

#### **4. NEGOTIATIONS OVER FOREIGN MINISTER HIROTA'S THREE PRINCIPLES**

##### **Both Japan and China submit proposals**

In 1935, Foreign Minister Hirota's Japan-China Friendship efforts reached a peak with the exchanging of ambassadors. Provocative Chinese activity in Hebei and Chahar provinces did put a damper on that groundswell of amity, but Japan's determination to further improve ties between the two nations never wavered, and culminated in the proposal of Hirota's Three Principles. They were a counterproposal to China's three principles, which the Chinese had cannily submitted, taking the initiative, as if to conceal their incendiary anti-Japanese activity.

China's three principles, which Ambassador Jiang Zuobin conveyed to Foreign Minister Hirota in early September, after consulting with Chiang Kai-shek, were as follows:

1. Each nation shall respect the other's independence.
2. Each nation shall support genuine friendship with the other.
3. Disputes between the two nations, without exception, shall be resolved by peaceful, diplomatic means.

Ambassador Jiang expressed his hope that if adherence to the principles submitted by the Chinese resulted in the two nations' becoming true friends, both the Umezu-He and Doihara-Qin agreements could be annulled, as they would no longer be needed. Jiang explained that Chiang Kai-shek could not recognize Manzhouguo's independence, but neither would he lodge a protest in that connection at that time. He added that Chiang would not insist that Japan revoke its recognition of Manzhouguo, and was prepared to discuss military cooperation toward the achievement of further "common objectives" if attempts to improve Sino-Japanese relations bore fruit.

When the Lugou Bridge Incident erupted two years later, Hirota's Three Principles as well as the Chinese aims were incorporated, almost in their entirety, into the ceasefire negotiations and a diplomatic adjustment plan (most commonly known as the Funatsu Initiative). However, Funatsu's efforts collapsed when Lt. Ōyama Isao was murdered (to be discussed later).

As for Japan's response, even before the Chinese came forth with their three principles, Foreign Minister Hirota was attempting to capitalize on the increasing momentum toward amicable relations between Japan and China. He instructed the head of his Secretariat to ask Army and Navy officials to draw up policy proposals designed to adjust diplomatic relations with China. On October 4, after much discussion and cross-checking, Hirota's Three Principles were approved.

Prefaced by a statement to the effect that the objectives of Japan's foreign policy were stability in, and the advancement, of East Asia, to be achieved through the collaboration of Japan, Manzhouguo, and China, the three principles were:

1. Eradication of anti-Japanese activity, be it word or deed (the Chinese shall eliminate all types of anti-Japanese activity and abandon their habit of pitting other Powers against Japan)

2. Tacit recognition of Manzhouguo (the Chinese shall acknowledge the independence of Manzhouguo and revoke their anti-Manzhouguo policies)
3. Collaboration to prevent the encroachment of communism (since communizing forces from Outer Mongolia are a common threat to all three nations, the Chinese shall cooperate with Japan to prevent the encroachment of communism into areas adjacent to Outer Mongolia)

The plan was that once there was evidence that the Chinese were prepared to address these principles in earnest, a new relationship could be forged among Japan, China, and Manzhouguo.

On October 7 Foreign Minister Hirota's Three Principles were communicated to Ambassador Jiang. Toward the end of that month, the Chinese replied as follows:

1. China has no intention of pitting one Power against another, nor shall she engage in anti-Japanese activity.
2. Government-level negotiations between China and Manzhouguo are not possible, but China has no intention of altering the status quo in Manzhouguo by anything other than peaceful means.
3. If Japan fully implements China's three principles, China will endeavor to cooperate on finding methods of joint defense against communism in areas adjacent to Outer Mongolia, provided that doing so does not undermine Chinese sovereignty or independence.

### **Negotiations reach a standstill**

Foreign Minister Hirota reacted to the Chinese assertion that "once China fully implements Japan's Three Principles, we will discuss joint defense against communism in the northern border area," by saying, "If that is the case, we may never see a solution."

Japan and China continued to hold negotiations relating to this situation. But the Japanese saw China's insistence on equality in relations between the two nations as a stumbling block. The Chinese were demanding the abrogation of all unequal treaties, as well as the abolition of foreign concessions and settlements, and consular jurisdiction. The Japanese position on this matter was that the Guandong Leased Territory, Japan's sole concession on the Asian Continent, was leased from Manzhouguo and had no connection with China. Hirota had no objection to equality between Japan and China. Still, China's emphasis on equal rights might be interpreted as a recurrence of its revolutionary diplomacy of the past. In that case, it would be nearly impossible for the Chinese to accept Hirota's Three Principles. It seemed as though negotiations had reached an impasse before they began.

Moreover, the pro-Japanese efforts made by Wang Jingwei and others fueled opposition to Wang, and on November 1, 1935, during the 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session of the Guomindang's Fourth Central Executive Committee, he was shot and seriously injured. The Chinese informed Japan that the attack was perpetrated by leftists. When surgeons were unable to remove the bullet after several operations, Wang resigned from his positions as president of the Executive Yuan and foreign minister. Chiang Kai-shek appointed himself president of the Executive Yuan, and appointed Zhang Qun foreign minister. The Chiang-Wang coalition had come to an end. Against this

background of changes in Chinese leadership and the continuing negotiations between Japan and China over developments in the North China autonomy movement, Hirota's Three Principles slowly lost their relevance.