

Epilogue

The End of Meiji

Revision of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

The Russo-Japanese War brought about tectonic changes not only to the balance of power in the Far East but also to the power balance itself among the Western powers. One of the reasons behind these changes was the revision and solidifying of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Before the war, the intelligence division of the British Army had predicted that the best Japan could do even if it won the war with Russia was to defend southern Manchuria. The intelligence division predicted that should Russia be victorious, it would not only occupy the entire Korean peninsula but possibly threaten Japan itself.

That was why Britain designed the alliance to allow it to remain strictly neutral when Japan fought Russia alone. Britain could not afford to risk sharing the fate of a country that was likely to lose.

After the fall of Lüshun and the Battle of Mukden, however, the British attitude toward Japan showed a marked change. Japan was no longer a burden for Britain because it was recognized as a trustworthy partner that was powerful enough to fight along with Britain.

From the British point of view, the Japanese victory had temporarily eliminated the fear of Russia's advance to Manchuria, northern China, the Korean Peninsula, and the Japanese Archipelago. But now Britain had to worry instead about what Russia's next move would be.

Britain at that time faced two worries. One was the possibility that Russia would acknowledge the toughness of the Japanese resistance and shift the direction of its expansion toward India, which would directly threaten Britain's sphere of influence. If this situation actually came about, Britain would wish Japan to restrict Russia from the east and, moreover, to join Britain in its defense of India.

The other worry was over the possible weakening of Russia due to its internal problems. A weakened Russia would disturb the balance of power in Europe, giving Germany freedom of movement. In this case, Britain would

wish to leave the Far East to Japan's discretion so that it could concentrate its naval forces in Europe to counter Germany.

Thus, Britain wished to revise the Anglo-Japanese Alliance into an offensive and defensive alliance by which Japan would be obliged to come to Britain's rescue when Britain was attacked by a third party and vice versa, setting aside wars in which the two countries had already been engaged. In other words, when and if Russia restarted the war against Japan, Britain would be obliged to participate in the war, and Japan would be obliged to assist Britain when Russia made an advance toward India and Afghanistan.

Although, needless to say, the Japanese side more than welcomed the strengthening of the alliance as a way of preparing for future retaliation by Russia, there was some hesitation in expanding the scope of the treaty to areas other than Manchuria and Korea.

Nevertheless, Japan at that time was under tremendous strain, waiting for the imminent arrival of Russia's Baltic Fleet, which had just departed Cam Ranh Bay, and it was not in the frame of mind to turn down the offer from Britain, its precious ally. On May 24, three days before the Battle of Tsushima, the Japanese cabinet decided to accept the British proposal and instructed Minister Hayashi Tadasu in London to commence negotiations with the British government.

Britain's decision to propose the revision of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance paid off even when it was still too early to predict the outcome of the Battle of Tsushima. The biggest worry for Britain from the time of the signing of the original Anglo-Japanese Alliance was that Japan would reach an agreement with Russia before it did with Britain. If that happened, the supremacy of British naval power in the Far East would be completely lost. Thus, even during the original negotiations for the alliance, the British side had repeatedly demanded Japan not to reach an agreement with Russia ahead of Britain.

As a matter of fact, Itō Hirobumi did attempt to strike an agreement with Russia on bartering influence in Manchuria (Russia) for special rights in Korea (Japan), although his attempts proved futile because Russia would not give up the Korean Peninsula.

After Japan's great victory, however, a possibility emerged for Japan to build a stable peace with Russia because the latter was now confined to the

north of the demarcation line in Manchuria. History shows that subsequent developments in the Far East did move toward that direction for a while.

Britain was most worried about the possibility of a Russo-Japanese entente based on mutual understanding as a result of the peace negotiations. By revising the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, therefore, Britain was able to forestall this possibility.

Japan's major concern during the negotiations toward the revision of the alliance was to secure Britain's approval of Japan's predominant position in Korea—or, put more bluntly, Japan's right to make Korea its protectorate.

On this issue, British minister to Korea John Jordan said: "To become a protectorate . . . seems to be the only viable solution for the interest of the Korean people. Korean people, except government officials, must prefer the status of being under Japan's protectorate to the mere nominal independence they've had in the past decade." In the end, the British government decided to approve Japan's wish on the condition that it would respect equality of opportunities. Thus, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was revised with the full agreement from both sides.

In retrospect, the period during which the revised, Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance was in effect was a time when the Japanese felt safest. When and if Japan's security was threatened, Britain was prepared to immediately jump in to assist Japan. In the days before the arrival of the age of the advent of air force, the security of the Japanese archipelago was 100 percent guaranteed by the combined naval powers of Japan and Britain, which had by far the largest navy in the world. As an equal partner of the British Empire, Japan, too, was capable of defending the British interests and was determined to do so if need be. Consequently, Japan was able to benefit from the British Empire's resources and markets, which were spread all over the world, as Komura, the advocate of the alliance with Britain, had pointed out. Peace and prosperity would naturally make people aspire for freedom as their next goal, and this was how the flow toward Taishō Democracy in the next generation began in Japan.

During this period, many people in Japan turned into Anglophiles. They found that the virile and patriotic temperament of a British gentleman and the traditional spirit of a samurai had something in common. Thus an era

began in which the Japanese called themselves “Britain in the Far East.”

Reshuffling of World Politics

The Russo-Japanese War further promoted rapprochement among Britain, France, and Russia, which had already been the undercurrent of international politics since the turn of the century.

Russia’s defeat in the Far East had the effect of relieving the tension between Britain and Russia in the region that had been the theater of their strife over global hegemony. Russia’s new foreign minister Alexandr Izvolskii had the view that it should be Russia’s national strategy to concentrate its attention and military forces in the Balkans, while reconciling with Japan by giving up on the Far East and settling the dispute with Britain on the Indian border.

France, on the other hand, was apprehensive of the Asian nationalism stimulated by the Russo-Japanese War. It felt that the situation could threaten the French colonial rule of Vietnam.

Phan Boi Chau, a pioneer of Vietnamese twentieth-century nationalism, wrote in his *History of the Loss of Vietnam* (越南亡国史, 1905) that, in reference to the Russo-Japanese War, “news on an incident had been carried by the wind from the east, with the roar of gunfire in Lüshun and Liaodong, which invigorated the activists who wanted to restore independence of Vietnam.” He admitted that the “transformation of the world and changes in the world trend were beyond Vietnamese imagination in those days, and their long-standing struggle had only been driven by great indignation and the instinct of retaliation, unfounded on concrete plans for independence.” Phan experienced a complete change in his thinking while in Japan after fleeing Vietnam. The change in his thinking, Phan believed, was also an aftereffect of the Russo-Japanese War.

Thus, when Phan arrived in Japan in 1905, he made contact with such Meiji dignitaries as Inugai Tsuyoshi and Ōkuma Shigenobu to plot a scheme for the independence of Vietnam.

It was, therefore, only natural for France to wish for Japan’s cooperation in restricting the Vietnamese independence movement. France had been waiting for the opportunity to form a coalition with Russia and Britain as a

part of its national strategy to avenge itself on Germany for its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71). In 1904, France succeeded in concluding the long-sought-after Entente Cordiale (between France and Britain). This was followed by the conclusion of the Franco-Japanese Entente in June 1907, which took advantage of Japan's desire to float its foreign bonds on the French market in light of the rising interest rates in the British market. Then France assisted the successful conclusion of the Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907 in July, and, finally, the signing of the Anglo-Russian Entente in August. Thus France materialized its grand strategy in one sweep.

This completed the European line of battle to enclose Germany and Austria, which eventually led to the eruption of the First World War.

The first Russo-Japanese Agreement was necessary for Japan to take care of the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. Even after the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, negotiations on the details for the transfer of management of the Manchurian railway or fishery in the northern sea had shown frustrating progress. Russia was wary about when Japan would decide to advance north to invade northern Manchuria, while Japan was obsessed with fear that Russia would someday resume its meddling with the Korean affairs, degrading the Treaty of Portsmouth to something akin to a temporary armistice.

The Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907 took care of all of these problems. Such pending issues as changing the management of the Manchurian railway had been settled one after another before the signing of the Russo-Japanese Agreement. And the document included secret agreements that left no room for Russia to interfere in the Korean affairs with the demarcation line that ran from east to west in the middle of Manchuria, assigning the north of the line to Russia's sphere of interest and the south of the line to Japan's sphere of interest.

Subsequently, as his last services to the country before he passed away, Komura successfully led the negotiations toward the renewal of the Russo-Japanese Agreement in 1910 and the revision of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1911.

The Second Russo-Japanese Agreement

The second Russo-Japanese Agreement was different in nature from the first Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907. The first agreement was concluded in order to attend to the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War so as to eliminate issues that could provide an excuse to restart the war. Two particularly important points were the blocking of Russia's interference in the Korean Peninsula during the term of validity of the agreement and the prevention of any invasion by Japan and Russia into each other's spheres of interest by dividing Manchuria from east to west.

The purpose of the second agreement was to jointly protect what Japan and Russia had agreed to be their respective spheres of influence from external forces. Japan and Russia were mainly guarding against one external force in particular—the United States.

Earlier, the United States had proposed to Japan that the two countries jointly manage the Southern Manchurian Railway, but Komura's maneuvering had crippled that proposal. Some time later, when William Taft succeeded Theodore Roosevelt as President of the United States in 1909, his Secretary of State Philander Knox proposed the internationalization of the management of the Southern Manchurian Railway—that is, to allow Qing to buy back the railway, which had been divided between Japan and Russia, with funds provided by the Western powers and to put the railway under the joint management of the Western powers.

Agitated by this American proposal, Russia consulted with Japan and the two countries agreed to cooperate in protecting their respective interests in Manchuria. This was the genesis of the Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1910. Both Britain and France were negative toward the American proposal because both found good relations with Japan and Russia, anticipating a possible confrontation with Germany. Consequently, the proposal was buried.

Meanwhile, Japan and Russia continued to consult and agreed on a secret clause which stipulated that, should the mutually agreed special interests of the two countries be threatened, both countries must cooperate with and assist one another to defend their interests. This was the essence of the second Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1910. Russia, instead of Britain or the United States, remained Japan's partner in its Manchurian policy until the

breakdown of Imperial Russia during the First World War.

Komura also made a critical decision during the course of the revision of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance that, in later days, affected Japan's policies toward the United States and Britain.

Around 1910, an argument emerged that Britain and the United States should conclude a treaty on comprehensive arbitration between the two countries—in other words, that any future disputes between the two countries would be referred to arbitration. Simply put, this meant that Britain and the United States would no longer go to war against one another. This proposal marked the beginning of the Anglo-American cooperation that won two world wars in the twentieth century and allowed the two to boast of Anglo-Saxon world hegemony.

Britain sounded out Japan's preference on the matter. Would it prefer to revise the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to make the United States exempt from the application of the treaty, or would it prefer to join the proposed treaty on comprehensive arbitration?

Komura judged that matters that could determine the fate of a state should not be left to arbitration and, furthermore, that Japan could be put at a disadvantage in an arbitration tribunal because of its culture, which is different from the West, and because of racial and religious prejudice against the Japanese. For these reasons, Komura chose the former option.

If Japan had signed the treaty on comprehensive arbitration, that would have been the de facto formation of an Anglo-U.S.-Japanese alliance. **Because** the United States Senate did not pass the bill, the proposed treaty on comprehensive arbitration did not materialize in the end. The mere signing of the treaty, however, would have sent out a strong message that Japan would not antagonize the United States. If the treaty had been concluded between Japan and Britain alone, it would have powerfully reinforced the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.

Now that we have experienced the disaster caused by Japan's autonomous diplomacy, it is beyond doubt that Japan's future would have been much more peaceful if it had abandoned its maverick diplomacy and, instead, relied on the Anglo-Saxon world in one way or the other. What Komura did was to nip one of the buds that would have made that possible.

Completion of the Revision of Unequal Treaties

One of the last contributions Komura made before his death was the completion of revising the unequal treaties on tariffs with the Western powers. The twelve-year transitional period of the old unequal treaties set by Mutsu Munemitsu expired with most of the Western powers in 1911 (44th Year of Meiji).

Revision of the unequal treaties was a major enterprise that took Japan the entire 45 years of the Meiji era to accomplish.

The unequal treaty issue revolved around two discriminatory treatments that had to be remedied. One was the consular jurisdiction—that is, the jurisdiction of alien criminals was in the hands of the consul of the offenders' country. This practice had been set on the grounds that Japan was underdeveloped in terms of Western-style legal and court systems. Within five years of the signing of the treaties in 1894, this practice had already been eliminated.

The other discriminatory treatment was the restriction on the import tariff to a maximum of 5 percent. This restriction had been imposed on Japan by the Western powers amid the confusion at the end of Tokugawa shogunate. Tariff autonomy, therefore, had to be achieved.

Although the Western powers had little reason to justify the continuation of this tariff restriction, they instituted the transition period of twelve years before the implementation of a full tariff autonomy for two reasons. First, they wanted to avoid setting a precedent: if tariff autonomy had been given immediately to Japan, it would have been the first case of a non-white nation being treated equally. And, second, substantial profits were at stake.

Toward the last one-third of the nineteenth century, Britain no longer enjoyed monopoly over industrial products and competition among nations had already become fierce. Each nation imposed high tariffs on imports to protect their own industries. Against this background, it is actually quite amazing that, despite the low tariff rate it had been forced to accept, Japan developed its industry to the extent that it was able to defeat both Qing and Russia in two wars. Compared with the special treatment that developing countries in the post-World War II era have enjoyed—that is, high tariff barriers of their own products and the privilege of low tariffs on their

exports—the labor of our Meiji ancestors, who made self-help efforts themselves, must be highly admired.

In later years, China attempted to repeal its own unequal treaties. Instead of improving its own legal system or using diplomatic persuasion, as Japan had done, China relied on such unruly measures as anti-foreigner movements, riding the tide of nationalism of the time. These attempts occurred while domestic conditions in China were still in a state of utter confusion and there was absolutely no way to guarantee the safety of foreigners. The Japanese had reasons to act like a Dutch uncle (a person who issues frank, harsh, and severe comments and criticism to educate, encourage, or admonish someone, particularly in comparison to his own hardship) toward China at that time.

Country-by-country negotiations on agreements to replace the existing tariff restrictions naturally turned into highly cumbersome economic bargaining for Japan. But all of the negotiations were concluded one after another.

In 1905–6 after the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan reached an agreement with Britain, the United States, Germany, and France to mutually upgrade their legations stationed in each other's countries to embassies. The first Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907 stipulated that each respective legation be promoted to an embassy status. In those days, there was a stern demarcation in the world between major powers and lesser countries, and the status of ambassador was reserved for diplomatic missions exchanged between major powers only; the missions major powers sent to lesser countries and vice versa were ranked ministers.

Thus, at this point, Japan became a fully independent, sovereign nation, and was accepted as a first-class country both in name and substance.

The Passing of Nogi and Komura

When Prime Minister Katsura stepped down in August 1911, Komura resigned as foreign minister. Komura passed away toward the end of November of the same year.

Komura's death heralded the end of the Meiji period. Emperor Meiji himself passed away on July 30, 1912. He was followed to the grave by

General Nogi Maresuke, who disemboweled himself on the evening of the Imperial funeral. Tōyama Mitsuru (頭山満), a leading figure in the Pan-Asianism in Japan from the Meiji to early Shōwa periods, commented, “His Majesty must have been pleased to be accompanied by Komura as a forerunner and Nogi as the rear guard.”

Nogi’s disembowelment manifested the samurai spirit and deeply moved the entire nation. It was this honorable disembowelment that immortalized Nogi in the minds of the Japanese until Japan’s defeat in the World War II. Nogi’s death poem reads:

Now that the living God has departed from this world
I shall follow after Him

This is a serene poem free of any pretentiousness or effusion. It was not that Nogi had not been endowed with poetic genius. Perhaps, to Nogi, it was conduct per se that mattered.

Meiji was over.

It was also a great turning point for Japan. In 1912 (45th Year of Meiji/First Year of Taishō), even before the mourning period for Emperor Meiji had expired, the Taishō Political Crisis (大正政変) began. This led to a nationwide movement in early 1913 (2nd Year of Taishō) which called for the protection of the Constitution, that is, a parliamentary democracy. This movement heralded the imminent arrival of Taishō Democracy.

The Chinese continent also entered a totally new era with the eruption of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911.

With the rise of democracy within Japan and nationalism overseas, the world had entered an era when straightforward advocates of the *raison d’etat*, like Komura, were no longer wanted.

Looking back, what were the merits and demerits of the Komura diplomacy?

Komura accurately judged that Japan had no other option than a war with Russia, given Russia’s intentions, which allowed the Empire of Japan to stay on the right track. This merit belongs to Komura alone.

All the other merits and demerits of the Komura diplomacy are directly

connected to the merits and demerits of the strides of the Empire of Japan that ended with the defeat in World War II. Komura diplomacy, therefore, automatically calls into question Japan's national strategy itself—that is, consistently pursuing an independent diplomacy instead of entrusting the country's fate to international cooperation or, put more bluntly, to collaboration with the Anglo-American world; and, in Asia, expanding Japan's exclusive sphere of influence beyond the Korean Peninsula deep into the Asian continent.

Now that we know this national strategy met a disastrous end, it is easy for us to blame Komura for it. If one singles out one generation, or about 20 to 30 years, after Komura's death, however, there were times when Komura's strategy was clearly successful. At least, most of the Japanese in those days believed so.

In any event, it would not do Komura justice to say that he had been swept along by the rushing trend of statism. Komura was merely running as its spearhead at the time. Even if someone else had been in the position of Komura, the rushing trend was so powerful that he could not have changed its course.

The only person who could possibly have halted the trend of the time was Itō Hirobumi. The passing of Itō two years prior to Komura's death was, therefore, the end of the Meiji era in another sense.