

CHAPTER 10: THE MANCHURIAN INCIDENT

1. RISING TENSION IN MANCHURIA; LIUTIAOGOU INCIDENT

Shidehara diplomacy vs. Tanaka diplomacy

The pillars of Shidehara diplomacy were non-interference in domestic Chinese affairs, international cooperation, and emphasis on economic affairs. On the other hand, Tanaka diplomacy was rooted in a “positive” policy toward China, an emphasis on public order, and the willingness to resort to military means to resolve problems. The comparison seems to have invited some to believe that the policies of the two men were incompatible. Yet there was very little difference between the ultimate objectives of the diplomatic styles espoused by the two men. It is possible to argue that the only difference lay in the means by which they were to be implemented. For instance, we have the following excerpt from the Lytton Report issued on the occasion of the Manchurian Incident.

Until the events of September 1931, the various Japanese Cabinets, since 1905 appeared to have the same general aims in Manchuria, but they differed as to the policies best suited to achieve these aims. They also differed somewhat as to the extent of the responsibility which Japan should assume for the maintenance of peace and order.

The general aims for which they worked in Manchuria were to maintain and develop Japan’s vested interests, to foster the expansion of Japanese enterprise, and to obtain adequate protection for Japanese lives and property. In the policies adopted for realizing these aims there was one cardinal feature which may be said to have been common to them all. This feature had been the tendency to regard Manchuria and Eastern Inner Mongolia as distinct from the rest of China. It resulted naturally from the Japanese conception of their country’s “special position” in China. Whatever differences may have been observable between the specific policies advocated by the various Cabinets in Japan — as, for example, between the so-called “friendship policy” of Baron Shidehara and the so-called “positive policy” of the late General Baron Tanaka — they have always had this feature in common.

The “friendship policy” developed from about the time of the Washington Conference and was maintained until April 1927; it was then supplanted by the “positive policy,” which was followed until July 1929; finally, the “friendship policy” was again adopted and continued the official policy of the Foreign Office until September 1931. In the spirit which actuated the two policies there was a marked difference: the “friendship policy” rested, in Baron Shidehara’s words, “on the basis of good will and neighbourliness;” the “positive policy” rested upon military force. But, in regard to the concrete measures which should be adopted in Manchuria, these two policies differed largely on the question as to the lengths to which Japan should go to maintain peace and order in Manchuria and to protect Japanese interests.

(...)

The Tanaka policy definitely asserted that Japan would take upon herself the task of preserving “peace and order” in Manchuria — in contrast to previous policies which limited their objectives to protecting Japanese interests there.¹

In other words, Shidehara and Tanaka diplomacy were in agreement about protecting Japanese interests in China and Manchuria. But Tanaka parted ways with Shidehara’s non-interference policy in that he was keen on maintaining order in China and Manchuria when those interests were at stake. This stance was inevitable, given that Shidehara’s policy of neighborliness and friendship could neither quell Chinese anti-Japanese activities nor fully protect Japanese interests in China.

Shidehara’s non-interference policy, Tanaka’s positive policy (sometimes appeasement policy) toward Zhang Xueliang: none of these succeeded in quelling China’s anti-Japanese campaigns nor its hostility toward Japan. With no effective solution in sight, the relationship lurched toward the catastrophe that was the Manchurian Incident. The reason for the deterioration of Japan-China relations should be attributed not to the policies adopted by Shidehara or Tanaka, but to Japan’s misfortune in having a disorderly nation like China for a neighbor.

Advent of revolutionary diplomacy

Subsequent to the Northeast Flag Replacement, the influence of the communizing GMD spread to the three eastern provinces, and anti-Japanese sentiment there intensified steadily. Communization and the anti-Japanese campaign were, without a doubt, the underlying causes of the Manchurian Incident. Still, both had been gradually brewing in the wake of the First United Front and especially in the course of the Northern Expedition. Wang Zhengting (aka C.T. Wang), who was installed as the Nanjing government’s minister of foreign affairs in the throes of the Jinan Incident, cleverly used the democratic movement to promote anti-Japanese policies. Among them, the one that proved most shocking to the Japanese was his “revolutionary diplomacy.”

Revolutionary diplomacy was an exceedingly selfish diplomatic ploy by which the Chinese announced, without engaging in any negotiations, that all unequal treaties would be abrogated. Upon the conclusion of the Northern Expedition, on July 7, 1928, the Nationalist government initiated the implementation of another aspect of revolutionary diplomacy, advising Japan that the Sino-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation concluded in 1896 was now null and void. According to the provisions of that treaty, negotiations on its revision could be held every 10 years. However, this time the Chinese stated that the treaty would become invalid should such negotiations take place and fail. With full support from the ruling and opposition parties, Japan vehemently protested this a unilateral declaration for making light, as it did, of international practices and the principles of good faith.

¹ League of Nations: Commission of Enquiry into the Sino-Japanese Dispute (Geneva: League of Nations, 1932); tails/service-gdc-gdcwdl-wd-1_-11-60-1-wdl_11601-wdl_11601/page/34/mode/2up.

Japan recognizes Chinese tariff autonomy

On July 2, 1929, Hamaguchi Osachi, chairman of Japan's Constitutional Democratic Party (Rikken Minseitō), became prime minister of Japan. Shidehara Kijūrō began his second stint as foreign minister. Soon after Hamaguchi's Cabinet was installed, his administration came out with guidelines comprising 10 major policies. Among them, the diplomatic guidelines called for a "renewal of diplomacy toward China," as "renewing diplomatic relations between Japan and China and strengthening friendly relations between neighbors are tasks of the utmost urgency." The framework for this renewal, in which Shidehara's peculiar brand of idealism is evident, included the following:

- (1) Both Japan and China must appreciate their special positions, exercise sympathetic scrutiny, and impartially and fairly seek points of accord.
- (2) The Japanese government seeks a harmonious coexistence with China and mutual prosperity.
- (3) Japan shall reject all policies involving aggression anywhere in China.
- (4) Japan shall provide amicable support toward the achievement of China's national aspirations.
- (5) It is right and proper for Japan to have a legitimate, vital interest in Chinese survival and prosperity.

It was the Japan-China Tariff Accord that lent prestige to Shidehara's second term as foreign minister. The treaty, concluded on May 6, 1930, recognized Chinese tariff autonomy. It was a partial revision of the 1896 Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, and as such was welcomed as the harbinger of a new phase in the relationship between Japan and China.

Communization of Manchuria and anti-Japanese uprisings

Shidehara diplomacy was enjoying a measure of success, and Japan's relationship with China was taking a turn for the better. Unfortunately, deep in Manchuria communism was rapidly gaining ground, and violent anti-Japanese incidents were breaking out in the Jiandao region, where the Chinese government had no control.

In June 1928 the Central Committee of the CCP held its 6th National Congress in Moscow. Policy drafted there emphasized land-reform-promotion drives intended to attract workers and peasants to the party. Subsequently, efforts were made to expand CCP cells in Manchuria. In November 1928 the CCP established a Manchurian Committee, which wasted no time in condemning the "traitorous diplomacy" of the Nanjing and Fengtian authorities. It called on the people of Manchuria to participate in anti-Japanese acts, and advocated furtherance of the struggle over railway rights, opposition to land transfers, the recovery of Port Arthur and Dalian, and the severing of economic and diplomatic ties with Japan. The CCP placed special emphasis on direct action as a means of abolishing unequal treaties, and advocated the revival of the "glorious struggle" to retake the Hankou Concession by force.

Communists in Manchuria began joining forces with anti-Japanese Korean groups and various communist organizations. Then in January 1930, the Korean groups decided to disband and join the CCP. During April and May, the Korean Communist Party of Manchuria, the principal

Korean organization, opted to disband and merge with the CCP's Manchurian Committee. (In early April the Korean Communist Party formed the All-Manchuria Insurrection Committee embracing more than 4,000 party members, and began making plans for an armed uprising on the anniversary of the May 30 Incident in Shanghai.) All these events led to the Jiandao uprising that occurred on May 30.

The uprising affected all of Jiandao, including the villages of Longjing and Toudaogou. From May 30, in the middle of the night, through May 31 electric power plants, and communications and traffic facilities were destroyed. The Japanese Consulate and the homes of pro-Japanese Koreans were attacked, and Japanese and Koreans living in the area were thrown into panic. Immediately after the incident ended, Japanese residents held a meeting at which they criticized the spinelessness of the Foreign Ministry and local authorities. They drafted a petition demanding an increased police presence, which they sent to the prime minister, foreign minister, governor-general of Korea, and Japanese political parties and newspapers.

On October 6 a Chinese assaulted a Korean. Not long thereafter, Chinese troops fired a volley of shots at Japanese police officers on patrol in Longjing. Two officers were killed instantly, and another was seriously injured. The Japanese decided to dispatch reinforcements in the form of 103 police officers. Japanese and Chinese garrisons now confronted each other, one on each side of the Manchurian border with Korea.

Then guerrilla CCP commenced guerrilla attacks all over Jiandao, targeting pro-Japanese Koreans and Japanese organizations (the 2nd Jiandao Insurrection). At that time even Korean residents criticized the Foreign Ministry's handling of the incidents and petitioned the Japanese to use force.

During this time Shidehara judged that increasing the number of Japanese police would intensify strife between Japan and China, and even threaten Japanese interests in Manchuria and Mongolia. Therefore, over the objections of Saito Makoto, governor-general of Korea, he ordered the reinforcements to withdraw (on November 5), but that decision was met by vociferous protests against Shidehara from Japanese residents of Jiandao.

In *The Manchurian Incident and the Consul-General at Fengtian*, Hayashi Kyūjirō, consul-general at Fengtian at the time, recalled his dissatisfaction with Shidehara's failure to comprehend the problems in Jiandao. When Hayashi met with Governor-General Saitō in July 1930, he explained that "the persistent pressure from China and the rampancy of anti-Japanese groups that we are seeing now in Jiandao create the impression that our country is at a crossroads. If there is no improvement, our influence in the region will deteriorate with each passing day. If we are to maintain our current strength, we must bolster our police force significantly. (...) Regardless of which direction it chooses, our government must decide on a policy. It is my hope that the Governor-General will arrive at an opinion and make a strong recommendation to the government." (...) Hayashi then returned to [China], but at the end of the same month, together with Governor-General Saitō, who by then had returned to Korea, and Okada Kanekazu, consul-general of Jiandao, who had been urgently recalled to Japan, visited Foreign Minister Shidehara to discuss the Jiandao problem. According to Hayashi, at the meeting, "Consul-General Okada explained the situation, and I added to what he had said.

Governor-General Saitō asked the foreign minister about the government's fundamental policy on Jiandao. At that time, the foreign minister seemed to be lost in thought and, as if he had entered into another conversation, began talking about minor matters without seriously addressing the matter at hand. Even when the elderly governor-general asked him again about the government's stance, Shidehara did not give a clear answer, instead going off on another tangent."² This anecdote serves as a subtle indication of Shidehara's indifference not only toward the Jiandao problem, but also toward every aspect of the Manchurian problem.

Despite a succession of anti-Japanese incidents in the form of assassinations and attacks, whose perpetrators brazenly solicited direct action and illegal activities, the authorities in the three eastern provinces were unable to contain them.

In the latter half of 1930 the number of terrorist incidents in the Jiandao region, referred to as communist bandit incidents, was estimated at 81, resulting in 44 deaths, and countless injured, not to mention homes destroyed by fire. The Chinese authorities discovered, through arrests of the terrorists, that the weapons and ammunition used in these incidents had been brought in from the USSR.³ Ten years earlier, fearing that the communization of the Russian Far East was certain to spread to Manchuria and Korea, both being adjacent to Russia, the Japanese had sent troops to Siberia. Those fears were now a reality, validating Japan's foresight.

Revolutionary diplomacy inflames anti-Japanese sentiment

Even after the Northern Expedition resulted in the unification of north and south China, domestic strife raged throughout the nation. For five years, from 1929 to 1934, China again descended into the morass of civil war as warlords opposed to Chiang Kai-shek's centralized government continued to launch barrages of attacks against him.

Even during that period of conflict, however, Wang Zhengting, China's foreign minister, persisted with negotiations whose objective was to abrogate the unequal treaties. In September 1929 Wang drew attention to his "scheduled diplomacy" in one of his speeches: "Scheduling is one way to increase efficiency, and also the most economical means of achieving success. My schedule for this year is to revise commercial treaties and move ahead with efforts designed to achieve tariff autonomy and abolish consular jurisdiction." This sort of primitive idealism ignores the fact that diplomacy always involves a dialogue with another party. In that sense it is self-centered, and remains firmly rooted in Sinocentrism.

At the end of 1930, after Chiang Kai-shek had temporarily unified China, GMD diplomacy intensified its uncompromising course. The Chinese began pressuring Japan to return the Hankou concession immediately and publicizing Wang's revolutionary diplomacy. On December 22

² Hayashi Kyūjirō, *Manshū jihen to Hōten sōryōji* (Manchurian Incident and the consul-general at Fengtian) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1978).

³ *Gaimushō* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), ed., *Nihon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō bunsho* (Chronology and important papers on Japanese diplomacy), vol. 2 (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1965).

Wang irritated the powers, including Japan, by declaring, “The Nationalist government can no longer stomach extraterritoriality. We are determined to take the appropriate measures to correct this situation.”

In 1931 the revolutionary diplomacy tactics intensified even further. In January the GMD government selected three objectives: (1) the withdrawal of all foreign troops stationed in China, (2) abolition of extraterritoriality, and (3) recovery of unclaimed concessions in Tianjin and Hankou. It also enacted a law, which would take effect after the abolition of extraterritoriality, to establish special courts in the five major cities as a temporary measure. In February the GMD instructed the Foreign Ministry to resume negotiations on extraterritoriality immediately, and issued a strict order against engaging in diplomatic compromise.

Consequently, at the beginning of 1931, ethnic consciousness was extremely strong in China due to the special circumstances that had arisen after the completion of the Northern Expedition. Demands for the restoration of sovereignty aroused public opinion. Except for the diplomats, everyone was talking about forceful revolutionary diplomacy, and criticizing the weakness of the authorities. As for the diplomats, for various reasons they were leaving room for compromise, but continued to make vacuous, inflexible pronouncements. By 1931 anti-Japanese sentiment in Manchuria had escalated to the point where the central government could not begin to control it.

From mid-March on, anti-Japanese propaganda disseminated by organizations subordinate to the GMD sharpened. On March 26 a conference intended to commemorate the establishment of the GMD in northeastern China was held in Fengtian. There violent anti-Japanese demands were issued that Zhang Xueliang could not suppress. Furthermore, in April the Liaoning Nationalist Foreign Affairs Association sponsored an anti-Japanese conference in Fengtian, which was attended by more than 300 representatives from all over Manchuria who discussed eliminating Japanese interests in Manchuria, including the confiscation of the South Manchuria Railway. The GMD’s organized leadership helped the anti-Japanese movement spread vigorously until it had infected every geographical and social sector of Manchuria.

Outcry from China: “Down with Japanese Imperialism!”

On April 4, 1931 the second Wakatsuki Cabinet took office. But the mood at the celebratory festivities was somber. Representatives of Japanese citizens residing in Manchuria spoke out resolutely against the relinquishment of extraterritoriality. Petitions opposing the abolition of extraterritoriality, and expressing the hope that resolute action be taken to prevent its relinquishment, had been collected from chambers of commerce throughout Manchuria and China. They were compiled into a letter requesting that “a forceful method of preventing the abolition of extraterritoriality be devised,” and sent to Foreign Minister Shidehara and Sakurachi Rikio, the new minister of commerce and industry.”⁴

However, at that very moment a wave of public opinion opposing the relinquishment of extraterritoriality was gaining momentum in Japan, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang’s

⁴ James William Morley, ed., *Japan’s Road to the Pacific War: Volume 1: The Loon Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

revolutionary diplomacy program was being newly announced, along with a five-part schedule for its implementation. During Phase 1 China would recover tariff autonomy. During Phase 2 extraterritoriality would be abolished. During Phase 3 China would recover foreign concessions, during Phase 4 leased territory would be reclaimed, and during Phase 5 railway interests, railway rights, inland river navigation rights, and coastal trade rights would be regained.

Shigemitsu Mamoru, consul-general at Shanghai, met with Foreign Minister Wang on April 14, and asked him if the five-phase program in Wang's revolutionary diplomacy represented his "true intentions." Wang replied in the affirmative. In response to Shigemitsu's question as to whether Guandongzhou, which encompassed Port Arthur and Dalian was included in China's demand for retrocession of foreign concessions, and if "railway rights" also included the South Manchurian Railway. "Of course," was Wang's reply.⁵

From the time when Saburi Sadao was minister to China (October-November 1929), there was a tacit understanding that the sensitive Manchurian problem would not be broached during diplomatic negotiations. Japan-China diplomacy would progress in such a way that first the unequal treaties would be revised, creating a favorable ambience for Japan-China relations. Only then would efforts be made to resolve the Manchurian problem. But Wang's revolutionary diplomacy program ignored this tacit understanding, and aimed to recover every single one of Japan's interests in Manchuria, and to make matters worse, within a short period of time. Also, apparently Zhang Xueliang was making headway implementing the Nanjing government's guidelines. Wang's program came as a great shock to Shigemitsu, who feared that "all of my hard work may have been for naught."⁶

Toward the end of April Japan's Foreign Ministry gathered around Shigemitsu, who had returned to Japan, and began work on guidelines for extraterritoriality negotiations. The result was the draft of an outline that established the principles governing the abolition of extraterritoriality.

The outline established the principles upon which would be based agreement to the abolition of extraterritoriality outside Japanese settlements and railway property, provided that Japanese nationals were granted the freedom to reside and to travel anywhere in China, and that Japan be afforded most-favored-nation treatment.

In early May Shigemitsu and Wang met and narrowed down points at issue. At first, it seemed as though negotiations were proceeding according to plan. But at exactly the same time, public opinion within the GMD had veered toward unilateral demands for the abolition of extraterritoriality, and anti-Japanese sentiment became very strong. When the GMD convention was held in Nanjing between May 5 and 17, the mood there was such that Japan became the target of criticism. There was a huge outcry of "Down with Japanese imperialism!" and angry demands for the recovery of Port Arthur and Dalian, of the Manchurian Railway, and withdrawal of Japanese troops guarding railway property. Between mid-May and the end of June, the anti-Japanese movement continued to gain momentum. Repression of anti-Japanese activities became

⁵ Shigemitsu Mamoru, *Gaikō Kaisōroku* (Diplomatic reminiscences) (Tokyo: Mainichi Shimbunsha, 1953).

⁶ *Ibid.*

increasingly difficult as it became the responsibility of lower-ranking authorities in the three eastern provinces⁷

Although Shidehara diplomacy, with its idealistic trappings, entered the stage once again, the Chinese made no attempt to return Shidehara's goodwill in kind. Instead, they were relieved by Shidehara's return and simply barreled ahead, placing their hopes in revolutionary diplomacy.⁸ It may be unfair to place all the blame for the worsening of Sino-Japanese relations and the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident on Shidehara. Still, as his biographer stated, Shidehara's impractical approach to diplomacy with China had already failed once. Therefore, during his second stint as foreign minister, Shidehara should have assumed a humble frame of mind and engaged in a great deal of contemplation and introspection. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Shidehara did either, perhaps because of stubbornness or pride.⁹ If these analyses are correct, there is a pressing need for a new historical assessment of Shidehara diplomacy.

Liutiaogou Incident

The Manchurian Incident was set in motion by the Liutiaogou Incident, which took place at about 10:30 p.m. on September 18, 1931 at Liutiaogou, 8 kilometers north of Fengtian, when explosives were detonated on the tracks of the South Manchuria Railway. The Guandong Army maintained that the explosion was the work of Zhang Xueliang's army and immediately proceeded to attack its North Barracks. By the next morning Chinese troops had fled the barracks, which the Japanese proceeded to occupy.

However, the truth about the incident was exposed for all the world to see after the conclusion of the Greater East Asian War. (Then) Maj. Hanaya Tadashi, a Guandong Army staff officer, was heavily involved in the incident. According to a journal he kept, the Manchurian Incident was the product of the scrupulous planning prowess of Operations Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Staff Ishiwara Kanji, and the commitment and energy of Senior Staff Officer Col. Itagaki Seishirō; both men also served in the Guandong Army. At the time Guandong Army units stationed in Fengtian were the 2nd Infantry Battalion of the Independent Garrison Corps and the 29th Infantry Regiment of the resident 2nd Division. Additionally, the 1st and 4th companies were stationed in Fengtian with the Independent Garrison Corps' 2nd Infantry Battalion; the 2nd Company was stationed in Fushun, and the 3rd Company in Hushitai. At 7:00 p.m. on September 18 the 3rd Company conducted nighttime maneuvers in the area south of Wenguantun, 11 kilometers north of Fengtian. Company Commander Kawashima Tadashi ordered Lt. Kōmoto Suemori to head to Liutiaogou with several subordinates to patrol the railway line west of the North Barracks. Keeping the barracks in his line of sight off to the side, Kōmoto chose a location approximately 800 meters to the south, where he placed an explosive device normally used by cavalry on the rails and detonated it. Sometime after 10:00 p.m. an ear-splitting noise was heard, and pieces of shattered rails and ties hurtled through the air. But since the amount of explosive used was

⁷ Morley, *op. cit.*

⁸ Hayashi, *op. cit.*

⁹ Ujita, *op. cit.*

calibrated so as not to harm any passing Manchurian Railway trains, only two railroad ties were damaged, and the destruction did not extend over even one meter of track.¹⁰

Simultaneous to the explosion a report was sent by portable telephone to battalion headquarters and the Japanese intelligence agency. Company Commander Kawashima immediately led his men southward, and launched an assault on the North Barracks. Later in addition to Kawashima's forces, the main strength of the battalion was added. By 6:30 a.m. on the morning of September 19, the Japanese had completed their occupation of the North Barracks. Chinese troops at the barracks, the Independent 7th Brigade, under command of Wang Yizhe, numbered 6,800 men; the Shimamoto company, which attacked them, numbered 500. The 29th Regiment managed to expel Chinese troops from the city of Fengtian without any difficulty. By the morning of September 19 all of Fengtian was once again in Japanese hands.

Manchurian Incident: an effect, not a cause

Today everyone in our nation knows that it was the Japanese who struck the match, who instigated the explosion on Manchurian Railway property at Liutiaogou, in a Manchuria whose environment had already turned toxic. Since the IMTFE, the Manchurian Incident has been labeled as the first phase of Japanese aggression in China. However, if the Japanese had not struck that match, the Chinese would assuredly have done the honors. That is how very explosive and volatile the situation in Manchuria had become. The explosion at Liutiaogou was merely the final, tiny cause, the last of a mountain of innumerable causes – the last straw, to borrow an English expression that means “a further difficulty that comes after a series of other difficulties, that makes a situation unbearable.” Therefore, the incident was more of an effect than a cause. In other words, the Manchurian Incident was not the first stage of Japanese aggression in China. It is this writer's conclusion that the incident was the inevitable result of Chinese policies that were, for a quarter of a century, hostile and insulting to Japan.

¹⁰ Hanaya Tadashi, “Himerareta Shōwashi: Manshū jihen wa kōshite keikaku saretā” (Hidden history of the Shōwa era: How the Manchurian Incident was planned), Supplement to *Chisei* (December 1956), 40-50.