

# Twentieth-Century Japanese Diplomacy \*

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## *Introduction*

It is fair to say that Japan in the twentieth century, looked at objectively, followed a dynamic trajectory of a kind that has rarely been seen in world history. After being incorporated into the modern international system in the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan implemented a series of political, military, economic, and social reforms and became one of the few countries in the non-Western world to maintain its independence. In the early years of the twentieth century, Japan ranked as the only non-Western state to successfully implement an imperial policy and achieve a position of strength alongside the world powers. Following these early achievements, however, the country failed to respond to a changing international environment. Disarray in the country's domestic politics contributed to an unstoppable expansionist policy that led the country into a reckless war, as a result of which Japan not only lost all of its colonies but also suffered from catastrophic war damage and occupation and for a time even lost its sovereignty.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Japan swapped swords for spades. Through economy recovery and development, it worked to recover its lost international position. This policy was hugely successful in the postwar international environment and, by the 1970s Japan had regained its position as one of the world's leading countries. It went on from there to achieve a position as an economic powerhouse second only to the United States, and became one of the major poles within the Western alliance alongside the United States and Europe. At the same, however, there were increasing signs of turmoil and disarray in domestic politics. The country's foreign policy, too, showed an increasingly conservative and diffident attitude that was content to concentrate on economic matters. In the years that followed, Japanese diplomacy struggled to escape from this essentially passive stance. These negative aspects of Japan's foreign policy became particularly clear at the end of the Cold War and the Gulf War. The final decade of the twentieth century was a decade of regret over lost opportunities.

Of course, it would be impossible to discuss in detail the turbulent history of Japanese diplomacy in the twentieth century in the limited space available to me here. At the risk of oversimplification, what I want to do is to look back at broad developments in Japanese foreign policy by dividing the twentieth century into five periods. I will then conclude with a summary of some tendencies that can be observed over the period as a whole.

## **1. *Establishment of a Colonial Empire: 1900–18***

The early years of the twentieth century marked the high tide of an international order based on the imperialist system developed in Europe. In this period, the major powers competed to acquire colonies, and those peoples and societies in the non-Western world that refused to follow the path of modernization (or tried unsuccessfully to modernize) were reduced to the position of colonies or dependencies. During this period, Japan secured for itself a position as an imperial country alongside the Western powers.

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The beginning of Japan's colonial expansion came with the "Boxer Rebellion" in Qing China and the dispatch of international troops in 1900 in response. The eight major powers with interests in East Asia cooperated to send a joint force to protect their diplomatic representatives and denizens. Japan provided an important part of the military force, contributing over 20,000 troops. This episode was symbolic of Japan's later international position. In terms of its diplomatic strategy, Japan was careful to appear non-committal about dispatching troops so as not to arouse the suspicions of the other powers about its own interests in China, and only sent troops when asked to do so by the other powers. Also, these troops behaved in a prudent manner, maintaining discipline and order and thus boosting international trust in Japan. Militarily, this incident was significant in demonstrating that Japan could outperform the other powers in terms of its ability to mobilize a sizeable modern military force at short notice within Northeast Asia. These factors combined to qualify Japan as one of the world powers. Having met the requirements to be recognized as one of the "civilized nations" of Europe and America, Japan confirmed its position as a major nation alongside the Western powers, with a superior military strength in East Asia.

Japan confirmed and strengthened this position through several diplomatic achievements. The system of extraterritoriality imposed on Japan by western powers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century had been scrapped in 1899, and Japan also regained tariff autonomy with the signing of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation in 1911, thus establishing itself as a totally sovereign state under international law. After entering an alliance with Britain in 1902, Japan was victorious in its war with Russia in 1904–05, and became the dominant power in East Asia. Following this, Japan renewed its alliance with Britain, and signed a commercial agreement with France. Having improved its relations with Russia and reached a certain understanding with the United States, Japan incorporated the Korean Peninsula and acquired interests in Manchuria. By the 1910s, Japan had become a colonial empire.

Japan thus became a major power through its diplomatic and military successes. This had happened at dramatic speed. One negative aspect of this rapid ascent was that Japan had only a short window of time in which to decide how to deal with the fruits of these successes. This new challenge was in some senses more difficult than those it had already faced; achieving success and maintaining the results of that success in an appropriate manner required quite different policies.

This problem gradually became apparent in several ways. First, there was the question of the characterization to be given to military power. After the Russo-Japanese War, Japan no longer faced any urgent military threats in Northeast Asia. Considering Japan's weak economic base at the time, it would not have been out of the question for Japan to have sought to reduce its military spending at this point. However, the period was one of a dramatic arms buildup around the world, symbolized by the arrival of the *Dreadnought*-class battleship in 1906. It was felt essential to keep up with these developments, and many people argued that Japan needed to increase its military strength in order to ensure stability within its newly expanded area of control. Another factor was that the lead-up to the Russo-Japanese War had increased the political prestige of the military. The military now became an ignorable political force as politics in Japan gradually became more democratic. These factors pushed the country onto a path of military expansion. By rights, the next question should have been to ask what strategic aims Japan wished to achieve through its new military might, and the leaders also recognized this question. The Imperial Defense Plan, formulated for the first time only in 1907, summarized the views of Japan's leaders at the time. The plan called for an offensive position: "In East Asia at least, it is essential to maintain the ability to take the offensive against any

country that might try to invade our interests.”<sup>ii</sup> Behind this offensive stance, however, it was difficult to discern any clear objectives. Unless limits were set, it was possible to legitimize almost indefinite military expansion. Now that Japan no longer faced any concrete military threat, it had to address a more difficult problem, that of defining new strategic aims and deciding a level of military strength commensurate with those aims.

To some extent, the same thing happened on the diplomatic front. Once it had achieved its aim of achieving independence as one of the world powers, Japanese diplomacy started to become too assertive. The best example of this was Japanese diplomacy during World War I, in particular the famous “Twenty-One Demands” issued to China in 1915. The Great War in Europe meant that the other powers were unable to divert forces to Asia. Japan entered the hostilities through its alliance with Britain, attacking German possessions in the Asia-Pacific and using the opportunity and excuse of the conflict to expand its own interests. The turmoil in China following the Xinhua Revolution provided an ideal opportunity to force the government to swallow Japan’s tough demands and allowed Japan to expand its interests in China. During the war, Japan reached agreements with Britain, France, and Czarist Russia on its right to control Shandong and the South Sea Islands. It also decided that it had received approval for this from the United States through the Ishii-Lansing Agreement, though some ambiguity remained in this respect. Japan also built a certain cooperative relationship with the Peking government through the Nishihara loans and other measures, and for a while it appeared that its diplomatic policy of seizing on World War I and the chaos in China as golden opportunities had succeeded. However, this position was rash and imprudent. This diplomatic policy that took advantage of the weakness of the other powers and China led to increasing international suspicion and dislike of Japan and had serious costs in terms of Japan’s diplomatic reputation.

Partly this lack of diplomatic prudence was the result of increasing rifts within Japan. It was increasingly felt that internationally taking a powerful stance was essential to maintain order among quarreling factions at home. It seems likely, for example, that in issuing the Twenty-One Demands, Japan’s Foreign Minister Takaaki Kato was trying to diplomatically make China agree to demand that would satisfy the military within the Japanese government to ensure that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would maintain its control over the military with regard to Japan’s interests in China. In fact, by this period Japan’s colonial interests were already becoming a major cause of political turbulence. The colonies were the fruits of the success of Japan’s imperialist policy, but they gave rise to problems that the Meiji constitutional system was ill-equipped to resolve. This had the effect of pitching the entire political system into disarray. Manchuria in particular became an almost insoluble problem. The primary reason for this is that Japan’s leaders failed to provide a conclusive answer to an essential question: were the country’s interests in Manchuria limited to the South Manchuria Railway and areas adjacent to it or did they represent a foothold for future territorial control? There was also a lack of clarity about how the interests should be ruled: should Japan prioritize its relations with China and acknowledge the leadership of the Foreign Ministry as diplomatic interests run in accordance with treaties, or should it prioritize military significance and place its interests under military control? This ambiguity over Manchuria was already clear by the

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i *Nippon teikoku no kokubou houshin* [The Defense Policies of Imperial Japan](1907), art. 1 Takeharu Shimanuki, *Nichi-Ro senso igo ni okeru kokubou houshin, shoyo heiryoku, youhei kouryo, (jou)* [The Development of the Imperial National Defense Policy, the Estimate of Requisite Armament, and the Outline of Strategy Since the Russo-Japanese War] *Gunji Shigaku* [The Journal of Military History] 8(4)(March 1973), P3.

time of the Conference to Discuss the Manchuria Issue, which brought civilian and military leaders together the year after the Russo-Japanese War. At this stage, the disagreement was limited to the level of debate, but it eventually grew to become a chronic disease that ravaged the entire body politic of Japan as a colonial empire.

There is no question that Japan was responsible for several of the important reasons it was able to become a colonial empire so rapidly. Its success in establishing the systems necessary to a modern state and its acquisition of the power that made diplomatic and military successes possible were crucial parts of its rise, but there were also several factors in the international situation at the time that helped to make Japan's expansion possible. Geography was one: Japan was, unlike other powers, the only major power located in East Asia. In the early years of the twentieth century, the focus of international politics began to shift away from imperial expansion to competitive rivalry among the European powers, while much of the non-Western world, including the Korean Peninsula and China, were in a state of chaos in terms of their internal politics. Instead of coolly analyzing these factors that had helped it to achieve such a rapid ascent, however, and debating seriously how to deal with the changes brought by its rise, Japan instead became drunk on success.

## **2. Demise of Empire: 1918–45**

Until 1918, Japan seemed to have used World War I to its advantage in achieving impressive results in terms of maintaining and expanding its colonial interests. As we have seen, however, Japan's actions in these years substantially increased international mistrust. In addition, several major changes both at home and abroad further increased the pressure on Japan's diplomacy in the years following 1918.

Internationally, the closing stages of the war brought fundamental challenges to the international order by colonial/imperial rule. The first of these was the rise of libertarian universalism, as typified by the Fourteen Points speech of US President Woodrow Wilson in 1918. The Wilsonian position was not only supported by the colossal national might of the United States, but was also linked to growing liberal forces and mass movements in various countries. These became powerful influences that leaders could not afford to ignore. The second challenge was socialism. In 1917, the Bolsheviks successfully took power following the Russian Revolution. Their criticism of imperialist foreign policy and advocacy of socialism linked these social movements together with international politics. The third challenge was nationalism. Aided partly by the goodwill and support shown to nationalism by Wilson and the Soviet regime, nationalist movements gradually came to challenge colonial governments around the world. East Asia was no exception, as evidenced by two major uprisings in short succession in 1919: the March 1st movement on the Korean Peninsula and the May 4th movement in China.

Alongside these challenges to the existing international order, there were also major challenges within Japan itself, as social and economic factors became increasingly politicized. The Meiji political system was essentially dominated by a favored elite but, during the first decade of the twentieth century, social movements became prominent. The Japanese economy boomed during the war, but the rice riots of 1918 soon revealed how flimsy were the foundations on which this growth had been built. Although the country had successfully modernized militarily, it was still underdeveloped economically. Socially too, the process of modernization was far from complete. The problem of poverty became a social issue with reportage such as Kawakami Hajime's essay *Bimbō monogatari*

[Tale of Poverty]. It was in this context that the influence of American liberalism and Soviet socialism were felt. By the end of the war, the domestic situation in Japan was in turmoil, with many people clamoring for reform.

The influence of these various domestic and international factors on Japanese diplomacy was complex. On the one hand, domestic liberalist movements overlapped with Wilsonian internationalism. This can be seen, for example, in the arguments put forward by people like Sakuzō Yoshino.<sup>ii</sup> This approach could be said to have provided the foundations for Shidehara diplomacy, which set the tone of Japanese foreign policy in the 1920s.<sup>iii</sup> On the other hand, it was pointed out that liberalism had tendencies that produced, and justified, social and economic inequalities both at home and abroad, giving rise to a view that prioritized the attainment of radical socialism rather than political liberalism. Some supporters of this view oriented themselves to socialism and became leftwing, while others became staunch statist. The famous essay “Reject the Anglo-American-Centered Peace” authored at the end of the war by Fumimaro Konoe, who was prime minister several times during the 1930s, reflects this radical evolution. Thus, there was opposition not only between conservative groups and progressives, but also between supporters of incremental and radical reforms. These were tied up in complex ways with political power groups among the military, political parties, and bureaucracy, as Japanese political history moved forward through the 1910s and 1920s into the prewar period.

These changes to political and social conditions within Japan and internationally posed huge challenges for Japanese diplomacy, but these challenges only came to the surface later. For a time after the end of World War I, Japanese diplomacy achieved positive results. At the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Japan was one of the major powers, and continued to be one of the “big five” major powers at the League of Nations. At the Paris Peace Conference, Japan was able to overcome Chinese protests and achieve its aims with regard to its biggest concern: its claims to Shandong and the handling of the South -Sea Islands in the Pacific. Following the treaty agreements made at the Washington Naval Conference, although the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was lost, it became possible to stabilize regional order in the Asia-Pacific and achieve a certain reduction in military spending. Japan’s relationship with the Soviet Union, which had been poor since Japan’s decision to send troops to Siberia, also stabilized after the signing of the Convention Embodying Basic Rules of the Relationship between Japan and the USSR in 1925. In the same year, a tariff convention was held in Peking between the major powers and China to implement the Washington Treaties. These developments helped to stabilize Japan’s foreign relations. Militarily, the Imperial Defense Plan, revised in 1923, defined the United States, the Soviet Union, and China (in that order) as hypothetical enemies. In fact, though, the possibility of war seemed low, and Japan felt increasingly secure, as can be seen from the fact that the military offered military spending proposals based on the assumption of fighting a short decisive war.

Nevertheless, the movement toward a fundamental shift in the global order that had been in evidence since the late stages of the war became increasingly difficult to ignore, and brought

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ii Sakuzō Yoshino: 1878-1933. Political Science Professor at Tokyo Imperial University who became famous for advocating Minpon-shugi during the First World War, a form of democracy with imperial constitutional system.

iii Shidehara diplomacy is named after Kijuro Shidehara: 1872-1951. Shidehara originally joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1896. After occupying the highest position of the Ministry such as the Vice-Minister, ambassador to the US and the plenipotentiary to the Washington Conference in 1921-22, he served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs repeatedly in 1920s, pursuing the cooperation with the US and UK.

increasing pressure to bear on Japanese diplomacy. In China, the KMT nationalist government led by Chiang Kai-shek based in Canton had made skillful use of the Chinese people's aspirations for nationalism and social reform and looked poised to unite the whole of Chinese territory under its unified control in the second half of the 1920s. This required fundamental changes to the Washington System, which had aimed to balance China's demands against the competing interests of the various powers in China. At almost the same time, the foreign policy of the United States, which had been introspective since the vote against joining the League of Nations, started to show signs of becoming more engaged again. For example, the Paris Peace Pact signed in 1928 was the result of a US-French initiative. Even if there were doubts about the effectiveness of the agreement, it demonstrated American readiness to engage with the global community again and make a major commitment. At the same time, it also showed that American foreign policy would not be oriented toward traditional power politics but would aim for radical change in the world order. Another factor was the Soviet Union. Although it had stabilized its diplomatic relations with all the major powers apart from the United States during the second half of the 1920s, the Soviet Union still used Comintern to control communist movements around the world, exacerbating political instability in many countries. The pressure in this respect was especially intense in Japan, which was struggling with the lingering effects of the WWI bubble and the devastation caused by the Great Kanto Earthquake, on top of the tensions caused by social and economic modernization.

The various difficulties affecting Japanese diplomacy came to a head in the context of the country's interests in China, concentrated in Manchuria. The Washington System was gradually losing legitimacy and, with Japan now in difficulties, the lingering problem of Manchuria's ambiguous status became acute. By the 1920s, the view that Manchuria was more or less the only possible route to Japanese economic development was already widespread among the Japanese elite. A cabinet decision under Takashi Hara on May 13, 1921 was typical: "It is hardly necessary to reiterate at this stage that Manchuria and Mongolia are intimately tied to our national defense and to the economic survival of our people. Accordingly, focusing on these two priorities and positioning our power in Manchuria and Mongolia are the essential fundamentals of our policy." Even if we accept the two goals of national defense and economic development, however, the actual policy to be followed will differ greatly depending on which of the two is made the number-one priority. However, Japan was not able to form a consistent strategy that would prioritize either national defense or the economy in Manchuria. In addition, because the Kwantung Army stationed in Manchuria performed an important political function, it became a hotbed for the politicization of the military. Japan's diplomatic, military, and economic development objectives became entangled. The involvement of Chinese warlords and other local powers further increased the chaos that marred Japan's management of its interests in Manchuria.

The system's rifts caused by the Manchurian problem eventually came to dominate the whole of Japanese politics. Following political disagreements, and with the military now involved as well as the political parties, the bureaucracy, and the Privy Council, Japanese politics became dysfunctional. The most frightening manifestation of this was the legitimization of the spirit of *gekokujo* (the spirit of "lower overthrowing the upper") in the military, which eventually led to assassinations, coups d'état, and, in China, conspiracies, and these started to manipulate politics. Starting with the assassination of warlord Zhuang Zuolin, the actions of a certain section of the military came to exert control over the government's foreign policy, as shown by the Manchurian Incident. In response, several attempts were made to unify the policy-making apparatus during the 1930s. These attempts only involved compromises by the major political players, though, and the lack of strong political

leadership meant that only nominal changes were made. On the diplomatic front, Japan was pressed to respond to constantly evolving conditions, making do with compromises at home and continuing to expand overseas.

Of course, we should understand the difficult international environment in which Japanese diplomacy was placed. The international order in the interwar years was plagued with contradictions, with an international order based on the colonial empires continuing to exist alongside advocacy of universal values opposed to colonialism. This contradiction forced a particularly difficult choice on a country like Japan, which was relatively weak as a colonial empire and something of an unconventional presence in the international order. Japan was too weak to cast aside the interests it had already gained from its empire and practice universal values instead, but neither could it simply cling to its colonies and ride out the difficult situation.

With Japan lacking sufficient strength both militarily and economically, probably the only path forward would have been to make use of its voice within the international community to speak up about the contradictions in the global order. In fact, some appeals of this kind were made through international organizations such as the Institute of Pacific Relations. Still, Japan's ability to make its diplomatic voice heard was limited, partly for cultural reasons, and it struggled to express its difficulties in universal terms before the international community. It is possible to see the Greater East Asia diplomacy (to use Sumio Hatano's term) that was adopted after Japan had entered into the Pacific War and the tide of the war had already started to turn for the worse as an attempt to express Japan's position within the context of universal principles, but these efforts were too little, too late.

The diplomatic and military complacency and systemic dysfunctionality that accompanied Japan's imperial expansion, which had been inherently present even in the period of Japan's first bloom as a colonial empire in the years leading up to World War I, were amplified in the interwar years by changes in the international environment and a series of domestic crises. Like a driverless steam train, Japan resorted to military means without any clear objectives, and left diplomacy to cobble together plausible rationalizations for its military actions. Expansion without any strategy led to a destructive war, and Japan's colonial empire was dismantled and taken apart.

### ***3. Rebirth as a Nation State 1945–69***

In World War II, Japan eventually ended up in a state of war with nearly all the world's major powers. The country suffered widespread strategic bombing and the dropping of two atomic bombs before it finally surrendered with the loss of all its colonies. This was nothing less than a massive failure of the country's foreign policy and political leadership. However, as is almost always the case, this massive destruction also gave rise to a new hope for rebirth. By expanding geographically, Japan had brought chaos into its domestic politics, and increased the number of its enemies. For Japan, the colonies were perceived like a non-performing loan. Seen from the perspective of world history, the colonial period was coming to an end in any case, and in the long term being forced to abandon its colonies after its defeat in 1945 was not a negative for Japan.

Several factors helped to give Japan an opportunity for rebirth. First, having passed through the tribulations of war, there was a kind of solidarity among the people. One of the reasons for the affection that most Japanese showed for the emperor immediately after the war was the image many people had of him as a savior who had rescued the people from the colonial imperial system that

had corrupted the Meiji constitutional system. Second was the presence of the occupation forces, which possessed enormous authority to build new systems to harness this solidarity and convert it into energy for social and economic modernization. The occupying forces did not exercise power directly, but were a presence that maintained a strict social order. Under this control, labor reforms and land reforms, which would have caused political chaos in prewar Japan, were pushed through in a short period of time. Japan was thus able to implement major systemic reforms peacefully and without causing major damage to national solidarity.

The international environment was also favorable to Japan. Unlike the closed prewar colonial imperial system, the America-centered Bretton Woods system was an open system in which Japan, too, would eventually be allowed to participate. Also, with East-West tensions gradually increasing, the victory of the communists in China (which the US had initially hoped to make the pillar of order in postwar Asia) also increased the international importance of Japan in Asia. The need to station US troops permanently in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula following the Korean War increased Japan's strategic importance and strengthened Japan's national security. This division of East Asia saved Japan from involvement in political chaos on the Korean Peninsula, in China, or in Southeast Asia, where the upheaval of decolonization was still ongoing, and freed it from the need to worry about political policy choices.

When we consider these factors, the choices taken by Shigeru Yoshida for peace and independence—that is to say, peace agreements with the Western powers, cooperation with the United States based on the Security Treaty and a priority on economic recovery—may seem obvious. Nevertheless, Japan was fortunate to have Yoshida as its leader at that time. He was one of the few Anglo-American-oriented Japanese diplomats with experience of having served in the colonial empire, as consul general in Mukden. This experience gave him vital insights into governing as a statesman, and allowed him to acquire a sense for the mechanics of diplomatic power. When he decided to delegate Japan's external national security to the United States, it was based on a careful analysis of the situation in which Japan was placed. Also, he had a different view on China from the US government at the time, and tried to find a way toward closer rapprochement. Yoshida's affection for Anglo-American liberalism and his dislike of state intervention in the economy made him a good fit with the Bretton Woods system. More than anything, his decisiveness increased the trust placed in him by the people.

Of course, reforms under the foreign occupying forces resulted in all kinds of contradictions, which gradually came into problems after independence with peace. The prime example is the Constitution. However, the content of these policies, including Article 9, was probably not far removed from the will of the various factions in the country at the time. The problem was that the enactment of the Constitution—the supreme act of political authority—was taken in a time of occupation, precisely when Japan was in a state in which neither authority nor politics really existed at all. This separated the Constitution from reality and overlooked the political bases for managing the Constitution by interpreting it to suit the changing times and to make amendments and changes. For example, although the new Constitution was based on a parliamentary cabinet system of government, many of the norms of the Diet continued unchanged from before the war, and the government was still weak. These defects were concealed under the occupation by the authority of the occupying forces but, once the occupation came to an end, they came to the surface, in the form of Yoshida's rapid loss of political leadership.



This systemic crisis was only resolved after widespread protests over the Security Treaty in 1960. In this sense, the various results of 1960 – the confirmation of the revised US-Japan Security Treaty, the resignation of Nobusuke Kishi, and the arrival in office of Hayato Ikeda with his policy focused on economic development to double people’s income – were all confirmations by Japanese actors of systems already in place. It is fair to say that the basic trajectory of postwar Japanese foreign policy, sometimes known as the Yoshida Doctrine, was laid down in these years. It was in this period that Japan decided to follow a policy of separating the defense of Japan from the wider regional security of the Far East. The former was treated as an issue of individual self-defense by legitimizing the Self-Defense Forces while the latter was made a matter for collective self-defense, in which Japan would essentially remain uninvolved. It was also during this period that the choice was made to follow a policy that would avoid political disagreements, unify the people through economic growth, and strengthen Japan’s standing in international politics—what might be called economic diplomacy in the broad sense.

This choice proved a great success. By the end of the 1960s, Japan was second among the Western powers only to the United States in terms of its GNP. Its politics had also stabilized, as can be seen from the two terms (four years) Ikeda served as prime minister and the four terms (eight years) of Eisaku Satō. However, the Japanese were not aiming for economic growth alone. Economic growth was also a means for achieving another, higher objective in international politics. This was the revival of Japan’s international prestige, which had reached rock bottom at the end of the war. Indeed, the Japanese showed an almost unusual eagerness to join international bodies. Apparently thirsting for a position as an advanced nation, Japan gradually acquired these memberships, even sometimes at the cost of protecting its own domestic industry. Also, through its economic cooperation, which had started in the form of reparations, Japan developed positive relationships with the newly independent countries of Asia, and slowly succeeded in achieving rehabilitation into the international community in Asia as well. The last of these objectives was the return of Okinawa. When Satō achieved the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty with President Nixon in 1969, all the aims that Japan had set after the war had been achieved. Like victory in the Russo-Japanese War, this was a time of triumph for postwar Japan and at the same time a new point of departure.

#### ***4. Economic Powerhouse Diplomacy: 1969–91***

Japan’s rapid economic growth naturally attracted international attention. Numerous commentaries were written on Japan’s economic “miracle,” and many people who were not Japan specialists became interested in the country. One of these, Zbigniew Brzezinski, called Japan a “fragile blossom” in his study of the country and its systems. Brzezinski believed that the international and domestic conditions that had made Japan’s economic growth possible were changing, and argued that there was a risk that these changes could have a negative impact on Japan.

These changes were first manifested in an expectation that Japan would adopt a more proactive position in its foreign policy. It could be said that this hope was already in evidence at the summit meeting between Satō and Nixon that decided the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty. The so-called “Korea Clause” and “Taiwan Clause” included in the joint communiqué can be understood as expressing an expectation that Japan would play a bigger role in regional security. Also, it is almost certain that the two leaders discussed measures to deal with exports of Japanese textile goods to the United States. These two were both certainly difficult problems. Considering Japan’s history as a colonial empire, it was understandable that it choose to be careful on the issues of Korea

and Taiwan, at least in this period. The textile issue also had some negative aspects involving the president's political considerations. Nonetheless, for Japan, occupying a position of international significance meant it would need to come up with answers to these kinds of difficult questions. In the event, nothing concrete was ever achieved in relation to the Korea or Taiwan Clauses, partly because of subsequent changes in the regional situation, while an agreement was finally reached on the textiles issue after some complications. Already in this period the patterns of Japanese foreign policy were on display—adopting a passive stance on military and security issues, and only taking steps to diffuse trade frictions with a fine diplomatic line by bringing domestic opinions together using the excuse of outside pressure.

Part of the reason for this strong tendency to bring domestic opinions together using the excuse of outside pressure was the weak structure of political leadership. Rapid economic growth had weakened opposition parties that espoused socialism and anti-liberalism. The diminished ideological conflicts had also made the ruling party less attractive, though, and damaged its ability to lead. In fact, after Kakuei Tanaka took office in 1972, the only person to stay in office as prime minister longer than two years was Yasuhiro Nakasone. In these circumstances, it became difficult to implement any ambitious foreign policy, and there was an increasing tendency to try to maintain the status quo with as few concessions as possible.

Of course, Japan did act with greater energy in some areas. On currency, for example, Japan started to act as one of the world's leading countries from an early stage and, when the first summit of leading industrialized nations was held in 1975, Japan's prime minister Takeo Miki took part, showing that Japan had now become one of the three major poles coordinating the West's economic policy, alongside the United States and Europe. Additionally, starting from the second half of the 1970s, Japan rapidly increased the amount of its overseas official aid assistance, which also helped to circulate its current account surplus. Part of this was used for "strategic assistance" that considered the security concerns and interests of the West. Also, growing attention was given to cultural exchanges—with the Japan Foundation, for example, founded in 1972.

One area to which Japanese diplomacy gave particular importance and in which it achieved a certain degree of success was the nurturing of international relations within the Asia-Pacific region. Already starting in the second half of the 1960s, terms like "Asia-Pacific" and "Trans-Pacific" came to be used in diplomatic circles but, with the Vietnam War and the Chinese Cultural Revolution still underway, there was little real development of any kind of international relations within the Asia-Pacific. In the second half of the 1970s, efforts such as the declaration of the Fukuda Doctrine by Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda and the concept of trans-Pacific cooperation articulated by Prime Minister Masayoshi Ōhira failed to attract much international attention at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, these efforts deserve to be recognized as the first to propose the basic foundations of the multilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region today.

Taken in summary, Japanese diplomacy in this period was economic-centered diplomacy, and can be said to have had certain characteristics that resembled the policy of the United States in the 1920s, sometimes called "dollar diplomacy" or "involvement without commitment." The results of this policy deserve to be given some credit, but we should probably be cautious about praising them excessively. The activities of Japanese diplomacy were totally dependent on the fact that the fundamental structure of international politics was ordered by the political, militaristic, economic, and social relationship of opposition defined by the Cold War. This can be seen from

the fact that Nakasone never received more international attention than when he spoke of the “solidarity” of the West at the Williamsburg Summit in 1983. It was within this order that Japan was able to concentrate on economic growth and use the proceeds of this growth to carry out economic diplomacy. Japan’s diplomacy fundamentally matched the character of the world order. Though it may have strengthened this world order in some aspects, it was never a diplomacy that would change the world order in any way. As an illustration of this, consider the fact that it was not possible to reestablish diplomatic relations with China until there was a change in the Sino-American relationship, notwithstanding the considerable economic ties between Japan and China that had already been built up before then. It is a fact that Japan’s relations with China and South Korea were maintained on a relatively positive level, thanks to the yen loans to China started under the Ōhira cabinet and the economic cooperation with South Korea realized by Prime Minister Nakasone, but it would be hard to say that these were founded on any kind of spiritual reconciliation with Japan.

In Japan, a view of the country’s national strength had taken root based on a distorted nationalism that combined pride in having become an economic superpower with a sense of inferiority based on a view of itself as a small country in political and military terms. This was expressed in the opinion that it was because Japan had concentrated on pacifism and its economy without spending on its military that it had been able to become an economic superpower, and that the United States and the Soviet Union were doomed to decline and bankruptcy by their huge military spending. This view became particularly pronounced in the 1980s, when there was even talk of Japan replacing the United States as a global superpower hegemon.

Seen from today’s perspective, it is clear that the 1980s were a period in which globalization had started to promote change in global politics. The reforms carried out by Thatcher, Reagan, and others tried to reform stagnant political and economic systems less by gradual transformations than by something closer to revolution. One side effect of this was prolonged turmoil and economic sluggishness. Still, these reforms gradually started to produce results and by the end of the 1980s even the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe had been absorbed into the wave of globalization and were on the path to de-communization. A certain amount of privatization also took place in Japan during this period under the Nakasone government, but this was less a response to the huge revolution brought about by globalization and more focused on international policy coordination and easy economic stimulus policies. These resulted in a bubble economy, and insensitive and excessive spending increased wariness of Japan and led to Japan revisionism.

The Persian Gulf crisis and the Gulf War that followed served to bring home to Japan that the fundamental structure of global politics had changed with the end of the Cold War, and made Japan aware of the limitations of the economic-centered diplomacy it had followed until then. Despite its provision of huge amounts of funding and some more modest manpower contributions after the war was over, Japan was an almost invisible presence during the Gulf War.<sup>iv</sup> As fundamental aspects of the global order were being questioned, Japan was made to realize that making peace by money and discussions alone was impossible. How it absorbed the lessons of this bitter experience would be the point of departure for Japanese diplomacy in the post-Cold War era from the 1990s on.

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iv e.g. advertisement titled “Thanks America and the Global Family of Nations”, *Washington Post* (11 March 1991).

## 5. *Japanese Diplomacy After the Cold War: From 1991*

It is still too early to fully evaluate Japanese diplomacy from the 1990s on. However, we can perhaps point to several characteristics.

First was a new readiness to criticize previous Japanese diplomacy as “checkbook diplomacy” and “one-country pacifism,” and to start gradually widening the parameters of engagement to political and military questions beyond purely economic matters. This began with the dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces to join the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission Activities in Cambodia (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia; UNTAC). The successful conclusion of this mission led to more systematic involvement of Japan’s SDF in UN peacekeeping missions. Japan also began to express its ambitions to be admitted as a permanent member of the UN Security Council and started to request support for this move from countries around the world. In addition, it also redefined the terms of the Japan-US Security Treaty and reached an agreement on new defense cooperation guidelines with the United States. It also increased its involvement in regional security. In parallel with this, Japan stopped its aid to China in protest at China’s nuclear weapons tests, and postponed its funding for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), in protest at missile tests carried out by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea), demonstrating a readiness to use its economic power more politically.

The second point is Japan started to give greater importance to international relations within the Asia-Pacific region. Until this point, dialogue in the Asia-Pacific had concentrated on the economy alone, but Japan began to show signs of a willingness to broaden dialogue to include political aspects as well, as seen for example with the launch of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1993 and the ASEAN Regional Forum with the countries of SE Asia in 1994. There was an increasing tendency to strengthen regional relationships on a global level, and it is possible to see Japan’s efforts in this direction as part of wider global trends. Yet it also meant the beginning of various multilateral relationships the likes of which had not previously existed in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, this new multilateralism aimed at bringing China onto the international stage and drawing it into greater involvement in regional affairs.

During the first half of the 1990s it was ASEAN and the developed countries on both sides of the Pacific who held the initiative in regional relations within the Asia-Pacific, but in recent years international relations in Northeast Asia have increasingly been the focus. Peaceful transitions of power in Taiwan, North Korea’s increasingly engaged attitude toward the outside world, and Russia’s move toward active diplomacy vis-à-vis East Asia are examples of rapid developments in this part of the world in recent years. As an area that involves some of the world’s major powers – Japan, the United States, China, and Russia – the Korean Peninsula has traditionally been a focus of international political attention. The shape that international relations in this region take will be important for international relations throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

The third aspect we can note is the increasing importance in politics and diplomacy around the world of the need to respond to information technology and the globalization it brings in its wake. Globalization worked to the advantage of the West in bringing change to the balance of power and bringing the Cold War to an end, but it has become clear that this does not mean that global markets are free from problems. Short-term movements of huge amounts of capital can cause considerable problems for small and medium-sized countries and, since this capital is often moved for speculative

reasons, it often inhibits rather than encourages fair market mechanisms. The Asian currency crisis demonstrated the dangers of these negative aspects of globalization.

Globalization does not simply affect relationships among countries; it also has the potential to affect society at large. It will therefore be necessary to respond to this change on a number of different levels. We need to consider some level of international supervision and regulation to govern the liquidity and speculative movement of capital. Japan has argued this at the G7. Mechanisms to balance speculation and stabilize markets are also necessary, and some measures to this end are being taken, including the liquidity swap arrangement among ASEAN plus Japan, the United States, and China. There is a need for a society-wide response to the information gap created by globalization and the growing inequality that comes with it, ideally involving cooperation between NGOs and governments. NGOs in Japan are still weak in general, though they are gradually becoming stronger.

Japan has thus made responses to the post-Cold War world in a number of areas. However, the country still seems to be lacking in two important areas that are vital for maintaining a global position as the post-Cold War world order is constructed. The first is a lack of a worldview or philosophy regarding the situation now underway in which globalization is bringing about fusion and frictions between the world's diverse value systems. Around the time of World War II, Japan did make some efforts to articulate a worldview and philosophy, but lacked the knowledge and ability to transform this into effective policy. However, today's Japan, although it does possess a certain amount of power, seems to me to lack the kind of profound philosophy that might enable it to pursue a vision of its worldview. There is a risk that this deficiency may make Japan's diplomacy a mere accumulation of tactics bereft of any unifying strategy. It will certainly not help to make Japan's presence felt in other countries.

Second is the problem of an adequate foundation for diplomacy within domestic politics. For diplomacy to carry weight in a mutually interdependent world, it is vital that the statements made by those in charge of implementing policy are supported within their own country and can realistically be put into practice. In modern diplomacy, almost everything depends on reciprocity, by which you accept a certain burden and expect the other party to shoulder its share of the burden in turn. In this situation, taking the initiative and shouldering one's own burden is an important diplomatic resource with regard to other countries. In Japan's case, the country has for some time actively taken up its burden in terms of contributing international funding, and this has not been entirely without significance. Still, this burden is not a question of funding alone. Other more politically challenging aspects such as system reform and manpower contributions can sometimes be more important. The only way of strengthening these aspects is for the government to have a consistent diplomatic strategy and to appeal to its people to shoulder their share of the burden. The 1990s were a decade of considerable confusion for Japan in terms of its domestic politics. Whether Japanese domestic politics will be able to reestablish itself on a stable foundation will hold the key to the success or failure of Japanese diplomacy in the early years of the twenty-first century.

### ***Conclusion***

In this paper I have provided a short review of the course followed by Japanese diplomacy in the twentieth century. In closing, I would like to make a few observations regarding Japanese diplomacy in this century.

In terms of diplomatic techniques and the pursuit of specific objectives, one can consider that Japanese diplomacy has in general achieved positive results. If we understand diplomacy to be the process by which a country develops cooperative relationships with other countries and decreases the number of its enemies, it is probably fair to say that Japanese diplomacy has achieved a degree of success.

Of course, part of the reason for this success has been the diligence of the people responsible for carrying out the nation's diplomacy. At the same time, though, we should not overlook another factor, namely, that when the international order has been stable and Japan has had a clear sense of direction and strategy, its people have pulled together and the strength of the nation has been enhanced. It was not so much that Japan aimed specifically to become a military power during the Meiji era or an economic powerhouse during the postwar period of rapid economic growth. Rather, the country aimed to achieve its independence and status within the international community, and the Japanese people rallied around and concentrated their efforts to those ends.

However, it cannot be said that Japanese diplomacy has always been astute about how best to use the gains of its diplomacy and the efforts of its people. Successfully increasing its international influence required it to learn to exert diplomatic efforts across a more diverse range of areas, and to put in place the decision-making systems vital for the major changes necessary to this end. Yet, there was often insufficient understanding of the importance of these conditions, and Japan's structures tended to postpone these difficult changes. After achieving military and economic strength, Japan both times became too reliant on the strengths it had achieved, and failed to pay sufficient attention to the negative aspects of this one-dimensional concentration on a single aspect of national strength. It also tended to underestimate the new problems brought by success, and the need to learn how to manage the fruits of its success, and only started to pay attention to these aspects once the situation had deteriorated quite seriously.

It is also true that Japan's success itself became a factor that changed the international order within which Japan existed and from which it derived its interests. From a long-term perspective, the fact that Japan rose to become the only non-Western colonial empire destabilized the colonial empire system. Likewise, Japan's rapid rise to prosperity in the postwar period was one of the factors that produced change in the international economic order. In the twentieth century, Japan was in the ironic position of being forced to adapt to international factors that were changing because of its own success.

At times of dramatic change in international conditions, what is most important for a country like Japan is, first, a worldview that enables it to speak in universal terms, and second, a strong foundation in domestic politics that will allow it to implement a consistent diplomacy in a period of revolutionary change. These are both essential prerequisites for producing a long-term foreign policy strategy, and Japan lacked both during the interwar period. As a result, its foreign policy became dominated by an internally focused expansionism that prioritized the logic of Japanese internal politics. Japan ended with a passive diplomacy that was always playing catchup with situations after they had already arisen. Of course, history does not repeat itself exactly, but to some extent Japan today resembles Japan of the interwar period. In this sense, the path that Japanese diplomacy followed over the course of the twentieth century has a number of important lessons to teach us today.

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