

HISTORY

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German-Japanese relations and the League of Nations

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Abstract. The article deals with analyses of the German-Japanese relations and shows position of the League of Nations. What were the reasons for withdrawal of Japan and Germany from the League of Nations? And what consequences it entailed? The author draws attention to development of bilateral relations in the 1930s: what were the Far Eastern interests of Germany and European interests of Japan?

Keywords: *the League of Nations, German-Japanese relations, Nazi foreign policy, the Soviet Union, Far East.*

In a single line, led by Yosuke Matsuoka, the Japanese delegation filed out of the Assembly Hall. The other delegates watched while the great doors closed slowly and noiselessly behind the gentlemen who had just left. There followed a few moments of uncomprehending confusion, for no one was quite sure if the Japanese had spoken their last word. Then the Assembly President, Mr. Hymans, grasping the appropriateness of his decision, moved to adjourn the morning session. The date was February 24, 1933, and the Japanese delegation to the League of Nations had just left the Assembly meeting for the last time. "On March 27 the Japanese government officially notified the League of its withdrawal and thereby set the seal on its complete isolation" [9, p. 48].

Matsuoka's exit was but the dramatic climax of a trend in Japanese policy that can perhaps be carried back to the Russo-Japanese War. That war introduced Japan into the ranks of the Great Powers and also inaugurated the first friction with the United States. Having initially favored the Japanese side, America next found herself arbitrating a peace at Portsmouth. Theodore Roosevelt accepted his new position, which was of his own making, with alacrity, but his efforts brought only trouble in its wake. The Japanese had expected an indemnity to pay for the war, and with the failure to obtain it they turned in anger against the peacemaker.

In the United States bad feeling manifested itself in agitation against the Anglo-Japanese alliance which, in American opinion, was a vehicle for Japanese expansion. When in 1911 the alliance was renewed, Great Britain took care that the United States would be excluded as a mutual object of hostility. A provision was inserted making the treaty inapplicable to those nations with which either party had a general arbitration treaty.

With the end of the war, Japan faced two problems: first, to obtain international recognition of the additions to her Empire, and second, to find a solution for her increasing population pressures. She brought these issues before two international conferences, only to find her badly worsted. What was worse, she lost her only ally of standing: Great Britain. And with this keystone of her foreign policy gone - which incidentally may also have assumed some sentimental value - she was thrust back into uncomfortable isolation. But we anticipate in our account.

As it turned out, by no means all the decisions of the Versailles Peace Conference were disadvantageous to

Japan. The limitation of naval armaments, even if she was forced to take second place, freed her from too great an economic burden. Less appealing, no doubt, were the provisions that she must evacuate Shantung province and end the Siberian adventure. It seemed to Japan that her immediate gains of empire were being challenged. With the Nine-Power Treaty which guaranteed Chinese integrity and the principle of the Open Door, Japan saw her wartime predominance in that country replaced by a constellation of powers. This new combination appeared less concerned, as in pre-war days, with securing economic privileges in China than wishing that country to serve as an effective counterweight to Japanese influence in the Far East [4, p. 24].

In February, 1932, the long awaited Disarmament Conference of sixty nations finally convened at Geneva. Yet the issues were brought no nearer to solution than before, for the crux was still security versus equality. When a year later the Conference reassembled, Prime Minister MacDonald put forward a scheme in which European armies were to be reduced by almost half a million men and France and Germany would achieve equality. But by now the Nazi assumption of power had destroyed the very *raison d'être* of the Conference. When, moreover, Germany insisted that the Brown Storm Troopers should not be counted as effectives under the MacDonald Plan, it confirmed the worst of French suspicions. In the end nothing came of all these plans and projects and it would be tedious to recount them further. In October of that year Hitler was to write with one stroke the conclusion to a fifteen year old argument.

As can readily be understood, Germany's international position did not improve under these conditions. Her insistence upon equality had even before the rise of Hitler tended to isolate her at the Disarmament Conference. Relations with France became rather strained and Great Britain and America, who desperately tried to save the Conference through some compromise solution, found German obstinacy after the Nazis took over most distracting. It was generally suspected that Germany had already started her rearmament; thus, the busy efforts of the Disarmament Conference were perhaps more concerned with legalizing the unavoidable than preventing it. This is why German intractability was so annoying, for it seemed to deny the possibility of limiting the new German militarization to some extent. But the Nazi government did not

desire to bind itself to such diplomatic niceties and there-with served notice of its unconcern for international good will.

The effects of Nazi foreign policy had hardly taken hold when rumors started to circulate about a German-Japanese rapprochement.

They were at first not very substantial, yet even the Survey found these reports sufficiently intriguing to mention them. From the very beginning the Soviet Union was implicitly accepted as the motive for such a combination. Still, it should be emphasized that the newspapers had an amazing propensity for anticipating events. Time and again during the early years of the German-Japanese courtship the press reported the conclusion of fictitious military or other agreements that had no basis in fact. Both the diary of the American Ambassador in Berlin, Mr. Dodd, and the one of his colleague in Tokyo, give adequate coverage to such hearsay. Actually, the budding relationship was painfully slow and only noticeable to the most careful observer in the first Nazi year.

Military experience was, however, not the only subject that Germany imparted to Japan. In the sciences Japan found in German chemistry, medicine, and the field of electricity sources of knowledge which she was quite eager to tap. In short, German achievements of a scientific character in the late nineteenth century were such that they established a cultural tradition in Japan. There was also the Bismarckian form of government which Prince Ito Hirobumi found a noteworthy archetype for his 1889 Constitution. Prince Ito made a trip to Europe to survey the various kinds of government, but the Imperial German Constitution with its sham parliamentary facade and its concealed authoritarianism suited his purposes best. The constitution drawn up for Japan under the supervision in the 1880's showed, to an extent, the influence of the German model.

In November, 1932, the Japanese periodical *Gaiko Jiho* (*Revue Diplomatique*) published an article entitled: "Japan should support the German claim for equality" [1, p. 276]. The author, an instructor in jurisprudence at Kyoto University, advocated, since Japan had not yet taken a stand on the disarmament question, that she should encourage the German desire for parity. Japan's international position since the Manchurian Incident had been precarious, and events after 1931 proved the loss of her diplomatic prestige. While Japan seemed without friends, it was not too late to correct this situation. But she would need the support of those who might show understanding for her Far Eastern position. The author discounted the possibility that America, England, or China could fall within this category. As for France, while the latter had been friendly to Japan throughout the Manchurian crisis, there was great doubt that she would maintain this position in view of her status with the League.

Thus only Germany, Italy, or the U.S.S.R. could qualify. The first, definitely recovered since World War I, had allies like Austria and Bulgaria among the small powers. Internationally she was threatened and isolated, however. With Japan she had no differences in either Europe or Asia, for German interests in the Far East were limited to trade. Since Germany had no reason to oppose Japan politically, cooperation with the latter could only be of use to her. One way to establish closer German-Japanese

relations would be for Japan to support the German demand for equality. If Japan took this approach she might expect Germany's help for her own claims in East Asia. German backing seemed worth the ill-will of France while German cooperation was, moreover, one way to assure Italian friendship.

The prophetic nature of this article and its date of publication may justify the somewhat lengthy reference. If ex post facto sources can be trusted, attention should also be given to a 1934 report from the American military attaché in Berlin. Informing his government about the now widespread rumors of a German-Japanese entente, he wrote: "Japan has apparently taken the more active part in establishing these relations.... The beginning on this relationship antedates the coming of the Nazi Government into power, but owing to the friendship of the previous German Government for Russia and China, its development was limited till the Nazis came in" [7, p. 31].

Apart from these signs, it would be well to recall Matsuo's statement of March, 1933, which intended to flatter German national feeling. Finally, so soon after the Nazis had assumed power did the American Foreign Service report a suspected German-Japanese understanding, that it may not be unjustified to consider whether its inception is to be sought in the period immediately before Hitler. Perhaps at one time Japan sought German support to stave off a final decision on the Lytton report, and when these efforts failed her interests flagged momentarily. Germany, soon in similar straits because of her new régime, then paid attention to the original Japanese feelers. Thus, on March 25, 1933, the American Consul at Harbin reported that the Germans in Manchuria had received instructions to cooperate more closely with the Japanese. Two years later, the former American Consul-General in Berlin, Mr. Messersmith, told Ambassador Dodd during a conference that in May and June, 1933, he "had heard talk in Berlin that the Nazis and the Japanese were trying to get together" [7, p. 32].

Unfortunately, the documentation for this early period is rather slight. The German diplomatic documents have not yet become available, and so we do not know how the German Foreign Office regarded relations with Japan. This hiatus is not, however, a too serious one because the Foreign Office played no part in the overtures for an understanding. Indeed, as will be explained in the next chapter, Nazi policy spared no efforts to circumvent the regular channels of diplomacy and keep the Foreign Service uninformed. The reason for this, besides a distrust of the professional diplomat, was the generally low opinion that Hitler had about his own foreign service. The Führer was later to declare that in 1933 and 1934 the German diplomatic service had been miserable in every sense of the word. The lack of documentary material is moreover compensated by a series of unofficial statements that appeared in German publications during 1933.

The difference in German opinion of that year on the subject of Japan is quite revealing. To start with outspoken Nazi statements of sympathy and proceeding by way of military publications expressing skepticism about her endurance in case of war, we find considerable business sentiment which is distinctly hostile toward Japan. Because of rigid censorship, it is an interesting question how these many viewpoints about Japan managed to

appear in print. More official direction on this problem was not lacking later on.

Early in June, 1933, the *Preussische Jahrbuecher* published an article by Manfred Zapp. The author expressed the opinion that national-socialism in Japan was no surprise, for like that of Germany and Italy it could be traced to certain principles [8, p. 52]. The Japanese movement was, however, no European import but originated in that country. Parallels with the West could nevertheless be made since the concept of the state was alike in Japanese as in German and Italian national-socialism, and the movement remained within the framework of the "legal state." Another comparison might be found in the educational mission of Japanese national-socialism which seemed similar to the function of the German and Italian parties. But unlike its mass basis in the two European countries, the Japanese movement was principally supported by the younger military element and the university students. An interesting feature was the way the author explained the problem of leadership in Japan. The Emperor served as Chief of State, but General Araki, the fiery Minister of War, contributed leadership to the nationalist movement and as such resembled Hitler and Mussolini.

What seemed unusual about this article was the publication in which it found expression. Outspoken Nazi views tended rather to be aired in newly established periodicals like *Volk im Werden* and *Wille und Macht*. In both there is an article by the Nazi publicist Dr. von Leers on Japan's position in the world. He considered Japanese actions in Manchuria and East Asia in the following light: "It would be a completely false stand for Germany to proclaim at this point a theoretical basis for the unity of the white race - this unity was buried at Versailles and the marks of it are everywhere to be seen where German people are forced to live under foreign domination. Every Japanese advance frees Germany. Every weakening of France in the Far East weakens her in Europe. And every increase in German strength would aid Japan against France. If Japan today is the dynamic state of Asia, then Germany with her torn frontiers and her impotence is by necessity forced to be the dynamic state of Europe. Her isolation and cooperation with Italy is also to be considered"[3, p. 107].

Some months later the same author argued it was erroneous to believe that Japan would assume the mantle of Genghis Khan. This great yellow empire of 127 million could not become a danger to Europe. Rather, Japan needed Manchuria as a source of raw materials and a safeguard in the rear for her expansion in the Pacific. This meant no danger to Germany and every increase in Japanese strength only relieved the former.

Extreme statements of this sort might have official encouragement, but they represented no more than a segment of the many opinions about Japan. It was necessary, after all, to evaluate Japan's military capacities, and the economic factors of modern warfare were not very favorable to her" [10, p. 375]. Even a writer who tended to be friendly was skeptical if she could be successful in a war with the Soviet Union. Russian endurance, bolstered by northern cold and the strength of her new industries, were bound to result in an American dictated peace.

In connection with German-Japanese relations, it is to be noted that Germany at present is too involved in European problems to give much attention to Far Eastern questions. The German attitude toward Far Eastern problems thus far has never been anti-Japanese in any positive sense, but has rather been neutral. Recently voices have been raised in Germany advocating recovery of the former German mandated possessions in the Pacific. However, "as these islands are not politically or economically of any vital importance to present-day Germany, it may be presumed that she will not insist in regaining them in the face of our objections thereto..." [5, p. 138].

"It is therefore advisable that, now the German rightist party is in power, we make efforts to have Germany understand our international position in the Far East, and at the same time promote closer contact in culture and science between the two nations, so that she may not deviate from her traditional neutral attitude towards Far Eastern problems" [6, p. 162].

The document concluded with a series of recommendations which, as far as Germany was concerned, foresaw that she would not go so far as to commit herself on Far Eastern problems by taking the same attitude as Japan. Japanese efforts should therefore be confined to promoting friendly relations with that country.

In summing up the balance of events of this first Nazi year, one is almost struck by the mockery of fate. For it was at Geneva, the center of international cooperation, that the Japanese-German entente found its inception. The League of Nations, despite all its shortcomings, had come to represent the summum bonum of international affairs. To be excluded from that circle, no matter if a nation was cast out or went out, meant to be in a state of international disgrace. For a state as sensitive about its national honor as Japan, the decision to withdraw must have been a painful one. This conclusion should, of course, not be driven too far. But with the power of hindsight it now seems clear that exclusion from Geneva created the consequent necessity to establish an anti-Geneva front. Because in an age of combinations no state could face the risk to stand alone for long.

Almost simultaneously with the Japanese departure from the League Germany underwent a revolution which left her without friends. The Japanese were not slow to perceive that German isolation could mean partnership in opposition to the established international order. Signs were not lacking, as the year progressed, of increasing German sympathy for Japan. We have shown, moreover, in the first chapter that the Germans appeared willing to compromise on the racial question. Yet, it should be pointed out that while omens of a rapprochement appeared aplenty they lacked a measure of official encouragement. A gesture was supplied by Germany's withdrawal from the League. After that event relations between the two countries entered a new stage. If Japan had been the first to interest herself in a more intimate relationship with Germany, it was the latter that seems to have taken the first steps toward its realization.

The two states also knew a common object of hostility - Russia. The anti-Communist slogan had, however, a greater influence in Germany than in Japan where the population tended to think less in terms of ideologies. But this anti-Russian front was in 1933 more apparent than

real. To be sure, the Soviet Union's isolation and potential richness were strong factors which favored aggressive action against her. But this inducement was overshadowed by the fact that at the time Japan was much more ready for aggression than Germany. The latter was still

disarmed and faced with a hostile France and Poland on her frontiers. The first year had only prepared the foreign stage; the next few would show if German and Japanese could jointly perform on it.

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Белоконь А.А. Немецко-японские отношения и Лига Наций

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена исследованию немецко-японских отношений и показывает позицию Лиги Наций. Какими были причины выхода Японии и Германии из Лиги Наций? А также, какие последствия это повлекло за собой? Автор обращает внимание на развитие межгосударственных отношений в 1930-е годы, какими были дальневосточные интересы Германии и европейские интересы Японии?

Ключевые слова: Лига Наций, немецко-японские отношения, нацистская внешняя политика, Советский Союз, Дальний Восток.