

The Soviet Military Leadership's Perceptions of Japan during World War II*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the Soviet military leadership's (high ranking officials of the General Staff of the Red Army and of the People's Commissariat for Defense) perceptions of Japan during World War II. Japan-Soviet relations during World War II, with the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact concluded in April 1941 as a strategic framework, were functioned as an official diplomatic negotiation route between the Allied and Axis powers, despite the hostile wartime relationship. Under these circumstances, the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan can be compared with their perceptions of Nazi Germany to find differences in the purpose of war and in the postwar conception. The Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan around the purpose of war indicated the Japanese threat continued to take a hard line since the Manchurian Incident, and, although it was not recognized as a racial and annihilation war like the German-Soviet War, it was assumed that the Soviet Union would enter into the war against Japan for the purpose of fighting militarism and imperialism. On the other hand, the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan around the postwar conception indicated two aspects of preventing the revival of Japanese militarism and imperialism and precaution of Japan's postwar rehabilitation, keeping in mind the idea of securing the rights and interests in postwar East Asia, guaranteed in the secret agreement at the Yalta Conference.

Introduction

This paper analyzes the Soviet military leadership's (high ranking officials of the General Staff of the Red Army and of the People's Commissariat for Defense) perceptions of Japan during World War II. In particular, this paper focuses on the three Soviet military leaders, Joseph V. Stalin, leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Georgy K. Zhukov, who served as Commander of the First Army Group in the Nomonhan Incident (the Battle at Khalkhyn Gol), and Alexander M. Vasilevsky, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Forces in the Far East, and clarifies their perceptions of Japan.

Japan-Soviet relations during World War II, with the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact concluded in April 1941 as a strategic framework, were functioned as an official diplomatic negotiation route between the Allied and Axis powers. This is starkly different from how Japan-Soviet relations in the 1930s were described as a coexistence of war and peace, which significantly

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increased tensions in the Soviet-Manchurian border area due to the Manchurian Incident and the subsequent foundation of Manchuko. In those times, large-scale regional conflicts that peaked in 1939 with the Nomonhan Incident, and the pursuit of the sphere of influence division after the outbreak of World War II as seen in Japanese-Soviet diplomatic coordination and in the “Japan-Germany-Italy-Soviet Quadruple Entente Conception” set forth by the second KONOE Fumimaro cabinet occurred. Additionally, in the latter half of World War II, the German-Soviet peace negotiations towards Japan and the Japanese-US peace negotiations towards the Soviet Union (including the agreements at the termination of war) were sometimes expected to play the role of mutual intermediary countries, but the former raised concerns that releasing Soviet troops from the Eastern Front would increase the threat to Japan in the Far East, the latter raised concerns that releasing Japanese troops from the Pacific Front would increase the threat from the Far East to the Soviet Union, and neither was realized. Until the Soviet Union’s entry into the war against Japan on August 9, 1945, Japan-Soviet relations remained superficially stable, and although the military and diplomatic expectations of the two sides greatly differed, it can be said that a great power relationship was established on mutual non-interference in the Far East region. As such, for an accurate understanding of Japan’s Pacific War and of the Soviet Union’s Great Patriotic War (German-Soviet War), it is important to analyze what kind of external perceptions Japan and the Soviet Union formed of each other during wartime.

Historical research results so far on Japan’s perceptions of the Soviet Union have mainly focused on political and diplomatic views towards the Soviet Union of TERAUCHI Masatake, GOTO Shinpei, KUHARA Fusanosuke, MATSUOKA Yosuke, and YONAI Mitsumasa, who are known as pro-Soviet politicians in the Japanese government, the activities of the Japanese Communist Party and Comintern (Communist International) that aimed for the social spread of communism in Japan, and military intelligence related to the espionage activities of the Japanese officers centered on the Army General Staff, the Navy General Staff, the various special service agencies, and the military attaché system attached to embassies.¹ Particularly with regard to the Japanese military’s perceptions of the Soviet Union, the Japanese Army recognized the Soviet Union as its greatest potential adversary, and carried out anti-Soviet and anti-communist espionage activities all over the world. In addition to gathering and analyzing information on the Soviet Union from the Army General Staff Division 2 Section 5 (Russia Section), the Navy General Staff Division 3 Section 7 (Russia Section, with Section 6 being in charge until October 1932), the Kwantung Army General Staff Office Section 2, and the Harbin Special Service Agency (reorganized into the Kwantung Army Intelligence Office after 1940), the actual situation of anti-Soviet and anti-communist strategy was elucidated from the military attaché system in Eastern European and Middle Eastern regions surrounding the Soviet Union (Poland, Hungary, Latvia,

¹ For more information on recent research results regarding Japan’s perceptions of the Soviet Union, see ASADA Masafumi, *Nichiro Kindaishi: Senso to Heiwa no Hyakunen* (The Modern History of Japan and Russia: A Hundred Years of War and Peace), Kodansha Modern Books Series, 2018, IOKIBE Makoto, SHIMOTOMAI Nobuo, A.V. Torkunov & D.V. Strel’tsov ed, *Nichiro Kankeishi: Parallel History heno Chosen* (The History of Japanese-Russian Relations: Challenging Parallel Histories), University of Tokyo Press, 2015, TOMITA Takeshi, *Senkanki no Nisso Kankei 1917-1937* (Japanese-Soviet Relations During Interbellum 1917-1937), Iwanami Shoten, 2010, WADA Haruki & TOMITA Takeshi, translated and ed, *Siryoshu: Comintern to Nihon Kyosanto* (Collected Materials: Comintern and the Japanese Communist Party), Iwanami Shoten, 2014.

Romania, Finland, Sweden, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan).²

On the other hand, the Soviet Union's perceptions of Japan have not been sufficiently analyzed due to the restrictions on the use of official documents and historical materials in the Soviet era, and historical research on this topic is currently underway due to the declassification of historical archives after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Particularly with respect to the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan, the possibility of research activities at the Archives has dramatically increased, although there were delays in declassifying official documents and historical materials. In addition, the publication of new research results, memoirs, collections of official documents and historical materials can be seen in Russia and the Western countries, however, it is a rather large problem that these are not sufficiently analyzed in Japan.

From that point of view, the purpose of this paper is to verify the reality of the military leadership's perceptions of Japan based on official Russian documents, which was often understood as Stalin's dictatorial ideology (and prejudice), by shedding light on the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan during World War II. In addition to clarifying views towards Japan in the Soviet military leadership, including perceptions of the threats posed by Japan, this paper will also try comparing the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan with the perceptions of Nazi Germany, which had the commonality as an Axis power during World War II. The author hopes that this research will not only deepen the general understanding of the Soviet Union's war leadership towards Japan, but that it will also provide a historical perspective for analyzing modern Russia's perceptions of Japan.

This paper's main research sources are the official documents and historical materials from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) and from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA), as well as memoirs and collections of official documents and historical materials published after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In particular, revised editions of "Memoir of Marshal Zhukov: Retrospective and Contemplation" and "Memoir of Marshal Vasilevsky: My Lifetime of Duty" were used, whose contents were declassified after the collapse of the Soviet Union.³

In this research, the term "war leadership" is defined as "military and diplomatic strategy by the Soviet military leadership, with Stalin at the top, and of operations at the military headquarters in the Far East." In conjunction with this, with regards to the name of the Soviet Army, the "Red Army" (official name: "Workers' and Peasants' Red Army") was renamed to the "Soviet Army" in February 1946 after World War II, but in this paper, "Soviet Army" is sometimes used to

² For books by the involved parties, see NISHIHARA Yukio, *Zenkiroku Harbin Tokumukikan* (All Records of the Harbin Special Service Agency), Mainichi Shimbun Publishing, 1980, HAYASHI Saburo, *Kwantung Army to Kyokuto Russia Gun* (The Kwantung Army and the Russian Army in the Far East: Memos from an Anti-Soviet Intelligence Officer), Fuyo Shobo, 1974. For recent research results, see KOTANI Ken, *Nihon Gun no Intelligence* (Japanese Military Intelligence: Why Was Intelligence Not Utilized?), (Kodansha Métier Selections, 2004), TAJIMA Nobuo, *Nihon Rikugun no Taiso Boryaku* (The Japanese Army's Anti-Soviet Strategy: Japanese and German Anti-Comintern Pact and Eurasian Policy), Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 2017. For more regarding the Japanese pre-war military attaché system, see TACHIKAWA Kyoichi, "Japanese Pre-War Military Attaché System," *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security*, Vol. 16 (December 2015), pp. 147-185.

³ Жуков, Г.К. Воспоминания и Размышления. 14-е издание. Военное Издательство, 2010, Том.1-2., Василевский, А.М. Дело Всей Жизни. Вече, 2014.

mean the Soviet military, so “Red Army” and “Soviet Army” are used together. Additionally, in connection with the reforms to the Red Army’s organization in the latter half of the 1930s, the rank names of senior commanders in the military leadership became easily confused with those of unit commanders, so the author has unified them to new rank names.

1. The Soviet Military Leadership’s Perceptions of Japan

(1) The Soviet Military Leadership’s Information Sources and Stalin’s Perceptions of Japan

The Soviet military leadership formed a variety of intelligence networks as information sources in order to accurate perceptions of Japan. This was not just for the purpose of gathering and analyzing information on Japan’s military threats in the Far East, but was also aimed at making accurate situational assessments of international security in East Asia, including on political trends in the Chinese Nationalist government and on the espionage activities of Western countries in the Shanghai Settlement. As such, the importance of perceptions towards Japan greatly increased due to military conflicts in the Far East such as the Sino-Soviet War (Sino-Soviet Conflict) and the Manchurian Incident.

According to research results in recent years, it has been clarified from confidential reports of the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), records of meetings with representatives of governmental authorities, reporting by TASS News Agency, confidential telegrams between the People’s Commissariat for Foreign Affairs and the Embassy to Japan, the military leadership’s espionage activities, and the Soviet All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) that, with Stalin at its head, the Soviet Union’s Communist Party had a diverse array of Japan-related information sources, including cultural exchanges.⁴ Of these, the military leadership’s espionage activities played a central role in the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff (GRU), the Military Publishing Department of the People’s Commissariat for Defense, and in the Military Council of each military district, headquarters, and fleet, and functioned as the vertical power structure of Stalin’s control system.⁵ Confidential information obtained from these espionage activities was transmitted directly to Stalin by the Director of the Main Intelligence Directorate (who also served as Deputy Chief of Staff of the Red Army from July 1940).

For example, Richard Sorge, who masterminded the Tokyo espionage ring, was famous as a representative intelligence officer of the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, and the mission assigned to the Sorge espionage group’s (Ramsay spy ring) activities within Japan was both diverse and complex. According to his “Prison Diary,” the purposes of the information gathering and analysis of Sorge’s espionage group were: (1) observe in detail Japan’s policy towards the Soviet Union after the Manchurian Incident and carefully study whether Japan is planning an attack on the Soviet Union, (2) conduct accurate observations of the reorganization and reinforcement of the Japanese Army and Air Force units that may be directed towards the Soviet Union, (3) carefully study Japanese-German bilateral relations with a view on if the Japanese-German relationship was

⁴ A.S. Lozhkina, K.E. Cherevko & I.A. Shulatov, “Stalin no Nihonzo to Tainichi Seisaku (Stalin’s Image of Japan and Policy Towards Japan),” *Nichiro Kankeishi*, p. 270.

⁵ The Military Council, which was established in November 1934, initially had 80 members, but its numbers saw large to repeat increases and decreases after the 1937 purge of the Red Army. Военный Совет при Народном Комиссаре Обороны СССР: Документы и Материалы 1938, 1940 гг. РОССПЭН, 2006. С. 23.

becoming closer after Adolf Hitler's government came to power, (4) constantly obtain information about Japan's policies towards China, (5) observe Japan's policies towards Britain and the United States, (6) observe the true role of the Japanese military in determining Japan's foreign policy and pay close attention to trends within the Army that could have an effect on domestic policy, especially to young officers, and (7) constantly obtain information about Japan's heavy industry, paying particular attention to the problem of wartime economic expansion.⁶ In addition to these, Sorge stated that his duties included detailed observations of the February 26th Incident, the Japanese-German military alliance, the Sino-Japanese War, the collapse of Japanese-UK and Japanese-US relations, Japanese policies on World War II and the German-Soviet War, and the Kwantung Army Special Maneuvers (KANTOKUEN), etc.⁷ Sorge's activities were not limited to Japan-Soviet relations, with him analyzing foreign relations between Japan and major foreign countries as well as the economic and political situation in Japan.

What is deeply interesting about the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan before World War II is that perceptions towards Japan in the military leadership were not uniform, there was not a unified view. As Anastasiia S. Lozhkina points out that Vasily K. Blyukher, Commander of Special Far East Army (Soviet Military Advisor in China from 1924 to 1927) and Lev M. Karakhan, Deputy People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs represented the pro-China faction, with the purpose of stabilizing the situation in the Far East after the Manchurian Incident. They aimed to strengthen relations with the Chinese Nationalist government and take a hard line in Japanese-Soviet relations, but this was criticized as unfeasible by Michael N. Tukhachevsky, Chief of Staff of the Red Army, with the hardliner faction against Germany, and by Maxim M. Litvinov, People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, with the internationalist faction, because of concerns about its negative impact on the situation in Europe.⁸ Under these circumstances, the Soviet military leadership paid great attention to the Far East's defense in preparation for a military advance by the Kwantung Army, and based on its Second Five-Year-Plan, it gradually achieved military modernization by increasing the number of Soviet troops in the Far East, strengthening technical equipment, and constructing large-scale military infrastructure in the Far East region.

Another point that can be noted with regards to the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan is their enthusiasm for gathering and analyzing information about Japanese history and culture as an attempt to understand the characteristics of Japanese society and its mentality. This was brought to light by an analysis of Stalin's personal library, with YOKOTE Shinji introducing three books that Stalin emphasized in forming his perceptions of Japan. The first book, "The History of Fascist Military Movements in Japan," was published by Khabarovsk, and through it, Stalin became keenly interested in Japan's economic situation, working class, and rural conditions, and it is also known that he carefully explored the possibility of spreading socialist and communist ideas in Japanese society and the various conditions for doing so. The second book was "Japanese Naval Power," published as a confidential booklet by the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff, and through it Stalin took special interest in the Japanese Navy's training systems, troop

⁶ OBI Toshito ed, *Gendaishi Siryo* (Modern Historical Materials (I) The Sorge Incident 1), Misuzu Shobo, 1962, pp. 23-24.

⁷ For recent research trends on the Sorge Incident, see HANADA Tomoyuki, "Sorge Jiken (The Sorge Incident)," TSUTSUI Kiyotada ed, *Showa Shi Kogi 2* (Showa History Lectures 2), Chikuma Shinsho, 2016, pp. 251-267.

⁸ Lozhkina, "Stalin no Nihonzo to Tainichi Seisaku," *Nichiro Kankeishi*, p. 275.

recruitment systems, organizational chart, and its development and manufacture of submarines, and it is also known that this book provided essential information on Japan's naval power to high ranking Red Army officials. The third book was "The Menace of Japan," by Irish professor of Japanese culture Taid O'Conroy, and through this book Stalin perceived the Japanese as a savage nation who liked blood and whose ancestors were close to "villains" and "scoundrels," with it also being pointed out that Stalin was concerned that such a violent Japanese nation would pose a military threat to the Soviet Union in the future.⁹

What is important here is that the Soviet military leadership focused on full-scale information gathering and analysis on Japan, concentrating on the period between 1933 and 1934, which coincides with the time when Japan withdrew from the League of Nations (the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations in September 1934) and brought to the forefront its hard line against the Soviet Union. According to Oleg V. Khlevnyuk, Stalin explicitly solidified his hardline towards Japan in October 1933, and Khlevnyuk revealed that, in a letter sent to Vyacheslav M. Molotov and Lazar M. Kaganovich, Stalin fiercely argued that "In my opinion, now is the time that the Soviet Union and the rest of the world must prepare for the formation of widespread and rational international public opinion in order to oppose Japanese militarism. This preparation must be developed by the *Pravda* party newspaper or by the *Izvestiya* governmental newspaper. . . . At the same time, it is necessary to sharply depict the imperialist, aggressive, and militarist aspects of Japan."¹⁰

Furthermore, Stalin's speech at the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on March 10, 1939 is noteworthy for showing his recognition of Japan just before World War II. Stalin, after accusing the British, Americans, and French of non-interference policies and of concessions against fascist forces, mentioned that "Japan tried to justify her aggressive actions by the argument that she had been cheated when the Nine-Power Pact was concluded and had not been allowed to extend her territory at the expense of China, whereas Britain and France possess vast colonies. Germany, who had suffered severely as a result of the first imperialist war and the Peace of Versailles, demanded an extension of her territory in Europe and the return of the colonies of which the victors in the first imperialist war had deprived her" and asserting that the new imperialist war was characterized by invading nations violating the interests of non-invading nations by all means.¹¹ On that basis, Stalin emphasized the superiority of the Soviet Union's international position, and after declaring the conclusion of the May 1935 Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, the March 1936 Soviet-Mongolian Friendship and Mutual Assistance Protocol, and the August 1937 Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, stated that "We stand for peaceful, close and friendly relations with all the neighboring countries which have common frontiers with the U.S.S.R. That is our position; and we shall adhere to this position as long as these countries maintain like relations with the Soviet Union, and as long as they make no attempt to trespass, directly or indirectly, on the integrity and inviolability of the frontiers of the Soviet state."¹² From this, it can be understood that Stalin was deeply concerned about the military threat from the East and the West based on the Japanese and German Anti-Comintern Pact, but intended to avoid

⁹ YOKOTE Shinji, "Stalin no Nihon Ninshiki 1945 (Stalin's Perception of Japan 1945)," *Hougaku Ronshu* Vol. 75, No. 5 (May 2002), pp. 4-12.

¹⁰ *Хлевнук, О.В. Сталин и Каганович, Переписка, 1931-1936. РОССПЭН, 2001. С. 386.*

¹¹ СТАЛИН: ПРО ЕТ CONTRA. РХГА/Пальмира. 2017. С. 148.

¹² Там же. С. 154.

a crisis for the Soviet security environment by utilizing alliances and military cooperation with neighboring countries.

In fact, two months later, Japan and the Soviet Union entered into the Nomonhan Incident, a large-scale regional conflict over differences in border recognition, and both sides mobilized more than two divisions of their forces. It should be noted that the reason for the entry of Soviet troops in this battle was, based on the aforementioned mutual assistance protocol, its military alliance with the Mongolian People's Republic, and that the Soviet Army's 57th Special Corps (later reorganized the First Army Group), stationed in Ulaanbaatar at the time, became the main force in the Battle of the Nomonhan Incident. Zhukov was the Commander of the First Army Group at the time, and his perceptions of Japan will be discussed later. According to recent research results, it has come to light that both the Japanese and Soviet armies suffered enormous casualties in this battle, with the Japanese side having 18,000 to 20,000 casualties and the Soviet side having 25,655 casualties.¹³ The Nomonhan Incident can be understood as a regional conflict in which the Soviet military leadership's perceptions towards Japan took form and surfaced as a hard line against Japan.

(2) Comparison with Perceptions of Germany: Purpose of the War

As mentioned above, for the Soviet military leadership, the war with Japan was a battle against militarism and imperialism, but when looked at from the point of view of the purpose of the war, its nature was ideologically different from that of the Wehrmacht (the German Army in World War II, 1935-1945), also one of the Axis powers. With regards to Hitler's war plans, Timothy D. Snyder points out that within the Wehrmacht, there were "four plans" when the German-Soviet War broke out in June 1941. They would, (1) destroy the Soviet Union in weeks with a Blitzkrieg victory, (2) starve 30 million people (Eastern and Central Europe) by a "Hunger Plan" in months, (3) make Poland and the occupied eastern regions into German colonies (Germanization) based on the Master Plan for the East, and (4) eliminate European Jews by embarking on a "final solution" after the war.¹⁴ These war plans were not just aimed at achieving normal military victories and strategic goals, but also at exterminating the Slavs, who were the main ethnic group in the Soviet Union and in Eastern and Central Europe, and had overtones of racial and annihilation war to expand and develop the "Lebensraum," or "living space" of the German people.

The link between Hitler's racism and the purpose of the war was clearly written in the "Hossbach Memorandum," in which Hitler himself lays out his war plans, emphasizing that "The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community [Volksmasse] and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space" and stating that "Germany's future was therefore wholly conditional upon the solving of the need for space."¹⁵ Afterwards, the idea of a German-Soviet War as a racial war is said to have influenced the Wehrmacht's war plans even before the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact was concluded on August 23, 1939. Führer Directive No. 21,

¹³ For the number of casualties on the Japanese side, see HATA Ikuhiko, *Mei to An no Nomonhan Senshi* (History of Nomonhan, Light and Dark), PHP Institute, 2014, p. 347. For the number of casualties on the Soviet Side, see *Кривошеев, Г.Ф.* Россия и СССР в войнах XX века. Книга потерь. М., 2010. С. 159. For recent research results on the Nomonhan Incident, see HANADA Tomoyuki, "The Nomonhan Incident and the Japanese-Soviet Neutrality Pact," TSUTSUI Kiyotada ed, *Fifteen Lectures on Showa Japan: Road to the Pacific War in Recent Historiography*, Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for Culture, 2016, pp. 177-195.

¹⁴ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, 2010, p. 187.

¹⁵ "Hossbach Memorandum," BERLIN, November 5, 1937. (<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/hossbach.asp>).

for “Operation Barbarossa,” was issued on December 18, 1940, stating that early occupation of the capital of Moscow was not important, with the aim being to strengthen the Army Group Center and carry out an annihilation siege war. After that, he ordered a north-south transversal to carry out an annihilation siege war in the Baltic States and Ukraine.¹⁶ However, in these battle plans, the leaders of the Ministry of Defense assumed that the Soviet Union’s regime would collapse internally in the face of a Blitzkrieg victory, embodying a shared, disdainful view of a Soviet Union that would face a variety of problems such as excessive burdens on its active troops and logistics difficulties. For these reasons, although Germany captured 330,000 prisoners of war in the Battle of Białystok–Minsk, the Army Group Center’s first siege, it allowed many Soviet soldiers to escape eastward and has been criticized as a strategically “empty victory.”¹⁷

The Soviet military leadership’s perception of Germany was based on battles with fascists, militarists, and imperialists, so reflected Wehrmacht’s racist ideology, the Soviet Union held out the purpose of the war as a total war of annihilation for the survival of the nation, and gave absolute priority to achieving great war results via operational plans and mobilization of troops and supplies. This can be gleaned from Stalin’s radio speech broadcast on July 3, 1941, in which he denounced Nazi Germany as a “bloodthirsty aggressor” for breaking the German-Soviet Nonaggression Pact and initiating a war against the Soviet Union, then expressing a strong sense of crisis saying, “The issue is one of life and death for the Soviet government, of life and death for the peoples of the U.S.S.R.; the issue is whether the peoples of the Soviet Union shall be free or fall into slavery. The Soviet peoples must realize this and abandon all complacency; they must mobilize themselves and reorganize all their work on a new, war-time footing.”¹⁸ He loudly proclaimed, “The war with fascist Germany cannot be considered an ordinary war. It is not only a war between two armies, it is also a great war of the entire Soviet peoples against the German-fascist armies. The aim of this Great Patriotic War against the fascist oppressors is not only to eliminate the danger hanging over our country, but also to aid all the European peoples groaning under the yoke of German fascism,” evoking wartime patriotism by comparing it to the “War for the Fatherland” between the Russian Imperial Army and the French Continental Army during the Napoleonic Wars.¹⁹ Relatedly, the Soviet government decided to dissolve Comintern in June 1943 in order to strengthen lines of international cooperation with the United Kingdom and the United States, and in September 1943, announced a policy of reconciliation with the Russian Orthodox Church and approving a revival of the Church’s patriarchate system, which can be thought of as making spiritual ties in order to prevail against the Wehrmacht.

What is interesting here is the differences with the Soviet military leadership’s purpose for the war against Japan. Although not well known within Japan, by definition, the Soviet Union’s

¹⁶ With regards to the purpose of the Wehrmacht’s German-Soviet War, the “Program School,” which explains Hitler’s conquest plans and political decisions as the main rationale, became mainstream in the field of modern German historical research, and its argument is based on the fact that, at Berchtesgaden on July 31, 1940, Hitler told the Wehrmacht leaders that he intended to wage war against the Soviet Union and that meetings with Commissar for Foreign Affairs Molotov broke down in November 1940. On the other hand, recent research results have focused on the existence of the anti-Soviet “Marcks Plan” and “Rosberg Plan” battle plans, which were created behind the scenes at the Wehrmacht. OHKI Tsuyoshi, *Dokusosen* (The German-Soviet War: The Terrible War of Annihilation), Iwanami Shinsho, 2019, pp. 20-28.

¹⁷ OHKI Tsuyoshi, *Doitsu Gunjishi* (German Military History: Image and Reality), Sakuhinsha, 2016, p. 257.

¹⁸ СТАЛИН: ПРО ЕТ КОНТРА. С. 174.

¹⁹ Там же. С. 175.

entry into the war against Japan is not included in the Great Patriotic War, which refers to the battles from the Wehrmacht's military advance via Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, until Germany's unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945. Additionally, the idea of racial and annihilation war, as seen in the German-Soviet War, is not found in official documents and historical materials around the purpose of the war against Japan. Therefore, it can be said that during World War II there was an ideological difference in the Soviet military leadership's purpose for war with Japan and for war with Germany even though commonality can be found between the militarism and imperialism of the two Axis powers.

The Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan during World War II can be analyzed from the Soviet Union's diplomatic negotiation process with the United Kingdom and the United States in regard to Soviet entry into the war against Japan. After the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 8, 1941, British Foreign Secretary Robert Anthony Eden asked Stalin on December 20 about the possibility of the Soviet Union entering into the war against Japan, and at the time, Stalin carefully answered that "If the Soviet Union declares war on Japan, then the Soviet Union will have to wage a truly serious war on land, on air, and on sea. This is completely different from Belgium and Greece declaring war on Japan. The government of the Soviet Union will have to carefully calculate possibilities and powers. At present, the Soviet Union is not yet ready to engage in war with Japan."²⁰ Additionally, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt asked the Soviet military leadership for permission to use air force bases in the Far East, Stalin refused, citing the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact and the intensification of the German-Soviet War. And while the Soviet Union replied that "We must resolutely wage war with our main enemy, Hitler's Empire," it emphasized that the anti-Japanese front in the Pacific war and the anti-Japanese war on mainland China were part of the joint front in the war against the Axis powers.²¹

Stalin's clear expression of intent regarding entry into the war against Japan was allegedly a statement to United States Secretary of State Cordell Hull at the Third Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers in 1943, but what is noteworthy when considering perceptions of Japan is the content of Stalin's speech at the November 6, 1944, celebrations for the 27th Anniversary of October Revolution. At this time, Stalin publicly denounced Japan as an "aggressor state" while showing a sense of caution when referring to it saying, "One cannot regard as an accident such distasteful facts as the Pearl Harbor "incident," the loss of the Philippines and other Pacific Islands, the loss of Hong Kong and Singapore, when Japan, as the aggressor state, proved to be better prepared for war than Great Britain and the United States of America, which pursued a policy of peace. . . . Accordingly it is not to be denied that in the future, the peace-loving nations may once more find themselves caught off their guard by aggression unless, of course, they work out special measures right now which can avert it."²² This tone was also seen in the April 5, 1945 denunciation of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, with Commissar for Foreign Affairs Molotov explaining that Operation Barbarossa and the attack on Pearl Harbor had not occurred when the pact was originally concluded, "Since that time, the situation has been basically altered. Germany

²⁰ YOKOTE, "Stalin no Nihon Ninshiki 1945," p. 14.

²¹ Boris Slavinsky, *Nisso Senso heno Michi* (USSR-Japan: On the Way to War, A Diplomatic History of 1937-1945)" translated by Katoh Yukihiro, Kyodo News, 1999, p. 322.

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed, *Senji Nisso Koushoshi* (History of Japanese-Soviet Wartime Negotiations), Vol. 2, Yumani Shobou, 2006, pp. 894-895.

has attacked the USSR, and Japan, the ally of Germany, is aiding the latter in its war against the USSR. Furthermore, Japan is waging war with the USA and Great Britain, which are the allies of the Soviet Union. In these circumstances the neutrality pact between the USSR and Japan has lost its sense, and the prolongation of that pact has become impossible.”²³

As described above, when analyzing the Soviet military leadership’s perception of Japan from the perspective of the purpose of the war, although the war with Japan ideologically differs from the Wehrmacht’s racial and annihilation war, it can still be seen, through the hard line taken towards Japan before World War II, that the Soviet military’s leadership recognized the Japanese threat. Additionally, even when taking into account the purpose of the war, which was to fight militarism and imperialism, it can be seen that Stalin envisioned the Soviet Union’s future participation in the war against Japan.

(3) Comparison with Perceptions of Germany: Postwar Conception

Another important point to consider when comparing the Soviet military leadership’s perceptions of Japan during World War II to perceptions of Germany concerns the German and Japanese postwar conceptions. This is an important theme that attracts attention not only as the termination of World War II, but also as the origin of the US-Soviet Cold War and the Asian Cold War, and there is a variety of previous research.²⁴ In this paper, the focus will be on the postwar conception before the end of World War II.

As for the Soviet military leadership’s perceptions of Germany around the postwar conception, there was a great deal of turmoil between the Soviet Union’s expansion into Eastern and Central Europe and the postwar security ideas for Europe as a whole, starting with the postwar problem of occupying Germany. In particular, the Soviet military leadership, which had fought a racial and annihilation war with the Wehrmacht, strongly demanded that Germany be weakened after the war by dividing and occupying it in order to prevent the revival of German militarism and imperialism, and strongly insisted on forcing Germany to acknowledge the result of the war through unconditional surrender to the Allies. Roosevelt also shared this idea of Germany accepting defeat, which was based on the failure to instill a sense of defeat in Germany after World War I attributing to the rise of Hitler’s Nazi regime. For this reason, the three major powers of Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, declared at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 that “It is our inflexible purpose to destroy German militarism and Nazism and to ensure that Germany will never again be able to disturb the peace of the world. We are determined to disarm and disband all German armed forces; break up for all time the German General Staff that has repeatedly contrived the resurgence of German militarism.”²⁵

On the other hand, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill assented to the Yalta agreement,

²³ Ibid., p. 903.

²⁴ For more information on Japan’s postwar plans for the United States and the Soviet Union, see SHIMOTOMAI Nobuo, *Asia Reishenji* (The History of the Cold War in Asia), Chuko Shinsho, 2004., HASEGAWA Tsuyoshi, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman, and the surrender of Japan*, Harvard University Press, 2005., Susan Butler, *Roosevelt and Stalin: Portrait of a Partnership*, Knopf, 2015.

²⁵ Arthur Conte, *Yalta Kaidan: Sekai no Bunkatsu* (Dividing the World at the Yalta Conference: A Record of the Eight Days that Determined the Postwar System), translated by YAMAGUCHI Toshiaki, Nigensha, 2009, p. 410.

but, in view of his overarching goal of reconstructing the British Empire, traditional anti-Soviet sentiment, and postwar security conception of Europe as a whole, Churchill was very wary of the Soviet Union expanding into Eastern and Central Europe, and supported reconstructing postwar Germany in order to form a strong anti-Soviet nation on the European continent. This was closely related to Britain's support for Free French and the Soviet Union's support for the Lublin Committee (Polish Committee of National Liberation), and the historical background for the formation of perceptions towards Germany can be seen while looking at the postwar conception. In particular, as the end of World War II approached, Churchill showed an awareness of the threats of the Soviet Union's military presence and of Communist ideology in continental Europe, and in considering the Russians as "a chaotic, semi-Asian group on the other side of the wall of European civilization," it is believed that he attempted to make compatible diplomatic needs for European cooperation and integration for postwar reconstruction with military needs based on the idea of a balance of powers.²⁶

Amidst these circumstances, in Stalin's speech at the 1944 celebrations for the Anniversary of the October Revolution, he said that "After her defeat, Germany will, of course, be disarmed, both in the economic and political sense. It would, however, be naïve to think that she will not attempt to restore her might and launch new aggression. It is common knowledge that the German leaders are already now preparing for a new war. History shows that a short period—some 20 or 30 years—is enough for Germany to recover from defeat and re-establish her might," showing a strong sense of caution about the reconstruction of postwar Germany.²⁷ On top of that, in order to prevent a new invasion from Germany, or to prevent the development of a major war should an invasion occur, Stalin agreed to the establishment of a special institution for peacekeeping and security and to the establishment of a leadership organization for the institution. With regards to the establishment of this special institution for peacekeeping and security, Stalin supported Roosevelt's postwar conception of a four-country system that included the three major powers of the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union, as well as the Chinese Nationalist government, and it has been shown that, at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference in September 1944, Stalin was willing to draft the United Nations charter despite confronting the British and American representatives over the veto power of the Security Council's permanent members.²⁸

Also noteworthy as a recent research result is that Stalin insisted on expanding the Soviet Union into Eastern and Central Europe for the unity of the Slavic peoples. When Stalin met with the delegation from Czechoslovakia at the end of March 1945, he emphatically described his postwar conception for Europe, "We are the new Slavophile-Leninists, Slavophile-Bolsheviks, communists who stand for the unity and alliance of the Slavic peoples. We consider that irrespective of political and social differences, irrespective of social and ethnic differences, all Slavs must ally with one

²⁶ HOSOYA Yuichi, "Winston Churchill ni okeru Ohshu Togo no Rinen (Winston Churchill and the Idea of European Integration)," *The Hokkaido Law Review*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (May 2001), p. 77.

²⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed, *Senji Nisso Koushoshi*, Vol. 2, p. 893.

²⁸ It has been pointed out that Stalin initially expected financial cooperation and the International Monetary Fund for postwar reconstruction of the Soviet Union. His relationship of trust with Roosevelt is said to have paved the way for tolerating ideological competition between socialist and capitalist economies. Susan Butler, *My Dear Mr. Stalin: The Complete Correspondence between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Joseph V. Stalin*, Yale University Press, 2005, pp. 254-255.

another against the common enemy – the Germans.” Additionally, after mentioning that the Slavs were the most victims of the two world wars, he named the Russians, Ukrainians, Belorussians (now Belarussians), Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, and Polish, arguing that “We will be merciless towards the Germans but our allies will treat them with kid gloves. Thus we Slavs must be prepared for the Germans to rise again against us.”²⁹ In this way, Stalin revealed that he was wary of Germany as a common enemy even after the war, and at the same time questioned whether the United Kingdom and the United States would conform the Soviet Union’s hard line against Germany. However, Stalin’s claims can be understood as distrust of both the United Kingdom and of the United States, but they can also be read as a great cause for establishing the legitimacy of control for the Soviet Union’s expansion into Eastern and Central Europe.

As described above, the Soviet military leadership’s perceptions of Germany around the postwar conception had two aspects of forcing postwar Germany to acknowledge defeat and to prevent the revival of German militarism and imperialism, countering Germany’s reconstruction in the postwar European security conception. It goes without saying that, after Roosevelt’s death on April 12, 1945, these two aspects became apparent in the great power relations between the Soviet Union and both the United Kingdom and the United States, becoming the greatest issue in postwar European security.

How then, was the Soviet military leadership’s perceptions of Japan around the postwar conception? The prerequisite for analyzing this is acquiring rights and interests in the Soviet Union’s postwar East Asia, which was guaranteed by secret agreement at the Yalta Conference. From the perspective of preventing the revival of Japanese militarism and imperialism, it emphasized (1) maintaining the status quo in the Mongolian People’s Republic, (2) the return of Sakhalin and all adjacent islands as a restoration of the rights of the old Russian Empire which were infringed upon by Japan’s “rebellious attack” in 1904, (3) internationalization of the Dalian commercial port and protection of Soviet rights and interests at the port, (4) restoration of leasing rights at Lüshun Port as a base for the Soviet Navy, (5) a joint operation by the Chinese Eastern Railway and the South Manchurian Railway via establishment of a Sino-Soviet joint venture, (6) retention of the full interests of the Chinese National government in Manchuria, and (7) handing over the Kuril Islands to the Soviet Union. Stalin particularly emphasized (2) and (7) in his September 2, 1945, speech commemorating victory over Japan, pointing out that “The southern part of Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands revert to the Soviet Union and henceforth will serve not as a barrier between the Soviet Union and the ocean and as a base for Japanese attack upon our Far East, but as a direct means of communication between the Soviet Union and the ocean and as a base for the defense of our country against Japanese aggression” after mentioning Japan’s “predatory acts” such as the Russo-Japanese War, the Siberian intervention, the Changkufeng Incident (Battle of Lake Khasan), and the Nomonhan Incident, as well as the Soviet Union’s participation in the war against Japan as a retaliatory act.³⁰ It is very interesting that at this time, Stalin strategically positioned South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands territory as an exit to the Pacific Ocean.

Additionally, Stalin said to Roosevelt during discussion for the secret agreement at the Yalta Conference, “The war against Germany clearly threatened the Soviet Union’s survival, but

²⁹ Jeffrey Roberts, *Stalin’s Wars: From World War to Cold War, 1939-1953*, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 234.

³⁰ СТАЛИН: ПРО ИТ КОНТРА. С. 254.

the Russian people may not easily understand why the Soviet Union will be at war with Japan when there has been no major conflict with Japan to date. However, if the above conditions are met, then the Russian people will understand that participation in the war against Japan is in the national interests.”³¹ It can be seen that the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan was positioned as a military and diplomatic strategy for securing rights and interests in postwar East Asia while aiming to prevent the revival of Japanese militarism and imperialism and being aware of the differences with the war against Germany.

On the other hand, in common with perceptions of Germany in the postwar conception, the Soviet military leadership showed a strong sense of caution about reconstructing postwar Japan, and were particularly concerned about the revival of Japanese nationalism. Stalin made this clear on July 7, 1945, in a meeting with T.V. Soong, President of the Executive Yuan of the Chinese Nationalist government stating, “Japan will not be ruined even if one accepts unconditional surrender, like Germany. Both of these nations are very strong. After Versailles, all thought Germany would not raise. 15-20 years, she recovered. Same would happen with Japan even if she is put on her knees.”³² Additionally, after talking of the incomplete connections between the Trans-Siberian Railway and the infrastructure at Vladivostok, Sovetskaya Gavan, Petropavlovsk, and De-Kastri, which were major Far East ports for the Soviet military, Stalin said at the meeting that “To complete the Soviet defense system in the Far East, we must construct a railroad that crosses Siberia north of Lake Baikal. This requires 40 years. As such, we need an alliance with the Chinese National government. During the period, the Soviet Union will secure rights and interests in Manchuria, but, when the deadline expires, the Soviet Union will waive its rights and interests in Manchuria.”³³

As described above, while keeping in mind the goal of securing its rights and interests in postwar East Asia, the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan around the postwar conception had two aspects of preventing the revival of Japanese militarism and imperialism and cautiousness about the postwar reconstruction of Japan. In order to deal with these two aspects, Stalin achieved great effects by positioning possession of the South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands territories as a strategic means and by concluding an alliance with the Chinese National government (the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance was concluded on August 14, 1945), both of which became the Soviet Union's strategic foundation in postwar East Asia.³⁴ Although this perception of the Japanese threat can be regarded as an extension of the hard line towards Japan that existed before World War II, the Soviet military leadership also hid its strategic intentions by informing the Chinese National government of the strength of the Japanese nation, fueling anxiety to try and have the Chinese National government allow the Soviet Union to secure its rights and interests in postwar East Asia.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan ed, *Senji Nisso Koushoshi*, Vol. 2, pp. 1068-1069.

³² ASADA Masafumi, *Nichiro Kindaishi*, p. 414.

³³ Русско-Китайские Отношения в XX веке: материалы и документы. Памятники исторической мысли, 2000. Т. 4-2, С. 89.

³⁴ For a record of the meetings between Stalin and T. V. Soong, as well as the entire Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance, see TERAYAMA Kyosuke, *Stalin to Mongol 1931-1946* (Stalin and Mongolia, 1931-1946), Misuzu Shobo, 2017, pp. 431-438.

2. Perceptions of Japan by Soviet Marshals

In understanding the perceptions of high ranking Soviet Army officials towards Japan during World War II, it is important to mention both Zhukov, Commander of the First Army Group in the Nomonhan Incident, and Vasilevsky, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Forces in the Far East during the Soviet Military Offensive in Manchuria. Not only did they have a war record of military victories against Japan, but they also exerted great influence on the Soviet military's leadership during World War II as the Chief of Staff of the Red Army, and as heroes of the Fatherland. It is very appropriate to study them in order to analyze perceptions towards Japan of two marshals in the Soviet military leadership.

From this point of view, this chapter clarifies the reality of Soviet Marshals' perceptions towards Japan by shedding light on descriptions found in Zhukov's and Vasilevsky's memoirs. As such, unlike the aforementioned purpose of war and the postwar conception related to perceptions of Japan, the discussion will proceed by focusing on operational dimensions of field commanders in the Far East.

(1) Zhukov's Perceptions of Japan in the Nomonhan Incident

The Nomonhan Incident broke out just before the World War II in the Far East, which became a large-scale regional conflict between the Japanese-Manchurian forces and the Soviet-Mongolian forces, and can be thought of as a battle of great historical significance, in view of the enormous number of casualties, the advanced military technology deployed in armored and aerial combat, and the logistics activities centered on strategic engagements and military transportation via the Trans-Siberian Railway. Additionally, in consideration of this battle's impact on the European and East Asian security environment, it can be regarded as one of the 20th century's major regional conflicts,³⁵ and it goes without saying that the Nomonhan Incident is an important battle in understanding Zhukov's perceptions of Japan.

To begin with, a brief biography of Zhukov will be introduced. Born in 1896 in the Kaluga province near Moscow Oblast, he enlisted in the Red Army in October 1918, and before World War II, served as Chief of the 4th Cavalry Division, Chief of the 3rd Cavalry Corps, Chief of the 6th Cossacks Corps, and Deputy Commander of the Belorussia Military District. During World War II after the Nomonhan Incident, he served as Commander of the Kiev Special Military District, Chief of Staff of the Red Army, Commander of the Leningrad Front, Commander of the Western Front, and Commander of the First Belorussia Front, etc., and commanded major battles on the Eastern Front, including the Battle of Moscow, the Battle of Leningrad, the Battle of Stalingrad, the Battle of Kursk, Operation Bagration, and the Battle of Berlin. After the war, he served as Commander of the Soviet occupation zone of Germany and as Minister of Defense, and became a representative of the Soviet Army.³⁶

Zhukov was ordered to move to the Far East on May 24, 1939 (there also exists official documents and historical materials that put the date as June 2). On this day, Kliment Y. Voroshilov, People's Commissariat for Defense, explained to Zhukov that "The Japanese Army has suddenly

³⁵ HANADA Tomoyuki, "Soren kara mita Nomonhan Jiken (The Battle in the Nomonhan Incident as Seen from the Viewpoint of the Soviet War Leadership)," *Soren to Higashi Asia no Kokusai Seiji 1919-1941* (International Politics of the Soviet Union and East Asia 1919-1941), Misuzu Shobo, 2017, p. 286.

³⁶ Военный Энциклопедический Словарь. Военное Издательство, 2007. С. 259-260.

invaded our friend country, the Mongolian People's Republic, and the Soviet government is obliged to defend them from all external aggression because of a Protocol concluded with the Mongolian People's Republic on March 12, 1936."³⁷ Voroshilov pointed to a map of the Far East region and told Zhukov that "It appears that the Japanese Army's Hailar garrison has invaded the territory of the Mongolian People's Republic and attacked the Mongolian border guards defending the eastern banks of the Khalkh River," and ordered Zhukov to take command of the battlefield.³⁸ Zhukov immediately headed to Tamsk (Tamsak-Bulak), where the 57th Special Corps Command was stationed, and was appointed to replace the commander Nikolai V. Feklenko.

Zhukov's perception of Japan was characterized by his duty to defend the Mongolian People's Republic against aggression by the Japanese Army. Upon being assigned to the Far East, he understood that the Nomonhan Incident was not a border dispute, but aggression from Japan, saying, "All conditions predicted that this was not a border dispute, that Japan had not abandoned its intention to invade the Mongolian People's Republic and the Soviet Union's Far East, and that even larger Japanese Army military actions would be in the near future. It told me what I had to do."³⁹ And "the Japanese government had entrusted this to the Kwantung Army in order to realize an attempted invasion and advance the military to the border of the Mongolian People's Republic," which he analyzed as "The Japanese government, in order to hide the true purpose of its border invasion of the Mongolian People's Republic, decided to arouse international public opinion that its aggression is a border dispute." Additionally, Zhukov mentioned the Kwantung Army's military advance while mixing in his own views that "The Japanese Army, in order to make their convictions large and secure, undertook no military actions by the bulk of their forces at the beginning of the military advance, letting units with special missions advance at first, and then deciding to increase its forces as the military actions developed. This was on the assumption that they could stop their aggressions and withdraw to their territory if an unfavorable situation resulted from the attacks on the Red Army."⁴⁰ This reveals that Zhukov understood the Nomonhan Incident as a well-prepared and systematic military action by the Japanese Army, not as a border dispute, and also that he predicted the possibility that the Kwantung Army's military advance would develop in stages.

In connection with this, Zhukov in his "Memoir" mentions the existence of an operational plan within the Japanese Army called the "*Nomonhan Jiken Dainiji Sakusen* (The Second Nomonhan Incident Operational Plan)," and he reveals that this plan lists "(1) siege and annihilate the Soviet-Mongolian army group located on the eastern bank of the Khalkh River, (2) cross the Khalkh River and advance to the left bank in order to destroy the Soviet Army's reserve forces, and (3) build a bridgehead on the left bank of the Khalkh River to secure subsequent military actions by the Japanese Army."⁴¹ Zhukov asserts that the Soviet-Mongolian forces needed to prepare for a counterattack as it was expected that the Japanese offensive operation would be

³⁷ Жуков. Воспоминания и Размышления. Т-1. С. 179. The main cause of the Nomonhan Incident was attributed to differences in border recognition between Japan and the Soviet Union, and that Japanese-Manchurian forces recognized the Khalkh River as the border line while Soviet-Mongolian forces recognized the border line as approx. 13 kilometers east of the Khalkh River.

³⁸ Там же. С. 180.

³⁹ Там же. С. 179-180.

⁴⁰ Там же. С. 180.

⁴¹ Там же. С. 184-185.

carried out by the time autumn arrived. As important points, he notes that “operational and tactical surprise attacks” were decisive factors for the success of the Soviet-Mongolian forces’ offensive operations, and notes that this required the Japanese Army to “be trapped in a position wherein it could not counter the Red Army’s devastating attacks and could not carry out counter-offensive operations.”⁴² Additionally, he analyzed that “the Japanese Army does not have excellent tank units and mechanized units. . . . It is not possible to quickly deploy reinforcement units from the depth of their own forces” and planned siege and annihilate operations on both banks of the Khalkh River.⁴³ In fact, the Soviet-Mongolian forces’ offensive operations (the August Attack), a total of 57,000 troops gathered and siege and annihilate operations were carried out by three groups (the Central Group, the Northern Group, and the Southern Group), and the Japanese 23rd Division under the command of Lieutenant General KOMATSUBARA Michitaro suffered devastating attacks. From this, it can be seen that Zhukov’s perceptions of Japan had a great influence on these operational plans.⁴⁴

On the other hand, Zhukov gave a high evaluation to the Japanese Army, saying that “Japanese soldiers are well trained” and that “They are disciplined in combat, serious, and unyielding, and can be considered as particularly strong in defensive battles. Additionally, their young commanders are extremely well trained and fight with fanatical tenacity.” However, he criticized the high ranking officers, saying “Their training is insufficient, they are not aggressive, and can only carry out military action that is strictly by the book.”⁴⁵ He also pointed out that underestimating the Red Army was a characteristic of the Japanese as a whole, stating that “The Soviet Army was said to be lagging technically, and its combat power was depicted in the same way as the that of the Russian Imperial Army during the Russo-Japanese War. Therefore, Japanese soldiers did not anticipate that their battles on both banks of the Khalkh River would be exposed to powerful attacks by Soviet tanks, aircraft, artillery units, and organized infantry divisions.”⁴⁶

As mentioned above, given that he recognized that this battle was not a border dispute but a systematic aggression by the Japanese Army, Zhukov’s perception of Japan in the Nomonhan Incident had a great influence on the Red Army’s operational plans, such as the necessity to prepare for a counterattack against the Kwantung Army’s military advances.

(2) Vasilevsky’s Perceptions of Japan in the Soviet Union’s Entry into the War against Japan

The Soviet Union’s entry into the war against Japan, which began on August 9, 1945, was conducted as Stalin’s final decision, despite being within the period of validity for the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact, and under Vasilevsky’s command, siege and annihilate operations were carried out on three fronts (the Transbaikal Front, the First Far East Front, and the Second Far East

⁴² Там же. С. 190.

⁴³ Там же. С. 190.

⁴⁴ HANADA, “Soren kara mita Nomonhan Jiken,” pp. 302-303.

⁴⁵ Жуков. Воспоминания и Размышления. Т-1. С. 207-208.

⁴⁶ Там же. С. 197.

Front).⁴⁷ The Soviet Forces in the Far East, which were comprised of the Karelian Front and the Second Ukraine Front (4 armies, 15 army groups, 36 divisions, 53 brigades, etc.) by large-scale military transports from the Eastern Front, succeeded in gathering a total of approx. 1.5 million troops, 5,250 tanks, and 5,170 aircraft, including the number of soldiers originally deployed in the Far East and the Transbaikal Military District. For Vasilevsky, the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan brought Soviet soldiers, immersed in the aftermath of their triumphs in the German-Soviet War, to the Far Eastern Front in order to "defend the Far Eastern region of our socialist homeland" during the final stages of World War II.⁴⁸ On this point, David Glantz describes the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan as World War II's "Encore Performance in Manchuria."⁴⁹

To begin with, a brief biography of Vasilevsky will be introduced. Born in 1895 in Novaya Golchikha, Ivanovo Oblast, as a son of a priest of the Old Believers, he enlisted in the Red Army in 1919, and before World War II, engaged mainly in the Directorate of Military Training of the General Staff, and was in charge of research and planning for deep operation theory and military education reform. During World War II, Vasilevsky served as Chief of the Operations Directorate of the General Staff, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Red Army, and from June 1942, as Chief of Staff of the Red Army (also served as Deputy People's Commissar for Defense). And with Zhukov, Alexei I. Antonov, and Sergei M. Shtemenko, he commanded major battles on the Eastern Front, such as the Battle of Moscow and the Battle of Stalingrad. After being appointed as a member of the State Defense Committee (GKO) in February 1945, he played a central role in creating operational plans for the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan, and in August 1945, served as Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Forces in the Far East. Known for also serving as Chief of Staff and Minister of Defense after World War II, he was described as the brains of the Soviet Army and Stalin's right-hand man.⁵⁰

According to Vasilevsky's "Memoir," he was ordered to move to the Far East in the summer of 1944, and after the end of Operation Bagration, which began on June 22, 1944, Vasilevsky wrote that there was a confidential order from Stalin "entrusting command of the Red Army in the war with Japan, a militarist in the Far East."⁵¹ At the time, Vasilevsky served as Chief of Staff of the Red Army and therefore was aware that at the Tehran Conference Stalin had "agreed in principle" to enter into the war against Japan, and did not show any exceptional surprise. According to research results in recent years, full-scale operational preparations for the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan began after September 1944, and based on estimates by the General Staff of the Red Army, the Soviet Union proposed to the United States a significant increase from 30 divisions to 60 divisions for the Far Eastern Front and requested equipment and fuel for 1.5 million soldiers as

⁴⁷ On June 28, 1945, the Soviet Supreme General Headquarters (Stavka) gave special confidential orders for strategic offensives in Manchuria on three fronts, with the goal of destroying the Kwantung Army (No. 11112, No. 11113, and No. 11114). HANADA Tomoyuki, "The Soviet Military Offensive in Manchuria and the Collapse of Japanese Empire in August 1945," *Senshi Kenkyu Nenpo* (NIDS Military History Studies Annuals), No. 22, 2019, p. 88.

⁴⁸ *Василевский. Дело Всей Жизни*. С. 550.

⁴⁹ David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* [revised and expanded edition], University Press of Kansas, 2015, p. 346.

⁵⁰ *Военный Энциклопедический Словарь*. Военное Издательство, 2007. С. 112.

⁵¹ *Василевский. Дело Всей Жизни*. С. 552.

logistic support from the United States.⁵²

What is noteworthy about Vasilevsky's perceptions of Japan is his responsibility to defend against Japanese aggression and his analysis around the military forces in Manchuria (the Kwantung Army). He said, "Japanese militarists had planned to seize the Soviet Far East regions for many years; continuously launching military provocations near the Soviet border. Manchuria, Japan's strategic base, was equipped with strong military forces and was preparing to attack the Soviet Union," showing a sense of caution towards the Japanese Army in the Far East region.⁵³ He pointed out that "the situation was the most tense when fascist Germany launched an invasion of our Fatherland," explaining that "eliminating the fires of war in the Far East region is important for all nations and all ethnicities."⁵⁴

In connection with this, Vasilevsky wrote in his "Memoir" that, after the Yalta Conference where the Soviet Union secretly decided to enter into the war against Japan, he talked with Deputy Chief of Staff Antonov and Andrei V. Khrulev, Chief of Military Logistics of the Red Army controlling the Soviet Union's logistical activities. While the General Staff of the Red Army drew up plans for entry into the war against Japan, they estimated that if military vehicles were not transported by rail, then the time entering the war against Japan could be shortened to two or three months after defeating Germany.⁵⁵ This is consistent with the secret agreement at the Yalta Conference, that the Soviet Union would enter the war against Japan within three months after defeating Germany. Interestingly, Vasilevsky envisioned a war against Japan with a view towards the whole of Manchuria saying, "The conception of this vast and large-scale operational plan was created in consideration of the battlefield characteristics where military operations would be deployed. The war would be carried out in an area approximately 150 square kilometers wide and 200-800 kilometers deep, and would develop in both the Sea of Japan and in the Sea of Okhotsk. The operational plan was to divide the Kwantung Army's main forces and destroy each one simultaneously by launching primary offensives towards the center of northeastern China from Transbaikal, Primorskaya Oblast, and Amur Oblast."⁵⁶ On top of that, Vasilevsky mentioned that, in order to realize this operational conception, "The primary offensive operations need to make the right choices and to have the appropriate strengths and formations. . . . Regarding front selection, it is necessary to consider not only the direction of strategic offensive operations, but also the unique geographical shape of the border area and the Japanese Army's deployments and defensive posture."⁵⁷

On the other hand, Vasilevsky calculated that, for the war against Japan, the Japanese Army would be strengthened by summer even though the Kwantung Army was in actuality merely supplementing its forces by "uprooting mobilizations" from elsewhere. He strove to grasp the whole picture of the main forces in Manchuria, Korea, South Sakhalin, and the Kuril Islands. Regarding this point he said, "The Japanese Army's military power is dependent on Manchuria's

⁵² HANADA, "The Soviet Military Offensive in Manchuria and the Collapse of Japanese Empire in August 1945," p. 87.

⁵³ *Василевский*. Дело Всей Жизни. С. 551.

⁵⁴ Там же. С. 551.

⁵⁵ Там же. С. 552-553.

⁵⁶ Там же. С. 554.

⁵⁷ Там же. С. 554.

industry, which produces abundant supplies, food, raw materials, and everything needed for their lives and operations in Manchuria and Korea. The area occupied by the Kwantung Army is home to more than 13,700 kilometers of railroads, 22,000 kilometers of motorways, more than 400 air bases, 870 military warehouses, and multiple defensively fortified cities," showing that he had minutely analyzed the Japanese Army's military power, including Manchuria's national strength.⁵⁸ And in the operational plans issued by the Soviet Supreme General Headquarters on June 28, 1945, it was decided to "(1) Promptly destroy Japanese support forces and advance the three main fronts to major, densely populated areas for the primary forces, and (2) after defeating Kwantung Army reserve units, advance the main forces to the lines of Chifeng, Mukden (Shenyang), Shinkyō (Changchun), Harbin, Jilin, and Yanji, defeat the enemy's strategic army groups, and have Soviet troops lead Northeast China to liberation."⁵⁹

As described above, Vasilevsky's perceptions of Japan for the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan had a great influence on planning large-scale troop operations, with a view to the whole of Manchuria, by positioning war with Japan as a defense of the Far East regions in the final stages of World War II. As such, it can be seen that Vasilevsky was envisioning strategic offensive operations on three fronts, based on the military forces of Manchuria and on the battlefields' geographic characteristics.

Conclusion

The following can be pointed out regarding the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan during World War II. The Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan were formed based on a variety of information gathering and analysis under control systems with Stalin at the top, and a consistent hard line towards Japan can be seen after Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. It is thought that this reflects the purpose of the war, the battle against militarism and imperialism during World War II, and even though the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact was concluded, a perception of the Japanese threat in the Pacific War can be seen. On this point, the war with Japan was never described as a racial and annihilation war as was seen with the German-Soviet War.

In addition, the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan around the postwar conception kept in mind the idea of securing the Soviet Union's rights and interests in postwar East Asia, as agreed upon in the secret agreement at the Yalta Conference, while still having two aspects of preventing the revival of militarism and imperialism and of being wary of Japan's postwar reconstruction. Stalin's positioning of the possession of the South Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands territories as a strategic means is very suggestive when considering the modern Northern Territories issue and the security of both Japan and Russia.

Furthermore, focusing on the perceptions towards Japan held by Zhukov and Vasilevsky, two marshals of the Soviet military leadership, it can be seen that their perceptions of Japan had a great influence on operational plans for the Nomonhan Incident and on operational plans for the Soviet Union's entry into the war against Japan, while also showing their responsibility to defend against a Japanese Army aggression. It can be said this clearly reveals that the military

⁵⁸ Там же. С. 555.

⁵⁹ Там же. С. 556.

leadership's perceptions of Japan occupied an important position in the Soviet Union's war leadership against Japan.

Finally, as shown in the beginning, even further research about the Soviet military leadership's perceptions of Japan is currently progressing, and it is hoped that the results presented in this paper will be helpful.