

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

1. BATTLE FOR RAILROAD SUPREMACY IN MANCHURIA

Theodore Roosevelt's pro-Japanese sentiments

Japan-US relations, which had been amicable for the half-century beginning in the Ansei era (1854-1860), deteriorated in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War. Before I delve into the circumstances surrounding that transformation, however, I would like to describe a time when relations between the two countries were truly friendly, during the Russo-Japanese War, through the lens of the words and deeds of President Theodore Roosevelt.

As already stated, as soon as the Japanese government made the decision to go to war with Russia, it dispatched Baron Kaneko Kentarō, who had studied at Harvard University at the same time as Roosevelt, to the US. Kaneko did his level best to accomplish his mission, which was to foster pro-Japanese public opinion. His efforts bore fruit: the US took Japan's side in the war.

Here are a few notable anecdotes about Kaneko's public-relations campaign.

On March 27, not long after he arrived in the US, Kaneko paid a visit to President Roosevelt; this was the first time the two men met. Roosevelt told him that Japan was going to win the war, adding that "we must ensure that Japan emerges victorious." He added that "Japan is fighting for justice and humanity, while the Russians are committing atrocities wherever they go. Russia's behavior toward Japan is particularly inhumane and unjust. I would like to work on Japan's behalf, both behind the scenes and openly. This must be a private agreement between the two of us. I do not want to read about it in the newspapers."¹

Kaneko's second meeting with Roosevelt took place on March 28. On that occasion Roosevelt said, "No one has greater respect for Japan than I." He explained that it was the writings of American orientalist Ernest Fenollosa that piqued his interest in Japan, adding that he would appreciate recommendations of books that might inform him about the driving force behind the Japanese temperament and moral education.²

¹ Kaneko Kentarō, *Nichi-Ro sen'eki hiroku* (Confidential records from the Russo-Japanese War) (Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1929).

² *Ibid.*

Kaneko's response was to promise to send copies of *Bushido: The Soul of Japan*,³ written by Nitobe Inazō, and *Heroic Japan*,⁴ by American linguist F. Warrington Eastlake,⁵ which contains detailed descriptions of the organization and campaigns of the Japanese military during the 1st Sino-Japanese War. When Kaneko received an invitation to the White House for June 6, President Roosevelt told him that *Bushido* had provided valuable insight into the attributes of the Japanese people. Roosevelt added that he had ordered 30 copies of the book to give to friends and acquaintances, and one copy for each of his five children. "I told them that they should be sure to read this book every day so as to cultivate that noble, elegant disposition and sincere strength of spirit that distinguish the Japanese character. However, since we are a republic and therefore have no equivalent of the emperor, whom the Japanese revere so greatly, I told them that we should look to the flag of the United States of America as our alternative."⁶ Kaneko had certainly plumbed the depths of Roosevelt's emotions.⁷

On April 2, 1905 Kaneko delivered a speech entitled "The Japanese Character and Ideals" at New York's Carnegie Hall. In it he referred to the Imperial Rescript on Education and the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors, which he had translated into English, as having been instrumental in forming the Japanese spirit.⁸ The audience response was very enthusiastic, and Kaneko received many requests for translations. For instance, instructors from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis asked for translations of the Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors to use as teaching material. Brig. Gen. Frederick D. Grant, the eldest son of General and former President Ulysses S. Grant, asked for a copy as well, saying that he wished to have the soldiers under his command read it and aspire to become soldiers who are as strong as members of the Japanese army.

When Japan's Combined Fleet destroyed Russia's Baltic Fleet in the Tsushima Strait, Americans were beside themselves with delight. Kaneko sent a telegram to Emperor Meiji, which read, "Americans are overcome with joy at the great victory in the Japan Sea, the likes of which the world has never seen." Especially pleased with the victory was Roosevelt. He sent a personal message to Kaneko on May 31, in which he wrote, "Neither Trafalgar nor the defeat of the Spanish

³ Nitobe Inazō, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Rutland, Vermont: Tuttle Publishing, 1969).

⁴ F. Warrington Eastlake and Yamada Yoshiaki, *Heroic Japan: A History of the War Between China & Japan* (Washington, D.C.: University Publications of America, 1979).

⁵ Eastlake's co-author was Yamada Yoshiaki, president of the Japan Chautauquan Association.

⁶ Matsumura, *op. cit.*

⁷ Kaneko, *op. cit.*

⁸ The 03 April 1905 edition of the *New York Times* gives "The Effects of the Russo-Japanese War on the Relations of Eastern and Western Nations" as the title of Kaneko's speech.

Armada was as complete – as overwhelming.”⁹ At the end of the letter the president handwrote “Banzai!”¹⁰

In July, as the war was nearing its end, Kaneko was invited to Roosevelt’s residence in Oyster Bay, New York. On that occasion Roosevelt told Kaneko, “Looking at the situation in the Orient, I realize that Japan is the only nation that possesses the strength that independence requires. Japan should take the lead in adopting an Asiatic Monroe Doctrine. It is urgent that Japan help the nations of Asia to achieve independence. To prevent the nations of the West from seizing territory or otherwise encroaching on Asia, Japan must be sure to proclaim to the world that she is inaugurating an Asian version of the Monroe Doctrine. Its scope should extend from the Suez Canal in the west to Kamchatka in the east.” Then Roosevelt cautioned Kaneko: “Do not make this public while I am president. However, when I cease to be president, and am simply Theodore Roosevelt, I will be sure to make my opinion known.”¹¹

These anecdotes are evidence of Roosevelt’s trust in Japan. According to diplomat and legal scholar Shinobu Junpei, it was from reading *Chūshingura*¹² that Roosevelt learned how much the Japanese prize loyalty; the tale inspired him to champion Japan.¹³

Japan is to be feared: Roosevelt’s apprehension

Soon after the Russo-Japanese War broke out, President Roosevelt warned Germany and France that if they collaborated with Russia against Japan, as they had done in 1895 with the Triple Intervention, the US would, without delay, side with and support Japan. “Japan,” he wrote smugly and somewhat shortsightedly, “is playing our game.”¹⁴

Perhaps historian Thomas A. Bailey was correct in his appraisal of Roosevelt’s comment. With the Japanese winning victory after victory, the seeds of apprehension may have been growing in his mind.

In June 1905, when the war was nearly over, Roosevelt wrote the following in a personal message to Sen. Henry Cabot Lodge:

⁹ Letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Baron Kaneko dated May 31, 1905; <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record/ImageViewer?libID=o191797> (retrieved 06/2023).

¹⁰ President Roosevelt did handwrite “Banzai!” at the end of at least two of his letters to Kaneko, but not this one. See letters dated 03/11/1905 and 05/29/1905 at <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Search?r=1&searchTerms=kaneko> (retrieved 06/2023).

¹¹ Kaneko, *op. cit.*

¹² Tamenaga Shunsui, *Chūshingura* (Loyal ronins, an historical romance), trans. Saitō Shūichirō and Edward Greedy (New York: Putnam, 1880); <https://archive.org/details/loyalroninshisto00chiuiala> (retrieved 06/2023).

¹³ Shinobu Junpei, *Meiji hiwa: nidai gaikō no shinsō* (Meiji revelations: the truth about two major diplomatic events) (Tokyo: Banrikaku Shobō, 1928).

¹⁴ Bailey, *op. cit.*, 517.

Most certainly the Japanese soldiers and sailors have shown themselves to be terrible foes. There can be none more dangerous in all the world.¹⁵

How do we interpret a comment like this, in light of the fact that we know Roosevelt was favorably disposed toward the Japanese? The aforementioned Tyler Dennett believed that Roosevelt admired, but at the same time, feared Japan. For that reason, he made efforts to rescue loathsome Russia from total annihilation.

Moreover, beginning with the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, American attitudes toward Japan began to change — subtly, perhaps, but unmistakably. Yes, with that war, the Japan-US relationship, which had been extremely friendly for half a century, starting with the opening of Japan to the world, transmuted into one of confrontation and conflict. That conflict would worsen with the advent of two problems: the struggle for railroad supremacy in Manchuria and exclusionary American immigration policy.

The Greater East Asian War: nomenclature and definition

The term “Greater East Asian War” was determined by the institution that enjoyed the highest effective decision-making authority in Japan on December 10, 1941, two days after the outbreak of the conflict, i.e., the Imperial Headquarters-Cabinet Liaison Conference. The announcement issued was, “The current war against the United States and Great Britain, as well as the 2nd Sino-Japanese War, and any future conflicts that arise in conjunction therewith shall be called the “Greater East Asian War.” On December 12, this nomenclature was formally approved at a Cabinet meeting. That is why, at the time, the entire nation of Japan referred to the war they were fighting as the Greater East Asian War. Given the geographical area in which the war was fought, and its historical background, including the fact that it was a confrontation between East and West, this name made very good sense and was easily accepted. Nomenclature that gained currency in the postwar period, e.g., the Pacific War and the 15-Year War, has no historical basis and are therefore not appropriate choices.

What sort of conflict was the Greater East Asian War? I shall attempt to answer this question.

The Greater East Asian War arose when two major historical currents merged and then collided. The first, and main, current was the contest for supremacy in Asia. US Far Eastern policy was based on the Open Door Policy, which was established in the late 19th century. American policy clashed with Japanese special interests in Asia, especially Manchuria and Mongolia. It merged and then clashed with the second current, the struggle to protect Japan and East Asia from communism, which surfaced after the Russian Revolution. The conflict between Japanese and American Asian policies and the battle against communism were the two main aspects of the Greater East Asian War.

¹⁵ Dennett, *op. cit.*, 163-64.

Prelude to tension between Japan and the US: breakdown of the Harriman project

In a nutshell, at the essence of the conflict between Japan and the US, which formed the main current of the Greater East Asian War, was Japan's continental Asia policy, which asserted a special relationship with China and Manchuria, and American Far Eastern policy, which was based on the Open Door Policy. When did the conflict between the two nations, whose finale was the Greater East Asian War, begin?

I believe that the starting point was the period immediately following the Russo-Japanese War. In other words, the prototype for the Greater East Asian War should be perceived as the conflict between Japan and the US over policy in continental Asia. In *Affirmation of the Greater East Asian War*, Hayashi Fusao maintains that the Greater East Asian War was the finale of a 100-year-long war that began during the Kōka era (1844-48).¹⁶ I do not dispute his claim, but if we are to define the essence of the Greater East Asian War as I have done, then we must conclude that there was no such conflict prior to the Russo-Japanese War. The struggle for supremacy over the Manchurian Railway, as I am about to describe it, was the prelude to the conflict between Japan and the US that culminated in the Greater East Asian War.

US interference in the railways of Manchuria began near the end of the Russo-Japanese War, when American railroad czar E.H. Harriman launched a project whose objective was the purchase of the South Manchuria Railway. Harriman dreamed of building a railway network that would extend around the world connecting the US, the Pacific Ocean, Japan, Manchuria, Siberia, Europe, and the Atlantic Ocean. His plan was to begin by purchasing the South Manchuria Railway, and then the Chinese Eastern Railway. He acted quickly, leaving for Japan in August 1905, while the Portsmouth Peace Conference was still in progress. Harriman approached powerful government officials and private citizens in Japan, suggesting that Japan and the US jointly run the South Manchuria Railway, ownership of which Japan was likely to acquire; he met with no opposition to his proposal. On October 12 he entered into a preliminary agreement with Prime Minister Katsura Tarō concerning the joint operation of the South Manchuria Railway, and triumphantly returned to the US. However, when Foreign Minister Komura, who returned from Portsmouth right after Harriman's departure, learned about the agreement, he was appalled! Komura strongly appealed for the annulment of the agreement. He argued that it was improper to enter into an agreement concerning transfer of the railway without obtaining approval from the Chinese. Komura added that the sale to the Americans of a railway acquired at the cost of the lives of 100,000 compatriots, ¥2 billion in government funds, and the surrender of Japanese interests in South Manchuria would go against the spirit of the Portsmouth Treaty. Komura's remonstrations prevailed; when Harriman's ship docked at San Francisco, he was told that the agreement had been rendered null and void.

Komura's decisiveness succeeded in blocking the first attempt to use American capital to interfere in the South Manchuria Railway. The Harriman agreement is noteworthy as the first effort on the

¹⁶ Hayashi Fusao, *Dai Tōa Sensō kōteiron* (Affirmation of the Greater East Asian War) (Tokyo: Miki Shobō, 1984).

part of the US, subsequent to the Russo-Japanese War, to implement the Open Door Policy in Manchuria.

Treaty of Manchuria; prohibition against parallel lines

As already stated, pitting one barbarian state against another is a time-honored Chinese policy. When the Russians occupied Manchuria, the Chinese, unable to rid themselves of them through their own devices, finally ousted Russian troops using the strength of the Japanese (the Russo-Japanese War). As a result, Japan acquired Russian interests in Manchuria, which prompted the Chinese to invite the UK and US to expel the Japanese. This endeavor caused great dissension, but in order to understand it we must first familiarize ourselves with the Treaty of Manchuria.

I have already stated that the Treaty of Portsmouth prescribed the transfer of the Russian lease on the Liaodong peninsula, as well as the South Manchuria Branch of the Chinese Eastern Railway (later known as the South Manchuria Railway), to Japan. However, Chinese consent to the transfer of interests was required because China was signatory to a treaty with Russia; the Treaty of Portsmouth clearly states that consent is required. In December of 1905, subsequent to the conclusion of that treaty, Japan and China signed a pact in Beijing stating that China had consented to the transfer of those interests. This was the Treaty of Manchuria.

In later years China, riding on an upsurge of nationalism, repudiated all Japanese interests in Manchuria, and using what is referred to as “revolutionary diplomacy,” attempted to unilaterally regain possession of Port Arthur, Dalian, and the South Manchuria Railway. That maneuver generated friction between Japan and China, and was one of the causes of the Manchurian Incident. But what is important to remember is that the aforementioned leases were transferred to Japan in accordance with a treaty between Russia and China. Later on, I will be discussing the Hull Note, which was received at around the time war broke out between Japan and the US. That document contained language denying that Japan lawfully acquired leases on the Liaodong peninsula and the South Manchuria Railway via the Portsmouth Treaty (negotiations for which were mediated by the US!) and the Treaty of Manchuria. The Americans were all but demanding that the situation in Manchuria revert to its status prior to the Russo-Japanese War. When the Hull Note was foisted upon the Japanese, they reached the conclusion that war was inevitable.

The most important aspect of the Treaty of Manchuria was an additional protocol attached to it by which China agreed not to construct a branch line or trunk line parallel to a South Manchuria Railway; its purpose was to protect the profits of the South Manchuria Railway. The Chinese would end up violating this protocol again and again, creating an important point of dispute between Japan and China that can be linked to the Manchurian Incident.

China was certainly the guilty party in this dispute. It is perhaps pointless to deplore such violations at this late date. However, if the Chinese had adhered faithfully to the Treaty of Manchuria alone, it might have been possible for the two nations to maintain a peaceful relationship. Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War restored freedom to Manchuria, which had been occupied by Russia and rendered inaccessible to the Chinese. Manchuria, which the Chinese could not recover on their own, was returned to China by dint of Japanese might. Nevertheless, the Chinese soon attempted to expel the Japanese by begging the UK and the US to intercede on their behalf. As a result, Manchuria was transformed into a hotbed of chaotic dispute and rivalry.

Dollar diplomacy intrudes on Manchuria

The problems caused by a proposal to construct a railroad between Xinmintun and Fakumen represented a new, blatant manifestation of the Chinese practice of putting barbarian states into opposition against each other. They arose in the spring of 1907, when the Chinese entered into negotiations “surrounded with secrecy” with the British firm Pauling and Company regarding the construction of a railway joining Xinmintun (situated to the west of Mukden) with Fakumen, (situated 50 miles north of Xinmintun). However, since the proposed line would run parallel to the trunk line of the South Manchuria Railway, its construction would constitute a brazen breach of the protocol attached to the Treaty of Manchuria.¹⁷ When the Japanese learned of the negotiations, they issued protests to China on several occasions, but the Chinese ignored them and proceeded with their *sub rosa* negotiations, even going so far as to draw up a contract with Pauling. The project grew, with the proposed line extending to Qiqihar in the north, thus becoming a large trunk line running parallel to the South Manchuria Railway.¹⁸

Fortunately, the British government was sympathetic to Japan’s position, and in 1909 an agreement was signed between Japan and China obligating China to notify Japan in advance of constructing a railway line between Xinmintun and Fakumen, whereupon the Chinese scheme collapsed. On the one hand, the Chinese entered into a pact with the Japanese promising not to build a railway that ran parallel to the South Manchuria Railway; on the other, they nonchalantly violated that pact. It is no wonder that the people of Japan came to view China with distrust and scorn.

During the international rivalry over railway lines in Manchuria, which suddenly became contentious with the Xinmintun-Fakumen problem, the most noteworthy incident occurred two months after that problem was settled, in November 1909. It was none other than a proposal by US Secretary of State Philander Knox. He submitted what is now referred to as his “neutralization proposals,” which would have affected railways in all of Manchuria. The first was for an international syndicate to lend China the funds to purchase all railways in Manchuria; the syndicate would administer the railways until China repaid the loan. The second proposal was to be implemented if the first proved unfeasible. Several Western powers would jointly build the Jinzhou-Aigun Railway, thus “neutralizing” all of Manchuria. Never mind that the proposed railway would have traversed Manchuria, extending from Jinzhou in the south to Aigun in the north, thus posing a serious threat to the South Manchuria Railway.

A single corporation can be blamed for the ill-fated Harriman project. However, when Knox interfered in Manchuria, he was secretary of state, and thus spoke for the entire US. The foreign policy espoused by William Howard Taft, who succeeded Theodore Roosevelt, was referred to as “dollar diplomacy.” The proposal to neutralize Manchuria was an attempt on the part of Secretary Knox to implement the Open Door Policy in Manchuria using the power of the US dollar, and was symbolic of dollar diplomacy.

¹⁷ Pauling and Company were not aware of the protocol.

¹⁸ Alfred W. Griswold, *The Far Eastern Policy of the United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 179-80; <https://archive.org/details/fareasternpolicy0000gris> (retrieved 06/2023).

Still, a policy that attempted to impose self-serving ideas totally divorced from the reality of Manchuria was bound to flounder. It was perfectly reasonable for Japan and Russia, which had the most urgent interests in Manchuria, to join together in opposition to it. Neither the UK nor France, both of which supported the stances taken by Japan and Russia, would side with the US; therefore, the Knox proposals, designed to “smoke Japan out” of Manchuria, was consigned to oblivion.¹⁹ However, this incident gave rise to the friction and strife between Japan’s continental policy, rooted in the history and reality of Manchuria, and American Far Eastern policy, based on the ideological Open Door Policy. In a broad sense, the Greater East Asian War, the series of disputes between Japan and the US involving East Asia, began at this time.

On the other hand, US interference in Manchuria, ironically, stimulated rapprochement between Japan and Russia. After the Russo-Japanese War ended, both nations chose conciliation over another conflict. In 1907 the 1st Japan-Russia Secret Agreement was concluded; in it both nations established their spheres of influence in Manchuria. In 1910, the year after the Knox proposal surfaced, the 2nd Japan-Russia Secret Agreement further elucidated those spheres of influence. As historian Alfred W. Griswold wrote, rather aptly, “Instead of dividing Russia and Japan, and opening the door to American participation in the financial exploitation of Manchuria, [Knox] had, as it were, nailed that door closed with himself on the outside.”²⁰

In 1913 Theodore Roosevelt wrote the following about the Taft administration’s interference in Manchuria: “Unfortunately, after I left office ... a most mistaken and ill-advised policy was pursued towards Japan, combining irritation and inefficiency”²¹

Roosevelt was right. Thanks to Taft’s dollar diplomacy, the Japan-US relationship, which had been so intimate and amicable until the end of the Russo-Japanese War, became one of enmity and conflict, all because of Manchuria.

¹⁹ Griswold, *op. cit.*, 157.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

²¹ Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1985), 395.