

## **2024 IHRP Summer Fellowship**

Final Report

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ALPHA Education

Emma Tang, JD Candidate 2025

I was hosted by the Association for Learning and Preserving the History of WWII in Asia (ALPHA) Education, where I worked as a summer intern. ALPHA Education, founded in 1997, has evolved into a global leader advocating for peace, social justice, and humanity. I was drawn to work at ALPHA Education because I always seek ways to connect with and support my community as an Asian descendant.

The summer program promotes the exploration of sustainable peacebuilding through critical inquiry into the history and legacies of World War II in Asia. It consists of learning, discussion, and research activities. This program was offered in person, remotely, or hybrid. The orientation was conducted via Zoom, and we had students from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Toronto. Participants have diverse academic backgrounds, including history, political science, international relations, and law, and represent several universities, notably from the University of Hong Kong and the University of Toronto. We had weekly staff presentations for each module, student-led discussions, online discussions, and group assignments. We also had individual assignments, which included reflections on weekly readings, replies to other students' reflection posts, and the research project. The topics included Critical Perspectives on World War II in Asia, Roots of Racism, Colonialism and Imperialism, Human Experimentation and Biological & Chemical Warfare, Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, Forced Labour, and Justice and Peace.

At the beginning of the program, on June 9th, it marked the Opening Gala for the WongAvery Asia Pacific Peace Museum. Over 800 guests attended, including senior representatives from the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board, the York Region District School Board, the York Catholic District School Board, and others. The gala was emotional, educational, and meaningful. It featured a mix of performances from the community, including Chinese and Korean artists. The event also recognized major donors and young leaders. Furthermore, it highlighted the museum initiative's story, the project process, and brought attention to the relatively unknown atrocities of WWII in Asia. I worked as part of the backstage team, witnessing the seamless coordination and heartfelt reactions of both performers and attendees, which further enhanced my passion for peace and advocacy.



*Image 1: Backstage student volunteers at the WongAvery Asia Pacific Peace Museum Opening Gala.*

As a group, I worked with another student from the University of Toronto and one from the University of Hong Kong. Together, we completed three assignments, including research on Unit 731 Testimonies, sources on Japanese Military Sexual Slavery, and the Ballad of Hanaoka. This collaboration enhanced our understanding of these significant historical events and strengthened our analytical and teamwork skills. I also co-led two discussions on the topics of Forced Labour, and Justice and Peace. By engaging participants in critical analysis, we aimed to deepen understanding and inspire action towards creating more equitable and peaceful societies.

My research project was dedicated to advancing peace education and exploring its implications for modern times. Gen-Ling Chang, the Deputy Executive Director of ALPHA, was assigned as my research supervisor. At our meetings, not only did I meet with her in her office, but she also provided personal tours of the museum for me to learn and to gather resources. She highlighted resources that could be useful for my research, such as propaganda materials that promoted Japanese militarism and racism, which were reflected in their military strategies. Later, I narrowed down my research topic to Japan's Militarism and War Preparations in Pre-World War II Asia.

I explored the factors that shaped and contributed to Japan's militarism and war preparations. This examination included an analysis of primary and secondary sources to understand the motivations behind the war of aggression. Factors leading to Japan's initiation of war included economic conditions, fear of being colonized, the aspiration to emulate and surpass Western colonial powers, and the ideologies inherent in Japan's militarism. As Japan undertook extensive preparations for war in the prelude, I also examined the strategies employed by Japan to foster acceptance for war among its population, utilizing various mediums to build support for the war effort. Understanding

these historical contexts helps us identify the dangerous potential of similar ideologies in contemporary global politics. I analyzed the connections between militarism and racism, and explored the lessons we can learn to foster peacebuilding in our modern world. I then extended my time at ALPHA Education to investigate the state’s actions and explore how to hold the state accountable, and the essential elements for effective peacekeeping. This enhanced my understanding of the mechanisms that can promote transparency, accountability, and sustained peace in political contexts.



Images 2 and 3: Me and my research supervisor, Gen-ling Chang, the Deputy Executive Director of ALPHA Education, at the WongAvery Asia Pacific Peace Museum.

At the end of the program, each individual presented their research project through Zoom meetings, facilitating discussions on historical events, reconciliation, and peacebuilding strategies. This experience deepened my understanding of how historical insights can inform contemporary peace efforts.



Image 4: Zoom meeting for research project presentations.