

# Nationalism Went Astray: Japan's Road to Self-destruction

Yu (Tony) Pan & Qin Zheng

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## Introduction

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Throughout the modern history of the world, Japan was undoubtedly an interesting case: from a "small country" surrounded by great powers, it ascended to the only independent Asian country, and by the end of the First World War, Japan even became one of the "great powers." From a higher perspective, Japan's success at that time objectively proved that Asian peoples were not naturally inferior to Westerners. Unfortunately, Japan, which was supposed to be the leader of a bright future, chose an expansive path and eventually became the primary source of fascist powers in the Pacific region.

It is undeniable that from the Meiji Restoration until the early Showa period (the end of World War II), Japan's foreign policy was expansionary. This expansionary national policy brought significant suffering to its neighbors also ultimately dragged Japan into the abyss of destruction. When World War II ended, Japan's developments of decades were basically erased by the war. As a result, Japan's expansionist policies, both on their own and from a broader perspective, ultimately brought disasters and nothing else.

In this context, several questions that we need to ponder are: what has led Japan down a path of expansionary self-destruction? Moreover, at what point did Japan's foreign policy start to lose its mind? What can future generations learn from Japan's harrowing experience to prevent the same fate from repeating itself? As a country that has been entangled with Japan for generations and has a complicated relationship right now, these issues have even greater relevance for Chinese researchers today.

Fortunately, there is actually a fair amount of academic research on this issue, and there are roughly four main explanations for the expansive history of the Empire of Japan.

First, there is the "structural explanation," most commonly used by scholars of international relations (especially realists), which argues that Japan's expansion and the

origin of World War II were deeply rooted in the decisive function of the international structure toward states' actions. In other words, the post-World War I "Versailles-Washington System" was unable to adapt to Japan's policy needs. From this angle, Japan's expansion between the two wars was, in fact, a result of its attempt to change the international structure into its own disadvantage.

Secondly, there is the "domestic explanation," which is more common among Western scholars. Scholars of this view argue that the root of Japan's expansion was the failure to establish a mature, modern democratic institution during the Meiji Restoration period and its inability to impose reasonable constraints on the power of the military and the Emperor, which ultimately led to the military's seizure of power and the hijacking of Japan's foreign policy, leading to Japan's expansion.

The third explanation focuses mainly on the constructivist perspective, the "Pan-Asianism." A considerable number of Japanese scholars hold this view. They believe that there was a deformed understanding within Japanese society at that time: that Japan should lead Asia against the European and American powers, while the Asian countries generally still have not completed their own national-buildings, combined with Japan's own geographical characteristics of scarce resources, it is necessary for Japan to join the process peacefully or forcefully, and for all kinds of reasons, Japan chose the latter method, using its iron fist to integrated Asia from the Western colonists. It should be noted that most post-war Japanese scholars have examined this idea in Japanese society from a critical point of view, but on the other hand, the objective existence of this idea cannot be denied. In fact, this idea of "Pan-Asianism" actually evolved into the actual policies like the "Continental Policy" and the "Manchurian-Mongolian Lifeline."

Finally, there is the IPE explanation of expansionary policies, the core logic of which is the Marxist assertion that economic foundation determines the superstructure. However, as the IPE theory evolves, different scholars have deepened and expanded the economic explanation, although the core remained the same, making Japan challenging to

realize its economic independence. From this perspective, Japan's expansionist attempts at foreign soil essentially compensate for the deficiencies and shortcomings in its own economic structure.

At first glance, it may seem that each of these explanations has its own rationale. However, this is all the more reason why none of the four answers may really get to the essence of the matter. Therefore, this question is still of considerable theoretical values.

In addition to its theoretical significance, this study has considerable relevance for today's world. Many observers have already noticed the similarities between today's international situation to 1930s: a new phase in productivity and production relations; the accumulation of confrontation between old powers and its emerging challengers; the global resurgence of populism; the radicalization of social trends, and the fact that many countries are in the grip of an economic crisis (even though the crisis today is mainly caused by the COVID-19). A fair question, therefore, is whether humanity is once again heading toward another global warfare. Furthermore, if there is another world war, can humanity ever be reborn from the ashes as it did 75 years ago? Thus, it is undoubtedly necessary to address these questions and understand why the fascist state moved towards expansion back then, which is the most crucial value of this report.

## Abstract

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This report argues that Japan's expansion prior to World War II was essentially the physical manifestation of its domestically uncontrolled nationalism. As to the reasons for this phenomenon, this paper argues that the four mainstream explanations regarding why Showa Japan took an expansion road, actually, can be integrated into the uncontrolled-nationalism perspective, and all four of them are, to some extent, correct. Of these four mainstream explanations, Snyder's view that the navy and army were becoming more and more extreme in their struggle for policy dominance has the most substantial explanatory power.

However, we also argue that the four existing explanations are incomplete, although they can be included in the "uncontrolled nationalism" framework. On the other hand, whether nationalism inevitably expanded without outside interference and whether this trend inevitably leads to expansionist policies has not been addressed.

In this regard, this paper argues that due to nationalism's natural characteristics, there does exist a natural tendency to expand in the process of nationalism's development. The main reason for this phenomenon is the cognitive dissonance of nationalists in defining the boundaries of the "rightful" national interests, and due to the unreliability of group rationality, nationalism, as a group ideology, tend to become increasingly extreme and irrational on its way of becoming a major social trend. When such movement is not reasonably controlled and eventually hijacks the national policies, the state tends to embark on a path of self-destructive expansion. The Empire of Japan was one of the most typical cases.

It should be noted that, although this paper is directly targeted with pre-World War II Japan, we believe that, in a broader context, the judgment that "uncontrolled nationalism will lead to irrational expansion" is equally applicable beyond this case. For

example, although the pattern is slightly different, the case of the Third Rich, which was another source of World War II, was also in line with this judgment. And therefore, we think the report has significance for people beyond historians and IR scholars.

# 1. Japan's Expansion from the 1930s to WWII

## 1) From the "Versailles-Washington System" to the "Manchuria Incident"

During World War I, Japan found itself a great opportunity to significantly boost its economy, as it was far from the main battlefield. And with its economic development, Japan gradually became one of the great powers and a significant player in the international affairs of the time.<sup>1</sup> In this context, Japan and the U.S. had considerable consistency in their policy goals during the 1920s, that both of them were trying to reshape to the "old diplomacy" as the emerging powers.<sup>2</sup> However, partly because of President Wilson's defeat at the Paris Peace Conference and the still-strong isolationist sentiment inside the U.S., Washington gradually shifted from Wilson's "new diplomacy" to previous isolationism. This fact means that the Washington System builds upon the Nine-Power Treaty was essentially a compromise, and, naturally, cannot be stable.<sup>3</sup>

On November 11, 1919, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany signed the instrument of surrender, which officially ended the first "World War" in human history. Soon, the re-arrangements of the post-war order became the primary concerns of the major players. After a series of negotiations and compromises, the United States, Britain, and France established the Versailles-Washington System around 1922 based on the Treaty of Versailles, the Nine Powers Pact, and a series of other subsidiary treaties. Among them, regarding Asian affairs, principles like "Respect for sovereignty," "The Open-Door policy," and "equal opportunities" were nailed down in term of China issue.

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<sup>1</sup> James Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy* (Princeton, N.J., 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Sumio Hatano, "Causes and Backgrounds of the Japan-China War(In Chinese)", translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds., *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War Chapter)*(中日历史认识共同研究报告〈战前篇〉) (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press, May 2020, first edition.)

<sup>3</sup> Sadao Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918–1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006).

Historically, when the system was initially founded, nearly all major powers felt satisfied: Britain, an old empire in relative decline, managed to maintain its precarious position as world hegemon and became one of the de facto dominant players in the League of Nations; while the United States was euphoric about breaking up the Anglo-Japanese alliance despite the Wilson administration's failure in Paris; As for the Japanese Government, even if it was dissatisfied with the dissolution of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and the inferior naval ratio, Tokyo was justifiably satisfied with the hand-over of Germany special interests in the Far East. Moreover, the "new diplomacy" advocated by the United States was, in fact, a perfect window for Japan to break the old colonial pattern.<sup>4</sup> However, as some scholars have pointed out, "The Nine Power Pact had a major flaw, namely, the lack of any implementing regulations for the principles and provisions it established, and thus no mandatory sanctions could be launched against the country (Japan) that violated the Pact. And this deficiency allows Japan to challenge this international order."<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, as far as the "Versailles-Washington System" was concerned, Japan's views at that time, especially in the diplomatic service, were generally positive. Mamoru Shigemitsu, one of the main actors of Japanese diplomacy, wrote in his memoirs: "As a result of coming to Paris and seeing the situation in the New World, we felt how Japan was lagging behind in the advancing world.....I really feel that the current diplomatic establishment must be fundamentally reformed in order to cope with the new international situation of the future. Diplomats like Arita, Matsuoka, and Kimura all shared my view and soon after our return to Japan, the Innovation Committee with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' was established by approval of senior leadership. In this way,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源), in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds, *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War Chapter)* (中日历史认识共同研究报告 (战前篇)) (Beijing: Social Science Literature Press, May 2020, first edition.)

we began to expand and strengthen the diplomatic apparatus within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to meet the requirements of the new era."<sup>6</sup>

However, the problem was that the diplomatic system could only represent one faction within the Japanese government at the time. Moreover, during this period, although the presence of the "Meiji Genro" still maintained the collaboration between the civil bureaucracy and Imperial General Headquarters (namely the Military) at a basic level<sup>7</sup>, the rise of nationalist forces in Japan could already be noticed. During this period, the fascist theorist, namely the extreme-nationalist ideological leaders, began to gain influences in Japanese society. Two of the most famous of these were Kita Ikki and Shūmei Ōkawa.

Known as the "Father of Japan's Fascism," Shoumei was hired by the Bureau of the East Asia Economic Survey under the heavily military-leaning South Manchurian Railway (Manchurian Railway) from 1918. He rose from a junior investigator to the chairman of the board and bureau directors over ten years. During this period, he was heavily engaged in right-wing political activities, such as the Yuzonsha (猶存社) in 1919, the Kochisha (行地社) in 1924, and the Jinmukai (神武会) in 1932.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the 1920s, Ōkawa published three works in promoting fascism: *Some issues in re-emerging Asia* (復興亜細亜の諸問題) (1922), *A study of the Japanese spirit* (日本精神研究) (1924), and *A study of chartered colonization companies* (特許植民会社制度研究), (1927). It can be said that most of Ōkawa's extreme-nationalist ideas were formed during this period, including:

- The spirit of Japan that surpassed all five continents;

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<sup>6</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵. Gaikō kaisō-roku 外交回想録 [Memoirs of a Diplomat] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun, 1978), 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> This is a viewpoint that has gained general consensus in the academy, see, for example, : Yuta Komori (2009) "Preface to the Study of Politics and Military Relations - A Case of Iga-kuni in the War Period", Political Science Research Papers pp. 201-214, Meiji University Graduate School [https://www.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/doc/2016\\_Writing\\_references\\_Chi.pdf](https://www.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/doc/2016_Writing_references_Chi.pdf); Takeshi Mitsuta, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Toward Total War (日中两国决策机制的变化与走向全面战争的原因)"; and Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Okawa, as a representative of the Manchurian Railway, was substantially involved in the planning and execution of the Manchuria Incident.

- The need for Japan to expand externally and reform internally;
- The opposition to party politics and the pursue of a big bourgeois emperor-fascist regime;
- The advocacy of " Manchurian lifeline"<sup>9</sup> and the idea that Japan should lead Asia in resistance to European oppression (what latter evolves into the Pan-Asianism).<sup>10</sup>

Like most successful fascists, Ōkawa was also an incredibly gifted orator. He was able to incite his large number of supporters with simplistic metaphors such as "Britain is a rich man, Russia is a landlord, America is a capitalist, and Japan is a samurai on a mission of justice."<sup>11</sup> Ōkawa has also openly advocated in Japanese society:

*"The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere(大東亜共栄圏) is to be based on the relationship between the leader and the led as a necessary prerequisite. If leadership is not exercised by those who have the ability to lead, the order will be disrupted. It is only natural and necessary to establish and develop a new order in East Asia that Japan should assume leadership. Excessive modesty should not be shown to ease the jealousy of third countries or to take into account the feelings of the East Asian peoples."*<sup>12</sup>

He also said:

*"The Kingdom of Heaven(This refers to Japan as a god-country, rather the notion in Christian theology) always exists in the shadow of the sword, and the duel between the two powers of the East and the West (meaning the U.S. and Japan), in which they will fight with their lives, was probably a fate arranged by history and unavoidable for the birth of a new world";<sup>13</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> Shūmei Ōkawa is the originator of the idea of "Manchu-Mongolian lifeline".

<sup>10</sup> Yi Wencheng, Tang Zhongnan, and Jia Yuqin, eds., *Biographies of Japanese Historical Figures (Modern Times)* (日本历史人物传 (近现代篇)) (Harbin: Heilongjiang People's Publishing House, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

He also denigrated the Chinese people's resistance against Japanese expansion was ignorant and manipulated by Britain and the United States:

*"Only by putting down this internal strife without delay can we expect the end of the Greater East Asia War...the Americans are a mongrel people, without spiritual strength, afraid of sacrifice, and only need the sword of Yamato to show, they can only choose to yield, and how dare they provoke us?".<sup>14</sup>*

In the 1930s, Ōkawa actually became a significant spiritual leader of those hot-headed junior military officers. He openly ridiculed Itō Hirobumi's cabinet for being too weak and was a major contributor to Inukai Tsuyoshi's assassination. At a Shinbukai rally in April 1932, he shouted to the naval men on stage:

*"Manchuria is Japan's, who of you can deny it? Who dare deny it? This is territory gained by the death of hundreds of thousands of Japanese young men, and it can only be maintained by force."<sup>15</sup>*

Japanese Army General Gen. Hajime Sugiyama once said of Ōkawa:

*"Ōkawa-Kun has a powerful influence over the Japanese people that we cannot match."<sup>16</sup>*

Besides Ōkawa, another fascist theorist, Kita Ikki, also began to rise in this period. In 1906, after completing his most important work(probably), *The Theory of the State and Pure Socialism*(*国体論及び純正社会主義*)<sup>17</sup>, via the invitation of the then-leader Song Jiaoren, he joined the Tongmenghui (Later known as the Kuomintang, KMT) and participate directly in the Chinese Xinhai Revolutions in Shanghai, Wuchang and Nanking during the early 1910s. After formally founding Japan's first fascist society,

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> The book went on to become a programmatic document for Japanese fascism.

Yuzonsha(猶存社), Ōkawa himself went to Shanghai to invite Ikki to join him, who returned to Japan with his newly completed “masterpiece”: *An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan*(日本改造法案大綱). However, due to their disagreement on issues like how to deal with China<sup>18</sup>, Ikki and Ōkawa parted their ways later peacefully. Nonetheless, the marks had already been there: In the late 1920s, most of the fascist organizations in the Army, such as the Isseki-kai(一夕会) and the Sakura-kai(桜会), actually all draw ideas from Ikki’s works. In the February 26 Incident, the mutineers, also known as Imperial Way Faction, were basically the followers of Ikki. Although they eventually failed to achieve their goals and Ikki himself got executed after the event, the Tōseiha (the opposite of the Imperial Way Faction) did not throw Ikki’s entire theory away, especially regarding the all-mighty power of warfare that it could solve any problem singlehandedly.

More importantly, the rise of the fascist theorist like Ikki and Ōkawa in the 1920s actually set the stage for Japan's gradual departure from the rational policies. The nature of this expansion, from another perspective, was a process in which the military gradually seized control of Japanese policy by promoting (extreme)nationalism.<sup>19</sup> For example, a military writer named Tadataka Ikegasaki once wrote in 1929:

*"It is well known that Japan's overpopulation grows more serious every year. Where should we find land for the extra three million people? The Western Powers had divided up the world: the only remaining area is the Asian Mainland. Moreover, Japan's claim to the region is written in the blood and treasure of two wars. Even if the United*

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<sup>18</sup> Ikki, because of his own experience, insisted that Japan should adopt a more gentle policy towards China and advocated a military alliance between China and Japan

<sup>19</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]. Last modified October, 2006. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/special/70yrs/#> (accessed June 28, 2020); Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Saburo Ienaga, The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

*States opposed Japan's legitimate expansion in China, we should resolutely pursue our interests.....if the U.S. persisted in blocking Tokyo's plans, Japan should go to war."*<sup>20</sup>

Although writers like Ikegasaki alone were not enough to push Japan toward expansion, when such ideas were embraced and utilized by the Imperial General Headquarters' senior leaders, the likelihood of Japan's foreign expansion increased dramatically. In fact, long before the Manchuria Incident, such thinking began to be translated into practical action.

On June 4, 1928, when Zhang Zuolin, the actual ruler of Manchuria at the time, was riding a special train through the Huanggutun station in Mukden City, whereas planted explosives blew up the train, and Zhang was seriously injured and later died. According to declassified information, this turned out to be a planned assassination by the Japanese Kwantung Army. Senior staff-officer Kōmoto Daisaku(河本 大作), Mukden secret service chief Hata Shinji (秦 真次) and Kenji Doihara constructed the details, and the then commander of the Kwantung Army Lieutenant General Chotaro Muraoka gave the final approval.<sup>21</sup> According to the Memoirs of Koiso Kuniaki, on June 16, 1928, when Kōmoto Daisaku returned to Tokyo from Northeast China, he confessed to Koiso that he was the real murderer of Zhang Zuolin, and later re-confirmed this fact in his memoirs, *I Killed Zhang Zuolin*, which were published after his death.<sup>22</sup>

For Japan, the Huanggutun Incident started a trend of "Gekokujō " in the Japanese military. From another perspective, this trend can also be interpreted as the process of the junior officers get "infected" by extreme nationalism and began to try to tear down the

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<sup>20</sup> Ikezaki Tadakata, *Beikoku osoruru ni tarazu (Why Fear the United States?)*, cited from Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p.29.

<sup>21</sup> The Second Historical Archives of China, Selected Archival Materials on the Japanese Imperialist Invasion of China, Zhonghua Book Store, 1995, ISBN 9787101012620; Zhang Jinsong, Analyzing the Conspiracy of the "Huanggutun Incident" from the Secret Letters of Daisaku Kawamoto, Journal of Liaoning University. (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Koiso Kuniaki 小磯国昭. Koiso Kuniaki jiden 小磯国昭自伝 [The Autobiography of Koiso Kuniaki] (Tōkyō: Marunouchi shubbansha, 1968)

foreign policy establishment, which includes their military commanders.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, after the Huanggutun Incident, the Japanese government did not make the incident public, nor did it punish the officers involved with a according manner. The Emperor even severely reprimanded the then Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi, who advocated a milder approach and was trying to take some actions to control these junior officers, and eventually led to Tanaka's cabinet's stepdown.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, this way of handling the situation generated an idea, that is, “the military officers had a free-jail card even if they messed up badly”, which further encouraged these young people to do whatever they deemed necessary for the Emperor.<sup>25</sup><sup>26</sup> On the other hand, before the assassination of Zhang Zuolin, Tokyo was still able to command its troops in Shandong. However, in this case, the Kentai was basically incapacitated between the Emperor and the nationalist groups. These indicate that the balance between the Imperial General Headquarters and the civilian government and even the power-structure within the Headquarters itself began to fall apart.<sup>27</sup> In this context, the Manchuria Incident fundamentally changed the Japanese government's policymaking mechanism three years later.

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<sup>23</sup> The term "Gekokujō" was first used in Japan during the Kamakura period, and refers to the replacement of a former ruler by a person in a lower position through political or military means.

<sup>24</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility], last modified October, 2006. <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/special/70yrs/#> (accessed June 28, 2020)

<sup>25</sup> This notion is also coherent with Japanese culture that Samurai, for most of their lives, are above the law. Clearly, it is not coherent with the construction of a modern military force. Just imagine several middle-level U.S. military personals declined to kill Soleimani and literally disobey without go to military courts.

<sup>26</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

<sup>27</sup> Kangda Fuhito 神田文人. “Manshū jihen' to Nihon no seigunkankei: Tōsui-ken to ten'nōsei” 「満州事変」と日本の政軍関係：統帥権と天皇制 [The 'Manchurian Incident' and Japan's Political-Military Relations: The Commander-in-Chief and the Emperor System], *Keiidaigaku kokusai kenkyū 敬愛大学国際研究* 3(1999): 1-68

## 2) The Manchuria Incident

The Manchuria Incident was treated as the starting point of the Pacific War by some observers.<sup>28</sup> The masterminds of this event were the Kwantung Army staff officers Kanji Ishiwara and Seishirō Itagaki.

For Itagaki, the theory of the final world war, in which Japan and the United States would inevitably fight against each other to become the world's greatest power, was the more than just a thought, it was the ultimate solution toward Japan's greatness.<sup>29</sup> In January 1928, in a Mokuyokai(木曜会) gathering with other elite army college graduates, Ishiwara declared that if all of China was used as a base, the war could be waged for 20 or 30 years.<sup>30</sup> In 1931, Ishiwara further wrote in his *My Opinion on the Manchurian Question* (滿蒙問題我見):

*"It may not be difficult to create an opportunity by the use of stratagems to force the country, with the military ministry in the lead."*<sup>31</sup>

In this context, these middle-level officers launched their attacks against the authority of Manchuria, and the development of the Manchurian Incident, unfortunately, reconfirmed the feasibility of Ishiwara's vision: the entire event actually began and ended

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<sup>28</sup> The Committee on the Examination of Struggle Responsibility (2006) "Examination of Struggle Responsibility" available at <https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/special/70yrs/#> (viewed on June 28, 2020); Professor Wang Jisi and Japanese scholar Naofu Nakatani also hold similar views.

<sup>29</sup> In fact, it is the "total war" Idea of Loudoun Dowd. For more details about Ishiwara's argument, see Kanji Ishiwara, *世界最終戰 (The World's Endgame Theory)*, 1940年(昭和15年)9月10日, 立命館出版部

<sup>30</sup> Same note 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

unilaterally by the Military. The Kentai became even more incapable of making material approach in terms of damage control.

On the afternoon of September 18, 1931, the Japanese Chief of Staff Operations, Yoshitsugu Tatekaw, arrived in Shenyang. In the evening, a minimal number of soldiers at Hushitai Barracks left its station and marched south along the South Manchuria Railway to the area of Wenguan Tun under the leadership of Lieutenant Kawashima Masao, the squadron commander, to carry out night drills. At about 10:20 p.m., a small detachment led by Lieutenant Suemori Kawamoto(the deputy squadron leader) and Kosugi Kiichi(a military cavalryman) detonated small explosives on a section of the Yanagō Hunan Manchurian Railway, which was about 7.5 kilometers north of Mukden, blowing up a small section of the railroad. Following that, this small group placed three bodies with Chinese uniforms at the scene as evidence of the Mukden clique's sabotage of the railroad. At 11:15 p.m., the Japanese Kwantung Army blew up the South Manchurian Railway's Liuchow iron bridge, falsely accusing it of being the work of Chinese troops as well.

Immediately after the explosion, Suemori Kawamoto ordered his troops to fire in the direction of the North Camp and reported to Lieutenant Colonel Shimamoto Masaichi, the captain of the Japanese 2nd Battalion of the Independent Garrison, that the Chinese troops at the North Camp had blown up the railroad and attacked the garrison. Masaichi immediately reported to the Kwantung Army command at Lushun. Ishiwara, at the time, was a senior staff officer of the Kwantung Army, was already waiting there and ordered

the Kwantung Army to “return fire” and attack the Northeast Army's North Camp and the city of Mukden. Almost immediately, the 3rd Squadron garrisoned in Wenguan Tun moved south to attack the North Camp, and its artillery located at Hushitai began to bombard the North Camp and the Fentian Airport.

In fact, the 7th Brigade of the Mukden clique had been informed in advance that the Japanese were about to pull off something like this; however, on September 6, Zhang Xueliang, the son of Zhang Zuoling and the then-leader of the Mukden clique, ordered the military chief of Mukden:

*"No matter how the Japanese are subjected to find trouble, must be extremely tolerant, not with resistance, so as not to escalate the situation."<sup>32</sup>*

After repeated considerations, Rong Zhen, his chief of staff, received Zhang Xueliang's order (Zhang Xueliang was not in Manchuria at the time), and ordered the 7th Brigade to take restraint measures as the response. Soldiers were allowed to fire their weapons only if the enemy marched forward to 700 to 800 meters of the camp, which Japanese soldiers did without any hesitations. Even after the enemy crossed the line, the Northeast Army did not really fight back because this was directly against the order from the highest level.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Guo Tingyi. Guo Ting-Yi, Guo Ting-Yi. *A History of Modern China* (近代中国史纲). (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press. 1986), p. 607..

<sup>33</sup> Like many other cliques, the Mukden clique was not on the control of the Nanjing-Government at that time. Zhang Xueliangn was their supreme leader.

As the situation went on, some senior officers at the field, like Pan Zhenyuan, used the telephone to ask Rong Zhen for instructions; Rong ordered them to lay down their weapons and let Japanese do whatever they want.<sup>34</sup> On September 11, Chiang Kai-shek also ordered to avoid conflict with Japan.<sup>35</sup> As a result, the Kwantung Army occupied Jilin and Liaoning provinces on September 23. It took nearly two months to occupy Tsitsihar, followed by Harbin on February 6 of the next year. In other words, in less than a half of a year, the Japanese Army basically controlled Northeast China and succeeded in annexing Rehe after the Defense of the Great Wall in 1933.

According to Japanese documents that were later declassified, the Mukden clique had nearly 270,000 regular troops and 180,000 militias. On the other hand, at the time, the Kwantung Army had only one unit, the Second Division, and some naval forces from the Second Overseas Fleet.<sup>36</sup> Even after the Japanese government subsequently decided to increase the number of troops in Manchuria, the Kwantung Army's peak strength was only between 60,000 and 80,000. Thus, even considering the disparity in equipment and training between the two sides, the difference in size was so great that the Kwantung Army's offensive behavior was basically a suicide mission. However, the situation's intricacies eventually allowed the Kwantung Army to seize Manchuria within a few months for several main reasons.

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<sup>34</sup> Same as footnote 31.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Translated by Tian Qizhi, edited by Song Shao Bo, *Outline of the Manchurian Incident: A Series of Materials on the History of the Republic of China* (满洲事变作战经过概要-中华民国史资料丛稿(译稿)(Zhonghua Book Bureau, June 1981.)

### i. Domestic Development in Japan

First of all, both the Nanking-government and the civilian bureaucrats in Tokyo were quite shocked by this incident. In the aftermath of the surprise, the civilian governments on both sides quickly began to look for a solution. The day after the Manchuria Incident, Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijirō was informed by the Minister of War, Jirō Minami, that there was a "railroad explosion in the suburbs of Mukden." An emergency cabinet meeting was immediately called.

At the meeting, Minamijiro further pushed the government to make up its mind in order to secure the outstanding special interests of Manchuria and Mongolia.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the Foreign Minister Kijūrō Shidehara objected to this idea, urging his colleagues to consider the international relations and keep the situation under control.<sup>38</sup> The basic principle of Shidehara 's policy was to adhere to the Washington system, coordinate relations with Britain and the United States, respect the principle of non-interference in China's internal affairs, and then secure Japan's rights and interests in Manchuria. As a result, the cabinet meeting on this day decided to adopt the policy of non-escalation. PM Reijirō brought this conclusion to the attention of the Emperor, who was very pleased, and said:

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<sup>37</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

*"The government's policy of trying not to expand the incident is very commendable, and I hope that it will be fully implemented."* <sup>39</sup>

When the Army Chief of Staff, Hanzō Kanaya, petitioned for the ratification of the dispatch of Japanese troops to Korea, the Emperor was even reprimanded the Army should be more cautious in the future.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime, Mamoru Shigemitsu, who was acting-Ambassador to China, visited Tse-ven Soong, a cabinet-level official in Nanking-government, almost immediately. During the meeting, Soong requested a local solution be found as soon as possible to prevent the situation from deteriorating.<sup>41</sup> Shigemitsu agreed and said:

*"It would be better for the Japanese government to deal with the matter on a localized basis, and there is no advantage in expanding the conflict."*<sup>42</sup>

He had also told Wellington Koo, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the KMT Government, that:

*"Zhang Xueliang's attitude is dangerous. To avoid conflict with Japan, Zhang Xueliang should quickly withdraw from Jinzhou, and the Japanese should not advance further as well. I think it would be best to set up a neutral zone in the middle to avoid conflict."* <sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵. Gaikō kaisō-roku 外交回想録 [Memoirs of a Diplomat] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun, 1978), 92.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. at 93.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. at 97.

As to the global perspective, at the meeting of the League of Nations on September 25, the Japanese representative also announced the policy of the Japanese government:

- 1: Japan had no territorial ambitions toward China.
- 2: Japanese military action was to protect the local Japanese population.
- 3: Japanese troops would begin to withdraw immediately. <sup>44</sup>

Given all these statements from Japanese diplomatic officials, it is not strange that Nanking-government misjudged the situation because these Japanese diplomats were not lying, they simply did not foresee the future as well.

Judging from the Manchuria Incident's actual development, almost at the second when the Kwantung Army fired the first shot, then Wakatsuki Cabinet's control over the military extinguished. The Army general at the time, Senjūrō Hayashi, even took it upon himself to send more troops in supporting Kwantung Army's mission. However, due to the complicated domestic political situation of the time and his fear over the opposition from the nationalist group behind the military, Wakatsuki basically got both hands tied behind his back and could not take any material actions, which led to his cabinet's resignation on December 11. <sup>45,46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

<sup>45</sup> Komori Yuta 小森雄太. “Seigunkankei kenkyū josetsu - Senkanki no wagakuni o jirei to shite” 政軍関係研究序説--戦間期の我が国を事例として [An Introduction to the Study of Political-Military Relations: A Case Study of Japan in the Interwar Period], *Seiji-gaku kenkyū ronshū 政治学研究論集* 29(2009): 201-214

<sup>46</sup> Masujima Hiroshi 増島宏. *Shakai minshu shugi to gunbu fashizumu: `Manshū jihen' o chūshin to shite 社会民主主義と軍部・ファシズム : 「満州事変」を中心として* [Social Democracy and Military-Fascism: The 'Manchurian Incident' as a Focus]. *Shakai rōdō kenkyū 社会労働研究* 17(1964): 1-59.

On the following day, Inukai Tsuyoshi, one of the Meiji Genrō, took the torch and became the new Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Sadao Araki took the minister's position of War. As a closer friend of Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of the Republic of China(ROC), Inuyasha had closer relationships with many KMT leaders. On December 20, he secretly sent a special envoy to Nanking to meet with the KMT leaders. However, these secret peace talks were leaked (the military reportedly intercepted the telegram), further infuriating the radicals within Japan. In the end, although Inuyasha should be the most respected Japanese politician at the time and one of the few remaining Meiji Genrō, the 77-year-old prime minister was shot multiple times by a dozen young trainees from the military academy. This assassination has been known as the May 15 Incident hereafter.

A military court later tried the murderers. However, a bloodletter signed by over 350,000 commoners was sent to the judge, hoping for a lighter sentence. As a result, these young, nationalistic “heroes” only served a minimal time in jail, and a few years later, the entire staff was pardoned by Emperor, following which most of the murderers were assigned with significant positions in Manchuria and other parts of China.

As a result, starting from the May 15 Incident, the Army fundamentally changed their mindsets: Trying to find common ground with the civilian government was either tedious and pointless, and the so-called “international coordination” was basically an

empty term.<sup>47</sup> Under these circumstances, until Japan's defeat in 1945, Japan never again had a civilian-dominated cabinet. More importantly, the civilians had become increasingly recreant to challenge the Military's authority. The Taisho democracy ended up with a worse situation.<sup>48</sup> The succeeding Saitō-Cabinet finally "ratified" the Kwantung Army's policy of establishing a puppet regime of "Manchukuo."

## ii. The KMT's Hope on International Factors

Beside the domestic factor in Japan, for the KMT government, the sterling gap between the nation's material capabilities and the fact that Nanking was only the capital-in-name forced the ROC's leadership to put their hope on the international factors, namely the intervention from the Western powers. Sadly for them, these dominators failed to launch a meaningful action toward Japan's expansion, at least not immediately.

In the afternoon of September 19, 1931, the Central Executive Committee of the Nationalist Government in Nanking held a brief meeting, where participants decided to "adopt the League of Nations to appeal to the outside world for justice, but internally seek to sacrifice prejudice and unite the nation and our Party comrades." <sup>49</sup> On 21

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<sup>47</sup> Guangtian Gang, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Towards Total War," translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds, *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War Chapter)*, Social Science Literature Press, May 2020, first edition.

<sup>48</sup> Most scholars have formed a unified view on the historical significance of the May 15 Incident. See, in particular, Zang Yunhu, "On the Reasons for the All-out War between China and Japan(关于中日战争全面爆发的原因)," in *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War)*; Takeshi Mitsuta, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Toward Total War (日中两国决策机制的变化与走向全面战争的原因)," translated by Liu Xing, in *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War)*; James Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy* (Princeton, N.J., 1966; Gordon Mark Berger, *Parties out of Power in Japan, 1931-1941* (Princeton N.J.); and Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978:

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in *The Diary of Shao Yuanchong(邵元冲日记)*, (Shanghai People's Publishing House), 775.

September, Shi Zhaoji, China's representative to the League of Nations, called for the withdrawal of Japanese troops from the occupied territories and a halt to Japan's aggression in accordance with international covenants.<sup>50</sup> In response, Japan's representative, Kenkichi Yoshizawa, expressed the hope that the two countries should negotiate directly on the pretext of a "local incident."<sup>51</sup> On January 2, 1932, Chiang delivered a speech on "independent diplomacy," in which he pointed out the potential problems of declaring a war against Japan<sup>52</sup>. In response to the January 28 Incident<sup>53</sup>, the Central Government issued another telegram:

*"Since the beginning of the North-East Incident, the Central Government has, in order to avoid the scourge of war and to protect the whole country, been willing to endure humiliation and maintain peace, hoping to promote the awakening of the Japanese invaders through justice and righteousness."<sup>54</sup>*

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<sup>50</sup> Diplomatic Issues Research Association of the Republic of China(中华民国外交问题研究会) eds., *Series of historical materials on Sino-Japanese diplomacy, published by the Republic of China Society for the Study of Diplomatic Problems(中日外交史料丛编)*, published by The Diplomatic Issues Research Association of the Republic of China.

<sup>51</sup> Li Shoukong. *The History of Modern China(中国现代史)*. Taipei: Sanmin Books. 1973, p. 98.

<sup>52</sup> Chen Bre et al. (eds.), *Chronology of Mr. Chiang Kai-shek(蒋介石先生年表)*(Taipei: Biographical Literature Press, June 1, 1978): 24.

<sup>53</sup> The "Shanghai Incident(or January 28 Incident)" was a war of aggression launched by Japan against Shanghai in early 1932.It was staged by Japan in support of its invasion of northeastern China after the "Manchuria Incident" in 1931. On the night of January 28, 1932, the Japanese suddenly attacked the Nineteenth Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army in Zhabei, and then attacked Jiangwan and Wusong. The Nineteenth Road Army, led by army commander Cai Tingkai and commander-in-chief Chiang Guang Nai, put up resistance. In the end, under the mediation of Western countries, on May 5, China and Japan signed the Songhu Armistice Agreement. The armistice agreement provided for the withdrawal of Japanese troops to the northern and eastern parts of the Shanghai Public Concession and the Hongkou Cross-Border Road Building, restoring the status quo prior to the "January 28th Incident". China recognized Shanghai as an unarmed zone, with no military presence. On the whole, the agreement was very unfavorable to China.

<sup>54</sup> "Message to the Soldiers and Generals of the Nation for the '128 Incident(为‘一二八事变’告全国将士电)", in *President Chiang's Thought and Expressions(总统蒋公思想言论总集)*, vol. 37(Taipei: Party History Committee of the Central Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang. 1984): 36.

However, as mentioned above, the civilian government at Tokyo did not succeed in controlling the extreme side. And the "international sanctions" expected by the ROC leaders, although not entirely non-existent, ended up in a painless " Lytton Report. " In general, the efforts from the international spectrum of curbing Japan's expansionary behavior basically became an empty promise.

In detail, it is not reasonable to fully overlook the determination of the League of Nations as it did react quickly to Japan's act of aggression in the Manchuria Incident. On September 30, the Executive Council of the League of Nations adopted a resolution setting a deadline of October 13 for Japan to withdraw its troops.<sup>55</sup> After Tokyo failed to follow this resolution, the Executive Council of the League of Nations resumed its special session on September 30, and by 13 votes to 1, it ordered Japan to complete its withdrawal before another session on November 16.<sup>56</sup> However, as Wang Jisi pointed out, there was a significant flaw in the entire system. The principles and provisions established therein lacked any implementing regulations. In particular, there were no mandatory sanctions against a country (Japan) that violated the Convention.<sup>57</sup> This, coupled with the system's inherent instability, ultimately stopped the international sanctions that Nanking longed for from happening.

At the time, Britain, the dominant actor of the League of Nations, believed that Japanese expansion in Manchuria would not harm its own practical interests, furthermore,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid .

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源).

it could weaken the Soviet Union and was therefore reluctant to take much practical action.<sup>58</sup> The United States, on the other hand, albeit significantly tougher than the British, was also helpless because the United States was not a member of the League of Nations and it was still in the yoke of isolationism. However, even so, on January 7, 1932, U.S. Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson issued a declaration, stating that:

*"The United States will not recognize any situation, treaty contract, etc., created by violation of the open door policy and treaty obligations to China."*<sup>59</sup>

Stimson also sent a note to Japan and China, declaring that Japan's invasion of Manchuria was interference in China's territorial internal affairs and a violation of the Paris Non-War Pact. Consequently, the U.S. government did not recognize it. This was the born of the famous "Stimson Doctrine." Although following the road, the U.S.-Japan relationship began to decline and eventually evolve into a total-level warfare, at the time, Washington's signaling did not alter Tokyo's actions.

To sum up, the Manchuria Incident was a significant turning point for modern Japanese foreign policy and the balance of power in Asia at the time. To begin with, it marked the beginning of military-take-over of Japan's foreign policy. Further, as the Incident did not be appropriately resolved, the Sino-Japanese relations' down-sliding become inevitable. More importantly, the Manchuria Incident marked the failure of

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<sup>58</sup> Li Yi. *A History of Antiwar Painting(抗战画史)*(Taipei: Lixing Books. 1969).

<sup>59</sup> Li Shoukong. *The History of Modern China(中国现代史)*. Taipei: Sanmin Books. 1973, p. 98

international coordination mechanism between the two World Wars in East Asia. Combining the flawed system design, the rise of non-institutional states, and the global economic crisis, this system was destroyed entirely later.<sup>60</sup> Finally, although it seems that Japan gained significantly in this event, the Manchuria Incident also left countless problems for Tokyo for several reasons.

First, after the Manchurian Incident, the democratic movement(including the communist movement) in Japan also deteriorated, and the right-wing trend became more and more prominent and become unrivaled eventually.<sup>61 62</sup>

Second, from this point, the Military began to fall into a kind of self-aggrandizement: If the soldiers of the past still wanted to try to understand the ideas and designs of the civilian government, from here, they started to abandon such attempts in large.<sup>63</sup> The Manchuria Incident nailed an idea into the minds of these military officers that "the arbitrary actions in defiance of the order were the work of men who were concerned about the country." This twisted mindset haunted the Military until the end of the war and

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<sup>60</sup> Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源); and Naoshi Nakatani (Japan), "The Changing International Order in East Asia and the Response of Japan and China", translated by Liu Xiaohui, in Wang Chaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds, "Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War)", Social Science Literature Press, May 2020, first edition.

<sup>61</sup> This was mainly due to the fact that the SDP's membership included young generals from the military and a number of right-wing groups, and under their influence, social democracy gradually drifted towards fascism.

<sup>62</sup> Masujima Hiroshi 増島宏, *Shakai minshu shugi to gunbu fashizumu: 'Manshū jihen' o chūshin to shite* 社会民主主義と軍部・ファシズム：「満州事変」を中心として [Social Democracy and Military-Fascism: The 'Manchurian Incident' as a Focus], *Shakai rōdō kenkyū* 社会労働研究 17(1964): 1-59.

<sup>63</sup> Takeshi Mitsuta, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Toward Total War (日中两国决策机制的变化与走向全面战争的原因)".

had a profound negative effect on Japan policymaking process.<sup>64</sup> Besides, the military hierarchy attempts to take advantage of the nationalist sentiments in lower-ranking officers further sow a seed of conflict within the military, eventually leading to a conflict between the "Tōseiha" and the "Imperial Way Faction."

Third, from an international perspective, Japan's decision to withdraw from the League of Nations was, in fact, an initiative to place itself outside the international order of the time, in which Tokyo basically shut down any alternative approach besides war and conflict to solve its conflicts of interests with other major powers. As Snyder argues, countless cases in history can prove that when an individual country tries to confront the prevailing international order, it is often greeted with a tragic fate.<sup>65</sup> Thus, from the Manchuria Incident, Japan had already laid a deep-rooted hint of its own near-destructive end in World War II.

### **3) From "Manchuria" to " Marco Polo Bridge. "**

The result of the Manchuria Incident was, at least on the surface, the complete consolidation of the "Manchurian special interests," which Japan had been longing for a long time. However, this event sowed the seeds of trouble for Japan's expansionist policy in several ways. In fact, due to the prolonged inability to resolve the Manchuria Incident's

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<sup>64</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. "Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任" [Verification War Responsibility]; and Sadako N. Ogata, *Defiance in Manchuria: The Making of Japanese Foreign Policy, 1931-1932* (University of California Press, 1964).

<sup>65</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

adverse effects, Japan was forced to choose the path of continued expansion to safeguard its existing privileges, which ultimately led to its self-destruction in WWII.

Initially, the establishment of Manchukuo meant that the "Continental Policy" finally became unshakable within the army. As Masayoshi Takahashi, an expert on Showa history, wrote in his book *Warlords in the Showa Period* that the Russo-Japanese War, which laid the foundation of the future development of the Japanese Army, was won on Manchurian soil by Japanese officers and soldiers fighting with blood. Due to this fact, many Army personnel had a special bonding with Manchuria, which gradually became the Army's traditional's highest policy goal.<sup>66</sup> In other words, this was a huge boost to the Army in terms of its domestic status. From another perspective, the Manchuria Incident can also be seen as a lower-ranking army officers' action to ensure this highest policy goal. According to Mamoru Shigemitsu's recollection, after the establishment of Manchukuo, the Military tried very hard to persuade the Kentai to go further and recognize Manchukuo as Japanese territory (since the Kwantung Army actually occupied the area). Yet, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted not to go that far. Although the Army gave in in the end, this was the almost the best of MOFA's policy influence, or one can argue that the Army did not stick to its stance simply because they did not care to do so.

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<sup>66</sup> Sited from Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. "Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任" [Verification War Responsibility]

In the "Continental Policy," Manchuria was only the starting point of the Japanese domination, and the final battle was to be fought between Japan and the Soviet Union. Therefore, for the final battle, Japan had to further encroach on China to accumulate war capital.<sup>67</sup> Although it was more reasonable in regular times regarding international affairs, the Navy became somewhat jealous of Manchuria's Army's success. They also found their own enemy for the "final battle": The United States. This crazy idea became increasingly popular as time went on. However, the problem was that the War Office's budget was limited due to the economic crisis and Takahashi's fiscal policy at the time.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the Army and the Navy had to be more "patriotic" for more money. This conflict of institutional interests ultimately made Japan's foreign policy crazier and crazier.

Second, the international order in the aftermath of the Manchuria Incident was becoming increasingly unfavorable for Japan. First, witlessly, Japan had given up its own privilege as a permanent member of the League of Nations, which meant that the conflict-management channel within the international institution was no more. Moreover, the most critical problem was that the United States showed evident dissatisfaction with Japan's further expansion in Asia.

After the May 15 Incident, even though civilian officials had ceded control of policy, there were still people in Japan, most notably in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who

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<sup>67</sup> Same as footnote 65.

<sup>68</sup> A more detailed analysis of "Takahashi finance" will be presented in later sections.

tried to mitigate the U.S.-Japan rancor caused by the Manchuria Incident. However, after the Army's "glorious victory in Manchuria," the career-diplomats in the MOFA could only play a marginal role. For example, after Japan withdrew from the League of Nations, *the Washington Naval Treaty* became the last insurance mechanism to maintain the post-World War I order in East Asia. It is easy to understand that such a treaty limiting Japanese naval armaments' development was undoubtedly not in the Navy's interest.<sup>69</sup> When the Five Powers met again in London in 1934 for a preliminary conference on disarmament, the Japanese navy vehemently opposed further downsizing and argued that the treaties should be abrogated as quick as it can be, but the MOFA insisted that the treaty could not be abrogated, which left a deadlock at the time.<sup>70</sup> Eventually, under a wave of domestic nationalism protest, the Japanese government unilaterally announced in 1934 that it would abrogate the *Washington Naval Treaty*, officially tearing down the East Asian order that had been promoted by the Meiji Genrō and American statesmen hand-by-hand. The hopes of both the United States and Britain that "the 'moderate faction' centered on Wakatsuki and Shidehara's team would be able to control the Military" were dashed.<sup>71</sup> Consequentially, as Shigemitsu argued, the abrogation of the Treaty would have fundamentally disturbed Chinese-centered political issues and

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<sup>69</sup> In fact, at the time the 1930 Treaty was concluded, many Japanese citizens were critical of the Treaty because they believed that the right to command their own military forces had been violated. For more details, see: Komori Yuta 小森雄太. "Seigunkankei kenkyū josetsu - Senkanki no wagakuni o jirei to shite" 政軍関係研究序説--戦間期の我が国を事例として [An Introduction to the Study of Political-Military Relations: A Case Study of Japan in the Interwar Period], *Seiji-gaku kenkyū ronshū* 政治学研究論集 29(2009): 61-72.

<sup>70</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵. *Gaikō kaisō-roku* 外交回想録 [Memoirs of a Diplomat] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun, 1978), 156.

<sup>71</sup> Sumio Hatano (Japan), "Causes and Backgrounds of the Japan-China War", translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds., *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Before the War)*.

encouraged the right-wing tendency of Japanese militarism.<sup>72</sup> The nationalist-demons unleashed by Ishiwara and others in 1931 were already gaining momentum and were beyond anyone's control.

In this context, in April 1934, Eliji Amau, the head of the Intelligence department of the MOFA, openly declared *the Amau Doctrine*, which is also known as the Asian Monroe Doctrine and an official document publicly chosen by Japan to break apart to the post-World War I order in East Asia:

*"In order to maintain peace and order in East Asia, Japan will, of course, act alone. If China resorts to tactics that are contrary to East Asia's peace by using other countries to marginalize Japan, Japan must strike".<sup>73</sup>*

Although Kōki Hirota later re-mentioned his perspective on a better Sino-Japanese relationship at a plenary session of the House of Representatives, declaring that war would never occur while he was in office, Japan's intentions on monopolizing China was treated as a given fact already. Therefore, around the time of 1935, Japan had transformed from a major participant of the post-World War I order to a revisionist power, and behind this was the Japanese military's attempt to re-establish the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," which was notably driven by far-right, nationalist ideology.

However, as we mentioned above, the Military's take-over also accompanied growing internal tensions, resulting in two opposing political factions, the Imperial Way

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. "Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任" [Verification War Responsibility]

faction, and the Tōseiha. The Imperial Way faction was mainly influenced by the ideology of Ikki Kita, who advocated respect for the Emperor, reform for the Emperor's absolute rule, and a purge of the capitalist plutocrats in Japan by force. The prominent supporters were the lower-class young officers inside the Military. On the other hand, the Tōseiha advocated a smooth and gradual reform of the country by legal procedures, followed mostly by mid-senior and people above. For quite a long time, these two fractions, even with disagreement (sometimes immensely intensified), managed to get along with each other in large until the February 26 Incident.

On February 26, 1936, the imperialist officers decided that it was now or never to save their country, leading over a thousand soldiers and carrying out a series of assassinations targeting on the senior generals and other government officials. They believed they are selected to eliminated "threat to the nation."<sup>74</sup> The list goes as follow:

- **Keisuke Okada:** Then-Prime Minister, Admiral of the Reserve, supporter of the London Treaty on the Navy and advocate of the " Mikado Organ Thought (天皇機関説)."<sup>75</sup>
- **Saionji Kinmochi:** Senator and former Prime Minister, who supported the London Naval Treaty and made the Emperor form an unqualified cabinet.
- **Makino Nobuaki:** former Minister of the Interior and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, supported the London Naval Treaty, prevented Admiral Prince

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<sup>74</sup> For more information on the February 26th Mutiny, please see: Kita Hiroaki 北博昭. Niniroku jiken zen kenshō 二・二六事件全検証 [Inspection of the 'February 26th Incident'. Asahi Shimbun] (Tōkyō: Asahi Shimbun, 2003)

<sup>75</sup> The Mikado Organ Thought basically sees the Emperor as an institution rather than a god.

Fushimi Hiroyasu from protesting the matter to the Emperor, and was a political ally of Saitō Makoto.

- **Kentaro Suzuki:** Vice-Admiral, Admiral of the Reserve, supported the London Naval Treaty and "obstructed the Emperor in the performance of his acts."
- **Saitō Makoto:** Home Minister, former Prime Minister, former Foreign Minister, retired Admiral, supported the London Naval Treaty, and was a political ally with Makino.
- **Takahashi Korekiyo:** Minister of Finance and former Prime Minister, linked to political parties to weaken the military and perpetuate the existing economic system.
- **Jōtarō Watanabe:** Replaced Manzaki as Director of Army Education and General of the Army, supported the "Mikado Organ Thought, "and refused to resign even though he was not fit for duty.

In the end, Makoto, Korekiyo, and Watanabe died in the mutiny, although in the resolute attitude of Emperor Hirohito, the Imperial Way faction's mutineers were also eliminated. Unlike several previous similarly lenient sentences handed down for the assassination of key government officials by young officers, the perpetrators of the February 26 incident were given heavy sentences. After a series of closed-door trials, a total of 19 rebel leaders were sentenced to death, and another 40 received prison sentences. The Imperial Way faction hereby stepped down from the stage of history.

However, the overall power of the military increased in Japan.

First of all, some senior officers in the army actually "approved" of high ranking party officials' assassinations by the young soldiers. They thought the only difference was that the young officers' "Showa Restoration" ideas were too extreme, but the moderate officials' assassinations (especially Takahashi Korekiyo) was a welcomed move.

Second, judging by the later development, this incident finally crushed those “uncooperative civilian officials.” On March 9, the Okada cabinet was dissolved, and a new cabinet was formed with Hiroki Hirota, Okada's Minister of Foreign Affairs, as the new prime minister, however, due to pressure from the new Minister of War, Hisaichi Terauchi, Hirota was forced to make some personnel concessions, such as choosing Hachiro Arita as Foreign Minister instead of his favored Shigeru Yoshida, who was also the first PM after the War.<sup>76</sup> The main reason for this was that, after the February 26th incident, the Japanese government restored the "active duty military attaché system" for the Minister of the Army and Navy, both of which are cabinet-level positions. Under the previous rules, these two positions had to be held by a retired general, while the restoration of the system made it possible for the active-duty officers to serve as Minister of the Army and Navy. In other words, the regulator of the Military now came from the Military itself, and whenever the Military feels uncomfortable, it could easily paralyze the government by making the Minister of War resign and refusing to send a successor to

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<sup>76</sup> Kita Hiroaki. Inspection of the 'February 26th Incident'. Asahi Shimbun. 2003. Asahi Shimbun. 2003. ISBN 9784022598219.

that position, therefore forcing a reorganization of the Cabinet. In short, the sustainability of the cabinet now entirely depends on the wills of the Imperial Headquarters.<sup>77</sup>

Third, the February 26 Incident fundamentally solve the money-problem for the Military. The Army viewed the Soviet Union as an imaginary enemy, while the Navy was aiming at the United States, and, as argued before, they did not really have enough money because Takahashi was not willing to give them whatever they want. However, as we should know, Takahashi was no longer a problem, and the debt reductionism that Takahashi had strongly supported was also dismantled. As a result, Japan's military spending increased exponentially without further obstruction from civilian politicians. Then Director of the East Asia Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote in his diary:

*"The Diet ends this day. I wonder how many people could have foreseen that the Diet would be ashamed to face the people in the future since it passed the supplementary budget of 2 billion without any detailed investigation. The constitution succumbed to the saber".*<sup>78</sup>

As a summary, up to this point, any hope left for a rejuvenation of the party-politics extinguished utterly.

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<sup>77</sup> Shillony, Ben-Ami. *Revolt in Japan: The Young Officers and the February 26, 1936 Incident*. (Princeton University Press. 1973), p206-207.

<sup>78</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

In addition to the above, another objective factor contributed to the continued growth of expansionist forces in Japan: The Great Depression that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. Actually, many scholars believed that this factor had already been reminiscing even before the Manchuria Incident because it had significantly impacted the economic benefits of Tokyo's occupation in Manchuria and further jeopardized Japan's domestic economy.<sup>79</sup> To cope with the crisis, many states, chiefly the U.S., turned to Protectionism, causing a sharp decrease in Japanese exports and agricultural products' prices, which was quite critical for Japan because most of its economy lies in agriculture and light industry.<sup>80</sup> As a result, the degenerating economic situation further highlighted the so-called need for further expansion for Japan's survival.<sup>81</sup> Besides the material impacts, the Great Depression also left a problematic thought in Japan, that is, the Western powers were facing a decline, and it was an excellent opportunity for Japan to strike. In this context, the Great Depression further agitated Japan's expansionism by

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<sup>79</sup> Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源), in Wang Chaoguang and Yu Tiejun (eds.), Sino-Japanese Joint Research Report on Historical Understanding (Before the War); Kikoshi Yoshinori, "The Doctrines Concerning the Economic Causes of the Sino-Japanese War", translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Chaoguang and Yu Tiejun (eds.), Sino-Japanese Joint Research Report on Historical Understanding (Before the War); Masaki Takahashi 高橋昌紀, *Dēta de miru taiheiyōsensō "Nihon no shippai" no shinjitsu データで見る太平洋戦争 - 「日本の失敗」の真実* [The Pacific War from data perspective - The Truth About the "Japan's Failure"] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun, 2017); \_and Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and The West Since 1750* (London: Thebodley Head, 2012). etc.

<sup>80</sup> Sumio Hatano (Japan), "Causes and Backgrounds of the Japan-China War", translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds., Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Before the War).

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the effects of the economic crisis also contributed to the Manchuria Incident on an objective level. As Shigeru Yoshida, who served as Japan's prime minister after World War II, put it: "The blow of the worldwide economic crisis made the Japanese Military Ministry bent on building 'Manchukuo,'" Shigeru Yoshida, *A Century of Agitation*, Sun Kung, Zhang Wen, World Knowledge Press, 1980, p. 36.

making people believe it was possible and necessary to move and expand the Asian values, consolidating Japan's control on its own continent.<sup>82</sup>

In light of this, a loop began to emerge: Manchuria's occupation was to secure Japan's special interests geopolitically and economically. However, even after its “obvious” success, the problem became even worse, which made many people began to believe that there was a need to further expansion and to establish a "security zone" in North China Manchuria or even gain more interest during this process. As to the China part, the increasing external pressure, objectively, faster the process of unification. The Xi'an Incident of 1936 marked a significant turning point in the inevitable conflict between Nanking and Tokyo. The Imperial HQ realized this fact, and the so-called North China autonomy (or North China secession) plan was officailly brought into the light accordingly.

In fact, the military had been brewing this idea almost right after the Manchuria Incident because this was always the primary argument of the Tsuyoshi Mitsuda.<sup>83</sup> The logic behind this was the idea of the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere."<sup>84</sup> After a series of preparations, the Japanese army began to implement the plan on May 30, 1935 formally. However, for various reasons, the Nanking government was unable to take effective countermeasures. Consequentially, the North China Separation Plan was quite

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<sup>82</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *Restless Empire: China and The West Since 1750* (London: Thebodley Head, 2012),p.250

<sup>83</sup> Tsuyoshi Mitsuta, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Towards Total War," translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun (eds.), *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War)*.

<sup>84</sup> This issue is explained later on.

resultful, especially after *the He–Umezu Agreement* and *Chin–Doihara Agreement*: Japan achieved its goal of expelling Nanking out of the North China Plain.<sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> However, the problem was that Japan's further moves in North China led to a further deterioration of its international situation.

After leaving the League of Nations, Japan also knew that it had to find allies in the international arena. If excluding the countries that were members of the League of Nations, the only options left were Germany, the United States, and the Soviet Union, which were also the main reason what this system failed in the first place because they are all de facto great powers in that time.<sup>87</sup> In this regard, there was indeed a theoretical way out for Japan. Nonetheless, the nationalist group basically shut them all down by themselves: In the army's "continental policy" - "Japan and the Soviet Union will have a war"; For the Navy, there was the "East and West always duel." Quite naturally, Japan had no choice but to move closer to Germany and to try, as far as possible, to restore relations with Britain.

However, this effort did not work as Tokyo (or at least part of Tokyo) expected. For one, Nanking was also trying to move closer with London and made more progress by

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<sup>85</sup> Yu Tiejun, Li Zhuo, "Re-Discussing the International Context of China and Japan's Approach to Total War in the 1930s," in Wang Chaoguang, Yu Tiejun, eds, *Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War)*.

<sup>86</sup> Interestingly, Ishihara, who had single-handedly concocted the Manchuria Incident, was not a proponent of continued expansion in North China (mainly because he believed it would be detrimental to his subsequent plans against the Soviet Union). However, in the face of a more "bloodthirsty" "aftermath", Ishihara, a former nationalist, was eventually "assigned" to the post of Deputy Chief of Staff of the Kwantung Army, during which time Japan had mobilized the interior of the country. of thirteen divisions.

<sup>87</sup> Sumio Hatano (Japan), "The Causes and Background of the Japan-China War"; and Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源)

successfully convincing the British government to support its currency reform and promising to peg the new currency to the British pound. The United States, fearing this could reduce its global financial influence, subsequently increased its financial support for Nanking as well.

Second, although Germany launched substantial contacts with Japan, but at that time, a vital principle of the German diplomacy in dealing with the Sino-Japanese-German triangle was to separately handle its relationship with both countries, leaving Berlin in the best possible strategic position to maneuver.<sup>88</sup> Although Japan did find a “friend,” this principle means that this friend was reluctant to further pressing China; rather, Berlin was actually relatively closer with Nanking until the total war in 1937.

Third, the Soviet Union finally began to perceive the Japanese threat in the Far East. As a result, Sino-Soviet relations began to warm up rapidly. On the other hand, Japan-Soviet relations deteriorated substantially after the signing of *the Anti-Comintern Pact* in 1936.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, and maybe most importantly, the U.S.-Japan relations were becoming irreversible at this stage. In fact, the United States was the Western power that cares about Asia at the highest degree, and Japan's continued expansion had unquestionably touched a nerve. On December 5, 1935, then-U.S. Secretary of State Cordell Hull

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<sup>88</sup> However, in the aftermath of the July 7 Incident, partly because of the changed situation in Europe, Japan and Germany came rapidly closer together. See, in particular, Yu Tiejun and Li Zhuo, "The International Context of the 1930s China-Japan Towards Total War Revisited"; and Tajima Nobuo (Japan), "The Manchurian Incident, the Japan-China War and International Relations-Centering on Relations with Germany", translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun, eds. (Pre-War Chapter)".

<sup>89</sup> In fact, there was a brief firefight between Japan and the Soviet Union in 1938. Judging by the outcome, it was not good for Japan.

condemned the "North China Autonomy Movement," trying to make a clear stance, which Japan either did not notice or just did not care.<sup>90</sup> The lapse of the *London Naval Treaty* in 1935 made it crystal clear for Americans: Rather than just thinking about it, Japan was already implementing its revisionary grand strategy in East Asia. Although the shackle of isolationism still haunted President Roosevelt, Washington began to squeeze Tokyo with an increasingly resolute attitude as times went on, which basically crushed Japan's economy bit by bit and eventually lead to the attack at Pearl Harbor.

In general, from 1933 to 1937, Japanese Foreign Ministry officials' attempts to ameliorate Japan's increasingly isolated international situation were mostly unsuccessful. Shigemitsu once recalled this period of history as follows:

*"I regret very much that Japan saved its position in East Asia, but lost its relationship with Britain, which was the only key factor in securing Japan's position in East Asia. According to Germany and Italy, relying on these two countries' power to blaze a trail forward was impossible. When the Anglo-Americans, Soviets, Jews, and Chinese would be hostile to Japan for the sake of Germany and Italy, and when Japan had established itself as the master of East Asia, Japanese politicians were about to go crazy."<sup>91</sup>*

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<sup>90</sup> Yu Tiejun, Li Zhuo, "Re-discussing the International Context of China and Japan's Approach to Total War in the 1930s(再论 1930 年代中日走向全面战争的国际背景)".

<sup>91</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵. *Gaikō kaisō-roku 外交回想録 [Memoirs of a Diplomat]* (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun,1978),194.

On June 7, 1937, Japan decided to attack Beijing, which is also known as the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. In one sentence, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident was basically attempting the Army to reproduce the Manchuria Incident in North China. The only difference was that this time it led to the total war between China and Japan. In June 1937, the Fumimaro Konoe Cabinet was formed, and a month later, on July 7, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred. It should be noted that, like the Manchuria Incident, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident itself was highly episodic and, if handled calmly, the crisis of total war could be averted.<sup>92</sup> In fact, four days later, on July 11, an armistice had been reached on the ground and was moving toward a partial settlement. However, on the same day, the Konoe Cabinet announced a statement on the further dispatch of troops to North China, igniting the escalating military confrontation. The statement said:

*"To punish the brutality of the Chinese army and urge the Nanking National Government to reflect on itself, we will now take decisive measures."<sup>93</sup>*

In the meantime, almost every independent force within China, including the Chinese Communist Party, had already reached a conclusion that they need to deal with the Japanese first before they settle their own disagreement. The Nanking government and Chiang Kai-shek became a rally-point of nearly 400 million people. At the beginning of the war, the Konoe Cabinet attempted to send secret envoys to the Nanking National Government to seek peace talks, but due to the Military's opposition (again), the attempt

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<sup>92</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

ended in vain.<sup>94</sup> In November 1938, the Konoe Cabinet issued the second Konoe Declaration, formally declaring its intention to establish a "New East Asian Order," an economic union consisting of China, Japan, and Manchukuo (Korea was already part of Japan at this point).<sup>95</sup> This move completely undermined the principle of Open-door Policy of the United States, which means the outside mitigation became hopeless as well. In this context, the total war was basically inevitable.

Interestingly enough to note, as the uncontrolled nationalism upgraded and spread, the previous right-winger like Kanji Ishiwara now became moderates, he strongly opposed a further confrontation with Nanking or a total conflict with China because he thought Japan could not afford to stretch in such a manner as the Soviet problem has not been solved yet. However, to this point, the Military was already out of reason. Lost in the idea that "the God-Empire always conquers," it led Japan on a course of unlimited expansion. Later, when Tokyo was thinking about attacking the U.S., the same thing happened again: Many people were uneasy about going to war with the United States, especially considering the attrition warfare with China was still going on. Navy Minister Koshirō Oikawa, in response to a question from Army Minister Hideki Tojo, bluntly admitted that he was not confident of victory over the United States, both of Oikawa's successor shared his idea.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Nonetheless, even in this circumstance, Japan still chose to charge. At that time, a Japanese colonel had submitted a study of the United States to the Imperial HQ, which showed that the United States produced twenty times as much steel as Japan, five times as much aviation capacity, and ten times as much war potential. In return, the Army ordered the report, and fired the officer for telling the hard truth.<sup>96</sup> Just less than five years later, Japan was utterly crushed by the U.S.-led alliance and lost decade's achievements from the Meiji period

To sum up, from the Twenty-One Demands in 1919 to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese Total War in 1937, those rational officials in Japan had been trying to curb the expansionary impulses from the Military, whereas, with May 15 and February 26 Incidents (and other domestic turmoil) as the turning points, their efforts mostly ended up with nothing. With the help of fascist theorists like Shūmei Ōkawa and Ikki Kita, the Military exploited the extreme nationalist movement, constantly seeking legitimacy for its expansionist policy, and eventually succeeded in holding the Japanese government's foreign policy hostage. As the vast majority of scholars agreed, it was only a matter of time before the Pacific War's total breakout after July 7, 1937.<sup>97</sup> The new East Asian

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<sup>96</sup> Kimitada Miwa, "Japanese Images of War with the United States", in Akira Iriye, ed., *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 125-127.

<sup>97</sup> This is widely agreed: Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); James Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy* (Princeton, N.J., 1966); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994); H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (Annapolis, Md., 1982), 68-74; Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013); 以及 Richard B. Frank, *Tower of Skulls: A History of the Asia-Pacific War, Volume I: July 1937-May 1942* (U.S. Rockville: W. W. Norton & Company, 2020); 等。

order envisioned by the Military was never more real than a fantasy if only achieved by force. As a nation and as a people, Japan was dragged into the abyss by its own obsession with expansion, which was generated by the unhindered nationalism.

## **2. Theoretical Explanations for Japan’s Self-destructive Expansion**

Why did Japan embark on a path of self-destructive expansion hotheadedly? There are four major interpretations inside the policy and academic world: the structural explanation, the domestic explanation, the “Pan-Asianism” explanation, and finally, the political-economic explanation.

### **1) The Structural Explanation**

The doctrine of "international structural determination" is a popular theory among scholars in the international relations areas (especially among realists). Kenneth Waltz, the founder of structural realism, first summarized this argument in his *Theory of International Politics* by stating that the international structures are characterized in no small extent by the balance of power between great powers and that when structures do not fit the needs of states, states make attempts to change them.<sup>98</sup> In other words, the balance of power is the very nature of international politics. With this as a starting point, many international relations scholars have applied a structuralist perspective in

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<sup>98</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (U.S., Illinois: Waveland Press, 2010).

explaining Japan's expansion policy before WWII: the fundamental reason for Japan's expansionist policy was that the international structure of the time, especially in East Asia, could not meet Japan's interests and demands.<sup>99</sup> Based on this, American scholar Snyder further elaborated on the influence of other international structure factors;<sup>100</sup> The "paper tiger" theory;<sup>101</sup> The problem of balancing and bandwagoning<sup>102</sup>; The problem of Strategic Window;<sup>103</sup> The problem of offense-defense balance;<sup>104</sup> And the problem Cumulative Gains and Losses.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>99</sup> For example, Tateishi Shinichi 立石信一. *Taiheiyōsensō no bakuhatsu gen'in — kokusai shisutemu-ron ni yoru apurōchi o chūshin ni 太平洋戦争の爆発原因—国際システム論によるアプローチを中心に* [The Causes of the Pacific War Explosion: An Approach Based on International Systems Theory], *Kokusai bunka kenkyū kiyō 国際文化研究紀要* 13(2006): 225-230; Masaki Takahashi 高橋昌紀, *Dēta de miru taiheiyōsensō “Nihon no shippai” no shinjitsu データで見る太平洋戦争 - 「日本の失敗」の真実* [The Pacific War from data perspective - The Truth About the "Japan's Failure"] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun, 2017); Teruo Kanamaru 金丸輝雄. *Wagakuni ni okeru taiheiyōsensō gen'in-ron: Sono dōkō no shōkai わが国における太平洋戦争原因論 : その動向の紹介* [The Causes of the Pacific War in Japan: An Introduction to that Trend], *Doshisha Hogaku 同志社法學* 19(1967): 61-72; Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源); Naoshi Nakatani (Japan), "Changes in the International Order in East Asia and the Response of Japan and China"; Sadao Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918-1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement ", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006); James Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy* (Princeton, N.J. 1966); Gordon Mark Berger, *Parties out of Power in Japan, 1931-1941* (Princeton N.J.); Davlbid Calleo, *The German Problem Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1978); Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919 -1941* (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013; and Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15 (Summer, 1990): 5-56 et seq.

<sup>100</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994

<sup>101</sup> The Paper-Tiger is a point first made by Chinese leader Mao Zedong that many countries are not as powerful as they appear - in other words, there is often a discrepancy between what they say and what they actually do with respect to the actions of other countries.

<sup>102</sup> Balancing and Bandwagoning is a messianic topic with the development of realist theory. Balancing refers to the state's action against other states. It has two major directions: by forming alliances or increasing their own power, which is one of the central arguments of Waltz. Bandwagoning is another possibility proposed by later scholars, which refers to the possibility that in the above-mentioned situation, a part of the country may not necessarily adopt a counterbalance but may instead choose to join it.

<sup>103</sup> The concept of Strategic Window is relatively easy to understand: When you are certain that your opponents are curbing your continued growth, the option left to you is how to deal with that trend. And it is obviously to understand it is better to strike when you have advantages.

<sup>104</sup> Offense-defense Balance is a concept developed by defensive realists, represented by Charles Glaser, which argues that in state power struggles, the offensive and the defensive power, sometimes, face inconsistent conditions, and that when the offensive side is dominant (e.g., offensive weapons are more efficient than defensive weapons), the state tends to pursue expansionary policies.

<sup>105</sup> The central idea of Cumulative Gains and Losses is that the power structure is, in most cases, dynamic, which means it is hard to determine what is the exact situation and therefore, the best option of all time is to expand your power. This is a classical offensive realist argument.

In conclusion, this type of argument believes that Japan's expansionary policy was rooted in its inability to adapt the post-World War I structure to Japan's national interest, which was a structural contradiction that could not be resolved. Consequently, the war was inevitable, and the only difference was when it broke out.

However, there are apparent gaps and problems with the Structural explanation.

First, while the realists' assertions about structuralism may be accurate at the macro level, this theoretical explanation's logic is somewhat flawed once applied to specific cases. As Snyder argues, in reality, policymakers always have a understanding that their own security can only be achieved through the expansionist policy, and there is no balance of power in the international system, nor do rival States resist when their interests are violated. This idea is quite common but quite flawed because, as Waltz himself emphasizes, most expansionist states tend to have the most enemies.<sup>106</sup> In this context, there would be a paradox for Japan's case: the international structure was destined to move Japan toward expansion, but the international structure was also destined to prevent Japan from successfully doing so. Thus, at least one part of the argument (most likely the first half) must be problematic.

Secondly, from the historical development perspective, the international structure theory is inadequate to explain why the major Powers are expanding. In most cases, the so-called structural reasons have become rhetoric to rally public opinion at home.<sup>107</sup> For

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<sup>106</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

example, although the civilian government lost control of Japan's policies after the Manchuria Incident, it had not been giving up entirely, which created a separate policy direction regarding the relationship between the international order and Japan. Under these circumstances, the structural reasons, namely the international oppression toward Japan, actually was just rhetoric formed by the extreme-nationalists to legitimize their own policies. More importantly, Japan's response to Article 21 after World War I actually showed that the structural explanation was not always accurate because Japan was quite obedient toward this so-called international oppressions under the Meiji Genros control.<sup>108</sup> This, in fact, leads to another question: No universal standards exist in judging the fitness between the structure and the state's interests. In other words, different people tend to reach different conclusions regarding the relationship between the structure and the state. The fact that the international structure does not always lead a country to an expansionary strategy or war also prove this point.<sup>109</sup> Thus, while undoubtedly influencing (in some cases decisively) a country's behavior or grand strategy, the international structure is not sufficient to explain Japan's expansionary behavior.

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<sup>108</sup> Sadao Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918-1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006); Sumio Hatano (Japan), "Causes and Background of the Japan-China War"; and Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源)" and others.

<sup>109</sup> There are many similar cases, such as the Soviet Union in Lenin's time, the United States in the 20's and 30's, and so on.

## 2) Domestic Explanations

The second explanation, which is more widespread among Western scholars, is that the reason for Japan's expansion was that the Meiji Restoration did not establish a modern democratic system in the real sense of the word, giving individual political forces within Japan (The Military) an opportunity to kidnap Japan's foreign policy, and that the expansion was, in fact, a kind of implementation of institutional wish.<sup>110</sup> This theory can be seen as a kind of reverse projection of the Democratic Peace Theory: The democratic systems are relatively difficult to expand externally because of the existence of decentralized mechanisms and the high cost of social mobilization, while the lack of checks and balances and decentralization makes it easier to gather a unified national will in authoritarian states and thus to launch an expansionist strategy.

It should be said that, on the face of it, as we showed in Chapter 1, the weak democratic government theory is convincing in explaining the expansion of Showa Japan:

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<sup>110</sup> Literature holding this view includes, for example, Komori Yuta 小森雄太. "Seigunkankei kenkyū josetsu - Senkanki no wagakuni o jirei to shite" 政軍関係研究序説--戦間期の我が国を事例として [An Introduction to the Study of Political-Military Relations: A Case Study of Japan in the Interwar Period], *Seiji-gaku kenkyū ronshū 政治学研究論集* 29(2009): 201-214; 「Kangda Fuhito 神田文人. "Manshū jihen' to Nihon no seigunkankei: Tōsui-ken to ten'nōsei" 「満州事変」と日本の政軍関係 : 統帥権と天皇制 [The 'Manchurian Incident' and Japan's Political-Military Relations: The Commander-in-Chief and the Emperor System], *Keiidaigaku kokusai kenkyū 敬愛大学国際研究* 3(1999): 1-68; Masujima Hiroshi 増島宏. *Shakai minshu shugi to gunbu fashizumu: 'Manshū jihen' o chūshin to shite 社会民主主義と軍部・ファシズム : 「満州事変」を中心として* [Social Democracy and Military-Fascism: The 'Manchurian Incident' as a Focus]. *Shakai rōdō kenkyū 社会労働研究* 17(1964): 1-59; Zang Yunhu, "On the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War". the causes of the war"; Mitsuhiro, "Changes in the Decision-Making Mechanisms of Japan and China and the Reasons for Moving Towards Total War"; 4 Sumio Hatano (Japan), "The Causes and Context of the Japan-China War"; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994); J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism (1902)*; V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916); Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919); H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (Annapolis, Md., 1982), 68-74; Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); and Michael A. Barnhart, *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919-1941* (N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013) et al.

from the Manchuria Incident onwards, the tendency for the Military to start breaking away from the control of the Japanese Cabinet is quite straightforward and distinct. After the May 15 Incident, there was no more civilian prime minister in Japan, and after the February 26 Incident, the Military largely gained the power to decide the survival of the entire cabinet. As Schumpeter had already emphasized, there was a natural link between the military and expansionary policies,<sup>111</sup> and Japan's case vividly proves that. Besides, there is also a theory arguing that expansion was based on the interests of bourgeois plunder,<sup>112</sup> and the victory of the Tōseiha in the February 26th incident seemed to prove the existence of this factor.

However, there is a problem with this explanation: why are minorities able to kidnap society as a whole? In other words, even if institutional deficiencies provide the possibility for individual groups to hijack the States' policies, this explanation does not make clear what the process or what the driving force behind the process is.<sup>113</sup>

On this basis, Snyder further offers his own explanation: the reasons for the expansion of Japan indeed lie at the level of domestic politics, whereas the real problem lies in the "Coalition Logrolling," where no single institution could unilaterally take control, and they have to compete with each other and become increasingly radical. Moreover, because of a lack of coherence, the state trapped in this situation often breeds

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<sup>111</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (1919).

<sup>112</sup> J.A Hobson, *Imperialism*(1902); *V.I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916).

<sup>113</sup> Snyder made a quite marvelous argument in this regard.

the multiplicity of political actors, increasing the difficulties of making timely stops when the risks outweigh the opportunities.

More specifically, as a late-beginner of industrialization process, Japan's inevitably had the emergence of multiple group political organizations due to its unresolved democratic revolution in a given period. Furthermore, unlike other industrial countries, Japan was quite polarized in terms of its social class distribution, namely that too few middle-class lived there. In this sense, Japan's expansion strategy was not a gamble but a choice based on helplessly domestic bargainings. Throughout the Showa era, Japan faced a far better situation than most countries in the world. The Japanese decision-makers were not wholly irrational or did not fully understand the international situation. They simply came to a wrong conclusion via rational reasoning because they had to consider, other than the international situation, their departmental interests within the Japanese government. In other words, the conflict between the Army and the Navy was the root cause. Then, the question comes as to why did this happen only in Showa Period? The answer is the disintegration of the complex set of coordination mechanisms created by the Meiji Genros used to stop the Coalition Logrolling, whereas after they gradually passed away (or be forced to do so), no one had that personal prestige anymore. On the other hand, the Military's ideological weapon also got sharpened by nationalist theorists like Ōkawa and gained more and more influence among the masses.

It should be said that, in the authors' view, Snyder's theory is one of the most outstanding works among the domestic explanations, and it does explain a lot. However, there is still room for further development of his theory.

For one thing, he does not clearly indicate the reason for the disintegration of the complex coordination mechanism created by the Meiji Genro". In other words, was the disintegration came from the desperately-need-improved mechanism or some other factors? Namely, is the seizure of power and struggle between the different military branches inevitable? In the light of this, one can make reasonable argument that the Coalition Logrolling is just a manifestation of the weak democreatic system.

Secondly, if we really dive into the history, we may found that the view that "the military is always militant" does not seem to be so accurate, which means there is a missing logical chain between "the soldier's struggle for control of policy" and "the expansion of policy." In other words, is the soldier necessarily belligerent? Alternatively, Why would Japanese soldiers choose expansionary policies to add to their domestic status? Such questions have not been adequately answered.<sup>114</sup>

Third, while Snyder's argument is relatively persuasive in the case of Showa Japan, at the higher level, the Democratic Peace Theory does not correspond to history because "democracies" do fight against "democracies." For example, the American War of Independence, the American-French Quasi-War, the Swiss Secessionist League War, the

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<sup>114</sup> In fact, Snyder touches on them in parts of the text, but it is not within the main thrust of his views in the context of the book, perhaps for the sake of theoretical brevity.

1947 Indo-Pakistani War, and the Cod War all happened between democratic countries. In fact, the rise to power of Hitler in Germany, which was also the source country of World War II along with Japan, was also by a democratic process. Therefore, at least at the macro level, the theory undoubtedly needs further development and refinement, which, in return, hurts the credibility of Snyder's argument at a certain level.

### 3) “Pan-Asianism” Explanation

This is a typical constructivist<sup>115</sup> interpretation: Japan's expansion resulted from an ideology and identity, which was widely known as "Pan-Asianism" within Japanese society. The "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity" was the actual policy projection.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, this school of thought argued that from the Meiji Restoration to the Russo-Japanese War, there was a prevailing sense of optimism growing in Japan in terms of Japan's future destiny, that was, Japan had an "obligation" to lead Asia to its

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<sup>115</sup> For constructivism, see: Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), ISBN 0-521-46960-0, and others' work.

<sup>116</sup> The majority of those who hold this view are Japanese scholars, which may be more directly related to their perceptions of Japanese society, e.g., Masuda Hiroshi 増田弘. *Manshū jihen no shōgeki 満州事変の衝撃* [The Impact of the Manchurian Incident], *Hōgaku kenkyū: Hōritsu · Seiji · Shakai 法学研究: 法律 · 政治 · 社会*, 70(1997): 151-158; Higuchi Hidemi 樋口秀実, *Nipponrikugun no Chūgoku ninshiki no hensen to 'bun Osamu gassaku shugi' 日本陸軍の中国認識の変遷と「分治合作主義」* [Changes in the Japanese Army's Perception of China and 'Bunji Kyosaku-ism', *Ajia keizai アジア経済*, (2016) 5:63-91; Tobe Ryoichi 戸部良一. *Nihonjin wa nitchūsensō o dono yō ni mite ita no ka 日本人は日中戦争をどのようにみていたのか* [How did the Japanese view the Sino-Japanese War], *GaikōShiryō-kanhō 外交史料館報*, 29(2016):1-38. In addition, a number of Western scholars have also referred to this view (though not necessarily in the same vein): Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*; David M. Gordon, "The China-Japan War, 1931-1945", *The Journal of Military History* 70 (January 2006): 137-82; and the more authoritative work on the subject: E. Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931-1945* (Springer, 2007), among others.

independence prosperity.<sup>117</sup> The problem was how to achieve this goal: Some scholars believed that Japan should join forces with China. For example, Hatsumi Ozaki argued that the "East Asian Community" theory required active cooperation from the Chinese people and advocated a better and more equal bilateral relationship between Tokyo and Nanking. Therefore the two countries could form a reciprocal alliance to boost the development of Asia in general.<sup>118</sup>

On the other hand, some believed that due to Chinese modernization's slow progress, it was impractical for two countries to cooperate equally unless Japan tries to boost this process and thereby build its dominant influence in later unified China.<sup>119</sup> This idea did not stop existing even at the end of the War,<sup>120</sup> and the Military, which later became the dominant force in Japanese policy, was a formative believer of this methodology.<sup>121</sup> However, even this divide-and-dominant strategy split after the Manchuria Incident: In 1920, when this strategy was initially introduced, one can make a reasonable argument that some part of Japan was trying to help China become a unified and modern state in their own ways, as China was still in a period of warlord-mess. However, after the Manchurian Incident, as the confrontation between Tokyo and the Nanking intensified, although China's internal process of actual unification indeed fastened, it was not done in

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<sup>117</sup> Kube, Ryoichi (2016) 'How did the Japanese view the Sino-Japanese War?', *Diplomatic Archives Bulletin*, 29, pp.1-3. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/000146806.pdf>.

<sup>118</sup> Chambers Johnson, *An Instance of Treason* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978)

<sup>120</sup> David M. Gordon, "The China-Japan War, 1931-1945", *The Journal of Military History* 70 (January 2006): 137-82; E. Hotta, *Pan-Asianism and Japan's War 1931-1945* (Springer, 2007).

<sup>121</sup> Higuchi, Hibidemi (2016), "Changes in the Japanese Army's Perception of China and 'Bunji-jochaku-ism'", *Asian Economy*, 5, pp.63-91 Institute for Asian Economics, Japan External Trade Organization

the presumed way. In other words, Japan's intervention policy was self-contradictory: it was either a more assertive and hostile China or a weak and friendly China.

In this context, Japan's divide-and-dominant policy also went "astray": The dominant part became stronger and stronger, whereas China's push-back also increased. With the series of separation movements, Japan "effectively" solved the Manchurian problem on the very surface level, making the Military more arrogant. Many Japanese soldiers, especially in the army, believed that, given the continuing instability in Chinese politics since the 1911 Revolution, the local separation was best suited to society's characteristics at that time, and that a unified leadership from Nanking could not be sustained in the long run.<sup>122</sup> Both the Separation of North China and the later Wang Jingwei-Regime can be seen as the continuation of this strategic thought.

It should be noted that, although the pursuit of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity " is indeed a possible theoretical explanation for Japan's expansionary policy at that time, it is more of a dependent variable. In other words, only a few scholars believe that it singlehandedly caused Japan's expansion. Moreover, as with all constructivist views, although they may be logically sound, once be put into the material realm, the problem of verification always existed. For example, it is difficult to ascertain whether the Japanese policymakers expressed their views on the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity " to rally domestic support or express their actual thoughts.<sup>123</sup> Finally, some scholars have astutely

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931-1945: a Critical Perspective on Japan's Role in World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978); 以及 Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition*

pointed out a question: if such a "politically incorrect" ideological viewpoint could constitute the majority in society, does it not mean that the country is institutionally deficient? Thus, even if the idea of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity" was indeed the direct cause of Japan's expansion, the explanation of a "weak democratic government" was still the real reason behind it.

#### 4) Political-Economy Explanations

Finally, there is an explanation that is very much in line with Chinese cognitive customs: The economic foundation determines the superstructure.<sup>124</sup> In this explanation, it is believed that the problem of Japan's high degree of external dependence on its economy is a real root cause of Japan's expansion. This view was a continuation of Lenin's idea that imperialism was the highest form of capitalism. However, as Yoshinori Kigoshi points out, as the theory developed and more information came in, scholars who agreed with the economic explanation gradually split into three groups.

The first focuses on the inevitability of the capitalist structure, mainly represented by Moritaro Yamada.<sup>125</sup> Yamada argued that the backwardness of the Japanese economy was the main reason for Japan's expansion.<sup>126</sup> Some researchers in the West who were

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<sup>124</sup> For a fairly detailed account of this interpretation, see: Kikoshi Yoshinori (Japan), "Various doctrines on the economic causes of the Sino-Japanese War," translated by Liu Xing, in Wang Zhaoguang and Yu Tiejun (eds.), Joint Research Report on Sino-Japanese Historical Understanding (Pre-War), Social Science Literature Press, May 2020, first edition.

<sup>125</sup> Similar literature 诸如: Moritaro Yamada, Understanding the Process of Rebirth in Analysis of Japanese Capitalism, Iwanami Shoten, 1977; Hiroshi Yoshikawa, Kosen-Growth: The Six Hundred Days that Changed Japan, Chuokoron Shinsha, 2012.

<sup>126</sup> Yamada Moritaro, Analysis of Japanese Capitalism: Understanding the Process of Rebirth in Analysis of Japanese Capitalism, Iwanami Shoten, 1977.

influenced by Marxism also agreed with this view. For example, Freda Utley put forward this view in her 1936 book *Japan's Feet of Clay* that Japan's economy was far from being modernized.<sup>127</sup> Although this book was banned by the Japanese government of the time, some Japanese intellectuals had a chance to read it and further developed the idea. The most famous of these was the "Three Rings Theory" of Nawa.

In detail, Tōichi pointed out that Japan earned foreign exchange by importing capital goods from England, and exporting them to the United States. On this basis, if Japan wanted to develop the Asian market, it had to expand its imports from Britain, and because of its need for foreign exchange, it had to increase its exports to the United States at the same time. Thus, Tōichi actually believed that if Japan wanted to expand its light industrial products in the Asian market, it would have to face the fact that its economic ties with Britain and the United States would deepen further, indicating this is a self-contradictory mission as well.<sup>128</sup> Following Tōichi, although different scholars from different countries continued to build upon this notion, they were fundamentally in the Leninist line of thinking.

In the postwar period, however, economic explanations have evolved as research has progressed further: while this part of the literature continues to argue that economic

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted by Yoshinori Kikoshi (Japan), "The Various Doctrines Concerning the Economic Causes of the Sino-Japanese War.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

causes were the underlying factor in Japan's move toward expansion, it has been divided into two types: resource-oriented and market-oriented.<sup>129</sup>

The resource-oriented argument was based on Ludendorff's idea of "Total War," which emphasized that Japan had to acquire sufficient resources in the future war situation and therefore had to expand abroad.<sup>130</sup> This coincided with the thinking of the army and the Manchuria Railway.<sup>131</sup> They envisioned an eventual confrontation with the Soviet Union that required Japan's special interests in Manchuria and the wider Chinese territory, and it was this idea that drove the escalation of the situation between China and Japan towards an all-out war.

Besides the resources-oriented argument, Kanji Ishii pointed out another direction that focused on the market space.<sup>132</sup> In this line of thinking, Japan should look to China as the primary market for its light industry, thus gradually freeing itself from its dependence on the American market. However, to do so undoubtedly requires that China and Japan maintain a stable and friendly relationship. To further exploited this view, it is necessary to understand the impact of the Great Depression on the Japanese economy.

After the booming period in and after World War I, Japan's price level did not maintain an equal, increasing proportion, hindering the big corporations from gaining

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<sup>129</sup> A comprehensive summary of the similarities and differences between the two views is provided by the Japanese scholar Ishii Kanji (Japan), *Japan's Foreign Strategy (1853-1937): the Evolution of Imperialist Thought*, translated by Zhou See, Zhou Liangliang Social Science Literature Press, 2018.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> It should be noted, however, that there were in fact two lines of how to acquire the resources as mentioned in the Pan-Asianism section, and in the Military's view, the former approach was not applicable.

<sup>132</sup> The following is a reference to Yoshinori Kikoshi's essay "The Doctrines on the Economic Causes of the Sino-Japanese War".

enough revenues and pushing the Japanese economy into a deflationary depression. The entire industrial sector was in a problematic status. In this context, the Great Depression made things even worse by further downgrading agricultural products' prices. In other words, during the 1930s, the Japanese economy was facing a complete standstill when Japan began to pin its hopes on solving its economic problems via expansion in China.

However, at that time, the civilian government did try to solve this problem from another angle, and the people at the center of this effort was Takahashi Korekiyo. His economic policy, also known today as "Takahashi Finance," which in many ways is similar to Abenomics: Devalue the yen to adjust the foreign exchange market; Issuing government bonds aggressively to solve the financing issue of big companies. By these two approaches, Takahashi's fundamental goal was to push the price level to a higher point and, after that, boost the economy. At the same time, Takahashi also launched a Keynesian approach to revive the rural economy by providing financial support to the countryside.

In terms of the result of the Takahashi Finance, although there is a difference in the perception of Takahashi himself and the reasons for his final failure, most people agree that it worked, at least to a certain extent.<sup>133</sup> Japan's industrial exports, spurred by the yen's devaluation, rose sharply and began to incline to European and American colonies, namely the Asian countries. The productivity and profitability of its firms improved dramatically as well. More importantly, through tariff protection, Japan's domestic heavy

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<sup>133</sup> Kisei Yoshinori (Japan), "The various doctrines concerning the economic causes of the Sino-Japanese War.

industry began to experience rapid growth. Urban employment was also recovering rapidly. Besides all these, the expansion of Japan's interests in Manchuria after the Manchuria Incident objectively further satisfied Japan's economic development needs. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that Japan's economy was getting better along the road Takahashi pointed out, at least in its initial stage.

Nevertheless, beginning in 1934, the limitations of Takahashi's finances began to emerge. First, the problem of inadequate supply in the Japanese labor market became increasingly apparent in 1934. The rapid rise in interest rates in 1935 further exacerbated the difficulty of obtaining capital for businesses. In other words, after Japan got rid of the past problems of overcapacity, it began to enter the stage of capacity shortage, and the money was far from meeting everyone's desires.

First of all, the Japanese economy's financial strength was not sufficient to meet the needs of the military, domestic enterprises, and investment in China at the same time. And due to the worsening international environment after the Manchuria Incident, Japan's international financing channels had been gradually blocked.

Second, the tariff barriers coming after the Great Depression were still standing, and Japanese products could not generate sufficient foreign exchange earnings in this context.

Finally, Japan's economic recovery naturally led to an expansion of imports, which resulted in further pressure on Japan's foreign exchange reserves from the perspective of expenditure.

In order to solve this problem, the Ministry of Finance chose to cut-off the increase in the Military's budget request and begun to restrict imports, which eventually led to the death of Kiyoshi Takahashi on February 26<sup>th</sup>. Easily to see, his own death was also the end of his financial reforms, and after him, the Japanese government eventually adopted a Modern Finance Theory(MMT) methodology by ordering the central bank to buy national bonds directly. Although it was still possible to solve the domestic economic problems through economic policy adjustment from the technical level until this point, the domestic political situation stopped this from happening. The money generated from the previous action all went to the military budget, which basically determined that Japan must expand militarily, otherwise, the over-issued currency would eventually tear the Japanese economy apart.<sup>134</sup>

All these political-economic explanations have gone beyond the areas of international relations theories, and therefore it may not be scientific to put them into the same matrix. However, from a more general level, what is certain is that the "economic factor" must have been influential in Japan's foreign expansion. The only question is whether it was the most crucial cause.

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<sup>134</sup> This is now the dominant explanation in Japanese economic history. See: Yoshinori Kikoshi (Japan), "The various doctrines concerning the economic causes of the Sino-Japanese War.

## 5) Summary

In summary, there are roughly four types of explanations as to why Japan expanded during the 1920-1930s: the structural explanation, the domestic explanation, the Pan-Asianism explanation, and finally, the political-economic explanation. In fact, the authors believe that all of them contributed to the process at a certain level, and it is just that scholars chose to focus on a specific aspect for the sake of argument or because of their misjudgments.

In terms of the theoretical explanatory power, if combining the "resource-oriented" economic explanation with Snyder's Coalition Logrolling explanation, we think it will be the most prominent theory in answering the question from the theoretical level: that is, in the context of worsening economic status, the lack of a proven decision-making process pushed Japan into a self-destructive road. Moreover, as the logic goes, it seems that Japan's expansionary policy was not inevitable, but rather a cumulative result of multiple (erroneous) policy choices. Nonetheless, this explanation, while maybe sufficiently explanatory for the subject, involves too many variables and therefore may not be sufficiently concise, which could also mean the explanation does have more room to go deeper.

In this context, the authors would like to propose a new explanation: Japan's external expansion was essentially a material projection of nationalism that went to extremes and

spiraled out of control. In other words, the history of Showa Japan is actually a history of how the Japanese government lost its grip on nationalism.

### **3. A New Perspective: Uncontrolled Nationalism and the Expansion of Showa Japan**

In addition to the four mainstream explanations provided above, the authors would like to propose a new explanation here: that is, Japan's expansionary policy before World War II was essentially the result of its uncontrolled nationalism.<sup>135</sup>

#### **1) Definition of Nationalism**

Before we get into the specific case of Japan, it is necessary to have a brief discussion regarding what nationalism is.

As far as the origins of nationalism are concerned, early scholars tend to view nationalism as an idea existing from the beginning of human society, focusing a lot on biological contents like genetic differences. However, in general, modern studies believe that nationalism is a product of social modernization generated during the French Revolution in the 18th century, and such a notion was closely connected with the birth of the nation-state.<sup>136</sup> In fact, since "nationalism" is an important topic that cuts across

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<sup>135</sup> It should be noted here that the author is not denying the first four explanations. As noted earlier, they all explain Japan's expansion to some extent. Rather, what I am trying to offer here is an alternative dimension of observation. Although I do believe that this explanation is more concise and explanatory for the case of Japan and, more generally, for the "Myth of Empire," it does not mean, essentially, that the four previous explanations are wrong. In the final analysis, there is no theory that can explain all reality.

<sup>136</sup> Some scholars have argued that the spread of nationalism is in fact complementary to the spread of democracy after the Enlightenment. It is precisely in the Enlightenment that the source of political power changed from the "divine right" of the past to the "civil right" based on the "social contract theory". As a kind of transfer of collective power, there is a natural link between civil rights and nationalism. It is important to point out that the question "Where does nationalism come from?" is not the subject of this paper, rather, it is to provide a basic background of the following topic, namely the problem generated by the uncontrolled nationalism. In this sense, readers interested about the nationalism itself may refer to literatures like: John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion Liberal Dreams and*

multiple disciplines, various understandings of the concept from different perspectives are generally reasonable. However, considering the case we are studying here, we believe that Mearsheimer's definition of "nationalism" fits into our category at the best level.

Specifically, Mearsheimer identified nationalism as an essential factor of a modern State.<sup>137</sup> He saw nationalism as encompassing six essential core elements: A strong collective identity, A sociocultural differentiation, A unique sense of specialness, A traceable history, A clearly defined geographic space, and, most crucially, A pursuit for self-determination and Anti-intervention.<sup>138</sup>

As the logic goes, this definition shows that the nation-state and nationalism are two different sides of the same coin: If the nation-state is the material embodiment of nationalism, nationalism is the nation-state's spiritual core. As Mearsheimer himself points out, despite these common features at the macro level, nationalism, because of the different histories, cultures, situations, and encounters, may differ in its concrete manifestations, with some showing more militant tendencies, while others are relatively peaceful.<sup>139</sup> However, no matter how different the individual case may be, some certainties remain the same in almost every case. First, nationalism is all about achieving

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*International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018); Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-Ce Qu'une Nation? (What Is a Nation?)* (Toronto: Tapir Press, 1996), English translation: [http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What\\_is\\_a\\_Nation.pdf](http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf) ; Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2003)); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016). and others.

<sup>137</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

national interests, and second, self-determination is a shared interest for every state. In the modern world, we usually named this shared pursuit as sovereignty.

In addition to this already concise argument, one thing we need to add to the definition of nationalism is that if we look around the history of political thoughts, we will notice that, in practical terms, the sources of the legitimacy of political authority can be separated into three stages: Divine – Monarchical – Democratic. More importantly, this is a dispersive process: The god is the one and only; Kings are powerful but not entirely mutual-exclusive, and the people is a collective body of a massive number of individuals. In this context, nationalism began to step in when kings decided to stop following orders from the Church and met its peak in the French Revolution when the Social Contract theory emerged.

In the light of this, one thing needs to be noted is that Europe did not have a similar, long-time centralism period like China because kings (or emperors) are not an independent and rightful ruler, at least not like they did in China. In the beginning, they need bless from the above, and when they get away from the Church, they did not really find an alternative source of legitimacy. Of course, realist scholars like Machiavelli tried to fill the vacancy by portraying the kings as the symbol of the state itself (and some of them succussed), whereas the wave of the democratic did not leave so much time for the kings. This new school of thought were quite different from previous ideas because the source of the political authority became a collective body and a dynamic process: By

bonding a social contract, the mass transferred parts of their given rights to certain political entities, and therefore the people are the owner of the state.<sup>140</sup>

Interestingly enough, the birth of democratic theory gave a significant boost to the development of nationalism and nation-state and led Europe in to the real peak of nationalism and form a new world.<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, both the democratic and nationalistic movement shared a common process: Moving from the bottom to the top, from decentralization to concentration.

Historically, this tendency to centralization can be observed almost everywhere, including the French Revolution, the Anti-colonial movement, and even the communist revolutions: First, people feel unhappy about something, then they formed various groups and later evolved into fewer but larger groups with certain leaders. In other words, nationalism is rooted in the mass in its origin, which makes it quite comprehensive in terms of specific topics it involves. Therefore, as a thought and a movement, nationalism can be influential to states' policies in almost every possible domain. Nevertheless, the problem is that the group rationality is not really reliable, and the efficiency urges for centralization, which made that, in most (successful) cases, the influence of nationalism is exercised through "political spokesmen" or "political parties," namely representative

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<sup>140</sup> Readers interested about this could try books like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*.

<sup>141</sup> In this respect, the Soviet Union's "Communist International" was the only exception. Soviet-style communism was an absolute "internationalism," as her name, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, implied, and it was not a single nationalism or "paradigm" that united the Soviets. In contrast, China's "Localized Marxism" is more of a combination of Chinese nationalism and the Marxism. In fact, the disconnect between "communism" and "nationalism" was one of the main reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper. Interested readers may refer to: Xiong Lili, Pan Yu, "The Ukrainian dilemma: Continuity and rupture in Russian diplomacy", *Foreign Affairs Review*, 2015, v.32; No.147(02) 123-137.

system. Up to this point, the democratic movement and the nationalism find their sweet spot, and most successful democratic countries fit into this category.

Nonetheless, there are also cases where the movement failed to achieve centralization and end up with anarchy.<sup>142</sup> This leads us to the next question: what is an uncontrolled nationalism?

## 2) Nationalism out of Control

As noted earlier, nationalism is, for the most part, an argument generated from the below, and its influence on policy often takes the form of a representative system or a more radical form of revolution. In fact, even amid the revolution itself, nationalist forces need a leading mechanism as well. At least until today, fully egalitarian is still impractical and cannot really adapt to the objective needs. This indicated one interesting fact: Nationalism, even though it can be interpreted as a type of populism in its nature and accordingly represented a relatively low level of rationality, still requires a hierarchical organizational structure in order to thrive and become really influential to the policymaking process. In other words, nationalist forces will produce elites eventually, who are typically described by a historian as great leaders.

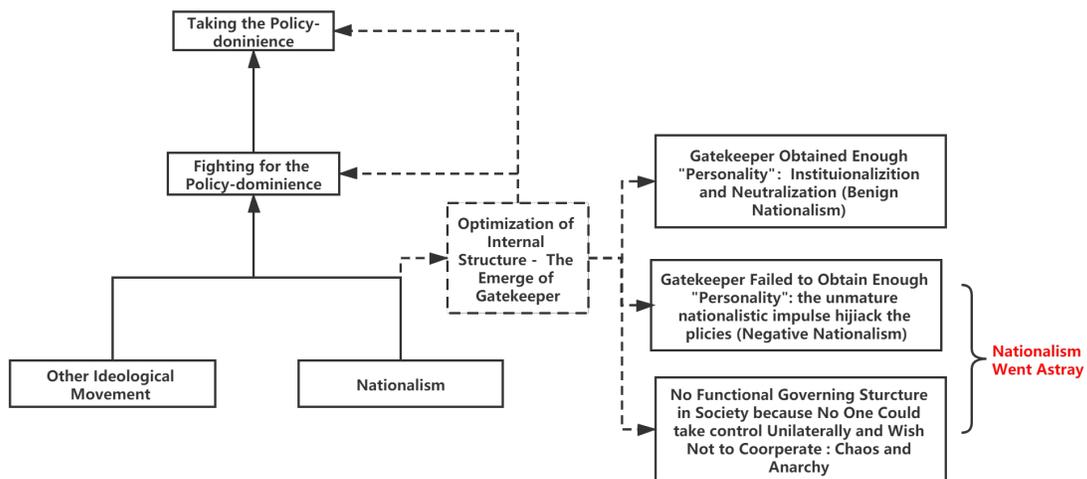
However, as these elites becoming increasingly politically-powerful and institutionalized, their eyes and minds also expand. They began to realize that the real

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<sup>142</sup> Developments in the later stages of the French Revolution are a prime example.

world is not as simple as they previously deemed. As a result, the outside observers may find these nationalist elites becoming increasingly moderate. The most recent case is the former U.S. President Barack Obama, who started from a (sorts of) anti-establishment figure and ended up as a hardcore supporter of the policy-establishment.

**Figure 1: How Did Nationalism (or any other social movement) Evolve?**



In the light of this, this paper argues that uncontrolled nationalism can actually take two different forms: the first one is that the nationalist forces did not form an effective and hierarchical organizational structure in the process of the pursuit of the policymaking influence, and the society then entered into the stage of anarchy. The immediate manifestation of this situation is the prolonged lack of political stability and the inability to carry out functional governance. In this regard, the late period of the French Revolution and the Cultural Revolution in China are the most typical cases.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> Of course, the Cultural Revolution was not driven by a purely nationalist ideology.

The second way is more common: Nationalist force found their representatives in the highest level, whereas these elites failed to identify the irrationality of its bases or unable to perform as the gatekeeper because of political interests,<sup>144</sup> making the states' policy into a direct projection of nationalist demands. In this regard, they simply became the "mouthpieces" of their bases. The most recent and famous case may be the previous U.S. President Donald Trump.

In this context, the case of Showa Japan is a typical example of the second form of "uncontrolled nationalism." In the following sections, six essential points<sup>145</sup> in Japanese history before World War II are selected to show how the top echelon of the Japanese government was gradually transformed from the balancing force (Menji Genros) into a mouthpiece for far-right nationalist forces (The military-controlled cabinet), and thereafter lead Japan into a self-destructive expansionist road.

Before we start, it should be noted again that the uncontrolled nationalism theory proposed in this paper is not mutually exclusive from the previous explanation of why Showa Japan was expanding. For example, Snyder's brilliant work, actually, can be seen as a verification of our theory in the relatively micro-level. The explanation in this paper

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<sup>144</sup> The theory of gatekeeping, or "gatekeeper", was originally born in communication science and originated with the psychologist Kurt Lewin's construction of the term "gatekeeper", which was followed by D. M. White's work. It extends the concept of "gatekeeper behavior". In a narrower sense, the theory is that the news media obtain a large amount of information from sources, and then the process is edited and censored. The selection of information is based on the "gatekeepers" themselves. This refers to the screening and elimination of "undesirable content" by the political elite in the process of forming national policy.

<sup>145</sup> The Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, the Paris Peace Conference, and the Washington Conference, the September 18th Incident, the July 7th Incident, and the Pearl Harbor attack.

is, to some extent, an abstract expression of the previous theoretical explanation, and the reader needs to have a clear understanding to really grasp the essence.

### **3) Japan's Expansion in the Lens of the Uncontrolled Nationalism"**

In the first chapter, we have already outlined the history of Japan's expansion from the end of World War I to the total breakout of the Sino Japanese War. However, for the sake of argument, we think it is necessary to lengthen the historical span a bit more, so that the reader can better understand what was happening during that period.

Before getting into this section, we would like to point out one thing in particular: from the great discoveries of geography to the founding of the United Nations after World War II, the act of "external expansion" as an objective policy option did not have the same sense of "original sin" as it does today. If we go back even further in history, from Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar in the West to the great emperors in China, it was those great conquerors who left their mark on human history, despite their achievements were primarily a successful result of expansionary policies.

However, the catastrophic results of the two world wars and development of humanization in moral areas eventually brought us into a more stable and civilized world as we know it. Therefore, we need to understand that the expansionist policy did not have original sin as an objective policy option during the timeframe we are discussing.. On this

basis, for the purpose of objective research (i.e., leaving aside subjective factors such as ethnicity and ideology), Japan's expansionist policy after the Meiji Restoration cannot be unilaterally described as an "evil act of imperialism." Understanding this point is a fundamental prerequisite for understanding the phenomenon of uncontrolled nationalism in Japan.

### **i. The First Sino-Japanese War (1894-95)**

The Sino-Japanese War in 1894 was Japan's first try in terms of foreign expansion after the Meiji Restoration. However, unlike Japan's expansion in the 1930s, the Sino-Japanese War was, at least to a certain extent, a decision based on a rational calculation rather than a naive impulse. During the war, Tokyo also had a better understanding of the status they were facing. The blind optimism had not yet emerged. More importantly, judging from the results, although it marked as an essential starting point of the bitter fate of China and Korea in modern times, the Sino-Japanese War was largely positive for Japan at that time.

In detail, Tokyo, actually, was not as assertive about the result before the outbreak of war. There had been a voice in Japan arguing about the potential risk of going to war with China, which had been Japan's teacher for hundreds of years. Even Emperor Meiji himself was hesitant about going to war with China.<sup>146</sup> However, as the war progressed

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<sup>146</sup> S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perception, Power, and Primacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

smoothly, public opinion in Japan began to change. Furthermore, during this process, the mass began to form a sense of Japan as a nation, and, by the around-the-clock propaganda from the authorities regarding their glorious victories, the significance of citizenship was also recognized gradually. Japanese people began to realize that they are a part of something greater than themselves and it was a duty to support the government regardless of their social class. In other words, this was the beginning of the formation of the Japanese identity. The Emperor, who was the army commander, played a very active role in this integration process. Therefore, if we treat the Meiji Restoration as the beginning of modern Japan and the outset of its nationalism, the Sino-Japanese War was the first time in modern Japanese history that nationalism was consolidated in Japan.

However, the Japanese political elite at that time clearly still had their sense, knowing that although the Qing Dynasty was no longer a great power, it was still too big for Japan to digest immediately. In this regard, what they they could and should do was to maximize the Japanese war profits under the existing conditions.<sup>147</sup> In other words, the Japanese government's focus on the outcome of the war was to ensure the existing results while avoiding adverse international reactions.<sup>148</sup> In the negotiation process, because Japan has deciphered the code that Li Hongzhang used to communicate with Beijing, Itō Hirobumi was aware that the maximum-payment that Beijing could afford was 200 million taels of silver from the early stage, which gave him reliable intelligence support

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<sup>147</sup> Mutsu Munemitsu (Japan), *Diplomatic Secrets of the Sino-Japanese War (in Chinese, translated by Chen Pengren)* (Taipei: Straits Scholarship, May 2005.).

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.* at 152.

and helped him to maintain its stance quite firmly<sup>149</sup> This clearly reflects the control of the Meiji Genros over Japanese policy at the time because they only wanted what they can get. Furthermore, we can also observe the same attitude from how Tokyo handled the later international intervention regarding the Liaodong Peninsula, which should be ceded to Japan based on the negotiation result.

To put some historical context first, since the Second Opium War, Russia had been obsessed with the territories in the Far East and occupied quite a big chunk of the Qing Empire, including Outer Manchuria and Sakhalin Island. St.Petersburg also began to build a railway in these lands, trying to establish its own perimeter of influence in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula. In this context, the clause in the Treaty of Shimonoseki regarding the ceding the Liaodong Peninsula almost directly placed Japan in opposition to Russia. Germany and France, due to their own geopolitical needs, choose to join the course with Russia. As a result, on April 23, 1895, these three countries sent a formal notice to the Japanese government, demanding that Japan must give up the Liaodong Peninsula and giving a deadline of 15 days to reply. In the meantime, they began to prepare their battlefleets in case Tokyo did not get the message. It was crystal clear that Japan was not the match of any of these three countries, let alone a coalition of all.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Qi Qizhang, *History of the Sino-Japanese War(甲午战争史)* (Shanghai People's Publishing House, May 2014) .

<sup>150</sup> S. C. M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Perception, Power, and Primacy* (CambrIbidge: CambrIbidge University Press, 2003).

However, as a newly emerge industrialized country, Japan desperately need these lands, which made Tokyo not willing to compromise instantly. On April 30, Japan offered to occupy only the Port Arthur and the Port of Dalian, plus some reparations. Sadly, this Russian-led coalition basically has no intention in any type of bargaining. Under these circumstances, the Japanese government once hoped that Britain would intervene to mediate, but the British government, while declaring its neutrality, "suggested" that Japan accept the demands. Up to this point, the decision had to be made on whether to accept the humiliating demands from these European colonials. Considering Japan had just achieved a great victory on the battlefield, such concession was not an easy decision.

Interestingly, in this situation, Hirobumi, who was the original architect of the Sino-Japanese War, became a grand peacemaker.<sup>151</sup> Under his leadership, Japan accepted the terms of the three countries, but at the same time, Tokyo brutally blackmailed another 30 million taels of silver from the Qing government as the "redemption fee." This apparent "change" of Hirobumi showed that he was neither a fanatical warmonger nor a "cowardly" pacifist. What guided his behavior was the pursuit of maximizing Japan's interests after rational calculation and analysis.

In light of this, although the victory in the Sino-Japanese War greatly stimulated the nationalist sentiment in Japan, and the warrior class, which had continuously been declining since the Southwest War, regained the respect and support of the Japanese

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

people. More crucially, judging from the result of the way of handling policy options of the Meiji Genros, the Japanese political elite at that time had a considerable degree of control over Japanese policy, fulfilling their rules as the functional gatekeepers. All these combined, the Sino-Japanese War was undoubtedly a very successful expansionist policy practise for Japan, despite the fact that Japan had to give up some of its vested interests due to outside interventions.

## **ii. The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905)**

If the defeat of the faltering Qing Empire was just a warm-up of the fruit of the Japanese Restoration, The Russo-Japanese War really put Japan on the same level with the West. This war significantly enhanced Japan's international prestige. On the other hand, it also created a dangerous environment for the thrive of the extreme nationalist forces within Japan. Fortanetely for Japan, on the whole, such forces remained in the control of the political elite during this period.

As mentioned above, it was clear that Russia and Japan had a conflict of interests in Manchuria, and the seed of clash already been planted when Japan had to give up what they obtained by force after the First Sino-Japanese War. For some parts of Japan, the war with Russia became a matter of time since then, making Japan far better prepared when the time actually came. More than 80 percent of the enormous reparations brought

about by the Treaty of Shimonoseki were spent on the armaments.<sup>152</sup> From Japan's perspective, this preparation work has both similarities and differences with the Separation of North China after the Manchuria Incident. The similarity is both of them were, to a certain extent, preventive work to secure the vested interests. Nonetheless, the difference is more significant for the scope of this report, and the most critical point here is that Russia, indeed, was on the way of Japan's pursuit to become a great power, whereas it was difficult to imagine that Japan's special interests in Manchuria would be substantially threatened by China in the foreseeable future, as long as Japan did not initiate the North China secession and the subsequent the attack toward Beijing.

Besides, there was another contributing factor to the growing tension between Russia and Japan. The defeated Qing court was hoping to use Russia to contain Japan via its so-called "open door" policy. Russia was more than just cooperative for this initiative. During the Siege of the International Legations, Tsar Nicholas II sent more than 180,000 Russian troops and effectively occupied Manchuria.<sup>153</sup> For Japan, this move largely sealed off any possibility of further Japanese expansion, materially or immaterially, into the continent. In other words, Japan's situation was not as promising as it did in 1936 because Russia was far more potent than the Qing Dynasty or later KMT government, and it was literally aggressive toward Japan.

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<sup>152</sup> Qi Qizhang, *History of the Sino-Japanese War*.

<sup>153</sup> Jukes Geoffrey, *The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905* (London: Osprey 2002).

However, unlike the Pacific War, the Japanese government at that time was well-informed about the status they were facing and was actually quite well prepared for a possible war between Japan and Russia.<sup>154</sup>

First, under the leadership of Katsura Tarō, another Meiji Genro, Tokyo succeeded in concluding an alliance with Britain on equal terms in 1902. Since the Napoleonic Wars, this was one of the few times that the “Empire on Which the Sun Never Sets” broke its “glorious isolation.” Taking this as an opportunity, Japan then deposited the vast majority of its gold reserves in London, and half of them were invested in British government bonds or other financial products of the Bank of England.<sup>155</sup> In exchange, London promised that it would provide full support for Japan in a future Russo-Japanese conflict.

Second, Japan's military preparations were clearly more solid. According to statistics, Russia, because of its constant military focus on Europe, had only 98,000 regular troops in the Far East, and the Pacific Fleet had about 60 warships. On the other hand, the Japanese army had 375,000 personnel, equipped with mountain gun specially designed for the local environment.<sup>156</sup> The Japanese navy had a total of 80 warships.<sup>157</sup> Although Japan was unable to compete with Russia in terms of overall strength, Tokyo clearly did its homework in a better fashion, and its meticulous preparations ultimately got paid off.

After successive defeats in battle against Japan, the domestic discontent against Tsar finally break out in January 1905. Interestingly enough, Japan even took the opportunity

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Yegang Akihiko, "Modern British Economic History", Iwanami Shuten, 1981.

<sup>156</sup> Jukes Geoffrey, *The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905* (London: Osprey 2002).

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

to send spies into Russia to incite the Bolsheviks to revolutionary activity, making it very difficult for Russia to keep fighting. Adding all together, Russia began to show signals for peace, and Japan's response once again showed the rational considerations of the Japanese government of the time in its decision-making process.

In detail, although Japan won most of the battles of the war, the country's finances were actually overwhelmed by the 1.7 billion yen in military expenditures, almost all of which had been financed through wartime national debt. Of the total manpower of 1,090,000 in Japan, the standing army was close to 200,000, leaving a severe shortage of labour for various industries and plunging the economy into the doldrums.

In this context, with Katsura at its core, the Japanese cabinet had an explicit knowledge that the war was becoming increasingly unsustainable for Japan as well. More importantly, they succeeded in controlling the military's impulse to attack further after the peace proposal was put forward. This time, Washington finally decided to step in as a mediator on August 10, 1905, and a peace agreement was reached on September 5.

However, in contrast to the Japanese people's generally positive attitude after the Sino-Japanese War, the nationalist forces in Japan were less obedient this time already. Dissatisfied with *the Portsmouth Peace Treaty*, on September 3, 1905, rallies opposing the peace treaty and demanding a continuation of the war appeared throughout the country. The severest one happened in Osaka City Guild Hall, which later developed into attacks on governmental facilities and irrelevant properties like the Orthodox branch in Japan, which, arguably had deep ties to Russia. However, compared to the May 15 or

February 26 incidents that followed, the Japanese government had a more precise grasp of the situation: on September 6, Tokyo imposed emergency martial law and then quelled the riots with iron-fist. During the riot, the Japanese government detained more than 2,000 people, 87 of whom were convicted.<sup>158</sup> Last but not least, the incident did not further contribute to the growth of nationalist forces in Japan. On the contrary, this incident made the Meiji Genros realize the "people" 's power and became a vital contributing factor to later "Taisho democracy." In this genuinely good ambiance, Japan officially became one of Asia's significant geopolitical players after the Great War happened ten years after.

### **iii. The Versailles-Washington System, the Manchuria Incident, and the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.**

This period's history has already been presented in relative detail in Chapter 1, so we will not repeat ourselves here. Instead, we like to focus only on the out-of-control trajectory of nationalism in these events.

First, as noted before, it was more than clear that the Kentai gradually lost its control over the far-right nationalist groups within the Military as its primary agent in the three historical events mentioned above. At the Paris Peace Conference after World War I and the subsequent Washington Conference, despite persistent domestic opposition, especially among young naval officers regarding the provisions limiting Japanese naval

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<sup>158</sup> Jukes Geoffrey, *The Russo-Japanese War 1904-1905* (London: Osprey 2002).

armaments, cooperating with each other, the navy's top leadership and the cabinet succeeded in controlling this trend.<sup>159</sup> In this regard, at least in the initial few years following the end of World War I, the military and civilian officials in the cabinet could still act as "gatekeepers" to coordinate a reasonable and functional policy. Of course, it was also during this period that nationalist trends in Japan began to be systematized. Via works from far-right theorists like Shūmei Ōkawa, nationalist ideas became more concrete and transmissible in Japan. The May 15 and the February 26th incidents were, in fact, the direct products of this process.

In this context, the most significant turning point was the Manchuria Incident: the fact that "junior officers took it upon themselves to blackmail the government and eventually succeeded" tells a vivid story itself. However, objectively speaking, the political elite in Japan at the time did not completely give up yet and were still trying to control the situation, while by the time of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, we can hardly observe any material resistance from those reasonable forces anymore. The far-right nationalist groups represented by the military had utterly controlled the policy direction of Japan.

Secondly, to understand the trajectory of uncontrolled nationalist forces in Japan, another important question is: Why did the "gatekeepers" of Japan fail its mission? In this regard, all four explanations presented in Chapter 2 made contributions, and Snyder's

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<sup>159</sup> Sadao Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918-1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement", *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (April 2006).

argument, in our opinion, is the most convincing one.<sup>160</sup> <sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, there is a deeper level regarding this question, namely, is nationalism necessarily at risk of spiraling out of control? In the light of this, if the four reasons as mentioned above explain "why the Japanese government of the time was unable to control nationalism," what we want to discuss is "if, without intervention, the nationalism was bound to overstep and go out of control." To answer this question, we still need to start with the definition of nationalism.

As mentioned earlier, nationalism, with the pursuit of self-determination as its central spiritual core, is a set of ideas that generally is primitive and irrational. It is essentially an "anti-intervention" pursuit regarding self-determination, namely the right to decide one's own fate within defined geographic boundaries. It usually includes two necessary parts: The right to survival and the right to development.<sup>162</sup> Thus, if the core of nationalism can be expressed in one sentence, it is "the right of a group of people to live and develop according to its own will in a certain place." This is also why we argued that nationalism is just the other side of the nation-state because the right to survival and development is, in fact, the core interest of every nation-state.

However, the crux of the matter is that the interests pursued by nationalists have a boundary, and there is hardly a simple standard in term of how or where the line should

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<sup>160</sup> Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

<sup>161</sup> This is why I have repeatedly emphasized that "nationalism out of control" does not contradict the four explanations given above.

<sup>162</sup> The reader can see that this is quite consistent with the spiritual core of democratic enlightenment thought. The difference lies in the fact that democratic enlightenment thought is directed at the individual, while nationalism is directed at the collective. This is an important reason why many analyses consider nationalism and democracy to go hand in hand.

be drawn as this is a result of individual rationality and it is nearly impossible to get everyone on board with a consensus. Even taking the most quantifiable geographical boundaries as an example, in today's world, although the survival of a nation-states have become genuinely secured (as long as it was recognized) and the inviolability of sovereign territory has become an important international norm, it was just a recent story from the founding of the United Nation, which only took a tiny part of the human history in general. On a more macroscopic time scale, there is no guarantee that these current norms or rules will always remain as the same in the future. Further, even in contemporary times, there are still numerous cases of territorial disputes between states, and in most cases, both sides had a reasonable argument. In this regard, it is crystal clear that a cognitive dissonance among individuals regarding the delimitation of the "boundaries" of the interests pursued by nationalism is nearly destined. Moreover, this cognitive dissonance leaves room and possibility for the expansion of nationalism.

More importantly, if serving as a foreign policy guidance, nationalism is not so functional in most cases. The phenomenon of the "unreliability of group rationality" has been demonstrated in many documents.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, as classical realists have stressed, power-defined interests are an instinctive pursuit that people often do not know where to stop.<sup>164</sup> Combining the two factors means that nationalists tend to define the boundaries

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<sup>163</sup> The most classic texts in this area are: Gustave Le Pen, "The rabble - a study of the psychology of the masses", translated by Feng Klee, Central Compilation and Translation Press, May 2011, and Wilhelm Reich, "The psychology of the fascist masses", translated by Zhang Feng, Chongqing Press, August 1990.

<sup>164</sup> i.e., Hans J.Morgenthau, and Kenneth W. Thompson. *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers, 2014.)

of (national) state interests beyond what they should be, pursuing those interests that exceed the boundaries, which will, as Waltz argued, lead to inevitable counterbalance.<sup>165</sup>

To a large extent, therefore, there is a natural tendency for nationalism to be expansive in its pursuit of national interests, which is a neutral phenomenon in the first place. However, because nationalism is a group-based ideology that is not always rational, this tendency is dangerous sometimes because it will go after things that cannot be achieved and end up with balancing actions accordingly. To be noted, we do not believe the irrationality of a group is unchangeable because if the individuals in the group can become more rational, so will the group itself, in which case the nationalism will also upgrade from its pristine stage. In fact, this is why contemporary societies (especially in developed countries) are becoming more “civilized” and smarter. Their nationalism is becoming more positive (in general) and less hostile as their citizens are becoming increasingly educated.

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<sup>165</sup> Waltz., *Theory of International Politics*.

Figure 2: Why Did Japan Choose to Expand?

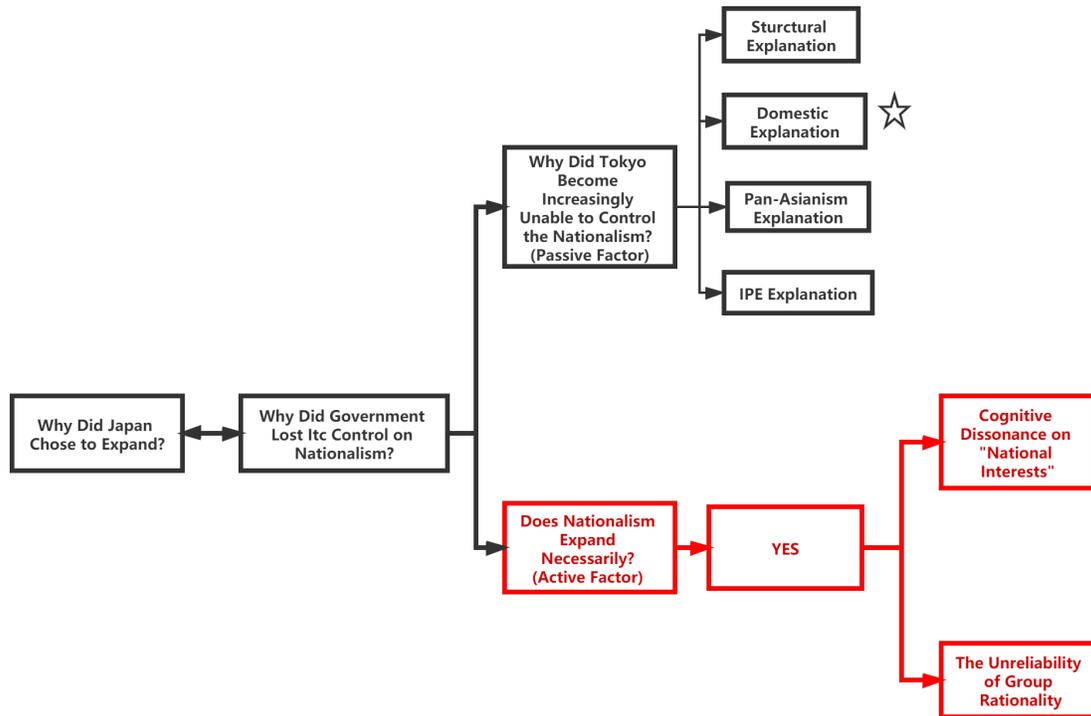


Figure 1: The red section focuses on this paper's discussion, i.e., innovation at the theoretical level.

#### iv. The Pearl Harbor

As mentioned earlier, for Japan at that time, the total war with China also indicated the certainty of a war with the U.S. as the uncontrolled nationalism pushed Japan to seek interests that are constitutionally unachievable. Tokyo had to keep stretching itself to protect the vested fruits. Therefore, Pearl Harbor was, actually, not so different in essence from the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, except Japan was facing the most powerful state this time. However, the blind optimism in Japan, which was already frenzied at the time, allows us to skim the surface of how far Japan's extreme nationalism had developed. It is

recorded that on the same day the Combined Fleet attacked Pearl Harbor, former Japanese Prime Minister Konoe Fumina said to his son-in-law, Morisada Hosokawa:

*"This war will be lost. How it will be lost, you will study it later. Doing this research is a politician's task".<sup>166</sup>*

Despite the initial Japanese victory, Konoe's thoughts did not change. As his friend and former Railway Minister Nobuya Uchida recalled, Konoe once asserted that:

*"Just as Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto had foreseen, such a success would not last a year." <sup>167</sup>*

More importantly, Konoe was not alone in this pessimistic attitude. Prince Naruhiko Higashikuni, a member of the Imperial Family, also advised then-Prime Minister Hideki Tojo:

*"It is expected that Singapore will soon fall as well. ....Negotiations should be held with the Chiang Kai-shek regime, and peace work should be started with Britain and the United States as well. This war must be ended as soon as possible".<sup>168</sup>*

Unfortunately for Japan, Tojo was basically in a completely alternative universe at the time. He arrogantly replied:

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<sup>166</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun 読売新聞社. “Kenshō sensō sekinin 検証戦争責任” [Verification War Responsibility]

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

*"At this rate, it would be easy to capture Australia, not to mention Java and Sumatra.*

*No peace should be considered at this period".*<sup>169</sup>

In a speech to the Diet in January 1943, Tojo went on to say:

*"Any words or deeds that may undermine domestic unity must be completely suppressed."*<sup>170</sup>

At the same time, the Allies had just won the Battle of Guadalcanal, establishing their absolute control of the sea and air space in the Pacific theater. Even as late as 1945, when Japan basically lost all of its maritime colonies, there are still people in the cabinet who believed that "we must do everything possible to create opportunities, and we must hurry to steer the war towards peace talks with Britain and the United States in an equal term."<sup>171</sup>

Besides, as the Tokyo kept trapping in a alternative world, the domestic control over the information transportation became more severe. After the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, the military-controlled government began to launch an information-control in the country: whenever there was a victory, the newspapers were overwhelmed with articles of praise, while negative news was hard to find. Considering the fascist ideology is totalitarian in nature, information regulation toward the mass is

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

somehow understandable, whereas such phenomenon even spread to the intelligence community, which was supposed to tell the truth regardless how bad it might be.

On the day of the war between Japan and the United States, the Cabinet Intelligence Bureau instructed that it was forbidden to publish any war reports other than those from the Imperial HQ.<sup>172</sup> According to Mamoru Shigemitsu, after he took the job as ambassador to Britain, British Foreign Minister Halifax once showed him this telegram from a British officer in Tokyo.

*" .....Britain is now on the verge of extinction, so it is not even in Japan's eyes. Japan's Foreign Ministry is so weak and ineffective that it does not represent Japan's true strength at all. The Japanese Army can now truly represent Japan's strength. The British side must respect this demand..... ”*<sup>173</sup>

Shigemitsu was basically shocked and embarrassed, whereas as a career diplomat, he had to explain that this narrative does not indicate Tokyo's official policy, which he knew was not entirely accurate. The MOFA was still trying to rebuild the relationship between Japan and the UK. However, after the formal formation of the Axis powers, the Japanese Government even dismissed many MOFA-affiliated personals and facilities, declaring that they were unnecessarily spending public money, urging these embassies needed to save as much as possible on telegraphic expenses.<sup>174</sup> From these cases, it is not difficult

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Shigemitsu Mamoru 重光葵. Gaikō kaisō-roku 外交回想録 [Memoirs of a Diplomat] (Tōkyō: Mainichi Shimbun,1978), 211.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. at p223.

to see that even the military's top leadership had been trapped in a kind of "madness" as the nationalist inside the Military constantly proliferated. Commenting on the prospect of war between Japan and the United States and Japan's Fight to support war strategy, many analysts made extensive feasibility calculations, and most of them agreed that Japan's expansion strategy would ultimately fail. However, none of these lower to middle-level analysts, who still had a basic understanding of the situation, ultimately escaped the fate of dismissal.

## 4. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

In conclusion, this paper argues that Japan's expansion prior to World War II was essentially the result of uncontrolled nationalism in Japan's material manifestations. All of the four mainstream explanations of why this phenomenon occurred have some degree of accuracy, of which Snyder's view that the Navy and the Army were increasingly extreme in their struggle for policy dominance has the most substantial explanatory power.

However, this paper also argues that the four existing explanations can actually be included in the framework of the "uncontrolled nationalism" theory. In other words, they are not comprehensive because these four explanations primarily focused on the objective side of the question, namely, why did Japan fail to prevent the nationalist force from stepping out of control. However, on the subjective side, the question of whether nationalism inevitably expands without external interference and leads to expansionist policies is not explained.

In this regard, this paper argues that due to nationalism's characteristics in its nature, there does exist a natural tendency to expand in the process of nationalism's development, that is, the nationalist group always goes for those interests beyond the scope. The main reason for this phenomenon is the cognitive dissonance of nationalists in defining the boundaries of national interests and the unreliability of group rationality. When such

currents are not reasonably controlled and eventually hold the state's policy hostage, the state tends to embark on a path of self-destructive expansion. Japan before the Second World War was the most typical case.

It should be noted that, although this paper is directly concerned with pre-World War II Japan, We believe that, in a broader context, the judgment that "uncontrolled nationalism will lead to irrational expansion" is equally applicable on a broader level. For example, although the pattern of uncontrolled nationalism is different, the case of the Third Reich, which was also the source country of World War II, is also in line with this judgment. Future research could focus on this area.

Another potential shortage of this report is that we did not elaborate on the actual process regarding how nationalism developed in Japan in a very detailed manner. The main reason for this is that we believe it will somehow hurt this report's conciseness and the limitation in time and resources. However, we do think this process is of great value. As we briefly touched on this issue, even though the core of nationalism is largely the same, its actual manifestation is unique in almost every case. In this regard, how does the different nationalist idea interact with each other? Does the rapid development of technology change the course of nationalism? Why did the United States, as the most powerful state in the world today, keep spinning in its populism movement? These are all great topics for future studies as well.

At the policy level, we first want to put an undeniable truth that even after 75 years since the end of the World War II, we are still in the era of nation-state, which remain as

the main actor in international relations, meaning that the "risk of uncontrolled nationalism" is still relevant today. For any country, preventing nationalism from spiraling out of control remains an important issue for ensuring national development and prosperity. And on a larger scale, taking into account the development of modern weapons technology and the close economic ties between countries today, preventing one country from expanding due to uncontrolled nationalism is also of considerable importance for the peace and stability of the world as a whole.

In this context, the real question is how to prevent a repetition of Showa Japan's mistakes. This is undoubtedly an issue worthy of continued in-depth study too. From an empirical observation point of view, however, there are two different directions:

- Eliminating "group irrationality" in nationalism.
- Create corresponding gatekeepers between nationalism and the policymaking process.

The first of these directions is essential to improve the level of civilization. This is the fundamental approach from the perspective of logic itself. Obviously, the improvement of the education system is the most crucial part of this line of thinking. However, for reasons that are easy to understand, this approach often takes too long to implement, and the process contains too many uncertainties. As a result, while consequential in nature, this approach is often insufficient for policymakers to meet real needs.

The second approach, on the other hand, is a short-term solution (relatively speaking). To use a popular metaphor, the idea behind this type of solution is not to eradicate the disease but rather to prevent it from damaging human health based on a tacit acceptance of its existence. More specifically, the creation of gatekeepers can also be broadly divided into two approaches.

The first is creating a sophisticated political system that uses institutional factors to isolate the adverse effects of nationalism. This is the status-quo in developed Western countries. It should be noted that this approach has proven itself effective, a prime example is the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, where there would be a real threat of civil war without the state-level GOP officials and institutions serving as the gatekeepers.

The alternative way is to rely on a small number of political elites to isolate the scourge of nationalism through their personal prestige or power. This is also an approach that has worked before. The best example is the enormous role played by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the "Reform and Opening-up" process. One can probably argue that the FDR can also be categorized in here.

So, which is more effective, the institution or the authority?

This is not a question that cannot be answered easily. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches and because every society is different, and there is no one-size-fits-all solution.

First, institutional gatekeepers' main advantage is that, once established, containment is evident and quite strong; however, the disadvantage is that they often take

a long time to develop and may be associated with unbearable costs (e.g., the French Revolution). The advantage of an authoritative gatekeeper, on the other hand, is its high degree of operability, while the disadvantage is the unsustainability and instability of the individual factor. On this basis, the realization of either approach requires integration with local realities. However, despite the different possibilities, one issue is undoubtedly certain: in today's time, any runaway nationalism in major states is a problem that threatens all, and the policymakers must give this issue enough attention.

In terms of China, which is the elephant in the room, the case of Showa Japan also has essential research value in another area: how to deal with the relationship with the existing international order? As Snyder points out, historical experience shows that almost any state that tries to challenge the existing international order independently ends up with destroying itself. Successful transformations of the international order tend to be gradual. For pre-World War II Japan, nationalism's immediate effect was to drive the Japanese government to place itself on the opposite side of the prevailing international order. China has certainly not come this far yet, whereas, as Professor Wang Jiisi has said: "Japan was an honored participant in the international order in the post-World War I era, while China was rejected and discriminated the West as an outsider. Today, Japan is still 'within the system' of the international order, while China has risen to become one of the most prominent powers around the world. But the relationship between China and the

current international order remains as the same"<sup>175</sup> In this context, preventing the negative impact of nationalism on state policy is undoubtedly an essential aspect in addressing this issue.

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<sup>175</sup> Wang Jisi, Sun Ying, "The Roots of the Sino-Japanese Conflict before the Manchuria Incident from the Changing International Order" (从国际秩序的变化看九一八事变前中日冲突的根源), 105.

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