Japan’s Modernization vs. American Expansionist Thrust Into East Asia at the Turn of the Last Century: The Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5*

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Introduction

The year 2005 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the end of the Russo-Japanese War in the summer of 1905 and the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Pacific War or the Asia-Pacific War in the summer of 1945. These two wars are very significant when Japan-U.S. relations are put into consideration: the former marked a turning point from friendship to hostility, and the latter the beginning of Japan’s sixty-year subordination to the U.S., in which the Japanese people have ironically enjoyed their happiness and economic prosperity in their sixty-year-long peace and stability in the shadow of the U.S. physical presence in their homeland. On the other hand, the year 2005 was colored by wave after wave of hostility between Japan and its neighboring nations such as South Korea and China which have particularly recently blamed Japan for its crimes upon their people and lands committed by its militarism in the first half of the twentieth century, primarily because of Japanese Prime Minister Jun’ichiro Koizumi’s annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Prime Minister Koizumi has never failed to pay a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine once a year since he took office, sticking to his public pledge to visit the Shrine “on August 15” he made at the time of the Liberal Democratic Party presidential election in 2001. Over his visits to the Shrine, there has been criticism on both sides of the Sea of Japan — between Japan and South Korea and China, making East Asia a capricious and fragile region.

Tense relations have never been eased; they were more critically intensified last year. Prime Minister Koizumi stubbornly preached the importance of the Japan-U.S. alliance as if it were the only pillar in Japan’s relations with the rest

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of the world. On November 16, 2005, for example, he said at the summit with President George W. Bush in Kyoto:

The United States remains the most indispensable ally to Japan. And if — the better our bilateral relations, the easier it would be for us to establish better relations with China and other neighboring countries, and the countries in the world. There is no such thing as U.S.-Japan relationship too close. Some people maintain that maybe we would pay more attention to other issues, probably it would be better to strengthen the relationship with other countries. . . . The U.S.-Japan relationship, the closer, the more intimate it is, it is easier for us to behave and establish better relations with China, with South Korea and other nations in Asia. (White House, p. 1.)

Prime Minister Koizumi has been refused a meeting by Chinese and South Korean political leaders because of his visits to the shrine which honors Class-A war criminals who led the last war, which both China and South Korea have believed to be a symbol of Japanese militarism in the first half of the twentieth century throughout Asia. On January 4, 2006, Prime Minister Koizumi defended his annual visits to the memorial to the war dead of Japan, even though they have so far contributed to the freezing of Japanese foreign relations with its neighbors such as China and South Korea. What is worse, he criticized the two countries of worsening relations with Japan, accusing them of interfering in Japanese domestic matters. “I can’t understand why foreign governments would intervene in a spiritual matter and try to turn it into a diplomatic problem,” he said, “I’ve never once closed the door to negotiations with China and south Korea.” (The Daily Yomiuri, p. 1.)

Thus, Japan celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Asia-Pacific War, while some Asian nations have never forgotten nor forgiven what Japanese militarism brought to them toward the very end of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth century when Japan colonized the Korean Peninsula and then invaded China, just as some European nations had done in East Asia. Even now, China and South Korea have criticized what Japanese militarism did in the first half of the twentieth century. It seems to this author that past Japanese militarism, which still taints Japan’s relations with some Asian nations, has much to do with Japanese modernization or Westernization which Japan launched in the middle of the nineteenth century. Then the United States ventured to open Japan’s closed doors to the West by sending Commodore Mathew Galbraith Perry to Japan in 1853, and he succeeded in concluding the Treaty of Kanagawa on March 31, 1854. This treaty paved the way both to Japan’s exposure to the Western World values and to its dealing with neighboring nations in East Asia. Thus East Asia became a battleground for creating a new order, replacing the Chinese order, at the very beginning of the twentieth century, in which the United States, Russia, Japan and Great Britain fought for predominance. Specifically speaking, the United States and Russia each tried to make its sphere of influence in East Asia, and the United States under the Theodore Roosevelt Administration,
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successfully and unsuccessfully, could make its manifested overshadowing presence there prominent, particularly in the wake of the conclusion of the Portsmouth Treaty to end the Russo-Japanese War in August 1905.

This author aims to pay a lot of attention to United States policy, domestic and foreign, Japanese responses to American diplomatic endeavors and its commitment to modernization in the Meiji Era, and receding European presence in East Asia toward the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century. In so doing, some part of rising Japanese militarism and Japan’s uneasy relations with the United States from friendship to hostility will be briefly explained, so that a clue will be given to the more chilly state of current Japan’s political relations with some Asian nations sixty years after the end of the last war and to sixty years of Japan’s subordination to the United States in the post-Asia-Pacific War era, primarily because of its military involvement in United States military strategy.

United States Expansion, Continental and Overseas:
The Perry Expedition to Japan

When it comes to the history of Japan-U.S. relations, the Perry Expedition could be a landmark: Commodore Mathew Galbraith Perry was sent to Japan in the Millard Fillmore Administration in 1852, arriving at the bay of Edo, on the afternoon of July 8, 1853. The fact is that an American attempt to open Japan had been made as early as 1846 and Secretary of State Daniel Webster prepared the first draft of the letter to the Japanese emperor in May 1851, even before Perry was given command. This attempt could easily be interpreted as an American interest in overseas expansion as an extension of its continental expansion in the form of Manifest Destiny. It is often described that about half a decade from 1848 to 1854 was a period of not only the most high-spirited efforts of continental expansion but also the first flirting adventures for overseas territory. Incidentally the so-called continental expansion was completed by the Gadsden Purchase on December 30, 1853. Overseas expansion was undoubtedly sensed, clearly shown in the instructions to Commodore Perry given in a dispatch from the Acting Secretary of State, C. M. Conrad to the Secretary of the Navy, John P. Kennedy:

Recent events — the navigation of the ocean by steam, the acquisition and rapid settlement by this country of a vast territory on the Pacific, the discovery of gold in that region, the rapid communication established across the isthmus which separates the two oceans — have practically brought the countries of the east in closer proximity to our own; although the consequences of these events have scarcely begun to be felt, the intercourse between them has already increased, and no limits can be assigned to its future extension. (Bartlett, p. 269.)

It is safe to say that the United States began to look westward across the Pacific at East Asia, making itself a participant in the game of power rivalry in East Asia, in which Japan was then almost isolated and little influenced by
European powers. In fact, before Perry, some European nations such as Great Britain, Spain, and Russia, which was in the middle of the nineteenth century most positive and aggressive in approaching Japan for mercantile enterprise, had attempted to open Japan’s closed doors for commercial intercourse. And the United States was most keenly aware of Russia’s interests in Japan, so it is unquestionable that the United States had great concern about Russia’s expansion into East Asia and even into Japan.

Thus even though the objects of the Perry expedition sought by his government were mainly commercial, the United States was concerned about Russia’s expansionist approach to Japan which the United States feared would possibly result in Japan’s being put into the Russian sphere of influence. It is often argued that the United States was very concerned about Russia’s intrusion into the Far West of North America toward the end of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, for example, Russia was perceived as an expansionist nation moving southward along the West Coast of North America. Alexis de Tocqueville referred to future global rivalry between Russia and the United States in his book *Democracy in America*, published in 1835 in France and in 1838 in the United States. He is often cited as follows:

There are at the present time two great nations in the world, which started from different points, but seem to tend towards the same end. I allude to the Russians and the Americans. Both of them have grown up unnoticed; and while the attention of mankind was directed elsewhere, they have suddenly placed themselves in the front rank among the nations, and the world learned their existence and their greatness at almost the same time. . . . The American struggles against the obstacles that nature opposes to him; the adversaries of the Russian are men. . . . The Anglo-American relies upon personal interest to accomplish his ends and gives free scope to the unguided strength and common sense of the people; the Russian centers all the authority of society in a single arm. The principal instrument of the former is freedom; of the latter, servitude. Their starting-point is different and their courses are not the same; yet each of them seems marked out by the will of Heaven to sway the destinies of half the globe. (de Tocqueville, p. 434.)

The United States became more interested in East Asia, particularly in China around the time when Perry was sent to Japan. Japan was to a great extent more wisely prepared to respond to the mission, because Japan learned a lot from increasing European influences in East Asia, particularly in China. The United States successfully concluded the Treaty of Kanagawa with Japan — the Treaty of Peace, Amity, and Commerce between the United States and Japan — on May 31, 1854, after the Shogun’s acceptance of President Fillmore’s letter forcibly given to Japan in the previous year. At any rate, the treaty conclusion was considered to be a new start for Japan as a nation in favor of friendly commercial relations with the United States and was followed by more than ten European nations such
as Great Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Italy, Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Austria-Hungary, and Switzerland.

Japan, in a sense, successfully seized the very opportunity to enter the Europe-oriented international, rather than the East Asian, community by concluding the Treaty of Kanagawa, though unequal, without being engulfed by any European nation like China, particularly by Great Britain. On the other hand, the United States did emerge as a new power across the Pacific from the east visibly more powerful than Russia. The United States readied itself to be a major player in East Asia, immediately after the completion of its continental expansion in 1853 by the Gadsden Purchase. The United States’ firm position in Japan was strengthened by diplomatic activities by Townsend Harris who was sent to Japan in August 1856 for the purpose of concluding a commercial treaty. Under his diplomatic leadership the United States further developed its relations with Japan, rivaling all other European nations. The fact is undoubtedly of much significance to Japan that the United States was ahead of Russia in developing its diplomatic and commercial relations with Japan, one of the East Asian nations, which Russia had been more interested in approaching.

Thus the United States’ position was more advantageous than any other European nation in struggling for power rivalry in East Asia in the middle of the nineteenth century. However, it was forced to pay more attention to its domestic affairs because of increasing hostilities between North and South: the Civil War broke out in 1861. During the war, the United States was inactive in its diplomatic conduct toward East Asia. Even for about twenty years after the end of the War in 1865, much energy was directed toward consolidating the divided nation under the capitalist economic system, in which the United States succeeded.

Japan and the United States on Their Expansionist and Imperialistic Course in East Asia after Their Domestic Turmoils

Japan and the United States were on good terms toward the end of the nineteenth century, even though they were both expansionist after they overcame their own internal difficulties. Japan could enter a new era of modernization and westernization the Meiji Restoration of 1868 paved the way for, after about ten years of internal reconstruction in the wake of its opening to the Western world by concluding commercial treaties, though unequal, with more than ten European nations after concluding another treaty with the United States in 1858. On the other hand, the United States healed its own wounds of the Civil War and developed itself in terms of economic prosperity and political stability experiencing the “Reconstruction” immediately after the end of the Civil War of 1865. With the official announcement of the disappearance of the frontier based on the 1890 census date, the United States was suffocated, feeling a sense of thirst for expansionist imperialism in the 1890s. Toward the end of the nineteenth
century and coincidentally at the end of the frontier in 1890, the United States in a sense came of age. Referring to the disappearance of the frontier, Professor Frederick Jackson Turner concluded his paper titled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” read at the meeting of the American Historical Association on July 12, 1893 in Chicago. He read that “And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.” (Turner, p. 38.) What he meant is that the United States came to maturity as a nation, so that a new era of overseas expansion would enter the second chapter of American history. Particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, the United States faced a lot of serious problems arising from rapid industrialization as a result of economic consolidation and technological innovation and capitalist economic practices which the “Reconstruction” produced after the end of the Civil War. In his presentation, he urged overseas expansion as a solution to these problems. Overseas expansion was positively considered to be a solution to those new problems the American Industrial Revolution produced toward the end of the nineteenth century, just as “continental expansion,” which brought the disappearance of the frontier, had functioned as a safety valve to American problems.

Overseas expansion was considered to be an answer to suffocation on the part of the United States, and the Spanish-American War of 1898 by accident turned out to be a concrete event of overseas expansion. The United States won the war with ease and the Treaty of Peace was concluded with Spain. By its terms, Cuba was to be given to the United States by Spain; it obtained Puerto Rico and some small adjacent isles in the Caribbean, Guam in the Marianas, and the Philippines. Particularly the acquisition of the Philippines in East Asia across the Pacific gave political and industrial leaders an opportunity to commit themselves to economic activities in China, and made the United States an East Asian power as well as a colonial power. The Spanish-American War graphically thus marked the new era of American overseas expansionism in the conduct of its foreign policy.

The United States began to gradually see what was happening in East Asia. It is safe to say that the United States paid little attention to East Asia at the start of the administration of President William McKinley. However, in the wake of the Spanish-American War, East Asia saw that the United States started to embark on the path of imperialism, economic, militaristic, and diplomatic. Encouraged by a sense of urgency among some businessmen and capitalists about the future of China, particularly northern China, the McKinley administration moved slowly toward conducting a new policy toward China. Responding to a sense of a pressing need for their over-produced manufacturers and for their over-accumulated capital from the home market to any foreign region, the United States, in the name of Secretary of State John Hay, sent so-called Open Door Notes dated September 6, 1899 and dated July 3, 1900, to all the nations which had leaseholds in China. In the First Open door Note, John Hay requested any
power in China to act in accordance to the following principles:

1. Within its sphere of interest or leasehold in China, no power would interfere with any treaty port or any vested interest.
2. The Chinese treaty tariff would be applicable within such spheres of interest, and the duties were to be collected by the Chinese government.
3. Within its sphere no power would discriminate in favor of its own nationals in the matter of harbor dues and railroad charges.

Almost all the powers were negative in responding to these U.S. requests, fundamentally understanding that these Notes are designed for America’s trade rather than China’s rights. The Second Open Door Note proclaimed that the policy of the government of the United States is to seek a solution which may reserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese empire. Thus John Hay only announced the U.S. wish for free trade activities in China.

Japan, on the other hand, after a drastic revolution called the Meiji Restoration far away from the feudalism and isolationism of the Edo Era, was on its way to modernizing and Westernizing itself so that it could stand on an equal footing with the United States and European nations and as a consequence it could revise its unequal treaties. Under the treaties which it had concluded, Japan suffered from some unjust and unequal conditions: it had no right to regulate the rate of its own import duties, and gave to any treaty power the right of extra-territoriality, which was duly considered to be an insult to the sovereign rights of an independent nation.

In order for Japan to be able to revise its treaties to be just and equal, Japan had to become a powerful nation, to be free from foreign interventions in its domestic affairs, and not to be engulfed and colonized by European nations just like China. So the Meiji government decided to unite itself under the emperor and to adopt the western way of life, quitting Asia, in other words, turning away from Asia, and learning from the civilized Europe. Even though very cautious, Japan gradually moved toward a militarized presence in East Asia. It is a historical truth that an idea of attacking Korea advocated by Takamori Saigo immediately after the Meiji restoration was rejected by the Meiji Government, particularly after the return of the Iwakura Embassy in 1873. However, in order to ease some discontent in the wake of the rejection of the military inroad into Korea, the Meiji government successfully concluded unequal treaties with Korea and China, respectively, in 1876 and in 1881, just as Japan had concluded them with the United States and about ten Europeans nations. These are the very first steps toward Japanese imperialism and colonialism in East Asia.

Then came the Sino-Japanese War in September 1894. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, both China and Japan were in bad shape over the issue of controlling Korea. And finally the two nations entered armed conflict. About five months of military conflict came to a close in favor of Japan, to the surprise of the
international community. Almost from the start of visible danger of armed conflict between the two nations, the United States was reluctant to positively engage itself with the conflict, sensing no danger to its policy in East Asia in the middle of the 1890’s. Rather, the United States was friendly to Japan. On April 17, 1895, both sides concluded the Treaty of Shimonoseki, by which China recognized Korea as an independent nation and ceded Japan the island of Taiwan and the Liaotung Peninsula of southern Manchuria, which Japan returned to China according to the tripartite — Russia, Germany and France — advice, with the United States free from any intervention. The treaty was revised and concluded at the beginning of May 1895.

How Japan fought in the Sino-Japanese War, however, was so impressive that those European nations in East Asia paid a fresh look at Japan as a nation which would influence the order of East Asia which had been maintained by them. Thus the Sino-Japanese war marked a turning point in the history of East Asia as well as Japan. The international community was very much impressed with Japan as an emerging power in contrast to China, while the United States did not sensitively and seriously perceive Japan’s emerging presence in East Asia to be a threat to itself. As a matter of fact, China was considered to be appallingly weak in the wake of the war with Japan, and as a consequence, it was easily broken up into foreign leaseholds.

Japan, to be sure, became visible in its relationship with its neighboring regions, particularly with Russia, in the conduct of its foreign policy in the second half of the nineteenth century. For example, Japan became very much interested in the northern part of the Kurile Islands, Taiwan, Korea, and China. Gradually Japan as a big power in East Asia began to pose a threat to the East Asian order instituted by the European nations, specifically by Great Britain, in place of the Confucius order there. Japan’s visibility was high first on the Korean Peninsula in the early years of the Meiji Era. Japanese political leaders in the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century were very expansionist, drawing Korea into the Japanese orbit against Russia.

**Emergence of Japan in East Asia and U.S. Concern about it: From Friendship to Hostility**

At the very beginning of the twentieth century, Japan and the United States were on good terms, particularly because the latter was still enjoying its aloofness even after holding the Philippines as a colonial strategic base in Asia Pacific. In contrast to United States inactivity, Japan gradually increased its interests in East Asia — Northern China and Korea, which were perceived by Japan as vitally important areas for its commercial and territorial expansion of imperialism. However, Japan was not free from any fear from Russian expansion toward these two nations. Under this situation, Japan chose to have an alliance relationship with Great Britain, which also had almost the same perception of Russian
southward advance. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 proved that both nations were partners of strategic importance. Owing to the alliance, Great Britain could afford to shift its naval strength from East Asia to the European theater and could manage to let Japan play a larger role in East Asia.

On the other hand, the United States was on good terms with Japan, but it never thought Japan to be a strategically important partner. However, Japan gradually became a challenging presence to the United States, which was increasingly conscious of Japan’s high visibility in East Asia. Probably the United States came to regard military cooperation between Great Britain and Japan as a manifestation of opposing its Open Door policy, even though the alliance was aimed at checking Russian southward advance into China and Korea.

Here came a turning point in the relations between the United States and Japan in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century: the Russo-Japanese War broke out with Japan’s undeclared attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur, Manchuria, in early February 1904. Even though the United States was on good terms with Russia and Japan, it was very sympathetic with Japan in the first stage of the war. Both the U.S. government and the American people were apparently on the side of Japan in the war. Even though the United States proclaimed its neutrality in mid-February 1904, it came to think that Japan should be a victor. In response to Japan’s invitation to President Theodore Roosevelt to act as a mediator, he came to a final decision that his effort at acting as a mediator would serve the best interests of the United States by bringing the hostilities to an end. Thanks to President Roosevelt’s mediation, Japan could win the war with Russia by a small margin, with considerable territorial gains from Russia. Particularly both in Korea and in Manchuria, Japan became a more visible and powerful presence, while the United States gradually came to have a concern for the balance of power in East Asia, with Japan in mind. The United States began to place Japan in its security strategy. On the other hand, even though the United States made a positive contribution to ending the Russo-Japanese War, seemingly on behalf of Japan, Japan also began to place the United States in its security strategy.

There was over-confidence among the Japanese people, who were not better informed of how costly the war was to their country, simply because of their sense of victory over Russia, a great European nation. Most of the Japanese people were very proud of their nation’s rapid emergence and rise as an Asian nation in East Asia, believing in its rise to power and prestige among the leading great powers of the day. And what was worse in the years after the end of the war, Japan’s interest shifted from Korea to Manchuria, China’s north-easterm provinces, which had been minor to Korea in Japanese foreign policy. The importance of Korea was major; that of Manchuria minor before Japan reached a final decision to wage war against Russia in early February 1904.

The more interested in Manchuria Japan came to be, the more serious the United States came to be about Japan’s expansion into northern China because of
its Open Door policy. So the United States and Japan were antagonistic toward each other, regarding each other as a threat. After the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War with the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905, which President Theodore Roosevelt’s mediation intentionally produced, the United States and Japan began to observe each other as a potential hypothetical enemy in a newly emerging East Asian order of peace and stability. Japan began to be very sensitive to the rise of the United States to major naval power status with an uncompromising desire for maintenance of its Open Door policy toward China, and to the U.S. presence in the Philippines as a potential threat to the security of Taiwan which Japan had gained as a fruit of the war with China toward the end of the previous century. Japan became very serious about its national defense in the process of the war with China and the war with Russia. And at the same time Japan was very watchful about U.S. attitude toward Japan apparent in the process of its mediation under the administration of President Theodore Roosevelt, who was seen as an expansionist as well as an imperialist. Under these situations Japan began to put an emphasis on the well-balanced combination of effective diplomacy and a well-coordinated defense policy in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, immediately after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War. Concretely, both the Army and Navy General Staffs began to secretly draft a national defense policy, with an alliance with Great Britain as a core. In 1907, the Imperial National Defense Policy was crafted, which designated the United States as a number one hypothetical enemy. For the first time in the history of Japanese defense policy, this national defense policy was the very first military plan, in which Japan put an emphasis on one comprehensive objective — a military establishment capable of meeting the strategic threats posed by the Russian army and the American navy. The United States, on the other hand, almost at the same time began to work for making a military strategy, which was called the Orange Plan, in which Japan was regarded as a hypothetical enemy. Now in the first decade of the twentieth century East Asia turned out to be a region for power rivalry, in which two rapidly emerging powers — Japan and the United States — were competing for a position of supremacy, rather for a sphere of influence and interest, with Great Britain gradually out of sight from the strategic environment in East Asia.

**East Asian Order of Peace and Stability**

**Dominated by the United States**

About a decade later, a great chance came to Japan: Japan became a participating nation in the Great War of 1914–18, due to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. And Japan was as a matter of course invited to the Versailles Conference of 1919 as one of the five major victors in the war, even though its role in the war was minimal. The United States, on the other hand, finally entered the “war to end all wars,” making the greatest contribution to defeating Germany and played the major role in creating the League of Nations under the political and philosophical
leadership of President Woodrow Wilson. The United States, however, could not join the League, returning to “normalcy.”

In the 1920s, international relations in East Asia entered a new post-Great War phase. Despite its denial to join the League of Nations, the United States was very positive in creating a new order of peace and stability in East Asia in the interest of the United States based on its Open Door policy. The new East Asian order was embodied in three treaties concluded at the Washington Conference of 1921–22: (1) the Four Power Treaty; (2) the Five Power Treaty; and (3) the Nine Power Treaty. The primary objective of the Conference initiated by the United States, which was thought to have returned to isolationism after the end of the Great War, was to discuss naval limitations and some East Asian and Pacific issues among concerned nations, sticking to its Open Door policy. The Five Power Treaty was on naval armament, limiting the size of capital ships and setting the tonnage that the United States, Great Britain and Japan could hold at a ratio of 5: 5: 3. The Four Power Treaty forced Japan to sever its alliance relation with Great Britain. And in the Nine Power Treaty, the U.S. Open Door policy was internationally accepted.

Leadership in this conference by the United States was so impressive and influential that U.S. East Asian policy of the Open Door policy was internationally approved. In fact, in this conference, the United States apparently made every possible effort at reducing Japanese influence to a nil, primarily breaking Japan’s military ties with Great Britain and keeping Japanese military capabilities far below those of the United States and approving the U.S. Open Door Policy as a basis for the East Asian order. U.S. success in this conference for creating a new order in East Asia endorsed U.S. eagerness to commit itself to the region and an internationally approved position of U.S. supremacy in the region. And as a result, Japan was driven into a corner of inferiority.

Conclusion

What happened in the first two decades of the twentieth century — the Russo-Japanese War, the Great War, and the Washington Conference, to name a few — made Japan be a nation of gradual subordination to the United States in the struggle for regional supremacy among a few powers in East Asia. Due to additional reasons, Japan and the United States, as a consequence, were on a collision course in the 1930s and 1940s, and an answer from Japan to U.S. policies was a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japan being driven into a corner of inferiority. And a defeated Japan was allowed to breathe under the occupation by the United States, blessed with the “pacifist” Constitution of May 3, 1947, a product of good-natured America, then free from fear of Soviet Communism.

At the beginning of this article, the author refers to the recent Japan-U.S. relations. The current bilateral relations were a product of 150 years of relations
between the two nations. Commodore Mathew Perry marked the very beginning of the bilateral relations in 1853. Since then, Japan toward the end of the Edo Era went through a variety of internal conflicts, learning how to live as a nation in the world community, particularly in East Asia. And Japan reached a conclusion: a bloodless revolution of the Meiji Restoration. Meiji Japan was unequal in its relations with European nations and with the United States. In order to be equal to them and not to be overcome by them, Japan had to learn a lot to become European and American.

The United States has been ambivalent in its relations with Japan. For the first half a century the United States was very friendly to Japan in contrast to European nations. Even over the issue of treaty revision, the most urgent issue facing the Meiji government, the United States was sympathetic with Japan, even though America represented by Mr. John Bingham was not so easy about any influence of Great Britain upon Japan. When he served as a minister to Japan from 1873 through 1885, John Bingham was rather often on the side of Japan as to its concern for equal standing in its relations with foreign nations. Whenever the United States was worried about Russia’s attitude toward East Asia, it was always in favor of Japan’s way of thinking about its foreign policy toward East Asia, specifically toward Korea and then Manchuria.

However, as Japan became aggressive abroad or even a bit interested in East Asia, the United States became very much concerned about Japan in place of Russia, particularly at the beginning of the twentieth century. Specifically the Russo-Japanese War changed the United States in its attitude toward Japan. It is easy to observe that it was due to much concern about Japan’s possible rivalry in East Asia in place of Russia on the part of the United States that the United States mediated the Russo-Japanese War. In fact, each nation became more attentive to each other’s schemes in East Asia in the years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War, as is mentioned above.

The Washington Conference of 1921–22 marked a decisive turning point in the bilateral relations, paving the way for the outbreak of war about twenty years later between the two nations in early December 1941. About twenty years of hostility toward the United States brought Japan to Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii in a military way.*

The United States has at long last become a predominantly unrivalled power in East Asia by winning the war against Japan in East Asia in the summer of 1945,

* When it comes to what has been happening in Japan’s relations with its neighboring nations such as the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea, this author has been very much interested in and worried about it. His understanding is that it has a long history of Japanese overseas aggressions for power rivalry, conscious of advanced European nations and the United States, a rapidly industrialized nation in the “new” world, starting with the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5, not with the Manchurian Incident of 1931. He has been doing another research on atrocities caused by the Japanese militarism in the Asia-Pacific War.
primarily because the United States did not allow the Soviet Union to occupy part of Japan, even though it had made a compromise at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 with the latter by allowing it to gain the Kurile chain and by restoring the southern half of Sakhalin Island and territorial rights in Manchuria which Russia had lost as a consequence of its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War. The Soviet Union did come back to East Asia to a certain extent after forty years of absence there. And the so-called Cold War, a new type of war, developed gradually between the United States and the Soviet Union conspicuously even in East Asia in the wake of World War II. And Japan was placed in the U.S. security strategy of the containment of Soviet Communism in East Asia toward the end of the 1940s, with Japan as a pacifist nation being under complete control of U.S. military strategy.

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References


