

## Chapter III

### The Qing Empire Falls

—How Western Powers Easily Overpowered Asia’s Last Empire—

#### Demise of the Asiatic Great Empires

During the 220 years that Japan had closed its doors to outsiders and lost interest in the outside world, the international situation on the Asian continent underwent tremendous changes.

In early seventeenth-century Asia, gigantic empires were still flourishing. In those days, the Ottoman Empire was a powerful factor in the European balance of power and presented occasional threats to Vienna, encompassing as it did the Black Sea coast on the east, the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea on the south, all of North Africa on the west, and the Balkan peninsula on the north. On the Indian Subcontinent, the Mughal Empire had been expanding its territory and enjoying prosperity since the reign of Akbar the Great (1556–1605), as if to fulfill the prophecy, “He who rules Delhi rules the universe.” In exchange for the export of its rich products, gold and silver poured into the empire, making India the most prosperous country in the world in those days. In China, the Qing Empire was ruling the largest territory in the history of China, except during the time of the Mongol Empire. Under the reigns of Emperors Kangxi (康熙帝) and Qianlong (乾隆帝), Qing was known as the world’s greatest empire and the most sophisticated civilization until the eighteenth century.

It was the Mughal Empire in India that was first crippled by the invading Western powers. In a quest for India’s wealth, Portugal was the first Western power to request a trading post in India, followed by the Netherlands, Britain, and France. In the eighteenth century, Britain gradually began to overwhelm the other Western powers, placing key locations in India under its control one after another. In 1805, the emperor himself came under the protection of Britain, marking the fall of the Mughal Empire.

If the eighteenth century was the history of the fall of the Mughal Empire, then the nineteenth century was the history of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In one hundred years between the Napoleonic wars and the end of

World War I, the Ottoman Empire lost all of its territory due to Russia's encroachment, the independence of the Balkan countries, the colonization of northern Africa by European powers, and, finally, the secession of the Arabic countries.

Against this background, the last empire remaining in Asia toward the end of the nineteenth century was the Empire of Qing.

Qing had also suffered encroachment from Russia. In as early as the late sixteenth century, Russian Cossacks had already invaded the Chinese territory beyond the Ural mountains and repeatedly looted the people from their strongholds that they had set up in various locations in Siberia. Emperor Kangxi took an unbending stance against these activities. Although the Russians made various excuses to maintain the *fait accompli*, they were overwhelmed by Qing's massive troops armed with state-of-the-art cannons. Forced to sign the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, the Russians withdrew from the area north of the Amur River. Consequently, Russia changed the direction of its invasion. For the next seventy years, it concentrated on the conquest of Central Asia, situated in the south of the traffic route to the Far East. Taking advantage of the Opium Wars, however, during which Qing could not afford to engage enemies in the north, Russia once again advanced to the Far East all the way to Vladivostok, occupying the north bank of the Amur River as well as the east bank of the Ussuri River (1858–60).

Russia's defeat by Emperor Kangxi's grand troops, however, long lingered in the memory of European countries, and Qing remained to be feared as a sleeping lion.

### **No Longer a Sleeping Lion**

The First Sino-Japanese War turned out to be the most profound turning point in the modern history of East Asia. To begin with, it was fought in the heart of Qing instead of at its peripheries, which the Western powers had encroached upon. Watching the Empire of the Great Qing being easily beaten by the miniscule state of Japan, Western powers were initially shocked and dumbfounded. In no time, however, they realized that Qing was no longer a sleeping lion to be feared; it was a living dead, just like the Mughal and Ottoman Empires had once been, that could be handled as they wished. The

subsequent conduct of the Western powers was among the most shameless even in the era of imperialism. As every history book on this issue describes, the Western powers were like vultures swarming over a carcass.

First, taking advantage of Qing's financial difficulties caused by the war redemption payment to Japan, Western powers competed with one another to grant credits to Qing. In the context of present-day economic assistance to developing countries, granting credit may appear to benefit the recipient. In those days, however, it was a means frequently employed by the Western powers to establish their influence on the recipient. Once they succeeded in having the prey accept their loans, they were almost guaranteed to notch a decisive victory. It would allow the creditor country to confiscate the debtor's tariff revenues, obtain a variety of concessions, and dispatch "advisers" to control the finances of the debtor country, making it into a semi-colony. Although Persia in those days barely managed to remain independent, it was deeply in debt, resulting in the transfer of such concessions as mines and railroads to foreign hands in the division of its territory between the British and Russian spheres of influence.

In fact, Russia and France, the two interveners in the Triple Intervention vis-à-vis Japan, succeeded in lending 400 million francs to Qing on the pretext of aid for the war redemption payment. Upon hearing this news, the British government reproached Qing for its insincerity in accepting loans from Russia and France as Qing had been requesting the British government for a loan. Thus Qing ended up with an additional loan of 32 million pounds from both the British government and the German government, which took advantage of the British action. To take a loan from a country in those days was tantamount to being a part of its sphere of influence. Incidentally, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Japanese government offered Central Asian countries low-interest, long-term yen loans, these countries were said to be frightened of possible demands that the Japanese government might make in the future.

The greatest concern for Russia at that time was to connect the Siberian Railway, which was under construction, directly to Vladivostok through Manchuria via Harbin, instead of running along the northern bank of the Amur River as it does today. The railway would have been not only shorter but also much more advantageous for Russia, because it would have run

through fertile Manchuria instead of barren Siberia and offered better access to the heart of China.

When Nikolai II was crowned in 1896 (29th Year of Meiji), it was Li Hungchang who attended the coronation representing Qing. Since the Liaodong peninsula had just been returned to Qing, thanks to the Triple Intervention by Russia, France, and Germany, the Qing court unanimously supported the policy to “coalesce with Russia to confront Japan . . . unaware of Russia’s great ambition,” according to Chinese journalist Wang Yunsheng (王芸生).

### **Buying over Li Hungchang**

When Li Hungchang left for Saint Petersburg, the Russian court tried to block his visits to Britain and Germany en route to Russia. It dispatched members of the royal family as well as the steamer *Russia* to Suez to meet him and transport him directly to Odessa, giving him the red carpet welcome on board.

Throughout the years before and after the Russo-Japanese War, the most influential individual on Russian foreign policies toward the Far East was finance minister Sergei Witte. According to Russian historian Boris Romanov’s *Russia’s Diplomatic History of Concessions in Manchuria*, “since the summer of 1900, it appeared as if Russia’s foreign ministry had become a subsidiary of the finance ministry; it could not move even an inch in the Far East without reporting to the finance minister.” It can be easily discerned, not only from his own memoir but also from the writings of Wang Yunsheng on the opposite side, that Witte was an outstanding diplomat with sharp insight on the international situation with excellent skills in diplomatic negotiation.

Convinced that negotiation with the Chinese should be conducted in a ceremonial, unhurried fashion, Witte welcomed Li with extreme courtesy, wearing the full dress worn for state ceremonies. After exchanging pleasantries, they moved to a different room where they exchanged news on their respective royal families and their own personal families over tea and refreshments, spending the entire first day of Li’s visit without even a single reference to his official business. According to Witte’s memoir, this tactic was

so effective that Li already appeared to be relaxed on the second day. On the third day, Witte himself visited Li to start the dialogue.

Fully utilizing his skill in rhetoric, Witte emphasized the importance of the railway that would reach Vladivostok via Manchuria, saying, “Russia has every intention of defending Qing’s territory. At the time of the First Sino-Japanese War, however, we encountered difficulty in transporting our troops because we did not have the railway. By the time our troops reached Jilin, the war was practically over.” Witte added that Japan, too, would agree to this railway because it would provide Japan with better access to European civilization—this reasoning was, of course, far from how Japan perceived the plan. The Japanese in those days had already become fully aware of Russia’s threat in Manchuria. Many were frightened by the railway construction and perceived it as if scores of Cossacks on horsebacks were rapidly making their way into the Far East.

When Li still remained indecisive, Witte arranged a talk between Li and the Russian emperor. Receiving a direct request from the emperor, Li had to agree with the passage of the Siberian railway through Manchuria. Witte then continued negotiations with Li to draft the outline of the Russo-Qing secret pact.

It has been rumored that in this process Li received a bribe from the Russian side. Although Witte’s memoir denied this rumor, Romanov wrote that Witte promised Li to pay him 3 million rubles in three installments. Judging from the situation surrounding the negotiation as well as Li’s subsequent conduct, it seems natural to believe that there indeed was a transfer of money between Li and Witte.

In this secret pact, Witte decided to save Li’s face.

The pact agreed on the following three points. The first point was a device for that purpose by emphasizing that Li had adamantly rejected the management of this railway by the Russian government. Instead, the Chinese Eastern Railway Company (東支鉄道会社), a nominally private company that was in actuality managed by the Russian government, was established to manage the railway. But the second point of the secret pact stipulated that the railway sites and land attached to the railway would be occupied by Russia, granting Russia the right to deploy its own police forces and garrison forces. As the third point, Russia and Qing agreed to form an

offensive and defensive alliance in anticipation of a possible Japanese invasion.

Wang Yunsheng denounced this secret pact as a de facto cession of Qing's territory and concession of its administrative authority and sovereignty to Russia, stating, "this is typical of a Qing diplomat, losing sovereignty, humiliating the country and its people, and, consequently, embellishing the surface in vain."

According to Witte's memoir, Li was recorded as making the following statement to Witte after the signing of the pact:

If you are truly after Russia's interest, you should under no circumstances consider advancing south of the Siberian railway, which ends at Vladivostok in the east. Dwellers in this region are averse to Caucasians, believing Caucasians would bring misfortunes on them. Should Russia harbor ambitions on this region, therefore, I must warn you that Russia's advance to the south of the railway would without fail invite political unrest and, moreover, unexpected disasters not only to Qing but also to Russia itself.

This statement reveals that Li was well aware that this secret pact would de facto put northern Manchuria under Russian control.

### **German and Russian Advances to China**

Germany was not far behind Russia in terms of its demand on Qing for receiving some reward for its service during the Triple Intervention.

During the period of the unification of the empire, German leaders were fully devoting themselves to consolidating the foundation of the central European empire, showing no interest in the colonization race fought among the Western powers. As the German economy as well as its population showed remarkable growth after the unification, however, Germany had already started to launch its own quest for overseas territories toward the end of Bismarck's chancellorship (the late 1880s). By that time, though, most of the better overseas territories had already been occupied by Britain. It was, therefore, only natural for the ambitious Kaiser Wilhelm II, who was

overzealous about competing with Bismarck's achievements, to be interested in Qing, the last empire that was left to be divided.

After the Triple Intervention, Germany promptly demanded settlements in Tianjin and Hankou and, subsequently, continued to demand Qing for its ports. Qing's minister to Germany once lamented to the German foreign minister that, "Once we make concessions to Germany, other Western powers would surely follow suit and make more demands on us. If this happens, what would Germany do for us?" In response, the German foreign minister pointed out that Russia had already occupied Vladivostok, France had occupied Saigon, and Britain had occupied Hong Kong, and insisted that Germany, therefore, should also be given a port.

Germany aimed at gradually obtaining Jiaozhou Bay. When Kaiser Wilhelm II visited Russia in 1897, he conveyed the German intention to Nikolai II on board the carriage. Claiming that Nikolai's abstention from protestation, which was more an act of diplomatic courtesy, was a silent approval from the Russian Czar, Germany maintained readiness to take whatever action necessary at any given time. It so happened that two German missionaries were murdered on Shandon Peninsula at this particular moment. Although Qing authorities immediately arrested four suspects and attempted to swiftly close the case, Germany did not hesitate to take advantage of this incident. It dispatched a landing party and occupied Jiaozhou Bay. Unable to do anything else, the Qing government was forced to approve the lease of the territory for the duration of 99 years.

In response to the German conduct, other Western powers also pursued the policy of forcing similar concessions from Qing. Russia promptly took action to obtain the Liaodong Peninsula.

Possibly recalling Li's warning, Witte, according to his memoir, at first opposed the idea of advancing into southern Manchuria, but Russia's foreign minister and army minister persistently insisted on the occupation of Lüshun and Dalian, which Czar Nikolai II supported in the end. Convinced that it would be more prudent to obtain the peninsula through diplomatic means, Witte offered bribes of 50,000 rubles to Li and 25,000 rubles to the Qing diplomat Zhang Yinhuan to persuade Empress Dowager Cixi—who ended up agreeing to the lease of the Liaodong Peninsula, including Lüshun and Dalian. Witte, in his memoir, predicted that, had Qing not agreed with

the concession, Russian troops would have occupied the Liaodong Peninsula anyway.

Moreover, now that Russia occupied Dalian, Witte admitted that Russia had to expand its naval forces in the Far East and, as finance minister, approved an extra-budget disbursement of 90 million rubles for that purpose. This pleased the czar immensely.

At this point, advancement to the Far East and occupation of Manchuria had become an established policy for Russia. And Qing's territory was completely at the mercy of the Western powers, with or without a pretext.

As another partner in the Triple Intervention, France obtained the lease of Guangzhouwan as well as the right to develop a railway and mines in southern China.

When Britain demanded the lease of Weihaiwei on the west of the Bohai Sea to counter Russia, which had obtained Lüshun and Dalian located at the mouth of the Bohai Sea, the Qing court had no means to reject this demand. Britain also demanded and obtained the lease of the Kowloon Peninsula in southern China just because France had expanded its concessions there.

Japan, at this point, was internationally isolated due to the Triple Intervention and too exhausted by the First Sino-Japanese War to participate in the game of dividing China. The only concession Japan succeeded in obtaining from Qing was its promise not to cede Fujian province to another country.

### **U.S. Open Door Policy and Announcement on Territorial Integrity**

The United States declared its Open Door Policy toward China in September 1899 (32nd Year of Meiji), followed by its announcement of China's territorial integrity in July 1900. Today, these declarations which proudly pursued American values on foreign soil mark a milestone in the history of U.S. diplomacy. In the history books of post-World War II Japan, which are heavily influenced by the Marxist historical view, however, they are explained as the capitalistic American quest to enter the Qing market as a latecomer.

Close scrutiny of the details reveals that historical facts were not necessarily as simple and clear cut as the above two views.

In his monumental work *American Diplomacy*, George Kennan objectively describes the process which culminated in these announcements. According to this book, in those days the United States initially pursued a policy of cooperating with the United Kingdom but subsequently started to base its diplomacy on domestic considerations.

The Open Door Policy had been originally advocated by Britain. British merchants, who had monopolized about 80 percent of Qing's trade at that time, always wanted an open door policy. In fact, Arthur James Balfour, a senior member of the Conservative Party and later prime minister and foreign minister, stated in his remarks in the 1898 Parliament that "the open door policy ... has been sickeningly repeated over and over."

In the same year (31st Year of Meiji), the British government sent a secret letter to the U.S. government to sound out the possibility of whether the two countries could cooperate to bloc other Western powers from annexing or leasing Qing's territories to gain exclusive economic benefits from these territories.

According to Kennan, the then Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, an advocate of U.K.-U.S. cooperation and husband of an American wife, took the initiative for this secret letter. Although the British foreign ministry had been considering cooperation with Germany and Japan at that time, it pursued cooperation with the United States to save face for Chamberlain. But deep down, British leaders were inclined to take the realistic view that the Western powers would inevitably divide Qing and place it within their own spheres of influence.

Hearing of this secret letter, John Hay, U.S. ambassador to Britain, advised the home government to support the British initiative. While his advice was not adopted at that time, the policy that he later commissioned William Rockhill and Alfred Hoppisley to draft when he was appointed to secretary of state was approved by President McKinley. This policy would soon be called the Open Door Policy. Hoppisley was a British customs officer stationed in Qing who also had an American wife. His professional experience had made him a believer in the equal opportunity in Qing's trade. In his view, the race for spheres of influence among the Western powers in China was already beyond control, but it should be contained to the areas of railways and mines. He judged that those spheres of influence must be prevented by all means

from becoming the source of tariff barriers.

In December 1899, the U.S. Department of State announced the Open Door Policy to the Western powers and requested their responses. Britain and Japan supported the policy in principle on the condition that other Western powers would also approve it. Russia, Germany, and France went only as far as to guarantee other countries the right of a most favored nation treatment in the areas that were de facto controlled by themselves. In comparison to what the United States had originally intended, this response was tantamount to outright rejection.

### **Politics in the Year of a Presidential Election**

Despite the lukewarm responses from the Western powers, Hay decided to declare that the Open Door Policy had been satisfactorily received by these countries because the year 1900 happened to be the year of the U.S. presidential election. He announced that the responses from the Western powers were “final and conclusive.”

Japan’s foreign ministry hesitated to accept Hay’s announcement at face value and inquired about the U.S. government’s position in writing. It was answered as follows:

The United States, from the beginning, did not expect each of the Western powers to give positive response the Open Door Policy. We just wished to ask for confirmation in writing of the policy that had been heretofore declared verbally. Nevertheless, all the responses gave a satisfactory guarantee to the world that those countries would maintain freedom of trade and equality of treatment. This is what the United States purported to obtain.

This was a far-fetched explanation given by the U.S. government to justify its endeavor as “a success.”

When this happened, Komura had just been stationed in Washington, D.C., as the Japanese minister. Komura reported his own analysis to the home office as follows:

The U.S. government did not have a set view on its policy toward Qing.

What happened was its Secretary of State adopted the advice submitted by bureaucrats who were knowledgeable of Qing's situation and made a recommendation to the president. The president initially hesitated to endorse it because Americans of German descent, particularly those in the state of Ohio where President McKinley is from, had always opposed a U.S.-U.K. alliance. In order to prevent the Western powers from taking advantage of Britain's being tied up with the Boer War and advance to Qing, however, the U.S. government decided to issue a notification on the Open Door Policy to the Western powers.

In the final analysis, the Open Door Policy was a policy **that** benefited Britain most, and its promotion was compatible with the argument in support of U.S.-U.K. cooperation.

### **How Japan Saved U.S. Moral Diplomacy**

In the meantime, the Boxer Rebellion (義和団の乱), a central theme of this chapter, erupted. The United States, which was in the middle of its presidential election, did not wish to be substantially involved in this incident; neither did it desire the revival of the imperialism debate fought in Congress since the annexation of the Philippines in the course of the Spanish-American War. It was against this background that Secretary of State Hay circulated a second message to the foreign powers involved in China, this time noting the importance of respecting the "territorial and administrative integrity" of China. The message was circulated on July 3, 1900, the eve of the Democratic National Convention on July 4.

It seems natural to believe that Secretary Hay himself was fully aware that the message was circulated solely for election campaign purposes and that its content was unrealistic in the face of the reality, i.e. the race being fought among the Western powers for the expansion of their respective spheres of influence in China. As a matter of fact, in December after the presidential election, Hay himself instructed the U.S. ambassador to Beijing to demand the concession of Sansha Bay in Fujian Province to utilize it as coal storage for the U.S. Navy. As the Sino-Japanese treaty had banned the cession of Fujian Province, however, Hay sounded out the position of the Japanese government. The Japanese government responded with a

courteous and skillful reply—that is, by stating that the Japanese government had willingly accepted Secretary Hay’s message on China’s territorial integrity, which could only be achieved through self-restriction on the part of all the countries concerned. Thus Japan succeeded in nipping the U.S. action in the bud.

As far as this conduct was concerned, the United States was no different from other imperialist nations. If the United States had really taken Sansha Bay, its announcement on territorial integrity would have been regarded as something obsolete due to a situational change in the East. Seen from this angle, it can be said that the United States, unlike other imperialist nations, escaped the disgrace of tarnishing its history with imperialism thanks to Japan’s implicit persuasion.

Perhaps, it may no longer be of any use to remember this kind of historical event in detail. In fact, the United States has been perceived by its own people as well as by the rest of the world as the nation that upheld the idealistic Open Door Policy and the territorial and administrative integrity of China all the way through until the era of decolonization after World War II, well ahead of the global trend, even daring to clash with Japan, which did not agree with these U.S. ideals. Americans are immensely proud of this history. Since World War II, the United States has continued to demonstrate its idealism to the world by dispatching large numbers of troops, again and again, to Korea, Vietnam, and the Gulf region, and then withdrawing them without demanding an inch of foreign territory.

But this definitely has to be taken as one historical example of how we should refrain from trying to easily distinguish right from wrong by frivolously fitting a historical incident to a solitary image that is popular among contemporaries. After all, it should be recognized that history consists of all kinds of complicated backdrops.

### **The Boxer Rebellion**

After being so violated by the Western powers, the Qing court finally felt the threat to its own survival.

Most of all, the need to modernize China was keenly felt by some

enlightened Chinese. Kang Youwei (康有為), an educator from a distinguished Guangdong family, stressed the urgent need for the reform of Qing to Emperor Guangxu (光緒帝). He preached to the emperor that Qing lagged behind Japan because it had indulged in the refinement of technical trivia, such as the construction of railways and schools, instead of engaging in fundamental political reform like the Meiji Restoration. Thorough modernization of Qing was what was really called for.

Meanwhile, the argument for an alliance with Russia so as to counter Japan, which had once been prevalent in Qing, finally began to lose ground as more Chinese became aware of the true intention of the Russians. Instead, the argument for an alliance with Japan began to gain strength. It so happened that Itō Hirobumi was scheduled to visit Qing in 1898. Some advisors recommended to the emperor that, during his stay, the Qing government should courteously ask for Itō's teachings on modernization; others went as far as suggesting that the Qing government request Itō to stay in Beijing as the prime minister of the new government.

The following statement was presented to the emperor as a rationale for partnership with Japan:

Although all the other Western powers wish to weaken Qing so that they can divide up Qing among themselves, only Britain and Japan do not wish Qing to be weakened, even though they do not wish it to be stronger either. When Qing becomes weaker yet, Britain can no longer monopolize the benefit because Qing will be divided up by other Western powers. In the case of Japan, even when Qing becomes weaker, it cannot annex Qing because it will be divided up only by the Western powers...Siam has also relied on foreigners for its modernization. Japan, too, had mobilized foreign experts at first, but they have all been replaced by the Japanese today. There are examples of European countries which have asked foreigners to stay on and become their ministers. There is nothing wrong with this.

The author of these statements was of the opinion that Japan and Britain were the only countries Qing could rely on at the time. And from this position, in order to protect China's territorial integrity and stability in East Asia, Qing had no other choice than to rely on the Britain-Japan alliance to block

Russia's advance.

But this attempt at reform was crippled in 104 days with the rallying of the conservative faction in the Qing court, resulting in the house arrest of Emperor Guangxu and revival of rule by Empress Dowager Cixi. This abortive attempt later was called the Hundred Day's Reform.

While the modernization attempt from above thus failed, it was only natural for common people in Qing to harbor xenophobic sentiment in the face of such outrageous humiliations by the foreign powers.

The Righteous Harmony Society (義和團), known in English as the Boxers, was originally a cult martial art group founded in a northern province and became widespread among the Chinese with its traditional Oriental superstitions. Members were convinced that they could become invincible against swords, spears, or even bullets once they mastered the art. This thinking was analogous to Korea's Donghak (東學黨) before the First Sino-Japanese War, whose members believed that their religion would cure any disease. These two groups were also commonly linked to anti-Christian xenophobic sentiment among the common people, causing a massive popular revolt. These are examples of what societies with prevailing pre-modern superstitions would experience when they have been linked to emotional and fundamental nationalism.

Also behind the Boxer Rebellion was people's indignation at Qing tax officers who filled their own pockets with tax revenues. These tax officers took advantage of the Qing government's order of imposing heavy taxes on the people, which were deemed necessary to finance the massive war redemption payment to Japan. Naturally, therefore, people's resentment was also targeted at foreign powers.

Boxers became rampant even in Beijing in around the spring of 1900, and they threatened the security of foreigners, chanting "destroy the foreign." Foreign residents in nearby Tianjin were completely isolated, surrounded by Boxers. In response, Western powers destroyed and occupied the Taku Forts, collectively mobilizing their battleships, and landed their sailors to successfully reestablish communication with foreign residents in Tianjin. Beijing, in contrast, was completely beleaguered by the Boxers and its foreign residents became isolated.

Meanwhile, a council meeting attended by Empress Dowager Cixi

received an incorrect report that the foreign powers had issued an ultimatum. On June 20, the imperial proclamation of war against foreign powers was issued.

After being defeated by tiny Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War and having succumbed to demands from foreign powers without resistance, the Qing court abruptly declared war against all Western powers.

### **War with No Chance of Winning**

The imperial declaration of war proclaimed that Qing would conduct an all-out fight, relying on its 400 million people and a territory of twenty some provinces. The declaration stressed that “it would be far more honorable to fight it out than to prolong our lives and live on in shame.”

In actuality, this was empty rhetoric that failed to inspire the Chinese people; the imperial family was evacuated from Beijing. To be sure, the Qing court had made countless misjudgments and had misgoverned: officials might have ruined the future of the country by indulging in power struggles and by pursuing personal gains. Viewed from a larger perspective, however, I would say that no matter how hopeless their cause may be, any government or any people would explode after being humiliated so freely by foreign countries.

When in 1941 Stanley Hornbeck, special advisor to the Secretary of State on Far Eastern affairs, was warned on the eve of Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor that Japan would be cornered to start a war if the United States did not modify its policy, he shot back, saying, “Tell me if you know of a single historic incident of a nation starting a war out of desperation.” He meant to stress that it was unthinkable for any country to start a war that it had no chance of winning. History shows, however, the Japan did start a war immediately after this remark, an act that was like “jumping onto the deep precipice,” according to a Zen aphorism quoted by Prime Minister Tōjō Hideki on that critical occasion. Confronted by Hornbeck, the other party had to back off, unable to think of a historic example. But there actually had been such an example in the same Far East less than half a century earlier.

### **Japanese Army of Strict Discipline**

The Boxer Rebellion provided the first opportunity for Japan to be recognized as an equal with other world powers.

It was obvious to anyone that given the geographical proximity of Japan, the military forces that could be dispatched most promptly to rescue foreign residents in Beijing and Tianjin were Japanese troops. Although the Japanese side had maintained the readiness of its troops for dispatch at any time, it first sounded out the British intention in fear of a possible negative reaction from the Western powers. The British government had initially taken a wait-and-see attitude, but it recognized the necessity for the dispatch of Japanese troops as the situation grew intense. For its part, then, the British government sounded out German and Russian intentions. While both Germany and Russia remained indecisive, situations in Beijing and Tianjin became increasingly critical, prompting the British government to urge Japan to send its troops. Because neither Germany nor Russia opposed the British position on Japan, the Japanese government decided to dispatch an army division to Qing.

The Japanese troops played a central role in the Allied operations due to the large number of troops and equipment, as well as their high morale. Troops from the other Alliance countries as well as foreign residents in Tianjin and Beijing were deeply impressed by the valor and strict discipline of the Japanese soldiers.

After the retaking of Beijing from the hands of the Boxers, assaults and lootings not only by mobs but also by members of the Allied forces became rampant in the city. In order to protect the Forbidden City from looting, Japanese troops were stationed at the North, East, and West gates of the city, while U.S. troops defended the Meridian Gate on the south. Hearing how well-disciplined the Japanese soldiers were, a large number of Chinese citizens rushed to the area under the jurisdiction of the Japanese troops. Citizens also hoisted the Japanese Rising Sun flag on their houses and house boats in an attempt to discourage looters. So many people did this that the Japanese divisional commander had to ban this act in order to protect Japan's credibility.

About four decades later, when Japanese troops occupied Beijing in July 1937 as an overture to World War II, staff officer Ikeda Sumihisa strictly forbid vandalism and looting inside the walled city of Beijing. Some Beijing

citizens, who remembered being looted by Caucasian soldiers during the Boxer Rebellion, were so appreciative of this noble decision that they proposed the building a statue of Ikeda.

### **Person Who Can Represent Japan**

In the meantime, Komura, who was serving as the Japanese minister to Russia, was busy sending telegrams to the home office in Tokyo with the analysis of Russia's responses to the Boxer Rebellion. When Russia dispatched its troops to Manchuria upon the Qing's declaration of war, Komura sent this prediction: "Although Russia might formally withdraw its regulars from Manchuria after the settlement of the Rebellion, Manchuria will remain de facto under seizure by Russian troops."

Komura's message was that, in anticipation of this kind of development, Japan too should protect its own interests. Although at this stage Russia had repeatedly announced that it harbored no territorial ambition over Manchuria, it gradually became obvious to everyone that Komura's prediction had been accurate.

Inside the Qing court, the influence of the anti-foreign faction ebbed rapidly after the defeat of the Boxers, and the emperor ordered Li to begin peace negotiations with the foreign powers. Suspicious of the remaining influence of the anti-foreign faction within the Court, Western powers were doubtful even of the power bestowed on Li and refused to take him seriously. Faced with this situation, Li sent a personal note to Prime Minister Itō to request his friendly support. The Japanese government suggested that Prince Qing, who was regarded as a moderate, should also be present at the negotiation along with Li, thus enabling a successful start for the peace negotiations. This episode reveals the high esteem in which Japan was held in Qing in those days.

During the peace negotiations between Qing and the foreign powers, nobody other than Komura Jutarō could represent Japan and compete with representatives of other countries in this negotiation.

Komura had been stationed in Russia only for ten months before he was transferred to Beijing. En route to Beijing, he spent a week in Tokyo, during

which Prime Minister Itō confided his utmost concern to Komura—that is, whether Japan could really join the “concert of powers.” Itō was genuinely worried whether Japan alone would be excluded from this concert of powers. Japan’s national power as well as its international reputation in those days would not guarantee automatic membership in this group. It was only after Japan won the Russo-Japanese War a few years later that it was allowed to become a member of the world powers. Prior to this, it was altogether uncertain whether Japan would be allowed to sit at the same table with other powers.

During the peace negotiations, Komura excellently lived up to the expectations of the Japanese government. It goes without saying that his success was supported by the accomplishments of the Japanese army during the Boxer incident, particularly the comportment of its strictly disciplined soldiers, who earned praise as the army of a civilized country.

During the conference, members gave Komura equal footing with Western participants and listened closely to what Komura had to say. The succession of telegrams that Komura received from the home office during the negotiations contained such messages as, “You are granted with the full authority to flexibly respond to the situation as far as this negotiation is concerned,” and “Because the Japanese government is fully aware that you will do your utmost best to defend our country’s rights and interests, we entrust everything to your discretion in regard to this negotiation.” These messages were indications of the depth of the trust in Komura by the Japanese government at the time.

### **Foreign Minister Komura Jutarō**

When the Katsura Tarō cabinet was formed on June 2, 1901 (34th Year of Meiji), Komura was appointed foreign minister. Because Komura could not be spared from the ongoing conference in Beijing, however, the Katsura cabinet was initially without a foreign minister. As soon as the direction of the conference became predictable, Komura rushed back to Tokyo and assumed the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs on September 21. Komura was then forty-seven years old.

It had been only eight years since he had been stationed in Beijing after

years of obscurity. In his speech at the reception celebrating his promotion, Komura said, “Now is not the time to evaluate my accomplishments or my character. I will allow nobody to do so. It is simply premature to do so. Difficult times are ahead of me instead of behind. Whatever I have done so far is only a preparative stage for the difficult times to come.”

To be sure, Komura’s ability and character were at the time still known only among a few. There were those, however, who placed high hopes on him, and one of them was Konoe Atsumaro, the central figure of *Kokumin Dōmei-kai* (国民同盟会 or National Alliance Society). Konoe, father of the later Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, was the representative advocate of conservative pan-Asianism, as opposed to the pro-Western liberalism of Saionji Kinmochi. *Kokumin Dōmei-kai* was a powerful organization supported by leading nationalists of the time. When Komura became foreign minister, Konoe announced that there was no need for his nationalist movement to exist any longer as long as Komura held a top position at policy-making. With the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, Konoe dissolved the *Kokumin Dōmei-kai* and held a party for Komura in recognition of his achievement.

This was a decision that could be made only by someone who had fully appreciated the personality of Komura and what he had carried out with conviction. And Komura, for his part, proved to be worthy of his friends’ expectations. He was an archetype of the Japanese nationalist/ultra-nationalist, or an imperialist in Meiji through the World War II days who had the courage not only to hold on to his convictions but also to carry them out whenever he found a chance to do so. And that was the kind of character that the era of dog-eat-dog imperialism called for. Komura’s mettle enabled him to defend Japan’s national interest.