

CHAPTER 3

Japan and the First World War

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Foreword

In 1914, the provisions of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, first signed in 1902, encouraged Japan to enter the First World War on the British side for mutual defense.¹ Japan declared war against Germany on the 23rd of August under the spirit of the Alliance, with the aim of capturing the German base at Tsingtao on mainland China and occupying the German Marshall, Caroline, and Marianas (except Guam) island groups in the Western Pacific (Micronesia).²

Tsingtao (and Kiaochow Bay) was besieged and taken on the 7th of November 1914 by a largely Japanese naval and land force, with token British participation for political reasons.³ By then, the German island groups in the Western Pacific north of the equator had been occupied by the Japanese.⁴

The Imperial Japanese Navy also helped escort ANZAC troopships across the Indian Ocean and some of its warships took part in the hunt for the German light cruiser *Emden* in the East Indies and Indian Ocean, and for Admiral von Spee's

¹ The Alliance was renewed and extended in scope twice in 1905 and 1911, before its demise in 1921. It officially terminated in 1923. For English literature on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, see Ian H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1894-1907* (London: Athlone Press, 1985), pp. 23-95; Phillips O'Brien, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2004). The Alliance committed Japan to "strict neutrality" in case Britain became "involved in war with another power."

² On the 15th of August Japan issued an ultimatum to Germany, stating that Germany must withdraw its warships from Chinese and Japanese waters and transfer control of Tsingtao to Japan. When the ultimatum expired on the 23rd Japan declared war on Germany.

³ For the Japanese, Tsingtao was an object of great interest. For English literature on the Tsingtao campaign, see John Dixon, *A Clash of Empires: The South Wales Borderers at Tsingtao, 1914* (Wrexham: Bridge Books, 2008); John Dixon, "Germany's Gibraltar: The Siege of Tsingtao," *Britain at War* (October 2008), pp. 25-31; Charles B. Burdick, *The Japanese Siege of Tsingtao: World War I in Asia* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1976); Mark J. Grove, "The Development of Japanese Amphibious Warfare, 1874 to 1942," in Geoffrey Till, Theo Farrell, Mark J. Grove, eds., *Amphibious Operations* (SGSI, The Occasional, No. 31, October 1997).

⁴ In 1898, following the Spanish-American War, Germany purchased three groups of Pacific islands, the Carolines, Marianas, and Marshalls, from Spain.

German East Asiatic Squadron in the Pacific Ocean.⁵

Until 1917, however, the Japanese forces stayed mainly in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. Japan's Decisions for War

Anglo-Japanese relations before and at the outbreak of the First World War were not cordial; they were far from it.⁶

Britain withdrew its earlier request for Japan to join the War, and when Japan did declare war on Germany, Britain maintained that Japan had to limit the scope of its military or naval operations to just off the coast of China, which naturally upset Japanese political as well as military leaders.⁷

This is because many British leaders quite correctly suspected that far from aiding the Allied cause in the War, the Japanese aimed simply to profit at the expense of the European powers' interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan, for its part, regarded the outbreak of the War as a "god-given opportunity"

⁵ At the beginning of hostilities the larger units of the German East Asiatic Squadron under the command of Vice Admiral Maximilian von Spee were dispersed in central Pacific colonies on routine missions. The ships rendezvoused in the northern Marianas for coaling, and, with the exception of *Emden* which headed for the Indian Ocean, made their way to the west coast of South America. There the squadron destroyed a Royal Navy squadron at the Battle of Coronel before being itself destroyed at the Battle of the Falkland Islands.

⁶ For example, the Australians were alarmed rather than reassured when, after the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1905 the British withdrew ships from the Asia-Pacific in order to better counter German naval growth in the North Sea arguing that Japan could protect British interests in the region. Carl Bridge, "W. M. Hughes and Japan at the Paris Peace Conference and After, 1916-22: A New Assessment" (Paper presented at NIDS seminar, April 2012).

⁷ For more details, see, for example, Ian H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance*, pp. 365-377; Ian H. Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-23* (London: Athlone Press, 1972), pp. 115-157; Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and Japan, 1911-1915: A Study of British Far Eastern Policy* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 177-219; Frederick R. Dickinson, "Japan" in Richard F. Hamilton, Holger H. Herwig, eds., *The Origins of World War I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 300-336; S. C. M. Paine, *The Wars for Asia 1911-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 13-47.

At the outbreak of the First World War, the British feared German cruiser raids on their merchant shipping, and planned to run the Germans down by destroying their bases and communications. In the Pacific, the Allies allocated German bases north of the equator to Japan, and bases south of it to the British Empire.

Japanese forces bloodlessly occupied the Palau, Caroline, Marshall, and Marianas Islands, taking the bases at Yap, Ponape, and Jaluit. Japanese surveys revealed the potential fleet base of Truk, which the Germans had overlooked. The Imperial Japanese Navy searched for the fleeing Germans with the First and Second South Seas Squadrons' powerful fast battle cruisers and light cruisers.

to expel the Germans from the Asia-Pacific, establishing and strengthening its sphere of influence in the region, most notably in China. Japanese Foreign Minister Takaaki KATO expected that the War in Europe could spell opportunity for Japan to assert itself as the hegemon of the Asia-Pacific, and therefore took the government into the War although Japan was technically not obligated under the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.⁸

KATO was an early advocate of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902. For him, the key to Japan's world standing was steadily expanding economic privileges in China and continuing Japan's association with the world's greatest naval power and largest commercial presence on the Asian continent, Britain.

As he told the Japanese Cabinet on the 7th of August 1914, participation in the War made sense "from the alliance friendship from which Britain's request derives." Given the declining enthusiasm for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and glorification of German prowess among other influential circles in Japan, the speed and decisiveness with which the Foreign Minister responded to Britain's request for assistance takes on added significance.

Sakuzo YOSHINO, soon to gain celebrity status among the Japanese as the preeminent champion of democracy, saw it as "absolutely the most opportune moment" to advance Japan's standing in China.⁹

Marquis Kaoru INOUE, another important political figure at that time, welcomed the "solidarity of the national unity" that a renewed drive for influence on the continent would bring.

At the same time, however, the Japanese military, especially the Imperial Japanese Army, worried about potential Japanese losses in a military engagement

⁸ In fact, KATO and a handful of his closest advisors single-handedly took the government into the war and KATO was the man most responsible for Japanese belligerence. KATO's swift decision had two aims. The first was to affect the outcome of a turbulent domestic debate over Japan's governance. The second was to enhance Japan's position in Asia, the easiest option being to eject the vulnerable Germans.

The outbreak of the war in Europe was thus widely viewed by the Japanese as providing an opportunity to advance Japan's larger continental ambitions.

⁹ Williamson Murray, Tomoyuki Ishizu, "Introduction to Japan and the United States," in Williamson Murray, Tomoyuki Ishizu, eds., *Conflicting Currents: Japan and the United States in the Pacific* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), pp. 1-17; Jonathan Bailey, *Great Power Strategy in Asia: Empire, Culture and Trade, 1905-2005* (Oxford: Routledge, 2007), pp. 61-84. For most of the Japanese, Shantung was an easy "steppingstone" to China.

with Germany. In fact, most of the military experts gave Germany a better than even chance of victory in Europe.¹⁰

Even the students of the First World War sometimes overlook Japan's role in the War, but there are four areas where, the author believes, Japanese commitment was important.

These are: (1) the landing and siege operations on the German base in China at Tsingtao, combined with the occupation of various islands in the Western Pacific; (2) the expedition against the Bolsheviks in Siberia from 1918 onwards; (3) exports of weapons and ammunitions to the Allied; and (4) the naval escort mission in the Mediterranean.

In addition, Japan was asked to contribute more to the Allied over the course of the First World War. These included: to send land forces to the Western and Eastern Fronts; to send a naval force to the American Atlantic coast; and to send an expedition to the Gulf of Aden or the Red Sea. However, the Japanese government turned all of them down mainly because of its military reasons.¹¹

Let us now briefly examine the four areas in turn.

2. Japan in the Asia-Pacific Region

Firstly, Japan was active over the entire course of the First World War in the Asia-Pacific region and the Indian Ocean, mainly by naval commitment. Japan's main contribution to the War was made by the efforts of its navy, not army, and even the army's operations could not have been carried out without naval support.

This includes, once again, the attack on the German base in China at

¹⁰ Germany for its part approached Japan in 1916 for a separate peace.

¹¹ These Allied requests were presented over the course of the War, officially or not, and were on the whole not pursued if they were once rejected by Japan.

Tsingtao,¹² combined with the occupation of the German island groups in the Western Pacific,¹³ hunting for the German East Asiatic Squadron in the Pacific Ocean, escorting ANZAC troopships across the Indian Ocean, and patrolling in the Pacific.

The Tsingtao Campaign was the first and the last Anglo-Japanese joint landing and siege operation in the First World War, which characterized the military

¹² By 1914 there was a regular presence of foreign soldiers in Peking where they acted as Legation Guards in that city. Britain also had a presence in Tientsin and Weihaiwei in Shandong Province, Eastern China. In 1914, the 2nd Battalion of the South Wales Borderers was the British Legation Guard with two companies in Peking and a further two at Tientsin. They had, by the end of August that year, nearly completed two years of their tour of duty.

The Tsingtao campaign was a naval blockade followed by landing and siege operations. From the British side, the 2nd Battalion of the South Wales Borderers and a half battalion of the 36th Sikhs took part in the campaign. See Dixon, *A Clash of Empires*, pp. 13-37; Dixon, "Germany's Gibraltar," pp. 25-31.

By the time the operations against Tsingtao took place, aircraft from the Imperial Japanese Navy bombed ships in the harbor, wireless station, army camps, and so on. In fact, aircraft of the seaplane carrier *Wakamiya* became the first of its kind in the world to successfully attack land and sea targets. These planes would also take part in another military first: the first night-time bombing raid.

Tsingtao fell in November 1914 and the widespread celebration in Japan marked the fall of the German fortress. *The Osaka Mainichi Shinbun* talked of "sowing the seeds" that would ensure the future "luxuriant growth" of Shantung Province according to Japanese wishes. And *The Tokyo Asahi Shinbun* welcomed the prospect of increased trade with China, especially in Shantung, where goods would now travel inland "after inspection by the Japanese [customs officers] and along railroads run by the Japanese."

¹³ Japanese occupation of the German islands north of the equator was carried out despite them having been ceded to the British Empire (in this case, Australia and New Zealand) in November 1914, when the Germans had surrendered to an Australian force at Rabaul, their Pacific capital, in New Guinea. However, the British had agreed to support the Japanese keeping the islands they occupied, which was formalized in a secret agreement of February 1917 in return for the dispatch of Japanese destroyer flotillas to the Mediterranean discussed below. The Australians were furious when they later found this out but a compromise was reached: they would stay quiet in public during the War but would reserve the right to re-open the question during the peace negotiations

cooperation as well as confusion and animosity between the two countries.¹⁴

The Tsingtao Campaign was the operation initiated by the Navy. On 3 August the Japanese Naval General Staff adopted a plan of operations for the Japan Sea and called for an assault on Tsingtao, in concert with the Army, aimed at “permanently extinguishing Germany’s power in Asia and eliminating its ambition.”

Japan even helped British forces to put down a mutiny by Indian soldiers in Singapore in February 1915.¹⁵

3. Japan and the Siberian Intervention

Secondly, the so-called Siberian Intervention from 1918 onwards may have been a small issue in the First World War for most of the European powers, but it was strategically very important for Japan.¹⁶

The Siberian Intervention was the dispatch of troops of the Allied to the Russian Maritime Provinces as part of a larger effort by the Western powers and

¹⁴ At the outbreak of the First World War in Europe, Britain clearly had concern about the German East Asiatic Squadron operating in the Asia-Pacific region, and recognized that the port at Tsingtao could not be allowed to provide supply and shelter for the Germans. The British therefore turned to the Japanese to gain control of the waters around eastern China and to effectively blockade the port of Tsingtao. The Japanese on their part had been expecting to gain a foothold in China for years and saw this request as a golden opportunity that was too good to be missed. They readily agreed to the British request for assistance.

The battle of Tsingtao was essentially one of siege. For the British part, Brigadier-General N. W. Barnardiston was only allowed the 2nd Battalion of the South Wales Borderers and a half battalion of the 36th Sikhs. In all he had about 1,650 men, not much when one considers that the final Japanese forces for the Tsingtao campaign was approximately 40,000 men.

With whatever good grace the Japanese accepted British cooperation in the campaign, their military leaders in Tsingtao did not welcome British “interference” not only because they had to arrange for food, horses, and fodder for the British troops, but also because they could not have been unaware that one of the purposes of Britain’s presence was to act as a “watchdog” over Japanese activities. For more details, see Dixon, *A Clash of Empires*. See also Dixon, “Germany’s Gibraltar,” pp. 25-31.

According to one Japanese source, casualties for the campaign among the Japanese Army were 416 dead and 1,546 wounded, whereas British ones were 61 wounded. Casualties among the Japanese Navy were 295 dead and 46 wounded, whereas British ones were only 3 wounded. According to another source, Japanese Army casualties numbered 236 killed and 1,282 wounded; the British, 12 killed and 53 wounded. The German defenders suffered 199 dead and 504 wounded. In any event, the Japanese Commander, Army General Mitsuomi KAMIO deserved credit; Japan paid a remarkably low price for sieging a major naval base.

¹⁵ In February 1915, marine units from the Imperial Japanese Navy ships based in Singapore helped suppress a mutiny by Indian troops against the British government.

¹⁶ The Japanese were initially asked by the French in 1917 to intervene in Russia but declined the request. However, the Army General Staff later came to view this as an opportunity.

Japan to support White Russian forces against the Bolshevik Red Army during the Russian Civil War.

The collapse of the Russian Eastern Front presented a tremendous problem to the Allied, since not only did it allow Germany to shift troops and war material from its Eastern Front to the west, but it also made it possible for Germany to secure the huge stockpiles of supplies that had been accumulating at such strategically important places as Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, and Vladivostok.

In addition, some 50,000 Czech Legion personnel, fighting on the side of the Allied, were now trapped behind “enemy-lines,” and were attempting to fight their way out through the east to Vladivostok along the Bolshevik-held Trans-Siberian Railway.

Faced with these concerns, Britain and France decided to militarily intervene in the Russian Civil War against the Bolshevik government.¹⁷ The Japanese viewed the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 as an opportunity to free Japan from any future threat from Russia by, if possible at all, detaching Siberia and forming an independent buffer state.

However, the Japanese government had at the beginning refused to undertake such a military expedition and it was not until the following year, 1918, that events were set in motion which led to a change in its policy. The agreement of the United States was obtained. Whereas Britain and France would have been happy to give Japan a free hand, the United States would not agree, and the Japanese leaders had declined to send an expedition to the area of Amur basin unless they

¹⁷ Britain and France had three objectives that they hoped to achieve: (1) prevent the Allied war material stockpiles in Russia from falling into German hands; (2) rescue the Czech Legion and return it to the European Front; and (3) resurrect the Eastern Front by installing a White Russian backed government. For English literature on the Siberia Intervention, see Paul E. Dunscomb, *Japan's Siberian Intervention 1918-1922: 'A Great Disobedience against the People'* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011).

were invited to do so by the United States.¹⁸

After lengthy discussions, Japan and the United States reached an agreement (without really consulting their European allies) to undertake an inter-Allied expedition on 2 August and Japan dispatched some 70,000 soldiers in total to Siberia.¹⁹

Although Western powers finally decided to withdraw from Russia in 1920, the Japanese stayed on, primarily due to fears of the spread of communism so close to Japan, and the Japanese controlled Korea and Manchuria in the north-eastern part of China.

It was not until 1922 that Japan decided to withdraw from the Russian Maritime Provinces, and finally in 1925 Japan withdrew from the northern half of Sakhalin after it had established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.

4. Japan as a Logistical Base

A third area is the exports of weapons and ammunitions to the Allied. Military supplies were sold on a large scale to the Russians for use on the Eastern Front.

¹⁸ When the United States entered the War on the 6th of April 1917, Japan and the United States found themselves on the same side, despite their increasingly acrimonious relations over China and competition for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. This led to the Lansing-*Ishii* agreement of the 2nd of November 1917 to help reduce tensions. See Murray, Ishizu, "Introduction to Japan and the United States," pp. 1-17.

In July 1918, the United States asked the Japanese government to supply 7,000 troops as part of an international coalition of 25,000 troops, including an American expeditionary force, which planned to support the rescue of the Czech Legion and recurring of wartime supplies. After heated debate in the Japanese Diet, the administration of Prime Minister Masataka TERAUCHI agreed to send 12,000 troops, but under the command of Japan, rather than as part of an international coalition.

Troops were sent to Vladivostok in September, but soon there were major Allied disagreements about numbers. An arbitrary figure of 7,000 from each of the Allies had been specified by the United States, although it bore little relationship to the actual numbers required for the vastness of Siberia. Indeed, Britain, France, and Italy had earlier urged that Japan be allowed to send a force far larger than the stipulated 7,000. During the negotiations with Washington, Japan had avoided committing to the numbers to be sent and the zones which would be covered by operations.

Naturally, deployment of a large force for the rescue expedition made the Allies wary of Japanese intentions.

¹⁹ There were of course other strategic reasons behind the Japanese intervention including the expansion of Japan's sphere of influence. True, Japan was in Siberia primarily to safeguard stockpiled military supplies and to rescue the Czech Legion. However, the Japanese government's intense hostility to communism, a determination to recoup "historical losses" from Russia, and the perceived opportunity to settle the "northern problem" facing Japan's security by either creating a buffer state, or through outright territorial acquisition, were also important factors.

One could argue that the Brusilov Offensive of 1916 could not have been carried out without Japanese military supplies. In fact, almost two-thirds of the weapons and ammunitions used by Russian soldiers in 1916 were imported from Japan.

But soldiers were not sent. Even when a compromise solution was reached with the United States over sending troops to Siberia in 1918, the Japanese troops were to be confined strictly to eastern Siberia, and there was no question of sending them to European Russia.

In addition, Japan helped the French by, for example, constructing 12 destroyers for the French navy, and again, a vast amount of Japanese military supplies was used by the French soldiers, say, at the battle of Verdun of 1916. It is needless to say that Japan exported weapons and ammunitions to its most important ally, Britain as well.

5. Japan's Naval Escort Mission in the Mediterranean

A fourth area of commitment is the Imperial Japanese Navy's escort mission in the Mediterranean.

As was mentioned above, it was Japan's desire to occupy Tsingtao and the German island groups in the Western Pacific that led Japan to war. Japan also needed to consolidate its position in China, as exemplified by the presentation of the "Twenty-one Demands" of 1915, and to secure a voice at a peace conference after the War.²⁰

The Imperial Japanese Navy, which had long advocated Japan's advance to the South as opposed to the Army's desire for northward advance, was among the most powerful driving forces.²¹ It is little wonder that Rear Admiral Saneyuki AKIYAMA, the main architect of the Japanese naval operation plan at the Battle

²⁰ Frank Dikotter, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan: Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 101-104, 160-161; Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 115; Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 84-116; Frederick R. Dickinson, *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919-1930* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-22.

²¹ This escort mission gave the Imperial Japanese Navy a *rationale* for enlarging its budget *vis-a-vis* the Army and expanding the fleet. See J. C. Schenking, "Bureaucratic Politics, Military Budgets and Japan's Southern Advance: The Imperial Navy's Seizure of German Micronesia in the First World War," *War in History*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1998), pp. 308-326.

of Tsushima in 1905, vigorously supported not only Japanese participation in the War but also its escort mission in the Mediterranean.²²

Responding to the British request for further support to the War, from April 1917, eight destroyers with a flagship cruiser under the command of Rear Admiral Kozo SATO (the Second Special Squadron with the 10th and 11th Japanese flotillas) were based at Malta in the Mediterranean, playing an important and efficient part in the anti-submarine convoy escort duty against German U-boats, along the sea lines of communication between Marseille and Malta, Taranto and Malta, and Malta and Alexandria.²³

Japan decided to send a naval force to the Mediterranean, because it received assurances from its allies of something tangible in return: an immediate promise by the Allied to support Japan's claims to former German possessions which it then occupied.

A further four brand-new destroyers arrived in Malta in August as the 15th flotilla with the armored cruiser *Izumo* to add to the Japanese commitment.²⁴ As one may recall, Germany had declared the policy of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917, and overall casualties of the Allied transports were increasing dramatically since then.

Apart from the warships mentioned above, two British destroyers, *Minstrel* and *Nemesis* (renamed as *Sendan* and *Kanran* respectively) were handed over

²² Admiral Saneyuki AKIYAMA, who had long advocated Japan's southward advance, argued strongly in favor of not only participation in the War, but also sending a squadron to the Mediterranean on the ground that, though there would be danger and possibly casualties, it would contribute to a greater understanding of naval techniques and technology and lead to the improvement of weaponry in the Japanese Navy.

At the same time, however, there was a strong group in the Naval General Staff who opposed this course on the ground that "for Japan to operate in a war zone which is of no direct interest to the Empire will not only cause disaster to its ships but also put at risk the valuable bulwark of the state." Those who opposed AKIYAMA's course also argued that, by sending a considerable naval force to the Mediterranean, Japan would be leaving its home island undefended and vulnerable. For AKIYAMA, see Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: American Strategic Theory and the Rise of the Imperial Japanese Navy* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2006).

²³ When Japan received assurances from its allies of something tangible in return—an immediate promise by the Allied to support Japan's claims to former German possessions which it then occupied—Japan decided to send a naval force to the Mediterranean.

²⁴ Cruiser *Akashi* arrived in Malta in mid-April 1917 as a flagship of eight destroyers of the 10th and 11th flotillas. In August 1917, armored cruiser *Izumo* arrived in the Mediterranean to relieve *Akashi* as the flagship.

to the Japanese Navy in June 1917 and manned by its sailors for the duration of the War. In addition, two British sloops, renamed *Tokyo* and *Saikyo*, were also in the Mediterranean. As was mentioned above, 12 destroyers constructed by the Japanese were handed over to the French Navy, all of which were on active duty there during the entire course of the War.²⁵

The Japanese were nominally independent, but they actually carried out whatever orders they received from the British Commander-in-Chief at Malta, Admiral George A. Ballard. According to Japanese sources, the Japanese Navy by the end of the War carried out escort missions 348 times, escorting 788 Allied warships and transports and 750,000 personnel, with 34 actual combat operations.

Three episodes are worth mentioning in this short paper.

First, in May 1917, two Japanese destroyers engaged in a rescue operation, saving British personnel from the transport *Transylvania* which was sunk by German torpedoes, despite the fact that the German U-boat was still in the vicinity. The Japanese rescued 3,000 out of 3,300 personnel. True, this escort mission itself was a failure because the Japanese destroyers could not protect the transport, but in recognition of this rescue operation, 27 Japanese officers and sailors were awarded military medals by King George V.

A second episode was rather tragic. One of the Japanese destroyers, *Sakaki*, was torpedoed by the Austrian U-27 on the 11th of June 1917 in the Eastern Mediterranean off Crete. She was badly damaged, with 59 dead including the captain of the ship, Commander Taichi UEHARA.²⁶

Thirdly, in the face of the German spring offensive of 1918, *Kaiserschlacht*, the Allied employed the so-called “Big Convoys” in the Mediterranean between Marseille and Alexandria, and all of the five round-trip convoys were escorted mainly by the Japanese destroyers with a minimum loss of transports.

With these Japanese activities in the Mediterranean, Admiral, G. C. Dickens, Commander-in-Chief of the British Mediterranean Fleet, reported back to the Admiralty that, “whereas Italians are inefficient, French are unreliable, Greeks are out of the calculation, and Americans are too far away, the Japanese are excellent,

²⁵ Furthermore, two of the four cruisers of the First Special Squadron were dispatched to Cape Town, South Africa.

²⁶ *Sakaki* was salvaged and repaired.

but small in number.”²⁷ *The Times* newspaper also praised the Japanese Navy using such expressions as “speedy arrival and seamanlike” and “good seamanship and greatest rapidity of action.”²⁸ From these remarks, one could easily imagine how grateful the British felt at that time to have Japanese destroyers in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, Ian Nish wrote in his *Alliance in Decline*:

“If we try to assess Japan’s naval contribution to the allied effort, we have to conclude that it was considerable in the last stage of the war. It was by no means the sole cause of allied success in meeting the submarine onslaught; but it has to be numbered as one factor alongside the contribution of American destroyers and the success of the British convoy system. Her contribution in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean was a great relief to the Royal Navy. Finally, Japan’s naval assistance was more valuable to Britain than to other members of *Entente* who were less dependent on keeping open trade channels.”²⁹

Paul Halpern also concluded in his *A Naval History of World War I* that “this Japanese contribution.....at a critical moment in the war against submarines has been largely forgotten, but under the circumstances it was far from negligible.”³⁰

It is, however, true to say that these commitments by the Imperial Japanese Navy during the First World War have almost been “forgotten,” even remaining outside conventional appreciation by historians, partly because they were overshadowed by the memories of the Second World War in 1939-45.

This is why the author wants to draw the attention of the readers to a small but remarkable aspect of the history among the Allied and that, some 100 years ago, Japan and the Allied European countries fought side by side in the Mediterranean for common causes.

If one visits Malta today, one can see a memorial built in 1918 at the Commonwealth War Graves, to the 78 Japanese sailors who fell in the

²⁷ Paul G. Halpern, *The Royal Navy in the Mediterranean 1915-1918* (London: Temple Smith, 1987), p. 496.

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, p. 228.

³⁰ Paul G. Halpern, *A Naval History of World War I* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), p. 393.

Mediterranean. Buried there are 73 out of these 78, including the captain of the destroyer *Sakaki*.

Ironically, the memorial was destroyed by a German air raid during the Second World War at the Battle of Malta and then left unattended until 1973 when it was reconstructed.

True, compared with the fierce battle and sheer slaughter of the Western Front, say, in Somme and Verdun, the Japanese naval commitment and casualties in the Mediterranean may only be a side-show in the First World War.

Even among naval operations during the War, the Mediterranean campaign could only be a small footnote if one compares its significance with that of, say, the Battle of Jutland to the entire course of the War.

True, compared with the U.S. Navy's contribution in the Mediterranean (note that the United States was a late comer to the First World War),³¹ the Japanese commitment cannot be exaggerated.

Having accepted this, however, one could still argue that the importance of logistics or supplying the theatre of war must never be underestimated.

However, the lessons of the Mediterranean operations, including the importance of the *guerre de course*, of blockade, of submarine and anti-submarine warfare, and the value of the merchant navy and convoy systems, for example, were neither properly learned nor implemented in the policy of the Imperial Japanese Navy in the 1920s and 30s.

Hence, the Second World War in the Pacific.³²

6. The Versailles Peace Conference and After

Japan after the First World War could take part in the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919 as one of the "Big Five," and it became one of the Permanent Members of the League of Nations in 1920.

In addition, Japan had increasingly filled orders for needed war materials for the Allied towards the end of the First World War, and the wartime economic

³¹ For the U.S. contribution in the Mediterranean, see for example, *The Times History of the War* (London: Times Publishing Company, 1919), Vol. XVIII, p. 449.

³² For a good account of the Pacific War, see Daniel Marston, ed., *The Pacific War Companion: From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima* (Oxford: Osprey, 2005).

boom had helped to diversify its domestic industry, increase its exports, and transform Japan from a debtor to a creditor country for the first time. Exports quadrupled from 1913 to 1918.³³

Japan had two overriding goals during the First World War and at the Versailles Peace Conference: to keep the best possible terms with old and new allies; and to pursue its territorial ambitions in the Asia-Pacific region.

To be more specific, Japan focused on two demands at the conference: territorial claim for the former German colonies, Shantung and island groups in the Western Pacific; and the inclusion of its “racial equality” clause.

Japan obtained the German island groups in the Western Pacific north of the equator as Class C mandates.³⁴

At the same time, however, Japan crossed swords with the Allied powers over this territorial issue of the Western Pacific (with the United States and Australia), the so-called Shantung problem (with China), and the insertion of a racial equality clause in the League of Nations covenant or charter (with most of them).

In the end, Japan’s campaign to have a racial equality clause was not successful.³⁵ Obtaining equal status with other Western powers was Japan’s dream since the 1860s, and Japan therefore had proposed the racial equality clause. The first draft presented to the League of Nations Commission was as follows:

“The equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree to accord as soon as possible to all alien nationals of states, members of the League, equal and just treatment in every respect making no distinction, either in law or in fact, on account of their race or nationality.”

The proposal received a majority vote in April 1919. Eleven out of the seventeen delegates present voted in favor of Japan’s amendment to the covenant, and no negative vote was taken. However, the chairman, U.S. President Woodrow

³³ For more details, see Frederick R. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention*.

³⁴ At the Versailles Peace Conference, it was agreed that, in the Pacific, mandates would go to Australia for New Guinea, New Zealand for Samoa, and Japan for the Marianas, Marshall, and Caroline Islands.

³⁵ Such a clause, however benign, in most of the Allied powers’ view and most notably Australia’s, might have been used to mount a legal challenge to their restrictive immigration laws, initially as applied to the mandate and perhaps ultimately to the countries themselves.

Wilson, overturned it, arguing that although the proposal had been approved by a clear majority, in this particular matter, strong opposition had manifested itself, and that on this issue a unanimous vote would be required.

The strong opposition came from the British or Australian delegation. This is because its adoption would have challenged the established norm of the Western dominated international system of the day, which involved the colonial subjugation of non-white peoples.³⁶

It is often argued that the rejection of the racial equality clause proved to be an important factor in turning Japan away from cooperation with the Western powers.

True, the Japanese domestic opinion was very much concerned with the issue and its media fully covered the progress of the Conference, leading to an alienation of the Japanese towards the United States, and leading to broader conflicts later on. At the same time, however, it has to be noted that the Japanese government was using the racial equality clause as a bargaining tool as well.

To be more specific, the Japanese wished only that they be treated equally as a nation and be considered a great power. They were more interested in ensuring that Japan, as a sovereign nation and member of the League, be granted the same privileges as Western powers, including the right to overseas colonies.

The racial equality proposal also masked Japan's own sense of racial superiority and racial discrimination towards other Asians that existed in the Japanese Empire. Its policies towards Koreans especially after the 1910 annexation left much to be desired. The Koreans were subjected to forced assimilation, and discrimination against Koreans was justified on the ground that they were not yet ready for equal treatment as a result of their low degree of civilization.³⁷

In other words, Japan's colonial rule was justified on the basis that Koreans and Taiwanese were an inferior race needing the guidance of a superior race to bring about civilization and enlightenment of their country.³⁸

In 1919, the year of the Versailles Peace Conference, the Japanese military

³⁶ Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality*, p. 115.

³⁷ Dikotter, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, pp. 101-104, 160-161. See also, Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality*.

³⁸ Dikotter, *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, pp. 112-113, 117.

brutally suppressed the March 1st Movement which was a Korean nationalist uprising in response to discrimination and oppression by the Japanese.³⁹ The Japanese never extended equal rights, legal or political, to their colonial subjects. Fair and equal treatment applied only to “civilized” nations and League members, and not their colonies or subject peoples.

True, Japanese domestic opinion was very much agitated by its media on this specific issue, but the Japanese government was prepared to broker a deal whereby, in return for recognition of their rights in China and the Western Pacific—the *Okuma-Ishii* Doctrine which paralleled the Monroe Doctrine—it would agree not to press the racial equality issue further.

In fact, Japan was delighted to get mandates to Shantung and the island groups in the Western Pacific north of the equator, its principal aim of the First World War and at the Conference.

On balance, one could therefore conclude that the Versailles Peace Conference was a diplomatic success for the Japanese. Despite its relatively small role and sacrifice in the First World War, Japan had emerged as a great power in international politics by the end of the War, admitting that it still felt like an unequal member of the “imperialist club.”

As far as the Sino-Japanese relations were concerned, the Twenty-one Demands imposed on China in 1915 had provoked bitter resentment among the Chinese and the Shantung problem added fuel to this resentment.

With Japan’s European Allies heavily involved in the War in Europe, Japan sought further to consolidate its position in China by presenting the Twenty-one Demands to the Chinese President, Yuan Shikai in January 1915. If achieved, the Twenty-one Demands would have essentially reduced China to a Japanese protectorate, and at the expense of numerous privileges already enjoyed by the European powers in their respective sphere of influence in China.

In the face of slow negotiations with the Chinese government, widespread and increasing anti-Japanese sentiments, and international condemnation, particularly from the United States, Japan withdrew the final group of demands, and the treaty

³⁹ The Koreans had hoped they could gain self-determination in the Versailles Peace Conference but they continued to be under Japanese control.

was signed by China on the 25th of May 1915. Furthermore, Japan continued to extend its influence and privileges in China via the *Nishihara* Loans in 1918.

At the Versailles Peace Conference, the Japanese claim to Shantung was disputed by the Chinese delegation. As mentioned above, at the outset of the First World War in 1914 Japan had seized the territory, most notably Tsingtao, which was granted to Germany in 1897. Japan also seized the German island groups in the Western Pacific.

And in 1917, Japan had made secret agreements with Britain, France, and Italy as regards their annexation of these territories. With Britain, there was a mutual agreement, with Japan also agreeing to support British annexation of the Pacific islands south of the equator. So, despite a generally pro-Chinese view on behalf of the U.S. delegation, article 156 of the Treaty of Versailles transferred German concessions in Shantung, China to Japan rather than returning sovereign authority to China.

Quite naturally, Chinese outrage over this provision led to a demonstration known as the May Fourth Movement and to China's eventual withdrawal from the Treaty.

Surely, this was not in accordance with the spirit of the racial equality clause Japan had long advocated; this was just of political and economic opportunism.

One could also argue that the First World War and the Versailles Peace Conference was one of the most important turning points of Japanese imperialism and of the road to the Pacific War, although this does not necessarily mean that war was inevitable. In fact, a new international order or peace—"uneasy peace"—was established and maintained in the 1920s in the Asia-Pacific region. Japanese foreign policy during this period can be characterized by "internationalism" as exemplified by the SHIDEHARA diplomacy. In fact, Japan withdrew from Shantung and Siberia.

The term SHIDEHARA diplomacy came to describe Japan's liberal and cooperative foreign policy during the 1920s. Japanese Foreign Minister Kijiyuro SHIDEHARA attempted to maintain a non-interventionist policy toward China and good relations with Britain and the United States. He also guaranteed "Open Door" in China, and pledged in the Japanese Diet that Japan should and will uphold the principles of the League of Nations.

At the same time, the naval balance in the Pacific was what concerned a majority of political as well as military leaders of Japan and the United States most. In fact, national strength was still measured by the number of capital ships in the 1920s. A naval race had already developed between the two countries, and Britain was in danger of lagging behind, especially in the Pacific.

In 1914 Britain had 29 capital ships, but only 2 in the Pacific (and 1 Australian Dreadnought cruiser), Japan had 4 capital ships and 1 Dreadnought cruiser, all in the Pacific, and the United States had 10 capital ships with only 1 in the Pacific. However, by 1918, British overall strength was 30, and Japan and the United States 16 each. By then, for the British to counter either Japan or the United States in the Pacific, they would always need one as an ally against the other.

This led to the Washington Naval Treaty (Five-Power Treaty), the Nine-Power Treaty, and the Four-Power Treaty. The latter would lead to the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1923, by which the Japanese felt “betrayed” by the British.

In the “Washington Treaty System,” equivalent to the Versailles treaty system in the Asia-Pacific region, major powers including Japan, the United States, Britain, France, and Italy confirmed the territorial integrity of China and the territorial *status quo* in the Pacific. They guaranteed they would consult before acting, but not aid each other mandatorily, and set fleet sizes in a ratio of 5:5:3 for Britain, the United States, and Japan.

These meant fleet reductions and also that the United States and Britain, as two-ocean navies, would need to combine their forces to counter Japan’s one-ocean strength in the Pacific. But the Japanese were not satisfied with the ratio at all.

Towards the end of the 1920s, SHIDEHARA’s cooperative approach was criticized as “weak-kneed,” and Japan opted for “Positive Diplomacy” in the 1930s, emphasizing its special interests in East Asia. Japan also began to claim that Manchuria was separate from China, keeping out the Chinese nationalists as well as communists.

Conclusion

Having said this, however, the “Washington Treaty System” of the 1920s was a qualified success for all of the parties which established peace—albeit uneasy—in the Asia-Pacific region for another ten years.

As far as the Japanese foreign policy towards China and the United States was concerned, however, Sino-Japanese relations were never to be improved and the conflict between Japan and the United States over China led the two countries into a collision course in the 1930s.

Presumably it was after the First World War that Japan started more proactive and aggressive foreign policies although they were still within the framework of the “Washington Treaty System.” But after 1931, the year of the Manchurian Crisis, Japan commenced its own way of empire building, which was quite different from Western Powers’.

This can be seen as confirming the division of Japan’s formal empire in Taiwan and Korea and its informal empire and sphere of influence in Manchuria and the treaty ports in China before the First World War. Though increased Japanese economic expansion, immigration, and special privileges in Manchuria seemed to threaten the policy of “Open Door” in China, it was not until the Chinese Revolution of 1911 and the outbreak of the First World War of 1914 that Japanese imperialism began to take on a different character in response to the breakdown of central authority in China and the inability of Western powers to intervene to protect their interests.

Japan’s goal in the early stage of its imperialism was the revision of the “unequal treaties” and the establishment of Japan as an equal status among Western powers. These goals were accomplished before the First World War.

And the study of Japanese imperialism after the First World War leads us to a completely different picture, and the Twenty-one Demands and the occupation of the German island groups in the Western Pacific, representing Japan’s desire for northern advance and southern advance respectively, mark a second stage of Japanese imperialism.

Especially after the 1930s, Japan challenged the new international order or peace—the “Washington Treaty System”—and tried to establish yet another international order—“New Order in East Asia”—by its own initiatives.

In this respect, the First World War was a very important event in modern Japanese history.