

Article

The Bombing of Sino-Italian National Aircraft Works (SINAW) in Nanchang: The End of Relations between Italy and the Kuomintang (KMT)

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Abstract: In the 1930s, the Chinese Nationalist government engaged in strategic military cooperation with Fascist Italy, focusing primarily on aviation. This collaboration culminated in the creation of the Sino-Italian National Aircraft Works (SINAW). However, the partnership was abruptly severed in August 1937 when Japan, following its full-scale invasion of China, launched targeted airstrikes on SINAW facilities. The bombing significantly impacted the Nationalist government's politics, diplomacy and military and changed the international political landscape before World War II. The present interdisciplinary study, grounded in historical documentation, archival sources, and theoretical frameworks from international relations, military history, and strategic studies, involved a qualitative analysis to elucidate the strategic rationale behind the Japanese bombing campaign and its geopolitical consequences. It was found that the bombing was intended to sever Sino-Italian cooperation, consolidate Japan's air dominance by crippling China's air force, pressure Italy to abandon China in favour of the Japan-Italy alliance. The Japanese bombing had significant consequences for the Chinese Nationalist government. It deepened distrust toward fascist states, led to policy adjustments domestically and internationally, and accelerated the formation of the Second United Front with the Communists. Globally, it contributed to shifts in power dynamics between fascist and anti-fascist forces. Italy fully aligned with Japan, while the Nationalist government adopted a more confrontational stance against Japanese aggression, helping to foster the development of an international anti-fascist coalition. The present study provides a fresh perspective on pre-World War II diplomacy and offers insight into the imperialist dynamics shaping international relations at the time.

Keywords: Sino-Italian National Aircraft Works (SINAW); Kuomintang (KMT); fascism; Chiang Kai-shek; Sino-Italian Relations

Introduction

In September 1933, the Fascist regime of Italy and the Chinese Nationalist Government (Kuomintang, KMT) initiated a program of military collaboration in the field of aviation. This agreement entailed the provision of trainer aircraft, bombers, and technical training by Italy to support the development of Chinese air capabilities. A key outcome of this collaboration was the establishment of the Sino-Italian National Aircraft Works (SINAW) in Nanchang, which commenced formal operations in April 1937 (Liu, 2014). Incorporating state-of-the-art aviation manufacturing technologies of the period, SINAW represented a significant advancement in industrial capacity, distinguished by its sophisticated production systems,

machinery, and technological infrastructure, on a scale largely unprecedented in China at the time. The facility comprised 29 buildings, encompassing a total constructed area of 127,500 square meters (Ouyang, 2015). In August of the same year, multiple air strikes by the Japanese caused serious damage to the factory area. Despite the visibility of Italian flags on the premises, the factory was deliberately targeted, suggesting a strategic intent to disrupt Sino-Italian cooperation and undermine Chiang Kai-shek's alliance with Italy.

Scholarly consensus generally holds that the Xi'an Incident, initiated by Zhang Xueliang on December 12, 1936, marked the onset of the second phase of cooperation between the CPC and the KMT, the formal beginning of China's War of Resistance against Japan, and a pivotal moment in the evolution of KMT-Italian Fascist relations. Further, the Japanese aerial bombardment of August 1937 is widely regarded as the event that effectively terminated Sino-Italian military cooperation (Michele, 2009). At present, although there are many academic studies on the impact of the "July 7 Incident" in 1937 on Sino-Italian relations, the impact of the Japanese bombing of SINAW on Sino-Italian relations has not been specifically discussed. The aim of the present study was to re-examine this historical event and analyse the deeper motivations behind the Japanese bombing of SINAW, as well as its impact on the politics, diplomacy, and military affairs of the KMT.

The motivations behind the Japanese bombing were thoroughly analysed. The Japanese bombing of the SINAW constituted a calculated strategic manoeuvre within the broader context of Japan's military campaign in China. The primary objective was to undermine Sino-Italian cooperation across military, economic, and diplomatic domains, most notably in the field of aviation technology. By crippling China's nascent air capabilities, Japan sought to secure aerial superiority, thereby removing a key obstacle to the further expansion of its fascist influence in East Asia. Simultaneously, the bombing served as a political signal aimed at pressuring Italy to disengage from its collaboration with the Chinese Nationalist government and instead align itself more closely with Japan. These motivations reveal the multilayered strategic logic underlying the attack, reflecting Japan's broader geopolitical calculations concerning power projection, alliance formation, and imperial expansion on the eve of the Second World War.

The impact of the bombing on the KMT in terms of the political, diplomatic, and military dimensions was also analysed. The Japanese bombing of the SINAW prompted a significant reassessment of both domestic and foreign policy by the leadership of the KMT, particularly under Chiang Kai-shek. Politically, the event catalysed the acceleration of the second phase of cooperation between the KMT and the CPC. On August 18, 1937, the KMT decided to appoint Zhu De and Peng Dehuai as the commander and deputy commander of the Eighth Route Army (Li, 2017). On September 22, 1937, the Central News Agency of KMT published the *Declaration of Cooperation Between Kuomintang and the Communist Party* (2011).

On September 23, Chiang Kai-shek recognised the legal status of the CPC. The second united front between KMT and the CPC was officially established. Diplomatically, the KMT pivoted towards deeper engagement with anti-fascist powers. The signing of the *Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty* on August 21, 1937, facilitated substantial Soviet military assistance to China, marking the country's integration into the broader international anti-fascist alliance. The bombing also symbolised a pivotal shift in the global geopolitical landscape, deepening the divide between fascist and anti-fascist blocs. In response, Fascist Italy realigned its foreign policy, forging closer ties with Japan and Nazi Germany. This strategic reorientation included Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations and its formal recognition of the puppet state of Manchukuo, thereby signifying a definitive diplomatic realignment away from China and in favour of Japan.

Methodology

In the present study, qualitative research was adopted in combination with historical archive analysis, literature research and case analysis. The motivation of the Japanese bombing of SINAW and its extensive impact on the Sino-Italian cooperative relationship were systematically organised and explored in depth. Citation tracking was employed as a primary method for source acquisition, whereby original archival materials were located through the examination of footnotes and reference lists in existing scholarly works. To ensure a balanced and critical analysis, archival sources reflecting divergent perspectives were systematically compared. The research draws upon a wide range of primary materials, including official

government documents, military records, diplomatic correspondence, and other relevant historical archives from both China and Italy during the period of the Republic of China.

The existing research results in related fields were systematically reviewed. These documents included academic topics on Sino-Italian cooperation, the spread of fascism, and international relations in the context of the Sino-Japanese war. The views of different scholars were analysed to determine the background and development trends of Sino-Italian relations, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of this historical event.

Through case analysis, the impact of Japan's aerial bombardment was examined, with particular emphasis on its role in precipitating the collapse of diplomatic and military relations between Fascist Italy and the KMT, as well as Chiang Kai-shek's strategic recalibrations in response to escalating Japanese aggression. The analysis further explores the broader implications of the incident for multiple stakeholders, including its effects on the KMT's domestic and foreign policies, the Italian Fascist regime's repositioning, the strategic orientation of the Japanese Empire, and Italy's subsequent policy shifts within the context of the Sino-Japanese War.

Qualitative data analysis and comparative methods were employed to examine the core components of Sino-Italian cooperation, including military collaboration, joint ventures in aviation technology, and bilateral economic agreements. By comparing Italy's level of support for China in 1935 with its position following the Japanese bombing of 1937, the research aims to clarify the factors that contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations. This comparative framework helps to demonstrate how the bombing served as a critical inflection point, ultimately signifying the dissolution of Sino-Italian cooperation.

The complex motivations and multifaceted background of the Japanese bombing of the SINAW were examined through an interdisciplinary lens, integrating theoretical frameworks from international relations, historical analysis, and military studies. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding that goes beyond Japan's immediate strategic military objectives to also consider the broader shifts in Italian foreign policy. By situating the incident within a wider geopolitical context, the study highlights its far-reaching implications for global power dynamics on the eve of the Second World War.

The Findings and Discussion

The Japanese bombing of SINAW significantly reshaped the KMT's strategic, diplomatic, and military posture, reinforcing its commitment to resisting Japan. Simultaneously, the incident altered the global political landscape by accelerating the collapse of Sino-Italian cooperation and facilitating the formation of the Axis alliance among Germany, Italy, and Japan.

In the present study, particular attention was paid to the dynamic changes in Italian foreign policy, which provides a new perspective on the diplomatic game of international politics in the early World War II and offers a new theoretical support for the academic research of the military and diplomatic relations of the Republic of China. In addition, the present study offers insights into the nature of the current expansion of imperialism, that is, no matter how strong the containment between imperialist countries is, their aggressive nature remains unchanged.

1. The Motivation and Historical Background of the Sino-Italian Cooperation

The period from 1927 to 1937 was referred to as the "golden decade" of the all-round development of the KMT government and was also a period of relatively stable relationship between China and Italy in terms of the economy (Xin, 2021), military and culture (Ilaria, 2019). Notably, Italy played a significant role in supporting China's modernisation efforts by supplying aviation technology and military equipment, thereby contributing to the enhancement of the Nationalist government's military capabilities.

Expansion of Italy's Influence in China through Full Political and Economic Infiltration

In the early 20th century, Italy evolved into a monopolistic imperial power and began expanding its presence in China, establishing a concession in Tianjin in 1902. However, its ambitions were later constrained by the *Nine-Power Treaty* signed in February 1922, which reaffirmed the principles of the Washington Conference

aimed at preserving China's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Valdo, 2007). These limitations curtailed Italy's expansionist activities, while the KMT capitalised on the strategic rivalries among foreign powers to strengthen its own position.

In October 1922, Benito Mussolini's rise to power marked the beginning of Fascist rule in Italy. The new regime placed significant emphasis on strengthening economic relations with China, actively encouraging Italian enterprises to expand their commercial presence. In 1926, the Mussolini government established the Export Research Institute to foster closer economic cooperation between Italian and Chinese firms, contributing to a steady rise in bilateral trade. Between 1923 and 1929, trade volume increased annually, growing from 10 million to 30 million silver dollars. In 1927, Daniele Vare was appointed as Italy's envoy to the Republic of China, coinciding with Chiang Kai-shek's ascension as leader of the Nationalist government, signalling the onset of a new era in Sino-Italian relations.

On November 27, 1928 (Guido, 1994), the Italian and Nanjing governments signed the *Treaty of Friendship and Trade* (Xin, 2021). The Roman government recognised China's tariff autonomy and agreed to revoke extraterritorial jurisdiction in due course. This suggested its supportive position toward the newly established nationalist government, laying the foundation for a strong cooperative relationship between the two countries. On October 17, 1928, Mussolini mentioned in a telegram to the Italian Ambassador to Japan (Pompeo Aloisi) that he wanted to adopt a "peace-first" policy toward China, stating: "although Italy's interests in China are less significant than those of other countries, they are non-negligible and will possibly increase". Mussolini cited two primary reasons: first, China's abundant raw materials and vast market potential; and second, Italy's obligation, as a *grande potenza* (great power), to exert influence in China. According to Fatica, a professor at the Department of Political Science, Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, diplomatic engagement between the Italian Fascist regime and the KMT was active and increasingly close between 1930 and 1937. Using Shanghai as a strategic base, Mussolini intensified Italy's political, economic, and cultural influence in China, resulting in an unprecedented period of development in Sino-Italian relations.

Italy's Support for China's Air Force Development and Its Pursuit of Military Influence

Mussolini viewed the Sino-Japanese conflict as a strategic opportunity for Italy to enhance its international influence and expand its presence in China. He directed the Italian embassy in China to actively engage in mediating the conflict, using diplomacy as a means to elevate Italy's role in regional affairs. On one hand, Italy offered rhetorical support to China to cultivate goodwill and pursue cooperative relations; on the other, it provided tacit backing to Japan by encouraging its defiance of the League of Nations, Britain, and France. This strategy aimed to divert the attention of Western powers toward the Far East, thereby facilitating Italy's own expansionist ambitions in the Mediterranean and Africa.

Mussolini's diplomacy toward China exemplified a flexible and pragmatic approach, manoeuvring between competing blocs to exploit geopolitical tensions. By destabilising the existing international order and fostering a precarious yet manageable balance, Fascist Italy's foreign policy revealed itself to be both realist and opportunistic in nature. On January 28, 1932, the Japanese aggression towards China was extended to Shanghai. Ciano, the son-in-law of Mussolini and the Italian consul in China, actively participated in the mediation. He complied with the principle of "keeping in line with world powers and meeting China's requirements", maintaining Italy's relatively neutral stand. Galeazzo Ciano played an important role in resolving the "Manchurian crisis" in May 1932, and was subsequently appointed the plenipotentiary representative to China (Ma, 2006). Under Ciano's active efforts, Italy began to sell fighter jets, bombers and other aircraft materials to the Nanjing government.

Count Galeazzo Ciano engaged in discussions on Sino-Italian cooperation with Song Ziwen, China's Minister of Finance, which ultimately led to the approval by Kong Xiangxi and Mussolini of Italy's decision to dispatch an air force support mission to Nanchang. Between 1932 and 1935, China and Italy collaborated on several initiatives involving the trade of military equipment and agricultural machinery. However, many of these projects encountered setbacks due to persistent interference from Japan, which sought to obstruct foreign support for China's modernisation efforts. In the early autumn of 1933, Italy sent

an air force support mission of about 20 people to Nanchang. In 1934, the Italian Consulate in Beijing was upgraded to an embassy. Ciano's fruitful activities continued until 1936. He had two basic goals: one was to instigate the Nanjing government to hire Italian experts and political consultants; the other was to ensure that China placed a large number of orders with the Italian enterprises. This formed the strategic backdrop for Rome's military assistance to the Nationalist government, with a particular emphasis on the development and modernisation of China's air force (Guido, 1994).

At the end of 1933, as Chiang Kai-shek once again requested Italy to help train Chinese air force pilots, most of the Italian generals in the mission began to instruct the Chinese air force in flying, bombing, chasing and other techniques in Nanchang Aviation Training Base. In early 1935, the training base was relocated to Luoyang (Zhao). During this period, approximately 250 Chinese air force generals received the training, and about 800 technical personnel were trained in special lectures. Rome's objective extended beyond technical cooperation; it also aimed to deepen its ideological and strategic influence within China's military establishment. For example, the fascist journal *Gerarchia* published the following report: "In Nanchang, where Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters was located, an Italian mission gave a lecture on flight operation for Chinese generals some days ago. Dressed in black shirts and military uniforms, all trainees extended their gratitude to fascism in Italy. Under the order of Chiang Kai-shek, a picture of Mussolini was hung in all classrooms" (*Gerarchia*, 1934).

SINAW, an Important Achievement of Sino-Italian Cooperation

In July 1933, Song Ziwen signed an agreement with Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano in London, laying the foundation for China's procurement of military equipment from Italy. Between 1933 and 1936, China acquired over 130 trainer aircraft and bombers from Italy, significantly enhancing the capabilities of the KMT air force under the framework of Sino-Italian military cooperation. As the war against Japanese aggression began, Nanchang emerged as a key strategic air force base. It hosted two major military airfields: Laoyingfang Airport, constructed in 1933 outside the Shunhua Gate, and Sanjiadian Airport, built in 1934.

At the time, 250 of China's total 305 operational aircraft were stationed at these two facilities, underscoring their critical importance to China's early aerial defence. The Sanjiadian Airport was once called "The Number One Airport in the Far East." Prior to the full outbreak of the War of Resistance against Japan, the SINAW had already developed the capacity to manufacture and repair aircraft. Production included models such as the Breda Ba.25 trainer and the twin-engine Savoia-Marchetti S.81 bomber (Gao). In addition to aircraft manufacturing, SINAW also offered training programs for aviation personnel and provided technical support to nearby airfields. The aircraft produced at SINAW possessed operational range and capability sufficient to conduct direct bombing missions against Japanese airfields in Shanghai, Taipei, and Nanjing.

2. The Change of Italy's Position toward the Chinese War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression

Although Italy initially sought to maintain its cooperative relationship with China, the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, combined with Italy's invasion of Ethiopia on October 3, 1935, and the subsequent imposition of economic and financial sanctions by the League of Nations, triggered a significant shift in Sino-Italian relations (Valdo, 2007). On October 7, 1935, Louis Acampora, the Neapolitan engineer heading the Sino-Italian National Aviation Committee, proposed to the newly appointed Finance Minister Kong Xiangxi that clauses guaranteeing equal treatment for Sino-Italian aviation enterprises alongside other foreign firms be added to relevant contracts.

However, Kong Xiangxi explicitly rejected this request. On November 5, 1935, as a member of the League of Nations, China formally condemned Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, and on November 18, it publicly endorsed the sanctions imposed by the League (1935). Having suffered from Japan's aggression, China naturally drew parallels between Italy's actions in Ethiopia and Japan's earlier "Manchurian Incident," and thus firmly supported the League's punitive measures against Italy. As a result, Sino-Italian relations temporarily deteriorated. Nonetheless, China remained cautious not to sever ties entirely. Finance Minister Kong Xiangxi repeatedly reassured the Italian ambassador that China's support for the sanctions was largely

symbolic, indicating China's desire to maintain the bilateral relationship and restore normal diplomatic engagement once the crisis abated.

Italy's Perception of Threat from Soviet Expansionism

In 1934, the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations, but its relations with Italy gradually deteriorated following Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936 further deepened this divide: the Soviet Union supported the Spanish Republican government, while Italy backed Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces. This alignment reinforced the ideological polarisation between the two powers, symbolising, in the eyes of many Europeans, the broader confrontation between fascist and anti-fascist forces.

Between 1935 and 1936, Italy grew increasingly concerned about the strategic balance in the Mediterranean following the Franco-Soviet alliance, particularly in light of the Soviet Union's potential expansionism through its intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano also closely monitored developments in China and noted the KMT's growing inclination to resist Japanese aggression through collaboration with both the Soviet Union and the CPC. Ciano believed that if Chiang Kai-shek cooperated with Stalin, Italy's interests in China would be threatened due to the Soviet Union's competitive advantage in aviation, and that Japan's threat in East Asia could effectively curb the Soviet Union's intervention in Spanish affairs. Out of this consideration, Italy fundamentally changed its pro-China policy to pro-Japan policy, rather than maintaining traditional friendly relations with China.

The Soviet Union's violent criticism of Italy at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern in August 1935 further deteriorated the Italian-Soviet relations. Although China strongly opposed Italy's unlawful occupation of Ethiopia, it nonetheless sought to re-engage in negotiations to restore bilateral cooperation. From the latter half of 1936, Sino-Italian collaboration gradually resumed but encountered two major challenges. First, both the United States and Germany sought to supplant Italy as China's primary supplier of aviation equipment. Second, Italy's relationship with Japan grew increasingly close, complicating its position as a neutral partner in East Asia (Guido, 1993). By the autumn of 1936, Italy had adopted a dual diplomatic strategy: on the one hand, it provided military support to the nationalist government, and on the other hand, it strengthened diplomatic ties with Japan.

Italy's Recognition of the Xi'an Incident as a Strong Pro-Soviet Union Tendency

On December 12, 1936, the Xi'an Incident occurred, during which Chiang Kai-shek was placed under house arrest by Zhang Xueliang in Shaanxi. The Italian ambassador to China promptly reported the development to Rome, highlighting that Zhang's forces were not only engaged in anti-Japanese resistance but were also cooperating with the CPC. He noted that Chiang was caught between encouraging domestic anti-Japanese sentiment and pursuing a negotiated compromise with Japan. The ambassador further warned that China might pivot toward communism. In response, segments of Italian public opinion speculated that Zhang Xueliang's defiance of Chiang Kai-shek and collaboration with the CPC may have been orchestrated under Soviet influence.

On December 14, Ciano sent a letter to Zhang Xueliang urging him to release Chiang Kai-shek but received no response. Ciano instructed the Chinese ambassador to convey a clear message to Zhang Xueliang: if compelled to choose, Italy would unequivocally align with Japan rather than the Soviet Union. Leveraging personal diplomatic channels, Ciano further warned Zhang that his cooperation with the Soviet Union risked jeopardising China's relationship with Italy, explicitly stating that such actions could result in the loss of "the friendship with the Italian government."

The End of Italy's Dual Foreign Policy

By the spring of 1937, Italy still adhered to a dual foreign policy, maintaining cooperation with the nationalist government and friendly relations with Japan. However, this attitude was changed after the Marco Polo Bridge incident on July 7, 1937. Ciano blamed the Soviet Union for the conflict (Valdo, 2007), and on August 15, the Japanese army attacked the SINAW, which further exacerbated the rift in Sino-Italian

relations. Merely six days later, on August 21, China and the Soviet Union signed the *Sino-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty*, initiating Soviet military assistance to China. In response, Italy's diplomatic stance underwent a fundamental transformation. Ciano abandoned Italy's previously neutral approach to the Far East conflict and instructed the newly appointed ambassador to China that Italy would henceforth align its sympathies with Japan (Valdo, 2007).

3. Italy's Abandonment of China in Favour of Japan after Japanese's Bombing of SINAW

In the 1930s, Japan was concerned about the KMT's potential quick unification of China and imitation of western modernisation system, believing that a developed China would far overtake Japan in terms of strength and influence given its rich resources and economic size (Zhang, 2009). These anxieties intensified as Fascist Italy expanded its ideological and technical influence in China. Japanese observers were particularly alarmed by the possibility that China, under the guise of fascist collaboration, might acquire advanced scientific and military expertise (Bai, 2003) and evolve into a strong, patriarchal national state, distinct from a true fascist regime, capable of challenging Japan's hegemony in East Asia.

The conflict between Japan and China in Northeast China, particularly the Japanese attack on Shanghai in early 1932, heightened Chiang Kai-shek's recognition of the strategic importance of naval and air power in modern warfare. Nevertheless, the development of China's navy and air force during this period was severely constrained by four major obstacles: first, the substantial indemnities imposed on China following the Boxer Rebellion in 1900; second, a dysfunctional and inefficient tax system; third, the loss of tariff autonomy due to unequal treaties imposed by foreign powers; and fourth, internal divisions within the KMT, exacerbated by the Nanjing government's prolonged focus on the "radiation of the CPC", which diverted significant economic resources away from national defence.

In May 1930, the Nationalist government regained the authority to set customs duties and introduced a formal internal tax collection system. By 1932, tax revenues were no longer allocated to the payment of foreign indemnities, enabling the KMT to redirect resources toward military development. Recognising this shift, the Italian government intensified its penetration into Chinese political, economic, and especially military affairs. Italy emerged as a uniquely influential foreign partner in the development of China's air force. However, Japan, committed to expanding its hegemony in East Asia, perceived any enhancement of China's military capabilities as a direct threat to its vision of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere and broader strategic ambitions. As such, the Sino-Italian collaboration in the aviation sector drew significant attention from the Japanese government. Japan sought to disrupt this cooperation for two key reasons: first, to curtail Italy's growing influence in China; and second, to prevent the rapid modernisation of China's military forces, thereby facilitating Japan's own expansionist agenda in Southeast Asia. To this end, Japan took a series of measures to undermine Sino-Italian cooperation.

In 1934, the Japanese ambassador to Italy protested to Mussolini about Italy's military assistance and arms sales to China (Valdo, 2007). At the end of 1936, Japan downgraded its diplomatic mission in Addis Ababa from a legation to a consulate, as part of a reciprocal arrangement allowing the continued operation of the Italian consulate in Shenyang, then under Japanese occupation, through diplomatic negotiations. This gesture was widely interpreted as Italy's initial step toward the de facto recognition of the puppet state of "Manchukuo" as a legitimate regime.

On July 7, 1937, the Sino-Japanese War broke out. On August 15th, the Japanese army bombed the SINAW, an important symbol of Sino-Italian cooperation in air force. According to historical records, the SINAW was targeted and bombed by Japanese forces despite prominently displayed Italian flags on its buildings. Japan's primary objective was to destroy the facility and cripple the Chinese air force, which had been receiving substantial support from Italy. This action aimed to secure Japanese control over the airspace (Giulio, 1935), disrupt China's emerging aircraft manufacturing capabilities, and ultimately undermine further Sino-Italian cooperation in the field of military aviation.

This bombing not only crippled China's air power and severed Chinese ties with Italy, but also pushed Italy to abandon China in favour of Japan, which cleared the path for Japanese expansion in East Asia. After the bombing, Italy made a fundamental shift in foreign policy by forging a formal alliance with

Japan and Germany, withdrawing from the League of Nations, and recognising the pseudo-Manchukuo regime (Cai, 2019). These actions marked the definitive end of Sino-Italian cooperation and significantly reshaped the global geopolitical order on the eve of World War II.

The bombing marked the complete break of Sino-Italian cooperation and caused the KMT government to review its international relations and foreign policy. The bombing of SINAW had a profound political impact on the KMT leadership. In its aftermath, Chiang Kai-shek developed a deep mistrust of fascist regimes, which significantly influenced his strategic assessments and foreign policy decisions. Realising the limitations and risks of aligning with fascist powers, Chiang reassessed his diplomatic orientation and began shifting toward cooperation with anti-fascist states. Simultaneously, the attack strengthened his resolve to resist Japanese aggression and galvanised a more active stance within the KMT government. This shift laid a critical foundation for China's broader engagement in the global anti-fascist struggle.

The bombing of SINAW had significant diplomatic repercussions for the KMT. First, it marked the definitive rupture in relations between the KMT and the Italian Fascist regime (Michele, 2009). Recognising that cooperation with Italy would yield no anticipated gains (Chen, 2015), the KMT government strengthened alliances with anti-fascist states, which promoted the formation of the Second United Front with CPC and the coalition with the Soviet Union to resist Japanese aggression. The cooperation not only reinforced China's forces but also won China broader international support. Second, the bombing prompted a recalibration of the KMT's broader diplomatic strategy, leading to the abandonment of political engagement with fascist regimes such as Italy and the pursuit of closer ties with anti-fascist powers. This realignment reflected a significant shift in the KMT's perception of the global political landscape and its strategic responses to emerging threats.

The bombing of SINAW had immediate and long-term consequences for the military strategy of the KMT. First, the attack resulted in a significant weakening of China's air power. With the destruction of the flagship facility of Sino-Italian cooperation, the KMT lost a key centre for aircraft manufacturing and maintenance, critically impairing its aerial capabilities. Second, the bombing prompted a strategic reassessment by the KMT leadership. Recognising the vulnerability of the Nanchang air base, the government opted to relocate aviation infrastructure to more secure rear-area locations. This decision not only preserved the remaining military-industrial capacity but also contributed to the reconfiguration and long-term development of China's air force.

Conclusion

Several key conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis. First, the Japanese bombing of the SINAW effectively marked the termination of Sino-Italian cooperation. The attack not only dismantled the military-technical partnership between China and Italy but also exposed Japan's strategic intent to pressure Italy and sever its ties with the Nationalist government. This event directly led to the breakdown of bilateral relations, prompting the KMT to recognise the limitations of collaboration with fascist regimes and to shift its focus toward building alliances with anti-fascist powers. The bombing intensified Chiang Kai-shek's distrust in fascist states and affected his strategic assessments and foreign policy. Recognising the limitations of cooperating with fascist regimes, Chiang Kai-shek began to review and adjust his diplomatic policy.

This shift reflected the KMT government's acute awareness of the international landscape and its adaptive strategic responses. The bombing served as a catalyst for the KMT government to strengthen cooperation with anti-fascist states, causing it to take a clear anti-fascist position. This development facilitated the Second United Front with the CPC and promoted the formation of the coalition with the Soviet Union to resist Japanese aggression. Such cooperation not only enhanced China's forces but also won China broader international support. Ultimately, while conflicts among imperialist powers provided temporary diplomatic openings, their underlying aggressive nature remained unchanged. The bombing of SINAW underscores a critical lesson for China's long-term security, only by building and maintaining strong national defence capabilities can sovereignty and survival be ensured. This realisation remains a vital strategic principle for China's future development.

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