military police were not accustomed to combat; on the other hand, infantry were not familiar with guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare will not succeed without well-trained, skillful soldiers.

The third problem is that IJA did not grant administrative power to the NCSGU. It is essential for a military power to exercise also economic, ideological and policing power in a coherent way when conducting counterinsurgency operations.

The fourth problem, the most critical point, is that the IJA failed to gain the support of the

²⁸ Dai Riku Mei 862 go (Imperial General Headquarters Army Order No. 862), NIDSMA, "Kitashina Tokubetsu Keibitai Daiikki Sakusen Sento Shoho" (NCSGU Headquarter, NCSGU First Stage Action Report), Jun. 1944.

locals. Notwithstanding the importance of local support for successful guerrilla warfare, the IJA had lost the support of the locals due not only to moral laxness on the IJA's part, but also to the malfeasance of Army civilians, Japanese residents and Chinese collaborators. The CCP army, on the other hand, adhered to army regulations rigidly and treated locals with compassion²⁹. The contrast was so tremendous that North China became insidiously 'red'. The IJA managed to occupy only urban centers, just like pearls floating in a 'red' ocean³⁰.

6. Conclusion

We can derive some lessons from the Japanese experiences that were indispensable for success in counterinsurgency. First, two types of high-accuracy intelligence were of crucial importance. One was military intelligence for operations and the other was intelligence on security. The former often came to hand by SIGINT and COMINT including code breaking, while the latter, and the more important one of the two, usually became available only through constant efforts by military police and experts on the CCP. The NCA realized the importance of intelligence and achieved a certain successful measure in building a mechanism effective for counterinsurgency.

Second, the support of the local population is essential for successfully conducting guerrilla warfare. If military forces need to achieve popular support, appeasing the locals is not enough. The military should seize and attract the minds of the locals through the local governments, and it is highly critical to use locals for administration and give them free hands. Moreover, the military should keep their behavior above reproach. The IJA had failed in this respect. We have to keep in mind that one of the most reliable sources of information was always locals who supported the military from the heart, as Col. Sadashige Orita had noticed³¹. Nevertheless, the IJA only considered military results important, and had no interest in the concerns of locals in general. Accordingly, the IJA ended up shaping a balance of power that favored the CCP.

²⁹ Mitsuhiro Omori, "Kitashina Tokubetsu Keibitai ni kansuru Mondaiten" (Issues Related to NCSGU), NIDSMA.

³⁰ Masanori Nozoe, "Nozoe Chujo Nisshi" (Diary of Lt. Gen. Nozoe), NIDSMA.

³¹ Sadashige Orita, "Tai Chukyo-sen Kaiso" (Reminiscence on Anti-CCP Warfare), NIDSMA.