

2. US EXPANSION INTO THE PACIFIC; OPEN DOOR POLICY

US defines new borders

As stated above, 1898 was the year when the great powers greedily encroached upon China. The Americans did not participate in those rapacious activities, but 1898 represented a dramatic turning point for them as well. It was the year in which, as a result of the American victory in the Spanish-American War, Cuba became an American protectorate. Additionally, Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the US, thereby solidifying the foundation for US control of the Caribbean. The US also made gains in the distant South Pacific, extending its reach with the acquisition of Guam and the Philippines. Another bonus reaped from the Spanish-American War was increased momentum toward the annexation of Hawaii. In August Honolulu became the stage for an annexation ceremony; now it was the Stars and Stripes, not Hawaiian flags, that fluttered over Hawaiian government offices.

In 1850 the US Western border was the California coast. But in 1898 the American sphere of influence suddenly expanded into the South Pacific. The US defined a new border in Asia, a line drawn from Hawaii, through Guam, to the Philippines. A new era of American interest and intervention in the Far East had begun.

Hawaii becomes a US protectorate

It is common knowledge that the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese Navy marked the opening of hostilities in the Greater East Asian War. However, we must give due consideration to destiny and its profound effect on Japan-US relations.

American interest in the Pacific Ocean probably began in 1872, when US Navy Captain Richard W. Meade II proposed establishing a US naval base at Pago Pago, on Tutuila, the main island of Samoa, and the US Secretary of the Army ordered a survey of Honolulu harbor to determine whether it was suitable for military purposes.

The survey revealed that Pearl Harbor (then called Pearl River) possessed great military value. The Americans asked the Hawaiian government to cede Pearl Harbor to the US, but the negotiations ended in failure when vigorous opposition was expressed by the Hawaiian people. Nevertheless, the US kept the pressure on Hawaii, and by means of the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875, the Americans gained the use of Pearl Harbor, as well as the authority to rebuild existing facilities and construct new ones. After annexation in 1898, Pearl Harbor gradually took on its modern appearance. Limitations imposed by the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty notwithstanding, fortifications in Hawaii and UK-controlled Singapore were allowed to remain.

Subsequently Hawaii acquired importance as an air base as well, and an airfield was constructed there at great cost. It became the most important American military outpost in the Pacific. The reason why, at the beginning of the Greater East Asian War, Pearl Harbor was the first target of the Japanese military, could certainly be traced to those aspects of Pearl Harbor's history.

The degree to which Hawaii had captured American political interest and determination is patently obvious from a directive sent by Secretary of State James G. Blaine to the U.S. minister to Hawaii.

The situation of the Hawaiian Islands, giving them the strategic control of the North Pacific, brings their possession within the range of questions of purely American policy, as much so as that of the Isthmus itself. Hence the necessity, as recognized in our existing treaty relations, of drawing the ties of intimate relationship between us and the Hawaiian Islands so as to make them practically a part of the American system without derogation of their absolute independence.

(...)

The steady diminution of the native population of the islands ... is doubtless a cause of great alarm to the government of the kingdom, and it is no wonder that a solution should be sought with eagerness in any seemingly practicable quarter. The problem, however, is not to be met by a substitution of Mongolian supremacy for native control The Hawaiian Islands cannot be joined to the Asiatic system. If they drift from their independent station it must be toward assimilation and identification with the American system, to which they belong by the operation of natural laws, and must belong by the operation of political necessity.

(...)

[The United States] firmly believes that the position of the Hawaiian Islands as the key to the dominion of the American Pacific demands their neutrality, to which end it will earnestly co-operate with the native government. And if, through any cause, the maintenance of such a position of neutrality should be found by Hawaii to be impracticable, this government would then unhesitatingly meet the altered situation by seeking an avowedly American solution for the grave issues presented.¹

Obviously, the US was determined to occupy Hawaii rather than allow it to escape from the American sphere of influence into that of Asia (in other words, Japan).

A little-known moment in history: King Kalakaua's plea to Japan

The directive issued by the Secretary of State reveals suspicions that ultimately led to an event now categorized as a little-known moment in the history of Japan-Hawaii relations.

In March 1881 Kalakaua, the king of Hawaii, happened to visit Japan, one of the destinations on an unofficial world tour. The Japanese gave him a warm, lavish welcome, but the little-known aspect of his visit was a confidential, informal conversation with Emperor Meiji held at the Akasaka Palace.

¹ Yoshimori Saneyuki, *Hawaii wo meguru Nichi-Bei kankeishi* (History of Japan-US relations with respect to Hawaii) (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjūsha, 1943); see also US Office of the Historian, "No. 401: Mr. Blaine to Mr. Comly, December 1, 1881 at <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1881/d405> (retrieved 11/2022).

King Kalakaua lamented the fact that in recent years the Polynesian population of Hawaii was decreasing in number, while the number of Caucasians was on the rise. Moreover, the whites were gaining more power in Hawaii as well. He was worried that the Hawaiian royal line would die out. The king made the following request of Emperor Meiji: “I have no choice but to seek the help of a powerful nation such as the Japanese empire. Hawaii is well suited to the cultivation of sugar cane. I am certain that if we invite Japanese people to settle in Hawaii, they will assimilate easily. They would be ideal for other reasons as well. With their guidance, industry will thrive, and a Japanese presence will help prevent the Polynesian population from declining and the white race from taking over. I hope Your Majesty will give due consideration to the situation I have described and help save Hawaii.” After this impassioned plea, King Kalakaua added, “I have no offspring, but I do have a niece, Kaiulani, who is of noble character. I intend to designate her to succeed me as the ruler of Hawaii, and would very much like her to have an exceptional consort. I understand that Prince Yamashina Sadamaro² is a stellar member of the imperial family. I would greatly appreciate Your Majesty’s blessing on a marriage between Prince Sadamaro and Princess Kaiulani.”³

It was the fervent hope of the king, who feared the conquest of Hawaii by Americans, to prevent annexation by the US through a marriage that would join the Japanese and Hawaiian royal families.

Since this was a request that was completely without precedent, and an important one, Emperor Meiji considered it carefully. Nevertheless, the following year he sent an emissary to decline Kalakaua’s proposal. The reasons given were that intermarriage between the Japanese imperial family and a foreign royal family had never taken place, and that Japan did not think it prudent to act in a manner that might seem to interfere in the American sphere of influence.

“I urge Japan to take the lead in establishing an Asian federation”

A detailed account of the confidential conversation between Emperor Meiji and King Kalakaua can be found in *Documents from the Meiji Era*. The dialogue took place on March 11, 1881; Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru served as interpreter.

On that occasion the king made another request of Emperor Meiji regarding the urgent need to create an Asian federation. “The nations of Europe think only of their own interests. They do not care a bit about other nations’ problems or difficulties. They collaborate in political scheming against the nations of Asia. As a result, the nations of East Asia are isolated, and in any case are not in the habit of engaging in political maneuvering against the nations of Europe. Today East Asian interests are controlled by the nations of Europe. Therefore, the urgent task for the East Asian nations is to form a federation that could protect all of East Asia, and enable it to hold its own against the European powers. The time is ripe for such an alliance.”

² More commonly known as Prince Higashifushimi Yorihiro.

³ Yoshimori, *op. cit.*; Kurobane Shigeru, *Nichi-Bei kōsō shi no kenkyū* (A study of the history of disputes between Japan and the US (Tokyo: Nansōsha, 1973). [ask about 再引用].

Kalakaua added, “My country does not have the power to draft a grand plan. However, I have learned not only that the Japanese empire has not only made surprising progress, but also that its people are numerous and brave. Therefore, if an Asian federation is to be formed, it should be Your Majesty who takes the initiative and becomes its leader; I will do my utmost to assist Your Majesty in any way I can.” He urged Emperor Meiji to take the lead in forming an alliance that encompassed the nations of Asia, including Siam (Thailand), Persia (Iran), and India.

Having listened to the king’s plea, Emperor Meiji replied, “Our nation’s progress is not as great as it may seem. Since conflicts with China often arise and the Chinese are always plotting against Japan, it would be difficult to achieve a complete peace with China. It would be nigh impossible to accomplish Your Highness’ proposal. I would like to consider this carefully; I will consult with my ministers of state and reply later.”

According to *Documents from the Meiji Era*, in addition to the king’s proposal of an Asian federation, Emperor Meiji addressed two others presented by King Kalakaua: the construction of an undersea cable between Hawaii and Japan, and marriage between the king’s niece, Princess Kaiulani, and the Japanese Prince Sadamaro.⁴

Emperor Meiji responded as follows: “In the first place, it is quite clear that China would never accept Japanese leadership. Furthermore, the notion of a federation including nations such as Siam and India is unrealistic, as they are located at a great distance from Japan, and their languages and customs are quite different from ours. Moreover, as far as the laying of an undersea cable is concerned, an American has already proposed such an undertaking and Japan has promised to render assistance. Regarding the matter of marriage between the Japanese and Hawaiian royal families, such an arrangement is inadvisable, as it might prove to be the source of problems in the future.

In March 1882 the emperor entrusted his reply, written in his own hand, to the Imperial Household Agency’s Second Secretary Nagasaki Shōgo, who delivered it to King Kalakaua. The missive addressed only the matter of an Asian federation proposed by the king. The reply begins by saying that an enterprise such as an Asian federation is immense and far-reaching, and that the circumstances, as well as climates, languages, and customs of the nations of Asia, differ greatly. The emperor politely declined the suggestion that he become the leader of such a federation. “The more thought I give to this concept, the more difficult its achievement seems. Not to mention the fact that I could not shoulder the heavy burden of being its leader.” In 1890, when he was preparing for the inaugural Diet session and was dealing with a multitude of domestic problems, he said, “I wasted an entire morning contemplating the affairs of a foreign country instead of attending to my own obligations,” adding that it “would be difficult to make the Asian federation concept a reality.”

⁴ Imperial Household Agency, ed. *Meiji Tennō ki* (Documents from the Meiji era) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1968-1977).

About the difficulties involved in a marriage between Prince Sadamaro and Princess Kaiulani, the matter of the undersea cable, and the immigration proposal, the emperor had Inoue Kaoru prepare a response and hand it to Nagasaki Shōgo for delivery.⁵

Judging from his entreaty to Emperor Meiji, King Kalakaua must have been a staunch advocate of Pan-Asianism. It is entirely possible that his proposal, however naïve, gave rise to the idea of the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, developed by Japan some years later.

Japan-led Pan-Asianism, whose purpose was to counter white imperialism, was viewed with envy and fear by the nations that most needed it: China and Korea, to name two. It is not hard to see the irony, the irony of history, in the fact that such an alliance was the fervent hope of the ruler of a kingdom located many thousands of miles away.

Obliteration of the Hawaiian Kingdom

King Kalakaua's desperate attempt to strengthen the bond between Japan and Hawaii to the point of forging a marriage contract with the Japanese royal family, in the hope of forestalling Western (especially American) encroachment on Hawaii, came to naught.

The king was terribly disappointed. If the marriage proposal had been approved, as he had hoped, Hawaii might have become Japanese territory, an extremely meaningful consequence.

In that case, the relationship between Japan and the US, as far as the Pacific region was concerned, might well have evolved in a totally different way. But since Emperor Meiji was loath to create friction with the US, Hawaii never became part of Japan, and was instead annexed by the US. In January 1893 the Americans sent a landing party of 150 sailors from the USS Boston to support white residents of Hawaii. Together they occupied Hawaiian government buildings and brought the rule of the Hawaiian monarchy to an end. How sad it was that a nation with no army was powerless to fend off American attackers numbering only 150 sailors and Marines. The Hawaiian flag, which had flown for 100 years, ever since King Kamehameha assumed the throne, was never to be seen again. The annexation took place five years later, in 1898. Japanese indifference and American obsession: that delicate equilibrium and ensuing events were the determining factors that shaped Hawaii's fate.

⁵ Nabae Michiyasu, "*Hawai ōkoku kōtei no Meiji tennō to no onmitsudan ni tsuite; daitōa kyōeiken no shushō*" (Confidential conversation between King Kalakaua of Hawaii and Emperor Meiji concerning a greater East Asian coprosperity sphere" (Tokyo: Institute of Budo and Moral Education, March 1987); https://kokushikan.repo.nii.ac.jp/?action=repository_uri&item_id=7819&file_id=189&file_no=1 (retrieved 12/2022).

Open Door Policy

The time has come for a discussion of the Open Door Policy, without which our quest to define the Greater East Asian War would not be complete. That policy holds the key that reveals the essence of that conflict.

In 1899 US Secretary of State John Hay sent a note (referred to as the First Open Door Note) to six nations: the UK, Germany, Russia, Japan, Italy, and France. It was a declaration, whose main points were: (1) European powers with concessions and leases in China should not interfere with treaty ports or other nations' vested interests, and (2) no nation should receive unfavorable treatment with regard to tariffs and railroad charges in another nation's sphere of interest.

In other words, the US was advocating equal commercial opportunity for all six nations, as long as their spheres of influence in China endured. During the last half of the 19th century, the US had extended its borders into the distant Western Pacific, but had had no opportunity to join the European powers in the free-for-all for Chinese territory. The Open Door Policy was a new one drafted to ensure that US interests, threatened by the establishment of European spheres of influence in China, were safeguarded.

However, the Open Door Policy, premised on the existence of European spheres of influence in China, soon expanded and transmuted. It then became the core of dissension between Japan and the U.S., which culminated in the Greater East Asian War. Here I will offer a brief explanation.

In 1900, after the First Open Door Note was issued, the Boxer Rebellion erupted in China. As each nation represented in the Allied forces sent troops to suppress it, the danger that China might be partitioned increased. Secretary Hay thereupon issued the Second Open Door Note, sent to the same six powers, which underscored the principles outlined in the first note, but also included a new proposal advocating not only equal commercial opportunity beyond spheres of influence, but also the preservation of Chinese territorial and administrative integrity.

American historian Paul Clyde made the following remarks about the expansion of the content and scope of application of the Open Door Policy:

The principle of the territorial integrity of China has been confused with the doctrine of the "Open Door" and by many considered an integral part of the doctrine. Failure on the part of critics to define the doctrine clearly has led to such confusion that careless writers have characterized actions which had nothing to do with the "Open Door," as violations of the doctrine.⁶

⁶ Paul H. Clyde, *International Rivalries in Manchuria* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1928), 168; https://ia804701.us.archive.org/33/items/in.ernet.dli.2015.12326/2015.12326.International-Rivalries-In-Manchuria-1689-1933_text.pdf (retrieved 12/2022).

Without a doubt, the difference between the Japanese and American interpretations of the Open Door Policy was instrumental in forming important points of issue that developed into dissension and antagonism between Japan and the US, in the Far East.

Collision between *special* and *prevailing*

What was at the crux of the controversy surrounding the Open Door Policy? Since the Meiji era, Japan's China policy was built around protecting and maintaining the special interests and special status it had accumulated on the Asian continent, particularly in South Manchuria, having risked its national destiny through wars with China and Russia and subsequent efforts, all of them laborious. The word *special*, as in "special interests" and "special status" implied not only geographical proximity but also a considerable amount of historical sentiment.

In contrast, the American Open Door Policy championed equal commercial opportunity and complete territorial and administrative integrity in all of China. Therefore, there was bound to be friction between that policy and the concept of special interests or special status. Certainly, when John Hay advocated the Open Door Policy, spheres of influence in China represented the *prevailing* situation, the standard of the times. The Open Door Policy, in principle, favored the special within the context of the standard. However, given the vicissitudes of Japanese-American relations, with the year 1921, when the Washington Naval Conference took place as a turning point, an "expanded" interpretation of the Open Door Policy rendered the special status claimed by Japan as special in the true sense of the word, i.e, nonstandard.

In the battle between Japan's China policy, which centered on the preservation of its special status, and American Far Eastern policy, Japan was at a distinct disadvantage. One of the combatants was engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the survival of its people, while the other, already in possession of far more than it needed, was assuming a paternalistic role. In the eyes of most people, the latter combatant seemed to be behaving correctly, even virtuously. Political scientist Hanabusa Nagamichi argued that where Manchuria was concerned, American diplomacy was disingenuous: at times, the US sought honor, i.e., righteousness, in defending the Open Door Policy; at other times, it sought to profit from it. However, most of the actions the US took with respect to Manchuria were intended to convince a third party (any third party) that it was the victim. For instance, the Americans condemned Japan when the Manchurian Incident occurred, maintaining that it was a violation of the Open Door Policy.⁷

Because the substance of the Open Door Policy was significantly expanded and underwent alterations, differences arose in the way it was interpreted by the Japanese and the Americans. Furthermore, those differences in interpretation and even understanding were never resolved. Some consequences: (1) the Open Door Policy inspired US Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to initiate his "non-recognition policy" when Japan issued the Twenty-One Demands to China in 1915; (2) it came to represent the central standpoint in the Nine-Power treaty, concluded

⁷ Hanabusa Nagamichi, *Manshūkoku to monko kaihō mondai* (Manchuria and the Open Door Policy problem) (Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Kyōkai, 1934).

at the Washington Naval Conference in 1922; it supplied grounds for Secretary of State Henry Stimson's "non-recognition" argument when the Manchurian Incident occurred in 1931, (4) it became an excuse for US condemnation of Japan when the 2nd Sino-Japanese War broke out, and (5) it was incorporated into the Americans' rigid insistence on respect for principles during negotiations with US Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1941, as well as in the demands in the Hull Note, which triggered the outbreak of hostilities between Japan and the US. Moreover, at the postwar IMTFE (International Military Tribunal for the Far East), the Open Door Policy was cited as the fundamental philosophy behind the Nine-Power Treaty, one of the pacts Japan was charged with having violated.

Though the structure of the Open Door Policy transmuted with the times and with circumstances, its fundamentalism continued to serve as the major point of contention in the Far East between Japan and the US, one that was never reconciled, and as the undercurrent at the heart of the 50-year conflict between the two nations. The Open Door Policy is the problem that offers the most consequential viewpoint to contemplate when we consider the evolution of the Japan-US relationship over a half-century, and the historical background of the Greater East Asian War.