

## Chapter 12

### Treaty of Portsmouth

— No Concession, Despite Roosevelt’s Persuasion —

#### “What Good Will Continuing the War Be for a Poor Country?”

Despite the official victory at the Battle of Mukden, the Japanese Army found itself in pitiable condition after the battle. Officers in particular were in short supply, resulting in the reduction of actual combat capability within each division by as much as 30 percent to 50 percent.

A platoon leader is popularly known as a “shield against bullets.” It was the post to which graduates of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy were first appointed. A platoon leader was expected to spearhead a charge at the enemy. As such, graduates of the army academy around the time of a major war have shown a distinctively high rate of death in battles all over the world. In 1905, the Imperial Japanese Army Academy shortened the officer training of its 17th class to only eight months in order to quickly feed platoon leaders to the battlefield. Nevertheless, the academy was able to send only 300 graduates to the field, among whom was Tōjō Hideki, who later became the Japanese prime minister at the time of World War II.

In contrast, the Russian side was able to send in 50,000 to 60,000 fresh soldiers every month. They were the cream of the Russian army both in terms of equipment and personnel that had been stationed on the German/Austrian front. According to a calculation by the Imperial General Headquarters, by mid-September the Russian side would boast 38 divisions against 17 divisions on the Japanese side (15 plus two that were hastily being organized). The Japanese side had less than a half of the Russian force in terms of numbers, but its combat capability was even more inferior. Postwar Russian official documents revealed the accuracy of the Japanese general headquarters’ estimate.

The Battle of Mukden was concluded on March 20. Only eight days later, on March 28, General Kodama Gentarō, Chief of General Staff of the Manchurian Army, arrived at Tokyo’s Shimbashi Station. The purpose of his visit was kept top secret. When Vice Chief of Staff Nagaoka Gaishi, who

came to meet Kodama at the station, quietly asked him in the carriage to share his future battle plans, however, Kodama said in a low voice, “I did not come back to consult on battle plans. I came back to stop the war.” From that point on, Kodama met one top government leader after another to speak his mind, saying, “Those who have started a war have to know when to stop it. What good will continuing the war be for a poor country like Japan?”

At the foreign ministry, Kodama met Yamaza Enjirō, Director-General of Political Affairs, who had been obsessed with the hardliner argument under Komura Jutarō’s influence. To Yamaza, Kodama warned, “The status of the war requires no more reinforcement. What we need instead is peace.”

When Foreign Minister Komura stressed the need to “deal a blow to Nikolay Linevich [commander-in-chief of the Russian land forces in Manchuria] one more time” so as to start peace negotiations with favorable terms, Kodama replied that all the odds were against the Japanese side and that it would be extremely risky to fight against a superior enemy at this stage. To Kodama, the big picture of the war was too obvious.

Russia, for its part, still remained fully confident as far as ground battles were concerned. The most serious bottleneck for Russia to continue the war was the domestic situation. In this sense, Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War is analogous to that of Vietnam in the Vietnam War, during which antiwar movements became rampant within the United States. But the situation in Russia in those days was far more serious than the mood in the American society at the time of the Vietnam War. The Russian society faced rising doubts about autocracy by the Czar and an upsurge of hope among the Russian people for a revolution, as well as a groundswell of desire for independence among minorities that had been oppressed by the Russians.

Sergei Witte, who was Komura’s counterpart during the forthcoming peace negotiations in Portsmouth, described these situations concisely in his memoir. According to Witte, prospects of the Russo-Japanese War were becoming increasingly unfavorable for Russia battle by battle, which gave an unprecedented shock to all Russians in every social stratum. The shock manifested itself in various forms, all of which expressed dissatisfaction with the current political regime.

To begin with, Witte reflected, it was mainly or even predominantly

because of its military might that the Russian Empire had been recognized as a world power. Similarly, it was solely due to the power of its troops and bayonets that the tiny, semi-Asian kingdom of Moscow was able to achieve the status of a formidable European power. The world was not awed by Russia's culture or wealth. The world was awed by Russia's military might. When it was revealed that Russia was actually just not that strong—in other words, that it was a house of cards—therefore, enemies both within and outside Russia immediately rose.

After the defeat at the Battle of Mukden, Witte observed, an increasing number of level-headed Russians began to believe that the war must not be prolonged any longer.

### **Mediation Attempt by U.S. President Roosevelt**

As a result of General Kodama's persuasion, consensus was formed among the Japanese government leaders on the policy to pursue peace with Russia. On May 31, as soon as the Japanese Navy achieved a historic one-sided victory at the Battle of Tsushima, Foreign Minister Komura instructed Takahira Kogorō, Japanese Minister to the United States, to request that U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt mediate peace.

Roosevelt immediately summoned the Russian ambassador to the White House and sounded out Russia's intention. Although Russia had once decided to continue the war after the Battle of Tsushima, the Czar's message was conveyed on June 7 that Russia would accept President Roosevelt's offer to mediate peace.

Representing the defeated as chief plenipotentiary at peace negotiations is a thankless and unsavory job. Thus, it took long and difficult persuasions to appoint one for Russia. In the end, Sergei Witte was appointed to the post because nobody else could replace him.

The Czar strictly forbade Witte from "making a concession of a single kopek on war redemption or an inch of the territory under any condition." Although this instruction was tantamount to the announcement of his downfall, Witte resigned himself to comply with it until the very end. It was due to Roosevelt's private telegram to the Czar that Russia conceded the southern half of Sakhalin Island at the very last minute. It was not Witte

that made the concession.

Although Japan was, officially, on the winning side, everyone in the government knew that the conditions of the country were far from victorious. This fact discouraged anyone from volunteering to represent the country at the peace negotiations. Itō Hirobumi adamantly declined the nomination, and, in the end, it was decided that Komura had to be the chief plenipotentiary for the peace negotiations. Witte's resignation found an echo in Komura's remark made at Shimbashi Station on July 8 on his way to Portsmouth. Being cheered off with a shout of "banzai," he said, "I will be a most unpopular person when I come back from the negotiations."

Prior to Komura's departure, Itō said to Komura, "No matter what others do or don't do, I shall never fail to meet you at the pier when you come back to Japan," a promise that Itō indeed kept three months later by meeting Komura at Yokohama pier. Everyone in the Japanese government had well anticipated the nationwide antipathy toward Komura when he returned from the peace negotiations.

Nevertheless, the predicament of the Japanese forces in Manchuria was top secret, something shared only among top government leaders and which should never be leaked at any cost. Even President Roosevelt in those days was convinced that, if the war was prolonged, the Japanese Army could drive the Russians out of Manchuria, albeit doing so would probably claim the lives of a large number of officers and soldiers. It was because this secret was so well kept that Japan was able to conclude the peace negotiations successfully. Had Russians known of Japan's predicament, the self-assured Czar would never have conceded to the Japanese terms.

On July 7, seven days before Komura's departure for Portsmouth, the Japanese Army captured Korsakov, the central city in southern Sakhalin. Hardliners, including Komura, had long demanded the occupation of Sakhalin, particularly from the viewpoint of obtaining an effective card to play at the peace negotiations with Russia. As a matter of fact, having heard that the Russian war council, at a meeting held in the Czar's presence immediately after the Battle of Tsushima, had already decided to continue fighting on the grounds that "not even an inch of Russian territory had been taken away yet," President Roosevelt suggested to Japanese special envoy

Kaneko Kentarō that Japan should occupy Sakhalin. But it appears that this suggestion by Roosevelt was somehow never conveyed to Tokyo. The Japanese government decided on the occupation of Sakhalin on its own, resulting in the subsequent possession of the southern half of the island.

### **No Intention to Concede on War Redemption or Territory**

Prior to Komura's departure for Portsmouth, he was given, in summary, the following instructions on the absolutely nonnegotiables, imperative accomplishments, and desirable outcomes.

First, it was absolutely nonnegotiable for Japan that Russia accept Japan's discretionary power on the Korean Peninsula, that Russia cede leasehold of Liaodong Peninsula and the railway between Harbin and Lüshun to Japan, and that Russia withdraw its forces from Manchuria.

Second, it was imperative that Russia agree to pay the war redemption and cede Sakhalin.

Additionally, if possible, the Japanese side was hoping to disarm Vladivostok and remodel it into a commercial port. Also, it was deemed desirable to restrict Russia's naval power in the Far East.

Comparing the above with the instructions that Witte had been given by the Czar, it is obvious that the absolutely nonnegotiables coincided perfectly for both Japan and Russia, making the outcome of the negotiations easily predictable. But it is the basic rule of negotiation to keep one's hand hidden from the other party, and, thus, the peace talks turned into two long months of difficult negotiations.

While the eventual outcome of the negotiations between Japan and Russia might have been, in retrospect, quite predictable from the beginning, there was a wide discrepancy in views on the future of Manchuria between the mediating United States and Japan—or rather, the hawkish element in Japan represented by Komura. This discrepancy remained the source of a fundamental perception gap between the two countries through the Manchurian Incident of 1931–33.

In his tentative proposal for a draft of the peace conditions that was submitted to Prime Minister Katsura in July 1904, more than a half year before the fall of Lüshun, Komura had already proposed to reject the

neutralization of Manchuria. Komura proposed that even Manchuria, not to mention Korea, which had been under Japan's discretion from the beginning, had to be brought within the sphere of Japan's influence, to a certain extent replacing Russia. Katsura agreed with this perspective.

This was to take advantage of the earlier announcement by U.S. Secretary of State John Hay that the United States would not oppose Russia's occupation of Manchuria as long as Manchuria was guaranteed the equality of opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Now that Japan had defeated Russia, Komura claimed, the tolerance Hay had shown for Russia should also be applied to Japan's occupation of Manchuria.

President Roosevelt, however, had already proposed to Britain, France, and Italy in January 1905 that Manchuria should be returned to Qing and made into a neutral zone guaranteed by the Western powers. Britain had already conceded. In the nutshell, it was a proposal for the Western civilized countries to administer Manchuria in place of Qing, whose administrative capability was highly questionable at best.

Komura officially instructed Minister Takahira to propose that Manchuria should be returned to Qing on the condition that the Qing's sound governance and administrative reform of Manchuria were guaranteed. This proposal was analogous to Japan's demand at the time of the First Sino-Japanese War when it refused to withdraw its troops from Korea until Korea's domestic reform was accomplished. The proposal aimed to secure Japan's exclusive right to have a say in Manchurian domestic affairs. Moreover, it was intended to enable Japan to justify its occupation of Manchuria for an indefinite period by imposing unrealistic conditions.

In the end, peace negotiations commenced with these two proposals—that is, the U.S. and Japanese proposals—being shelved. Essentially the difference between the two proposals was whether the administration of Manchuria, which had been de facto in the hands of Russians, should be undertaken by Japan (Japan's proposal) or Western civilized powers (U.S. proposal). Neither proposal called for a full return of the administration of Manchuria to Qing.

### **Roosevelt's Early Peace Argument**

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<sup>1</sup> Tsunoda Jun, *Manshū Mondai to Kokubō Hōshin* (Manchurian Issue and National Defense Policy) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1967). See, for instance, p. 191.

President Roosevelt intended to accomplish peace by requesting Japan's self-restraint. When Japan's request for his mediation reached him, he made the following comment, "Japan is showing a symptom of being out of its mind. To be sure, if the United States had accomplished what Japan has had in the past 16 months, we would also be out of our mind."

As soon as Komura arrived in the United States, Roosevelt attempted to convince him of the virtue of concluding a peace treaty at that stage, saying, "While no doubt Japan will win the war if it continues to fight, the damage that Japan would incur will also be enormous. It is high time to negotiate peace."<sup>2</sup> But Komura, who had advocated for a continuation of the war, would not listen.

Despite President Roosevelt's personal persuasion, Komura had no intention to concede on the issues of territory and war redemption. On August 17, Komura sent a wire to Tokyo, warning, "There is a good chance that we would not be able to accomplish our goals, in which case we have no other choice than to decide on the continuation of the war." Government leaders in Tokyo had been well aware of Komura's hardliner argument. They told Komura beforehand, "If by any chance the negotiations should result in failure, do not abandon the negotiations on the spot. You are requested to report to headquarters in advance for advice."

Since Komura refused to follow his advice, President Roosevelt wrote two long letters on August 22 and 23 to Kaneko Kentarō in order to appeal directly to Japan's top leaders. Roosevelt stressed, "Now that Japan has achieved the original objectives of the war, it should meet the expectation of the civilized world for peace by not waging a war to obtain greater war redemption."<sup>3</sup> Hearing of these letters, Komura hardened his conviction that Japan had no other choice than to continue the war and to wait for another opportunity to negotiate peace. He advised such to Tokyo.

Around the same time, General Kodama sent an appeal from Manchuria that it would no longer be possible to continue the war, as not a single soldier was in reserve. Both Komura's and Kodama's telegrams were submitted to

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Katsura's August 4 telegram No. 15 to Kodama. Tsuda (1967), p. 255.

<sup>3</sup> Elting E. Morrison, ed. *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951-4), Vol. IV. pp. 1808-10, 1812-13, quoted in Tsuda (1967), p. 256.

the cabinet meeting on August 28 for deliberation. Minister of War Terauchi Masatake lamented, “We are so short of officers that we cannot continue to fight,” while Minister of Finance Sone Arasuke declared, “It would be impossible to finance the war any longer.” In the end, Komura’s proposition was rejected and members of the cabinet decided to pursue the course of negotiating peace with Russia.

Meanwhile, Itō Hirobumi and Saionji Kinmochi, two of the Meiji elders, had strongly insisted on accepting President Roosevelt’s advice. Saionji in particular openly expressed his opinion at a *Seiyūkai* party convention, “Although we in Japan believe that we have won the war, other countries in the world do not necessarily agree with us. We must interpret the U.S. president’s proposal as representing the expectations of countries in the world.” This view was a courageous challenge to the clamorous domestic chorus which opposed peace negotiations and demanding continuation of the war.

When Japan finally agreed to compromise, President Roosevelt sent a personal letter to the emperor on August 31, saying, “Your Majesty has presented a splendid example to the world on how it is indeed possible for a country which has accomplished a succession of victories to win a war without losing its self-control.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Swaying American Public Opinion**

Because Japan succeeded in securing all of its “absolutely nonnegotiables” plus the southern half of Sakhalin Island through the negotiations, the Japanese government, objectively speaking, ought to have been contented with the outcome.

Nevertheless, it was natural that voices of dissatisfaction were raised among the Japanese public because people had been unaware that Japan was so desperately strained both militarily and financially. Harsh words were hurled at the government, anti-government meetings were held, and even some buildings in Tokyo were set on fire, resulting in the declaration of a martial law. Being more of a sporadic outburst than an organized rebellion,

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<sup>4</sup> Morrison (1951–4), Vol. IV, p.1328, quoted in Tsuda (1967), p. 261.

however, the riots, which had lasted for a couple of days, had mostly subsided by the time the martial law was declared. Determined to promptly sign the peace treaty, the government ratified the draft treaty unanimously at the Privy Council and obtained imperial sanction on October 10 before Komura returned to Japan.

Nowadays, a myth is prevailing about Komura—that he was actually a dove who had gone against public opinion and concluded the peace for the sake of Japan’s future, prepared to be the lone target of hardliners’ criticism. This was a myth created during the post–World War II era when the doves were lionized. In actuality, Komura was the hawk of hawks, and he had been determined to break down the negotiations in order to continue the war. He only signed the treaty because he was instructed to do so by the Japanese government. That said, Komura was indeed komura, as he endured the accusation of being dovish without making any excuses until he died.

It has been rightly pointed out that, during the two months of the negotiations, the tone of the American press went from being 99 percent pro-Japanese before the negotiation to being more sympathetic toward Russia. This reversal was attributed to “a grave blunder”<sup>5</sup> that Komura committed, as Sergei Witte bragged in his memoir.

During the six-day voyage across the Atlantic, Witte decided on the principles on which he would base his tactics while in the United States. In essence, he resolved “not to show that we were in the least anxious to make peace, [because Russia was] undismayed by the fact that the mighty empire had become involved temporarily in a slight difficulty.”<sup>6</sup> This was exactly the attitude that the Czar maintained and Witte had no other choice than to assume it.

Additionally, Witte decided, “in view of the tremendous influence of the press in America, to show it every attention and to be accessible to all its representatives; to behave with democratic simplicity and without a shadow of snobbishness, so as to win the sympathy of the Americans; [and] in view of

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<sup>5</sup> *Memoir of Count Witte*. (Garden City, N.Y., and Toronto: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1921), p. 141.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 139–40.

the considerable influence of the Jews on the press and on other aspects of American life, especially in New York, not to exhibit any hostility toward them.”<sup>7</sup>

Witte continued to reminisce that, “I took care to treat all the Americans with whom I came into contact with the utmost simplicity of manner. When travelling, whether on special trains, government motor cars or steamers, I thanked everyone, talked with the engineers and shook hands with them. In another words, I treated everybody, of whatever social position, as an equal.”<sup>8</sup>

He admitted, “This behavior was a heavy strain on me as all acting is to the unaccustomed, but it surely was worth the trouble.” The sympathies of American public opinion and the media began to swing more toward Russia. This change of mood was also reflected in the telegram President Roosevelt sent to the Japanese government toward the end of the negotiations, warning that American public opinion had lately become remarkably sympathetic toward Russia and that Japan could no longer expect similar sympathy from Americans as before if the peace negotiations turned out to be unsuccessful.

President Roosevelt’s sympathy had originally been with the Japanese side. Bright man as he was and “. . . seeing that American public opinion was becoming favorable toward Russia and fearing that the unsuccessful end of the parley might turn the sympathies of the people away from him and from the Japanese,” he knew it was unwise to go against the public opinion. That was why, Witte believed, Roosevelt repeatedly advised the Japanese government to accept conditions offered by Witte.

Witte admitted that another favorable factor for him was the attitude of the Japanese delegates. They were not supercilious, which Americans find intolerable, but their secretive and dismal attitudes turned off openhearted Americans. “Not supercilious but secretive and dismal” is indeed an accurate description of Komura’s character.

It has been pointed out that “diplomacy without face”—that is, diplomacy devoid of personality or human charm—is a critical flaw of Japanese diplomacy even today, and it seems undeniable in retrospect that this

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

“diplomacy without face” has worked to Japan’s disadvantage on various occasions, particularly those that took place in the United States.

While it may be easy to say that the Japanese could have done the same as what Witte had done, there seem to be obstacles to such conduct in the Japanese society, including such negative reactions as denouncing the conduct as being “weird” or calling it “grandstand play.” Consequently, it is beyond doubt that even if such conduct yielded successful outcomes, it will never be counted as virtuous in the Japanese society. Rather, it would have appeared to be against the code of samurai of not expressing any personal emotion. Also, there might be an element of aversion to exerting one’s individuality. If somebody else had been appointed as Japan’s representative, he could not have acted like Witte, either. But his conduct, like Komura’s, would be something totally acceptable to the Japanese society as expected of a Japanese, never becoming a target of criticism.

### **Change of American Attitudes toward Japan**

Some in Japan resent the change in the American attitude toward Japan, which shifted from sympathy before the Russo-Japanese War to apathy after Japan’s victory in the war. This interpretation of the American attitude is correct in some senses but wrong in others.

It is a plain fact that, during the peace negotiations in Portsmouth, the tone of the American press changed from being pro-Japan to anti-Japan. But the press returned to its pro-Japan stance after the treaty was signed and praised Japan’s magnanimity and wisdom, saying “it takes courage and tolerance on the part of the Japanese to conclude such a treaty.” Witte’s diplomatic victory and its flip side of the coin, the Japanese diplomatic failure, therefore, was only short-lived—except that it occurred at a very critical moment. Overall, the American attitude can be interpreted as one of those fluctuations that American public opinion is known for.

From the long-term international perspective, however, it was only natural for the United States to change its policies toward Japan as power in the Far East shifted from Russia to Japan. To risk oversimplification, this transformation was analogous to the sea change in the post–World War II international environment where the archenemy of the United States was

immediately taken over by the Soviet Union and China with the destruction of Japan.

No matter how amicable the United States had been toward Japan during the Russo-Japanese War, it was obvious to anyone that the United States would not support Japan's continued expansion of its influence on continental China. It was also only natural for China to regard Japan as its greatest threat and to start approaching the Western powers to counter Japan.

The long-term American perception of Japan was also affected. While there had been only curiosity about an "exotic" Japan or contempt of and discrimination against one of Asia's immigrants to the United States, a distinctive concern and wariness over Japan and its people emerged, partially fanned by Russia's "yellow peril" argument during the Russo-Japanese War.

### **U.S.-Japan Joint Management of South Manchuria Railway Proposed**

Immediately following the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, Komura took an important action that sowed the seeds of the U.S.-Japan conflict which eventually culminated in World War II.

The American railway tycoon Edward Harriman had a dream of owning transportation that went around the globe, a grandiose plan of an American businessman in those days. What he envisioned was an around-the-world route connecting Baltimore on the American East Coast to San Francisco on the West Coast by the Union Pacific Railway; crossing the Pacific to Dalian by the Pacific Mail Steamship; connecting Dalian to Harbin and Moscow by railway, and then from Moscow by railway again to Libau Port along the Baltic Sea; and finally sailing from the Baltic Sea back to Baltimore by steamboat.

Having already arrived in Tokyo in the midst of the public riots in protest of the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, Harriman proposed that the Japanese government should form a syndicate with his company to jointly manage the South Manchuria Railway.

Because the syndicate was to buy up the railway and its accessory facilities, it would be de facto cost-free for Japan except for the investment in the form of a railway. Although in principle the venture would be under joint ownership with Harriman, it was proposed that Japan should retain some of the existing say on operations, particularly in case of a war either with Russia or China, in which case the Japanese right to command on the military use of the railway would be fully respected. This was not at all an unfavorable condition for Japan.

Not only such elder statesmen as Itō and Inoue Kaoru but also Prime Minister Katsura found this proposal attractive. Inoue, in particular, went around persuading everyone, saying, "It would be absolutely absurd not to take advantage of this opportunity." The elderly statesmen's thinking was based on two apprehensions. One was the financial strain caused by the Russo-Japanese War, which made it highly questionable whether the Japanese government could take on an additional financial burden by managing the South Manchuria Railway singlehandedly.

Much more worrisome, however, was the possibility of vengeance by Russia. Japan was able to win only by taking advantage of Russia's unpreparedness. When and if a fully prepared Russia attempted at revenge, Japan would have no chance to weather it. Japan was not confident at all that it could protect Manchuria from either Russia's retaliation or diplomatic pressures from Western powers engineered behind the scenes by China. Under such a scenario, might it not be safer to make Manchuria a sort of an internationally managed region, involving, among others, the United States and China?

Although it had been scheduled that the agreement would be signed in Yokohama on October 12 before Harriman departed Japan, the Japanese side proposed that the signing be postponed until Komura's return on October 16. Agreeing, Harriman left Yokohama and headed home, carrying the draft agreement with him. As soon as Harriman arrived in San Francisco, however, the Japanese consul there visited Harriman on board ship and announced the cancelling of the signing.

Behind this reversal was Komura's action.

Komura had been convinced from the beginning that Japan's national strategy should be to put Manchuria under Japanese influence. He had no

intention to concede even an inch on this matter. There was a fundamental difference of perceptions on this matter between Komura and the elderly statesmen. From the viewpoint of the Meiji elderly who had gone through the hardship of a lesser state since the arrival of Commodore Perry, it was inconceivable that Japan could continue to compete indefinitely with the Western powers indefinitely; this perspective urged them to take precautionary measures. This demarcated them from the younger generation, including Komura, who had been flared with imperialistic zeal through the First Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars.

But the shortage of finances to manage the railway was also a headache for Komura—however, a key to the solution of this problem came from an unexpected direction. Kaneko Kentarō's record shows that there was an offer from the Morgan financial group, the archrival of Harriman's enterprise, for financial assistance on the condition that Japan would hold on to the South Manchuria Railway, not allowing Harriman to monopolize it. Overjoyed by this offer, Komura declared, "Now that we have secured funding for the restoration of the South Manchuria Railway, we can proudly report on the outcome of the peace treaty without hesitation."

Although Komura had been recuperating in the United States from exhaustion after the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, he decided to return home in haste. When Komura learned in Yokohama about Harriman's proposal from Yamaza Enjirō, director-general of political affairs of the foreign ministry who had returned to Japan ahead of Komura, he immediately started scheming to wreck the proposition, deploring, "What a blunder! That's why I had to come back despite my ailment."

The plan Komura came up with was to postpone the signing of the contract until Japan had obtained Qing's approval, which would be necessary even after Russia had formally agreed to hand over the South Manchuria Railway to Japan.

Because Qing was at the mercy of Japan at that time and it had to do anything Japan told it to do, however, this reasoning was actually far-fetched. Subsequently, Komura sailed to Beijing in spite of his physical condition, in place of Itō, who had been eager to conduct negotiations with Qing himself, and succeeded in inserting in the treaty signed in December a clause which said, "No other country than Japan and Qing is allowed to

participate in the management of the South Manchuria Railway,” effectively blocking the participation of the United States.

Prior to the negotiations in Beijing, Komura had drafted an outline of the Manchurian/Korean management that was approved at a cabinet meeting. At the outset, the outline declares, “As the result of the peace negotiations with Russia, a segment of Manchuria now belongs to the sphere of influence of the Empire of Japan. Japan therefore needs to maintain and consolidate its influence in the region.” The outline was even equipped with a contingency plan in case of Qing’s resistance: to suspend the negotiations and continue the occupation of the Liaodong Peninsula and the South Manchuria Railway.

While President Roosevelt persuaded Qing to follow Japan’s advice without resistance, a commitment he had made at the time of the peace negotiations, he also kept reminding the Japanese government of the importance of keeping the Manchurian doors open.

### **Misjudgment That Affected Japan’s Fate**

Conventional Japanese history books have been mostly favorable to Komura’s effort of wrecking Harriman’s scheme.

*Komura Gaikō-shi* (「小村外交史」, History of Komura Diplomacy), compiled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, praised it as, “hidden efforts by Komura to resolutely topple the scheme,” while *Nichibei Gaikō no Keifu* (「日米外交の系譜」, Genealogy of Japan’s Diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States) by Kuroha Shigeru expressed admiration for Komura’s “keen insight and decisiveness.”

To be sure, the argument, albeit a little sentimental, that Japan should not give up Manchuria that it had obtained at the sacrifice of one hundred thousand soldiers was easily convincing. And it is a historical fact that the Empire of Japan succeeded in protecting its special interests in Manchuria for the subsequent forty years, including the years of the Manchurian Incident (1931–33).

In 1906, one year after his proposal was turned down, Harriman met Takahashi Korekiyo (高橋是清, who became Governor of Bank of Japan in 1911, Minister of Finance in 1913, and Prime Minister in 1921) and

predicted that, “Within ten years, Japan will regret having lost the opportunity to jointly manage the South Manchuria Railway with the United States.” As it turned out, Harriman’s prophesy did not come true in ten years and, in this sense, it may be said that Komura’s judgment was more accurate than Harriman’s.

In retrospect, though, it is undeniable that luck played an important role in Japan’s good fortune. The focus of world politics shifted to Europe after the Russo-Japanese War, where the War in Europe erupted only ten years later, and Russia had to stake its fate in a war with Germany, depriving it of any energy to take revenge on Japan. All the other countries could not afford to pay attention to the Far East. Also, power vacuums of fifteen years emerged in the Asian continent—fifteen years between the Xinhai Revolution of 1911 and the 1926 launching of the Kuomintang’s Northern Expedition, for one, and fifteen years between the Russian Revolution in 1917 and the completion of the First Five-Year Plan under Premier Joseph Stalin in 1932, for another, during which no threat was posed on Japan’s monopoly of Manchuria. However, if a war had not erupted in Europe, which would have allowed Russia to recuperate from the defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and, in time, advance into the Far East again, or if China had managed to evade disintegration and schemed to retrieve concessions in Manchuria in cooperation with Russia and the United States, the world might have experienced what Harriman had predicted in more or less than ten years. All of the above suppositions must have easily come to mind at the time immediately after the Russo-Japanese War. In other words, Komura’s decision put Japan at the risk of these developments.

International relations are, after all, power relations. If any one of the above suppositions had become the reality, the sentimental argument of defending the land that was obtained in exchange for Japanese blood would have become nonsensical and Japan would have been cornered either to accept the consequences that reflected Japan’s relative power or to wage a hopeless war. What happened was the fulfillment of Harriman’s prophesy in thirty years, instead of ten, in the form of the Pacific War after all of Japan’s luck had run out. In retrospect, therefore, it would have been wiser for Japan to accept Harriman’s proposition. In this sense, it should be admitted that Komura had taken a wrong choice for the future of Japan.

## **Intellectual Energy of Itō Hirobumi**

During the Russo-Japanese War, as the Japanese troops captured cities that had been occupied by the Russian one after another, the Japanese military did not return those cities to Chinese authorities and, instead, put them under its own military administration with the purpose of “keeping them as they had been under the Russian occupation in order to establish Japan’s rule in the future.” Fukushima Yasumasa was put in charge of the military administration of Manchurian cities, and he aggressively pursued the establishment of Japan’s rule there.

This was not how Komura had envisioned things. In the cabinet meeting on October 27, after the peace treaty was signed, Komura remarked that everything except for what Japan had acquired from Russia under the treaty should be returned to Qing. Komura thought that Japan would lose credibility in the international community if it held on to Manchuria, which it had occupied as a result of a military victory in the Russo-Japanese War. While this argument may appear to contradict to his own ideal of putting Manchuria into Japan’s sphere of influence, this was the view of the mainstream at Japan’s foreign ministry. This view was shared by the latter-day diplomacy of Shidehara Kijūrō in the 1920s—that is, an aversion to the coercive seizure of a territory that diplomacy fails to obtain, while resolutely defending what was acquired by a treaty.

During the Russo-Japanese War, Manchuria had been under the military administration of the general headquarters of the Imperial Japanese Army’s Manchurian Army, and that military administration continued even after the signing of peace. Yet Japanese consulates were stationed in major cities of Manchuria because, legally speaking, it was a foreign land to Japan.

Because this military administration had aimed to establish Japan’s rule in Manchuria, resisting, openly and covertly, American and British demands for an open door as well as Qing’s request for the restoration of sovereignty, it was only natural that it caused friction with these countries. Each country filed complaints with the Japanese consuls. And this was the starting point of the differences in views between the Japanese military and the foreign ministry that culminated in World War II. Hagiwara Moriichi, who was appointed to the consul general at Mukden, sent the following wire, which

accurately depicted the discontent on Qing's side:

If our military administration should misrule the occupied areas and invite further criticism from the international community, it would tarnish our glorious victory and negatively affect our relations with Qing and other friendly nations.

Wary of the situation, Itō requested four elder statesmen (Yamagata Aritomo, Ōyama Iwao, Matsukata Masayoshi, and Inoue Kaoru), two semi-elders (Katsura Taro and Yamamoto Gonbei), as well as major cabinet members (starting with Prime Minister Saionji) and Kodama Gentarō, Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff, to participate in the historic “Consultative Meeting on the Manchurian Issue” convened on May 22, 1906, at the office of the Prime Minister.

At the meeting, Itō made the opening remarks based on a proposal he himself handwrote, a lengthy (the equivalent of some 30 pages of writing papers) and substantial document written in classical Chinese style. The intellectual energy of Itō to produce such a rich work singlehandedly was incomparable among all the modern statesmen in Japan.

In the document, Ito first analyzed the situation surrounding Japan as follows.

If Japan continued with the current military administration, Britain and the United States would end up with the impression that Japan, despite many years of announcements and accumulated statements, aspired to monopolize interests in Manchuria and close its doors. Sir Claude MacDonald, the new British ambassador to Japan famous for his sympathy for Japan, unofficially sent a warning that the continuation of the military administration of Manchuria would be a suicidal act that would make countries sympathetic to Japan turn their backs, which would be a critical handicap when Japan had to fight Russia again in the future.

If Japan persisted with the current military administration of Manchuria, it would only benefit Russia's militarist faction, who could use it as an excuse to expand war preparedness in the Far East, degrading the Portsmouth Treaty to a mere temporary armistice.

The goodwill that Japan had shown to Qing, paying a dear price in doing

so, would be wasted, making Japan a target of Qing's resentment. If the military administration was left untouched, the hearts of people not only in Manchuria but in all twenty-one provinces of China would turn against Japan.

On the basis of these considerations, Itō proposed a detailed action plan to abolish the military administration. Participants of the consultative meeting deliberated on the plan.

Itō was basically a statesman with a flexible mind. While advocating the suprapartisan constitution, he became the party president of *Seiyūkai*. Similarly, Itō approved the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the end, although he had persisted with advocating the possibility of an entente with Russia until the last minute. In this meeting, however, Itō was determined to be adamant, and the firmness of his conviction was simply commendable. Having sensed the direction of public opinion and the intention of the military, Itō might have determined that there was nobody else who could restrain the flow of events.

As Kodama, who became the chief target of Itō's questioning, tried to defend the military administration in all sorts of ways, Itō went on to ruthlessly argue him down. Kodama argued that not all of what the Japanese military was doing was, given the examples of foreign countries, unlawful, but Itō counterargued,

What I am worried about is the immense influence of the American public opinion. No matter how sympathetic to Japan the government authority in the United States might be, once the public opinion changes its course, the U.S. government will have to adopt policies that are acceptable to the public.

This reasoning was exactly what all the leaders in the 20th century had to seriously address. Itō refuted the argument for a military action by stressing that it was the impression of the American public, not the logical explanation, that mattered.

Minister of War Terauchi tried to wrap up the argument, saying that although time would not allow participants to discuss each of Itō's proposals

individually, he was in favor of the spirit of the proposals as a whole. In response, Itō retorted, “it is lukewarm to say ‘no objection to the overall spirit.’ If you have no objection, I urge you to deliberate on concrete measures to implement my proposals.”

In the end, Prime Minister Saionji, who had shared Itō’s concern, led the meeting to adopt Itō’s proposals unanimously with no modification. It was decided that every proposal would be carried out.

“Elderly statesman” was not a legal status. Nor was it an official position. If it had to be defined, it is an advisor to the emperor appointed personally by the emperor himself. Itō was an elderly statesman both in name and reality, and, in this consultative meeting, he beautifully played the role of a nation’s helmsman.

Not all elderly statesmen were like Itō, though. Yamagata, who could be comparable to Itō in terms of his status and influence, represented the interest of the military and the *han* clique all along, impeding the development of democracy in Japan. Saionji, “the last elderly statesman,” may have made correct judgments in each situation, but he was not endowed with the personal will and power to resist the flow of the public opinion.

After all, the most critical element in politics is human resources. Japan was able to hold on to parliamentary democracy, the main course of the world’s political thought, and maintain cooperation with Britain and the United States, the mainstream of world politics, thanks to the wisdom of Itō.