

THE DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS DURING SINO-JAPANESE WARS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN SINO-JAPANESE RELATIONS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the Diplomatic Relations during Sino-Japanese Wars and its implications for modern Sino-Japan International relations in the 20th century was characterized by the prevailing forces of expansionism, colonialism and struggle for power and influence by European powers in Europe, Asia, and even Africa. This highlighted the paradoxes in the 'subtle' and pragmatic westernization of Japan by the United States in the nineteenth century laden with the spread of capitalism against communism. This has not been without costs and unprecedented variations in Sino-Japanese social institutions, economic, political, military relations even in contemporary times. This manifested in detente against Chinese allied aggression in the South China sea and Asia with dual co-operation and sometimes 'conflict of interest'. Using the historical approach, this paper examines the diplomatic relations during Sino-Japanese Wars and its implications for modern Sino-Japanese Relations. It argues that Japan's 'courting' of the United States since the first World War was a means to an end to achieve power status in the region as well as gain recognition as belonging to the class of the powerful hegemon countries and that explains her survival and the conduct of the diplomacy between China and the west today. The paper concludes that Japan did not change its diplomatic strategy in the region and globally, it has only manifested during different epochs and helped strengthened Japanese cause as a regional power.

Introduction

Japan opened the floor for the active participation of non-European states in international politics in the 20th century. Japan, which was an isolated country in the Far East was both lucky and unlucky to be discovered by the westernising and questionable geo-political grounds of the West,

majorly the United States of America in the 1850s. The discovery of Japan was the beginning of series of decision making processes that would later result in some of the world's changing events. The West's decision upon her discovery of Japan was 'exploitation' and westernisation and the aftermath of this was the Japan's harbouring of hatred against the protective relationship with the West as well as the awakening of the desire for strength, power and recognition in the international system. Japan was of the opinion that gaining power and recognition in the international system would allow her to deal with the western powers on an equal footing and never become a victim of western domination again. Thus, the age of Meiji Restoration began in Japan in January 1868. The Meiji age was characterised by Japan's utilisation of the knowledge gained from the United States to effect modernised political, economic, social and military changes. The Meiji Restoration had much similarity with Western policies and even adopted the Western type of colonial expansion. However, Duus argued that Japan's Meiji imperialism and expansionism was a backward imperialism shaped by a sense of inferiority vis-a-vis with the West¹. The achievements of Japan during the Meiji period nevertheless enabled her to emerge as the most sophisticated state in East Asia and also symbolised a breakthrough for non-Western states. This was because Japan's Meiji system provided a blueprint on how non-western states could catch up and eventually match the European powers in imperial, economic and military strength.

However, despite the fact that Japan emerged from the Meiji Period more powerful and modernised, she was in no way ready to face the western powers directly; so she turned her attentions to her fellow Asian states of China and Korea who were directly and indirectly controlled by the western powers. Drawing from the imperial knowledge she had gained from the west, Japan started pursuing the control, colonisation and imperialism of China and Korea under the guise of 'Pan-Asianism' also referred to as the policy of Asian for Asians. Pan-Asianism to Japan entailed the 'liberation' of her Asian neighbours from the clutches of the West. Japan, through her control of China, Korea and other Asian states sought to attain world power status and also the position of the most powerful state in Asia. This position had been previously occupied by China, a very large and populated Asian country, which like Japan was subjugated by the western powers, but unlike Japan emerged in a state of backwardness and depreciation because of her non-modernised ruling Manchu dynasty. The imperial desires of Japan made her to invade China and also engage in series of wars against her Asian neighbour, China, which she viewed as weak and divided, and eventually the Western Powers. However, the invasion of China by Japan effected series of changes in China and also went a long way in influencing global diplomacy.

The First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War

Prior to the 1800s, Japan and China being neighbours in East Asia had been having economic and diplomatic relations with China, being the most powerful country in the region having the upper hand most of the times. However, at the beginning of modern times, the position of power shifted to Japan who had become more westernised and modernised than China as a result of her contact with the West. Apart from becoming more modernised, Japan also emerged with imperialistic desires toward her Asian neighbours. She sought to acquire more territories as well as natural resources which were all present in China. In her bid to acquire more territories, Japan in the late 19th century became fixated on acquiring the control of Korea, an Asian territory that was China's most important tributary state. In 1885, Japan tried to enthrone a pro Japanese Korean government in Korea but was unsuccessful. Then, in 1894, when a Korean revolt erupted, both Japan and China sent troops to suppress the insurrection. After, the insurrection had been suppressed; Japan refused to withdraw her troops and induced the Korean court to abrogate its agreement with China. This led to the First Sino-Japanese war for supremacy in Korea between 1894 and 1895². The war ended with the modernised Japan emerging as the victor. It also marked the emergence of Japan as the major power in Asia and demonstrated the weakness of the Chinese empire. Thus, dominance in East Asia shifted from the weak China which had failed to modernise, and update its military and was just recovering from losing two opium wars to the European powers to the modernised and westernised Japan which just came out of isolation with improved military strength³. Many scholars have opined that the First Sino-Japanese War was a disguise used by Japan to get rid of two states, China and Russia(indirectly) who posed as threats to Japan's expansion in Asia as both states had expanded to Korea⁴.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki officially ended the First Sino-Japanese War. Japan benefited a lot from the Treaty as she was able to gain control of Korea which she later annexed in 1910. The Treaty also ensured that China ceded some of her territories such as Taiwan, Liaodong Peninsula and Penghu Islands to Japan. China also granted Japan some trade rights in Chinese territories. Although the First-Sino Japanese War ended in 1895, it had long lasting effects. It brought Japan to the notice of the world's major power especially Russia, who now viewed Japan as a threat to her expansionism in Asia. It also marked the inclusion of Japan into the ranks of the imperial powers and this was confirmed by the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance between Britain and Japan which can also be said to be an alliance put in place to enable Britain check the spread of Russian expansion into the Pacific areas⁵. Japan's victory in the war stimulated her to further invade China. However, in

China, Japan's victory alerted the Chinese people to their government's corruption and weakness and this triggered anti-foreign sentiments and later a rebellion. The Sino-Japanese War not only made China vulnerable to Japan, it also opened her up to further European control and exploitation. Russia, unsatisfied with Japan's control of the Liaodong Peninsula, which she also coveted, persuaded a reluctant Japan to relinquish the Liaodong Peninsula on a 25 years lease while other European powers of France and Germany also gained land and trade concessions in China⁶. All in all, the First Sino-Japanese war ended only to pave ways for events and decisions that resulted in more strife in East Asia. The years after the end of the First Sino-Japanese War saw the rise of tension between Russia and Japan over the Chinese territory of Manchuria and control over the affairs of Korea. In Korea, Russia usurped Japan's trade concessions and in Manchuria increased her influence as well as her military forces. All these eventually led to the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. Although the war was between Japan and Russia, it involved China because it was a war of partitioning of Chinese territories. However, on the part of Japan, the war was all about eradicating European powers and control in East Asia, especially in China and Korea while paving the way for Japan's imperialism in China and other parts of Asia. It was never considered that Japan would go to war against a major power, but when she did, many thought that the war was unequal and that Russia, the European giant would vanquish Japan. However, having the advantage of proximity to the scene of the war and control of the sea, Japan emerged as the victor⁷.

The Russo-Japanese war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. With the Treaty, Russia ceded control of Korea to Japan and also gave up her hold on Chinese territories such as Port Arthur, Liatung and South Manchuria to Japan. She also transferred her rights regarding Chinese Eastern Railways to Japan amidst other things. For Japan, her victory against Russia means the consolidation of her status as world power and an opportunity to penetrate into China under the guise of Pan-Asianism while finally annexing Korea in 1910. To the Western powers, Japan's victory demonstrated the emergence of a new Asia's regional power and a new world power. Scholars such as W.E.B. Du Bois saw Japanese victory as a challenge to western supremacy⁸ and this is certainly true as Japan was able to achieve two of her goals which were to gradually eradicate European or western powers in Asia as well as exert her imperialism on China. The war was definitely a catalyst of series of future events in both China and Japan.

The Russo-Japanese war was also described by H.G. Wells as the end of an era, the end of European domination⁹. It encouraged the rise of nationalism in China which later led to the end of monarchical rule in 1912 and brought in a republican government led by Dr. Sun YatSen, the leader of the Chinese

National Movement. However, the emergence of a new government was not the end of China's internal troubles as she later fell under the leadership of Yuan Shi Kai, a dictator who disrupted stability in China leading to the division of the country between two governments, the Communist government and the Kuomintang national government. The internal strife in China thus made her more vulnerable to Japan's further invasion and imperialism which was further strengthened during the period of the First World War.

Japan and China During and After the First World War

The First World War was very important to Japan and China as it was very crucial to the two countries' attainment of regional dominance and global recognition. The First World War, to China, was an opportunity to reshape the geographical balance of power and attain equality with European nations¹⁰. Despite remaining neutral at the beginning of the war, China offered secret assistance and supplies to Britain and the allies. She later entered the war with the mindset of regaining the control of her territories that had been hitherto seized by Japan and the European powers. Japan on the other hand joined the First World War on the side of the Allies. However, Japan made use of the war as an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen itself and expand its power in China and the Asian region¹¹. As the Western powers were occupied with the war, Japan attacked and took over Germany's held territory in China, Kiaochow, occupying the railway port from Tsingtao to Tsinan so as to eradicate Germany's control in Asia and get the room to expand its influence in China. Japan also presented Chinese President Yuan Shi Kai with a set of Twenty one demands which was aimed at ensuring Japan's colonial power and position in China in January 1915. Through these demands, Japan sought concessions in Chinese territories of Manchuria, Shantung and Inner Mongolia provinces, facilities concerning coal and iron and other economic concessions. Japan also asked china not to cede any harbour to any other power except from Japan. In addition to these, Japan also made demands which were not to be made public such as the appointment of Japanese officials as advisors in political, financial and military matters. The aims of Japan was to use the twenty one demands to colonise China, especially her economic rich or wealthy areas such as Manchuria and also close the Chinese doors to the Europeans under the guise of 'Asia for Asians' or 'Pan-Asianism'¹². The terms of the demands were so formidable that if accepted, would have converted China into a vassal or colony of Japan. Nevertheless, China did not have any choice other than to concede to the demands in 1915 especially as Japan threatened her with war. Thus, Japan invaded and colonised China.

When the First World War ended in 1918, both China and Japan were invited to attend the Paris Peace Conference along with other countries of the world. According to Xu, China had planned, to attend the post war peace conference as early as 1915, consequently, when the war ended in November 1918, China sent her delegation hoping to finally achieve full control of her mainland territories. The Conference, however, intensified tensions in East Asia instead of dissipating it. At the conference, Japan was given five seats and China only two. Some of the European and Western delegates, unfamiliar with Japan's Twenty One Demands formalised Japan's control over the defeated Germany's territories in China, much to China's dismay. Japan also sought to expand its empire and seal its position as the equal of other Great powers. To achieve this, she sought to insert a clause opposing racial discrimination into the Covenant of the League of Nations but the clause was opposed by Australia and was not included. Nevertheless, Japan's demands were half satisfied at the Conference and she came out to become the world's third largest naval power. On the contrary, China's demands which were the restoration of her sovereign rights in all Chinese territories and cancellation of all spheres of influence and relinquishment of all leased territories were not satisfied at all. Thus, China did not sign the Treaty of Versailles although it later joined the League of Nations through the Treaty of St. Germain with Austria. At home in China, a protest called the May Fourth Movement was organised in response to the decisions made at the conference. According to Xu, the protest was a sign of China's turn towards socialism in 1921¹³. The Paris Peace Conference further encouraged and boosted up Japan's imperialism and control of China. However, seeing Japanese power intensifying and spreading, USA and Britain sought new ways to curb Japan.

The Washington Conference and the Inter-War Years Period

The beginning of the inter-war years and the aftermath of the Paris Peace Conference marked the efforts of the United States to curb the growing imperial and naval power of Japan in China. Against this background the U.S. convened a conference of the eight powers (France, Britain, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal China and Belgium) with interests in the Western Pacific, particularly with regard to China and how to establish a framework for naval arms limitation in November, 1921. At the end of the three Treaties signed at the conference in February, 1922, the U.S was able to limit Japan's Navy so that it did not compete with that of U.S and Britain. The US also cleverly contained Japan's power to an extent in China, especially so that it did not prove any threat either to China or to the interests of other powers in the Far East.

The three main treaties signed at the conference included a Four Power Treaty signed by Japan, France, Britain and USA to check Japan's growing power in East Asia and secure the other three's possessions in East Asia. The second treaty was a Five Power Treaty signed by Britain, USA, Japan, France and Italy on naval arms limitations and the start of a form of disarmament. The third treaty was a Nine Power Treaty where all the eight powers including USA pledged themselves to uphold an 'Open Door' policy towards China and also respect the integrity and territorial independence of China. In addition, two other documents not officially part of the Washington Treaties were signed. The first of the document was an agreement between China and Japan whereby the latter agreed to return to China the leased territory of Kiaochow which had been ceded to her by Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Japan also surrendered to China all her privileges she enjoyed in the Shantung Province although she would still retain control over certain railways for 15 years (Khanna). These treaties helped secure China's partial territorial and economic security and independence from China. However, it was obvious that Japan's agreement to the conditions of these treaties was not voluntary. According to E.H Carr, Japan's compliance can be said to be as a result of her being intimidated by a firm Anglo-American front and by the 'moral pressure' of world opinion especially as Japan was at that period shifting from Oligarchy government to government by party politicians which allowed for new political agendas such as universal suffrage, women's right and morality in international affairs¹⁴. Generally, the Washington Treaty was considered a success especially as it appeared to have restored the pre-war balance in the Pacific and East Asia. However, the improvement and successes of the Treaties were temporary and superficial.

In retrospect, the Washington Conference's decisions reduced Japan's control over China, it gave room for the western encroachment which showed indifference to China's nationalism. However, at this point, China had been influenced by internationalist, socialist and democratic ideas that rose up at the end of the First World War. They incorporated USA's Wilsonian ideas of self-determination; however, their hope for self-rule using Wilsonian ideas was dashed at the Treaty of Versailles. These propelled them to take actions such as boycotting the goods of foreigners especially that of the Japanese in an attempt to resist imperialism in their lands. Thus, by incorporating USSR socialist ideas and at the end of the day, China became divided between those that think China will be unified and stabilised under the socialist rule (The Chinese Communist Party) and those that think that China will be stabilised under China's Nationalist Party (The Kuomintang). Also, China became divided territorially among different warlords who autonomously controlled different areas in China. Meanwhile, Japan whose military leaders had been

advancing towards the path militarism saw China's division as an opportunity to reaffirm her economic and political imperialistic designs in China. This led to series of events which sparked another war between Japan and China.

The Manchurian Crisis (The Spark Of 1931) and the Second Sino-Japanese War

For much of the 20th century, Japan had exercised effective control of Manchuria in China, initially through the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905 and through the Twenty One Demands in 1915. Meanwhile, around the year 1931, the control of Japan's state structure by military leaders brought about a change in her diplomacy. Although, the civilians in government desired to achieve the goal of making Japan great by cooperating with the West; the military leaders, followed the course of militarism and armed conquest aiming at the seizure of Manchuria in China especially as Japan had been devastated by the Great Depression of 1929 and population explosion in the 1920's. Japan, therefore, needed the natural resources such as coal located in Chinese territory of Manchuria to revive her own economy and increase her military power. She also needed Manchuria as a place to export her exploding population. Thus, a serious conflict slowly ensued over the total control of Manchuria. This consisted of majorly Chinese majority, and was still legally under the control of China. Though Japan controlled much of South Manchuria through its railways and its hold on the Liaodong peninsula, China's sovereignty was already indirectly being compromised.

The Chinese in their attempt to assert their independence and sovereignty started to build series of railroads that would in part encircle the Japanese lines and terminate at Huludao, a port being developed by China. Also, Chang Hsueh- Liang the leader in charge of Manchuria was siding with the Kuomintang and its desire to rid China of foreign control, especially that of Japan. All these and more propelled those in charge of Japanese main armed force in Manchuria to decide that the time had passed for compromising with the Chinese despite the agreement to respect China's integrity at the Washington Conference. All this led to the spark which effected series of events-the Mukden incident. By the treaty of Portsmouth, the Japanese had acquired the right to maintain about 15,000 troops which were based at Mukden. It was these troops who alleged to have discovered that a group of Chinese soldiers were attempting to blow up part of the South Manchurian railway near the city of Mukden on 19th of September, 1931, although this claim has been questioned by various scholars over the years. Using this as an excuse, the Japanese army seized Mukden and the Chinese provincial government was forced to leave Mukden and establish itself at Chinchow. By October 1931, the Japanese commander announced that the Provincial

government was no longer to be recognised. The Japanese continued on to capture the whole of Manchuria without any formal declaration of war by 1932 and in the same year the Japanese attempted to occupy Shanghai after a failed anti-Japanese boycott carried out by the Chinese in the city. But this was stopped by the League of Nations. However, by March, 1932, the Japanese, facing little resistance from the Chinese Nationalist forces consolidated her position in Manchuria by establishing a puppet state called Manchukuo and installed the deposed king of China's last dynasty, Pu Yi as its titular head.

Japan invaded China without regard to the rules and agreements of the League of Nations though the league was privy to this aggressive move as contained in the Council of the League under the Article 11 of the League's covenant which provided that "any war or threat of war... is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations..."¹⁵. Japan, however, denied committing aggression against China's territories and claimed that Japanese army was only protecting the rights of Japan. Japan further assured the council that she would withdraw her troops as soon as her interests were secured. However, she continued her invasion until China petitioned the League again. The League then assembled a commission of inquiry known as the Lytton Commission to inquire about the circumstances that threatened peace between China and Japan. The result of the inquiry was the League's rebuke of Japan for establishing the state of Manchukuo within China's sovereignty and also the refusal to internationally recognise Japan's Manchukuo. Seeing this result, Japan gave notice of withdrawal from the League as she was not willing to restore autonomy to Manchuria within China's sovereignty. This action of Japan along with her initial invasion of Manchuria went a long way in contributing to the outbreak of another world war.

Japan continued in its invasion and aggression of China by moving on in 1933 to seize control of Jehol, another Chinese province rich in oil under the claim that the province was an integral part of the newly established Manchukuo. By 1934, Japan had assumed the role of protecting Asia for Asians. She adopted her own 'Monroe Doctrine' which was a notice to the European Nations to vacate China. Japan also gave notice of withdrawal from the Washington Treaties and announced from Tokyo that China was a Japanese preserve in which no other power could take important actions without Japan's consent. Japan went on in 1935 to force the withdrawal of any officials and armed forces that might prove unfriendly to Japan from the provinces of Hebei and Chahar. Both of these territories came partly under the control of Japan and other territories such as Suiyuan, Shansi and Shantung were threatened.

Meanwhile, China's Nationalist leader, Chiang Kai-Shek did not offer open opposition to the Japanese, preferring instead to pursue his campaigns against the Chinese Communist forces. However, in December 1936, in what came to be known as the Xian incident, Chiang was seized by forces under the command of his own generals and compelled to ally with the Chinese Communists in a United Front against Japan in 1937. All this was just a prequel to a series of devastating and life changing events in China.

By 1937, China had achieved a degree of unity and was keen to stand firm to protect the integrity of the country¹⁶. Practically all Chinese regional military and political groups had rallied to support the joint efforts of the KMT nationalists and the communist party in their mission to rid China of the Japanese by every means. In Japan, however, the rift between moderates who believed in conciliation and young officers who believed in the use of force was widening. In November, 1936, an Anti-Comintern Pact with the objective of defeating and eradicating international communism was signed by Germany and Japan and although, no specific country was mentioned as the enemy, Japan saw the pact as an opportunity to contain and get rid of the KMT-CCP alliance in China especially as the KMT-CCP allies were so dedicated to opposing Japan's control over China and take total control of China.

It is against this background that an undeclared war broke out between China and Japan in July 7, 1937 two days after the KMT nationalists allied with the Chinese Communist Party. The fighting broke out at the Marco Polo Bridge, few kilometres away from the Chinese province of Peking which was a route which the Japanese from the North wanted to use to penetrate into central China. The fighting occurred as a result of a clash between the Chinese and the Japanese troops, with the first shots being fired by the Chinese. This provoked the Japanese to demand the immediate withdrawal of all Chinese forces from Northern China. Japan also desired and demanded for the stoppage of all anti-Japanese propaganda and Chinese cooperation in fighting communism. All these demands were rejected by Chinese leader, Chiang Kai-Shek. As a result of Chiang's refusal to comply with the Japanese demands, the Japanese launched a full scale offensive in China and thus, a second Sino-Japanese war which later became a part of a bigger war, the Second World War began.

By the end of July, 1937, Japan had occupied not only the Marco Polo Bridge but also Peking and Tientsin. During the course of two years, the Japanese obtained possession of most Chinese ports, the majority of the cities and the railway lines. China's capital, Nanking also fell into Japanese hands by December 1937 in what became known as the Nanjing Massacre where many Chinese civilians were killed and raped. In March, 1940, the Japanese established a puppet government at Nanking under the leadership of Wang

Chang Wei. The Chinese capital was later moved west to Hankow but the Japanese followed and took the city in October 1938. In the same month, the Chinese lost Guangzhou and later Pieping along the railway lines into Shansi and Inner Mongolia. They dominated Shantung and took possession of the Peiping-Hankow and Lung-Hai railways and even had complete command of the sea. However, despite their repeated defeats, the Chinese United Front did not give in to the Japanese demands for surrender and received support from Western countries such as Russia and USA. Japan, seeing this, moved to strengthen her ties with the Axis power in Europe. These actions of Japan which also included the harassment of Western territorial concessions in China along with the brewing of another European war led to the Pacific war which contributed enormously to the ultimate outbreak of another European war and the Second World War. However, it is important to note that for Japan, the invasion of China and the Second Sino-Japanese war ultimately proved to be a disaster as she ultimately lost the war not only in China but also against the Western powers. China, victorious from her war against Japanese invasion emerged militarily. Though economically bankrupt, was still capable of going through a civil war which resulted in the emergence of the Chinese Communist Party as the Chinese government. It witnessed the fleeing of Chiang Kai-Shek and the KMT nationalist party from China.

Conclusion

It is important to emphasize that Japanese invasion of China and the two Sino-Japanese wars had a lot of effects on East Asia and also on the world at large. It was a spark that ignited series of events and changes in the global world and in the world diplomatic systems and a change in the regional configuration of security of Asia and Americanization of Asia. Chinese resurgence militarily, economically and politically has often 'challenged' the uniqueness of the U.S.-Japan alliance for the provincial security situation makes it much more than a bilateral question. Though superior Japanese military provision for U.S. forces may fortify deterrence and the capability to respond to chinese allied regional aggression, it could exacerbate Asian apprehensions about Japan's remilitarization, perhaps even firing a new regional arms race. The extent to which this security alliance gives assurances of a peaceful environment to sovereign countries in East China Sea and South China Sea is only a matter of time for the foreseeable future with the rise of China and resurgence of Russia military. One could argue that at least for now the peace is relative. But whether there is a likelihood of having a third Sino-Japanese war fought along Super power alliance configurations remains an issue for sino-Japanese relations and global security in the 21st century. The individual level of analysis cannot be ignored as well. Also, this may likely

impact the security of trade routes and economic relations along the South China Sea and South East Asia in so far as China- Japanese relations do not improve in the foreseeable future.

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