CHAPTER 4: THE INCEPTION OF DISCORD BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE US

2. US ANTI-JAPANESE EXCLUSIONARY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Chinese Exclusion Act

Now I must address problems relating to the exclusion of Japanese immigrants, which arose in the US at about the time the Russo-Japanese War was being fought. Along with the struggle for supremacy in Manchuria, those problems formed one main current of conflict between Japan and the US.

The first East Asian immigrants to the US were Chinese, who began arriving in California during the Gold Rush, in 1848. There was a grave shortage of manpower needed for railway construction in the American west, as well as in the emergent mining industry in California. At first the Chinese laborers were made to feel welcome. However, their numbers soon swelled, and when they did, discord with American laborers resulted, arose, giving birth to a movement to exclude Chinese. The exclusion crusade gained strength until finally, in the 1880s, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed (and later made more stringent. After 1906 Chinese laborers were permanently barred from entering the US and its possessions, and Chinese nationals were denied the right to become American citizens.

Japanese emigration to Hawaii

Japanese emigration to the US began as far back as 1861, but at first the number of immigrants was very small. However, in the 1880s, when the Chinese Exclusion Act went into force, the number of Japanese laborers entering the US, replacing the Chinese, began to burgeon.

In Hawaii, after the middle of the 19th century, most of the workers in the sugar-cane industry were Chinese immigrants, but once the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, it affected Hawaii, even though Hawaii was not US territory. As stated earlier, King Kalakaua visited Japan in 1881, at which time he expressed his hope for more Japanese immigrants to Hawaii. In 1884 the Agreement Between Japan and Hawaii Concerning Emigration from Japan[1] was concluded, and in 1885 the first group of 944 public contracted workers arrived in Hawaii. Subsequently the number of Japanese immigrants ballooned. By 1900 there were 61,111 Japanese residing in Hawaii (39.7% of the total population).[2]

The Japanese were the largest foreign group in Hawaii; they outnumbered Chinese and native Hawaiians by two to one, and Americans by nine to one. According to Griswold, "Had the issue

[1] Konishi Naojirō, ed., *Hawaikoku fūdo ryakki* (Brief description of the society of the Kingdom of Hawaii) (in Japanese) (Tokyo: Eishodo, 1884).

[2] Griswold, *op. cit.*, 339.

[of which nation Hawaii should belong to] been decided by numbers of settlers alone, the islands might well have gone to Japan."[3]

Nevertheless, Hawaii was annexed by the US in 1898.

Anti-Japanese trend gains momentum

Until about 1900 Japanese immigration to the continental US did not cause a serious problem. But with the dawning of the 20th century, the number of Japanese immigrants suddenly soared. The reason for this increase was the new territorial status of Hawaii, and the subsequent large numbers of Japanese moving to the West Coast of the US, California in particular. As if corresponding with their increase in numbers, the anti-Japanese movement began to gain momentum.

The Japanese government took remedial action by limiting the number of Japanese emigrants bound for the US, but the anti-Japanese trend in the US remained unabated. Soon politicians from western states resorted to using the "Japanese problem" as a political platform. The Russo-Japanese War served to fuel the flames of the anti-Japanese movement in large part because the war had given rise to a national perception of conflict between Japan and the US. When the war was near an end in May 1905, the Japanese and Korean Exclusion League materialized in San Francisco. The organization used propaganda and provocation to lobby the US Congress, aiming to achieve its objective of expanding the Chinese Exclusion Act to include Japanese.

On April 18, 1906 San Francisco was visited by a huge earthquake, which was followed by catastrophic fires. Since Japan had been plagued by earthquakes throughout its history, the Japanese government was quick to send a gift of ¥500,000 for disaster relief. That gift would be equivalent to over ¥1 billion today, and it amounted to more than the total of similar gifts from other nations. Nevertheless, little appreciation was shown for Japan's generous gesture. Professor Ōmori Fusakichi, a seismological expert from Tokyo University and his team, who came to the US to do research on the earthquake, were greeted by stone-hurling vandals. Japanese restaurants were boycotted, and all the city's newspapers were filled with hateful, anti-Japanese rhetoric day after day, which further poisoned the already anti-Japanese atmosphere.

Proposed segregation of Japanese schoolchildren

In October 1906 the San Francisco Board of Education ordered the segregation of Japanese schoolchildren, a decision that had been brewing since the preceding year. As a result, Japanese students who had been enrolled in public schools were to be forced to attend a segregated school (the Oriental Public School) located on Clay Street in San Francisco's Chinatown.

There had been unceasing vituperative attacks on Japanese immigrants, likely designed to justify the enactment of a Japanese Exclusion Act. But according to Griswold, "The school board seems to have acted more in response to a desire to humble the Japanese than on the merits of the case it

[3] *Ibid.*, 339-40.

presented. The segregation order was one with the anti-Japanese riots, boycotts and Congressional resolutions that marked the progress of the exclusionist movement."[4]

The Japanese government responded with a protest that condemned the segregation order, pronouncing it a contemptuous act that categorized the Japanese as an inferior race, and caused grievous insult to their national pride and honor.

For some time President Theodore Roosevelt had been worried about the effect the exclusionist movement might have on Japan-US relations, and he was extremely critical of the segregation order. In October 1906, he wrote the following in a letter to his son Kermit:

> I am being horribly bothered about the Japanese business. The infernal fools in California, and especially in San Francisco, insult the Japanese recklessly and in the event of war it will be the Nation as a whole which will pay the consequences.[5]

In a message to Congress delivered at the end of 1906, Roosevelt spoke of the progress Japan had made, saying that it "now stands as one of the greatest of civilized nations." He also referred to the generous gift of $100,000 Japan had sent to the people of San Francisco after the earthquake. He drew their attention to the friendship that had developed between the two nations, and the economic and cultural cooperation. Roosevelt referred to the segregation order as a "wicked absurdity." He recommended that legislation be passed enabling Japanese immigrants to become American citizens. And he warned that if persecution of the Japanese continued, he would not hesitate to employ the military forces of the US to stop it. Roosevelt's hard-line stance on this matter was welcomed by the Japanese, but only antagonized the residents of California.[6]

The Gentlemen's Agreement and its aftermath

Roosevelt ultimately succeeded in convincing the San Francisco Board of Education to rescind the school segregation order. But in its stead appeared a prohibition against Japanese with passports for Canada, Mexico, or Hawaii entering the continental US, and also a treaty limiting the number of Japanese immigrants.

Subsequently the US warned Japan that if the aforementioned prohibitions had no effect and that the Japanese government did not make a sufficient effort to limit the emigration of laborers, a Japanese Exclusion Act was likely in the offing. Between November 1907 and March 1908, 11 memoranda were exchanged between Foreign Minister Hayashi Tadasu and US Ambassador to

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[4] *Ibid.*, 350.

[5] Theodore Roosevelt to Kermit Roosevelt, letter, 27 October 1906 https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record/ImageViewer?libID=o280819&imageNo=1.

[6] Transcript of President Theodore Roosevelt's Sixth Annual Message to the Senate and House of Representatives, 03 December 1906; https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-3-1906-sixth-annual-message.

Japan Thomas J. O'Brien concerning limitations on the emigration of laborers, before an agreement was reached.[7]

That agreement was what is referred to as the Gentlemen's Agreement. In it the Japanese government voluntarily agreed to prohibit new immigration to the US. Only laborers who were returning from visits to Japan; the parents, wives, and children of laborers already residing in the US; students, merchants, and the like could now enter the US. No new laborers were permitted.

Later the Japanese government made every effort to suppress any recurrence of anti-Japanese campaigns in the US by steadfastly adhering to the terms of the Gentlemen's Agreement.

Historian Payson J. Treat's perspective on the Gentlemen's Agreement follows:

> [U]nder the agreement, the Japanese Government scrutinized carefully every applicant for a passport. Its officials knew perfectly whether a man was a merchant or a laborer. There have been few if any cases of passports having been wrongly granted.
>
> (…)
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> Man for man, the Japanese immigrants compared very favorably with the European immigrants of this period. They were generally literate, almost always law-abiding, industrious, and ambitious to rise in the world.[8]

Unfortunately, the Gentlemen's Agreement did not succeed in calming anti-Japanese crusades, though it remained in force until 1924. The aforementioned Mr. Griswold describes those offensives as follows:

> [The Gentlemen's Agreement] was constantly shaken by exclusionist activities on the Pacific Coast, and by the pursuit, on the continent of Asia, of a policy precisely the opposite of that which Roosevelt had counseled. Anti-Japanese bills and resolutions kept piling up not only in the California legislature but also in those of Nevada, Oregon and Washington.[9]

[7] Gaimushō (Foreign Ministry of Japan), *Nihon gaikō bunsho* (Documents on Japanese foreign policy), 40-3, 1907: "Beikoku ni oite honpō imin tokō seigen oyobi haiseki no ken" (Travel restrictions on and exclusion of Japanese emigrants to the United States)."

[8] Treat, *op. cit.*, 256-57.

[9] Griswold, *op. cit.*, 360.