



Title	The Soviet Factor in Japanese Foreign Policy, 1923-1937
Author(s)	SAKAI, Tetsuya
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 6, 27-40
Issue Date	1988
Doc URL	http://hdl.handle.net/2115/7975
Type	bulletin (article)
File Information	KJ00000034137.pdf



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The Soviet Factor in Japanese Foreign Policy: 1923 — 1937

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Treatises abound on Japanese foreign policy from the Washington Conference to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. Soviet-Japanese relations during this period, however, have not been investigated as fully as they should be. Although some historians treat several topics concerning negotiations between the two powers, it is rare to find any discussion of Soviet-Japanese relations in the broader context of international East Asian politics. Thus, my assignment here is to analyze the Soviet factor underlying Japanese foreign policy during this period and thus to reexamine the framework of Japanese diplomatic history.

I. Aspects of Soviet-Japanese Relations under the Washington System

1. Pro-Russian Groups in Japan

After the Washington Conference, most major political groups in Japan, willingly or not, accepted the Washington system as a framework of the international politics in East-Asia. Pro-Russian groups in Japan, however, did not regard the Washington system, which excluded the USSR, as an effective system. From their point of view, Russo-Japanese relations had been the center of Japanese diplomacy since the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese treaty in 1907, and in spite of the overthrow of the Russian Empire by the Revolution they should necessarily continue to be so. It was in this context that pro-Russian groups advocated Japanese recognition of the USSR after the Washington Conference.¹ Their search for the rapprochement between the USSR and Japan derived from the following three motives.

First, pro-Russian policy in the context of Japanese foreign policy often implied an anti-western powers policy. Gotō Shimpei, who invited Ioffe to Japan to open informal talks, ultimately intended to take further steps toward making Russo-Sino-Japanese collaboration the new order in the Far East instead of the Washington system.² The counterpart of Gotō's design could be found in the Soviet diplomacy at that time. Immediately after Japanese recognition of the USSR, for example, Chicherin, Commissar for Foreign Affairs, sent up a *ballon d'essai* to the Japanese Embassy in Moscow in search of a Russo-Sino-Japanese alliance.³ Suzuki Teiichi, assistant military attaché in Peking at that time, reminisced that it was proposed that he assist in the Chinese revolutionary movement and exterminate the influence of western powers.⁴

Socond, Japanese collaboration with the USSR was needed in order to sefeguard and develop Japanese railways and enterprises in Manchuria. In 1920s, Japan and the USSR accounted for more than 95 percent of the foreign investment in Manchuria. Japan and the USSR had vital interests in Manchuria, the South-Manchurian Railway, and the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) and they shared common concerns in protecting their own interests from Chinese nationalism. This is the reason why the Japanese government consistently took a neutral attitude toward disputes over the CER between China and the USSR, disputes which sometimes

resulted in favor of the USSR.

Third, simply from the point of view of strategy, Japanese navy advocated Russo-Japanese collaboration. Both Admiral Katō Tomosaburō and Admiral Yamamoto Gonbei took the initiative in Japanese recognition of the USSR when they were Prime Ministers. Katō as the premier approved Gotō's invitation to Ioffe in spite of the opposition of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁵ Furthermore, Yamamoto, Katō's successor, recommended Admiral Saitō Makoto as a foreign minister in order to control the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which took a negative view on the recognition of the USSR.⁶ Traditionally, the Japanese navy looked upon the United States as its primary potential enemy and the "Imperial National Defense Policy," revised in 1923 when Admiral Katō Tomosaburō was the premier, prescribed that Japanese policy toward Russia should be based upon friendship so as to reduce the possibility of a clash between the two nations.⁷ Moreover, the Japanese navy had large interests in the oil concessions in North Sakhalin.⁸ Concerning the navy's attitude, the retrospect of Besedovsky, who served as the Soviet *chargé d'affaires* to Japan, deserves quotation; when he was nominated to *chargé d'affaires*, Chicherin showed him the general lines of conduct to be observed and said:

Japan is a prey to the struggle between two political factions, Mizoubishi [*sic*] and Mizoui [*sic*]. One of the chief features of this struggle is the antagonism it creates between the followers of the two rivals Tchosue [*sic*] and Satzuma [*sic*], Ministers for War and Navy respectively. The former group is hostile to us. They want to increase the bases of Japanese influence on the Continent, in China, in Manchuria, and in the Soviet Far East. The latter have to reckon with an inevitable war between Japan and the United States, the outcome of which will be determined at sea. This group wants oil concessions...and seek to secure our neutrality in the event of war. The present Prime Minister and Sidehara [*sic*], the Minister for Foreign Affairs, are on the side of Mitzoubishi [*sic*] and Satzuma [*sic*], which make your work the easier. But remember that in Japan the War Department plays an important part in the country's affairs.... Very often there is complete disagreement with the prime Minister. Keep a careful watch on all that goes on in military circles.⁹

Pro-Russian groups in Japan advocated collaboration with the USSR from different viewpoints, but they sometimes formed a coalition in order to exert influence upon the government. Some positions which were important in the formulation of policy toward Russia were occupied by pro-Russian groups: the chairmanship of the Russo-Japanese Society was held by Gotō Shimpei and, after his death, by Admiral Saitō Makoto; the presidency of the North Sakhalin Oil Enterprise was held by Admiral Nakazato Sigetsugu and then by Admiral Sakonji Seizō. These men even tried to deal directly with the USSR, Gotō's invitation to Ioffe being the outstanding example.

Although it is true that pro-Russian groups could exert some influence upon the Japanese government, this does not mean, however, that Japanese government itself accepted the Russo-Japanese collaboration as an alternative to the Washington system. In the 1920s, the Japanese government, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was firmly committed to the Washington system; therefore the pro-Russian groups' attempt to establish "Rappallo" in the Far East failed, as did the Soviets'.

2. "Shidehara Diplomacy" and the USSR

Shidehara Kijūrō, who was one of the most prominent diplomats and firmly committed to the Washington system, played a leading part in making foreign policy in the 1920s. As a matter of course, Shidehara objected to the Russo-Japanese collaboration as an alternative to the Washington system. In this sense, as one historian analyzes, it may not be incorrect to say that "Shidehara diplomacy" was based upon Japan's cooperation with western powers and that its policy toward Russia was negative.¹⁰

It should be noted, however, that Shidehara's commitment to the western powers did not mean that he was antagonistic toward the USSR. As a foreign minister in the Katō Takaaki Cabinet, he did his utmost to resume the deadlocked negotiations between Japan and the USSR in contrast with the negative attitude of the former foreign minister, Matsui Keishirō.¹¹ Shidehara's tenacious efforts and astonishing skill in negotiations contributed to breaking the deadlock, and on January 20, 1925, the Soviet-Japanese Basic Treaty (Peking Treaty) was concluded.

Shidehara's attitude toward Russia was closely connected with his view of the Chinese situation and his nonintervention policy toward China. In the mid-1920s, the USSR extended its ideological influence on Chinese nationalist movement and at the beginning of the Northern Expedition, Soviet influence was at its peak.¹² This situation caused anxiety in Japanese political circles and sometimes even resentment was felt against Soviet penetration into China. Particularly the Japanese army and the Seiyūkai representatives criticized Shidehara's nonintervention policy toward China and emphasized the necessity of countermeasures against the Comintern's activities in China.¹³

Shidehara did not share this anxiety, however. In a conversation on July 31, 1931, with Ch'en Yu-Jen, the foreign minister of the "Canton Government," Ch'en made a proposal for a Sino-Japanese alliance to combat the Chinese communist movement allegedly supported financially by the USSR. Shidehara expressed his view, recalling the Chinese situation in the Northern Expedition:

I am not afraid of Russian activities. I do not think that even Chinese can easily be ruled by the Russian influence from outside. In fact, I hear that when Borodin came to Hankow and began to agitate Chinese people in the street, they looked upon him with embarrassment, asking themselves who he was. I thought then that Borodin's appearance meant his "beginning of the end" and I have made a speech to that effect in the Diet.¹⁴

The Soviet government appreciated Shidehara's nonintervention policy. At the central executive committee Litvinov, the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, stated:

We may note with satisfaction that a certain change is taking place, very slowly it is true, in the policy [towards China] of certain powers.... In this connexion we should note the present position of Japan, the nearest neighbour of China and the USSR, in contrast to the position of the English government, as expressed in the speech of the Foreign Minister Shidehara at the last session of the Japanese Diet. We can only welcome the idea of the Japanese Foreign Ministry that any attempt at the forcible establishment of peace by pressure from outside does more harm

than good.¹⁵

It should be noted that in this statement, Litvinov pointed out the difference between Japanese government's policy toward China and the British government's. The British government, faced with the Northern Expedition, was alarmed at the "menace of Bolshevism" and advocated the strengthening of relations between powers committed to the Washington system, especially between Britain and Japan. The Tanaka Government's policy toward China was in line with this.¹⁶ Shidehara, however, was opposed to the British policy and did not interpret the Washington system as a system antagonistic to the USSR. The Soviet government itself acknowledged Shidehara's interpretation. In addition to this, Shidehara assumed a positive attitude toward economic cooperation with the USSR, and was ready to set up credits needed for the Soviet government's accomplishment of the five-year plan, though the credits failed owing to the Manchurian incident.¹⁷

In conclusion, "Shidehara diplomacy" contributed to create mutual images of stable relations between Japan and the USSR. After the Manchurian incident, which put an end to the "Shidehara diplomacy," Litvinov rightly stated:

From the Peking agreement right up to the end to 1931 excellent good-neighbourly relations existed between ourselves and Japan. There were no conflicts, no serious misunderstandings, and if any dispute did arise, it was settled by peaceful diplomatic means. There was no talk of threats from either side.¹⁸

3. The Soviet Factor in Japanese Policy toward Manchuria in the 1920s

On May 30, 1924, the Kiyoura cabinet decided on the "Program of Policy toward China." The most conspicuous feature of this program was an activist attitude toward North Manchuria.¹⁹ This decision was to some extent a countermeasure against the Soviet diplomacy at that time. In contrast with the Japanese withdrawal from Siberia after the Washington Conference, the USSR succeeded in consolidating its influence over Outer Mongolia and then made a further step toward China.²⁰ On August 1923, for example, Karakhan went on an observation trip to North Manchuria and spoke with Chang Tso-lin.²¹ Karakhan's activities caused the army and the officials associated with the South Manchuria Railway Company (SMRC) to become anxious. Matsuoka Yōsuke, director of the SRMC, cabled to Mukden: "Never fail to match the Karakhan's activities in Mukden. Concerning the CER, the *status quo* should be maintained. Give General Chang a warning not to be maneuvered."²² Karakhan succeeded in concluding two treaties the following year; in May, the Sino-Soviet treaty between the Soviet Government and the Peking Government; and in September, the agreement for the management of the CER between the Soviet Government and the "autonomous" Mukden Government.²³

It was felt in Tokyo that Soviet influence in North Manchuria would continue to extend, and that some countermeasures should be taken. In the conference that laid down the "Program of Policy toward China," this matter, particularly the issue of railway construction in Manchuria was discussed. In this conference, Debuchi Katsuji, chief of the Asian Bureau in the Foreign Ministry and firm supporter of the "Shidehara diplomacy," enumerated three railway lines to be constructed: the Kaiyuan-Hailong-Kirin line, the Kirin-Dunhua line, and the Changchun-Taonan line. All powers of the Four Power Consortium of 1920 acknowledged the Japanese

right to grant loans to these railways.²⁴ In regard to the Taonan-Tsitsihar line, Debuchi expressed a negative view on the grounds that it was not within the framework of the Washington system and that it would irritate the Soviet government.²⁵ It was apparent that in this conference Debuchi took Shidehara's line, designed to keep up friendly relations with the USSR within the framework of the Washington system not only on the Chinese mainland but also in Manchuria.

On the other hand, the army was opposed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hata Eitarō, chief of Military Affairs Bureau in the Army Ministry, enumerated the Taonan-Ang'angxi-Tsitsihar line, and then the Changchun-Taonan, Kaiyuan-Kirin, Kirin-Kainei, and Harbin-Heihe lines. Hata pressed for the construction of the Taonan-Ang'angxi-Tsitsihar line in view of its military and economic importance in North Manchuria.²⁶ He was able to persuade Kiyoura to consent to his plan and the government decided to construct the Taonan-Ang'angxi line.

Chang's attitude toward this matter, however, remained ambiguous. On the one hand, Chang hinted at his negative view of the Sino-Soviet treaty,²⁷ and on the other hand, Chang asked his military adviser, Honjo Shigeru, if the agreement for the management of the CER should be concluded in view of the possible rapprochement between his rival, Wu Pei-Fu, and the Soviet Government.²⁸ Although it was apparent that Chang's ambiguity was not preferable to the army and the officials associated with the SMRC, the Japanese government did not explicitly support Chang, partly because given the precarious international situation it was too risky and partly because it was in conflict with the nonintervention policy toward China.

The army and the officials associated with the SMRC bitterly criticized the government. Matsuoka Yōsuke wrote to Katō Takaaki, successor to Kiyoura, at the end of 1925:

Needles to say, the construction of the Taonan-Ang'angxi line, which is in conflict with the Russian sphere of influence after the Russo-Japanese treaty in 1907, is a challenge to Russia. Hence I have no doubt that the government's approval of this plan is designed to make invisible war against Russia.... The reason why Chang hesitated about the conclusion of this agreement is that he did not know (a) whether to be in alliance with Russia or Japan or whether to be detached from both of them, (b) if in alliance with Japan, whether to rely on the Japanese government's full-fledged support or not, and (c) whether to depend on Japan or not in case of a Russian counterattack after the construction of the Taonan-Ang'angxi line. Thus I barely persuaded him to conclude this agreement, promising him our government's support.²⁹

It was in this context that Kuo Sung-ling revolted against Chang in Mukden.³⁰ Matsuoka emphasized Soviet encouragement of Kuo in his letter cited above, an image which was shared by the Kwantung Army pressing for intervention in this conflict to support Chang. Although it is known that the controversy over intervention in this conflict was closely related to that over policy toward North Manchuria³¹, the question of why policy toward North Manchuria was closely connected with intervention policy toward entire Manchuria should be further discussed. In regard to this, General Ugaki Issei, one of prominent leaders in the army, wrote in his diary on December 5, 1925:

The downfall of Chang, who has been arrogant these days, is rather preferable to

Japanese South Manchuria policy. No one besides him could neglect and destroy existing Japanese position.... But Chang's presence in North Manchuria is the fruit of his efforts over a decade. Anyone besides him would take at least a few years to consolidate his influence over North Manchuria.... Just as Feng Yü-hsiang depends on the Soviet government to defend his own position, [in case of Chang's downfall] there would emerge a second and a third Feng in North Manchuria and Soviet penetration would extend further and further. In short, Chang's downfall is not beneficial to our policy toward North Manchuria.³²

Ugaki here clearly delineated the Soviet factor underlying Japanese policy toward Manchuria. In other words, Ugaki suggested that while it was possible to keep up the nonintervention policy so far as defending vested interests in South Manchuria from Chinese nationalism, it was necessary to pursue a policy of intervention in order to eliminate Soviet influence in North Manchuria. Any Japanese political leader at that time, even Shidehara, took it for granted that vested interests in South Manchuria had to be defended. But Shidehara was opposed to a positive North Manchuria policy because of his idea of a cooperative Russian policy. Thus, controversy over the intervention policy toward Manchuria was closely connected with that over policy toward Russia.

Tanaka Government's activist policy toward Manchuria should be reexamined from this viewpoint. Critical about "Shidehara diplomacy," Tanaka pursued an activist policy toward North Manchuria, supporting the local government in Mukden. It should be noted, however, that there was a limit to Tanaka's policy. It was also applied to the Yamamoto-Chang agreement, known as a symbol of "Tanaka diplomacy." The Ang'angxi-Tsitsihar line, the extension of the Taonan-Aug'angxi line northwards, was included in the demand to Chang for railway construction in Manchuria sanctioned by Tanaka after the Eastern Conference met in Tokyo in the summer of 1927.³³ Moreover, Eto Toyoji, endorsed by Yamamoto, demanded the construction of the Tsitsihar-Heihe line close to the Soviet border.³⁴ Chang, however, did not consent to the construction of both lines. All five railways which Chang agreed to were railways extending northwards, but none of them was a railway northwards across the CER. Aware that his position depended on the balance of power between Japan and the USSR in Manchuria, Chang could not run the risk of constructing railways that unduly irritated the USSR in spite of pressure from Japan.

This set a limit to the Japanese activist policy toward North Manchuria, which could not be exceeded if Japan remained dependent on the local government for the implementation of its policy toward North Manchuria. Tanaka realized this limit; therefore he did not cling to the Ang'angxi-Tsitsihar line. Although he pursued an activist policy toward North Manchuria, he regarded North Manchuria in the north of the CER a Russian sphere of influence. In this sense, Tanaka did not hope to destroy the *status quo* in Manchuria.³⁵

Firmly opposed to Tanaka's attitude, the Kwantung Army staff officers began to seek for an activist policy free from the control of the local government, though the whole outline of their plan had not yet emerged. The first, but significant step was the assassination of Chang, which was, at least in retrospect, a prelude to the Manchurian incident three years later. To the government and the military authority in Tokyo, Chang's death meant the disappearance of a reliable partner in Manchuria. After Chang's death, military authority in Tokyo still sought for the policy toward

Manchuria similar to Tanaka's line but the disappearance of the partner reduced the effectiveness of its policy. Thus on the eve of Manchurian incident, not only did the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over the army, but also the control of the military authority in Tokyo over the Kwantung Army declined.

The beginning of the five-year plan in the USSR alarmed the Kwantung Army which was after Chang's death extremely sensitive to the challenge to its position from both abroad and at home. The Kwantung Army regarded the possible USSR's emergence as a power in the Far East as a threat to its position in Manchuria and, in view of this Soviet factor, the Kwantung Army was searching for the right time to put its major aim into practice. Military intervention on such a large scale might not be needed to defend its position from Chinese nationalism alone in view of the weakened defense capabilities of the Chang Hsueh-liang Government.³⁶ The Kwantung Army's aim, however, was far beyond this, and the Soviet factor gave an impetus, though not the only one, to the Kwantung Army's activities in the Manchurian incident.

II. The Deterioration of Soviet-Japanese Relations after the Manchurian Incident

1. The Manchurian Incident and its Impact on Soviet-Japanese Relations

The Manchurian incident destroyed drastically the *status quo* in Manchuria and abruptly raised tension between Japan and the USSR. It was apparent to both Tokyo and Moscow that the Kwantung Army's encroachment on North Manchuria across the CER, traditionally regarded as a Russian sphere of influence, would change the subsequent Soviet-Japanese relations. One of the most serious controversies in the Manchurian crisis between the Kwantung Army and Tokyo's authority was over this point. Ishiwara Kanji, who took a leading part in Manchurian incident as the Kwantung Army staff officer, said that if the troops stationed in North Manchuria was not sanctioned, the Manchurian incident deserved nothing and thus he could not accord with the vacuum in Manchuria because it permitted the Soviet penetration. This testified to the Kwantung Army's will.³⁷

In addition to this, the emergence of "Imperial faction" headed by General Araki Sadao of the Japanese army was an irritating factor to Moscow. Araki, the army minister under Inukai and Saitō, was famous for his ideological antagonism against the USSR and sometimes even professed in public the possibility of Soviet-Japanese war. Although it might have been mainly meant for home consumption, the army minister's conduct itself seemed threatening to Moscow.

It is well known that the Soviet government made a series of concessions to Japan in the Manchurian crisis.³⁸ Troianovskii's letter of March 31, 1932, to Karakhan, the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs,³⁹ sheds some light on Soviet perception of the Far Eastern crisis. First, Troianovskii, *polpred* to Japan, pointed out in the beginning of his letter that Japanese power structure was not monolithic. Not only did there exist rivalry between the Army and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but there were also various trends in the "military-fascist movement." Therefore, it was impossible to say that this movement was totally hostile to the USSR.

Second, Troianovskii's comment on the Shanghai incident should be noted. Troianovskii, citing an article of Sokolskii, the American journalist for the New York Times, noted the impact of the Shanghai incident on American-Japanese relations. It is hardly surprising that the Soviet government intended to make use of the US-

Japanese conflict for the sake of its own defense policy in view of the situation in the Manchurian crisis. The activities of Skvirskii (the Soviet Union's unofficial emissary), searching for US recognition after the Shanghai incident, seemed to reveal the Soviet government's intention.⁴⁰ It was symbolic that Troianovskii himself served as a first *polpred* to the United States after American recognition of the USSR. The American ambassador to Japan, J. C. Grew, remarked in his diary that the transference to Washington of Troianovskii, who was well-informed about Japan, was much noticed in Tokyo.⁴¹

Third, Troianovskii's concern about the Shanghai incident seemed to be connected with his concern about the direction of Japanese expansion. Interestingly, R. Sorge, at that time in Shanghai, recalled, after his arrest by the Japanese police, that the Shanghai incident revealed Japanese intentions of a "southward advance."⁴²

In Tokyo, as Troianovskii suggested, controversy had arisen over Japanese policy toward Russia. Pro-Russian groups were working to reorient Japanese policy from its position of confrontation with Moscow, and Troianovskii tried to make every use of these groups. He seemed to think highly of Admiral Saitō and Katō Kanji and made contact with them. Although Katō was firmly opposed to Saitō in the London Naval Conference, both Katō and Saitō were members of the Russo-Japanese Society and took the same line in regard to policy toward Russia. In the conversation with Troianovskii, Katō agreed to the non-aggression pact offered by the Soviet government at the end of the previous year⁴³ and offered Troianovskii to arrange Saitō's visit to Moscow to improve Soviet-Japanese relations.⁴⁴

In his telegram to Moscow, Troianovskii reported the "severe struggle" between Araki and Katō.⁴⁵ Katō was rather overestimated in his report. Although Katō was opposed to Araki's Russian policy, they worked together to exterminate the influence of liberals in Japanese political circles. It was nevertheless interesting that Troianovskii tried to make use of the rivalry between the Japanese army and navy. The "nothern advance" versus the "southern advance" was a major theme in Japanese foreign policy after the Manchurian incident up to Pearl Harbor, and this theme was closely related to the rivalry between the army and the navy. Understandably enough, the Soviet government preferred a "souther advance" to a "northern advance" if Japanese expansionism should be inevitable. In this sense, Moscow was fortunate to have two admirals, Saitō and Okada, as successive Japanese prime ministers in the critical moment after the terrorist overthrow of the Inukai cabinet.

It may be an exaggeration to say that all policies of the Saitō Cabinet were in favor of Moscow. Although the navy and Japanese officials in Manchukuo supported the non-aggression pact, the Saitō Government finally refused the pact at the end of 1932.⁴⁶ Araki's influence on the Government was surely not negligible. Troianovskii ironically reported to Moscow that Uchida, foreign minister under Saitō, acted at the command of the military.⁴⁷ But this did not mean that Saitō government's policy toward Russia entirely depended on Araki. This Government otherwise consistently restrained Araki's insistence on crucial decisions in which the framework of Japanese policy toward Russia was decided.

The Saitō government made the crucial decisions on its foreign policy in the summer of 1932 and in the autumn of 1933. The Cabinet decision on August 27, 1932, prescribed that the measures irritating the USSR should not be taken because it was very important to avoid a clash with the USSR, at least at the present international situation. Though a non-aggression pact was not explicitly mentioned, the enunciation of non-aggressive intentions between Manchukuo, Japan, and the USSR was

decided in this Cabinet decision.⁴⁸ It was evident that Araki had failed in his objective.

Araki raised the matter again at the Five Ministers Conference held in October 1933. At this conference, he insisted that it was because of the USSR's present defense capabilities and relations with western powers that the USSR did not take countermeasures despite the fact that Japanese policy toward Russia brought about a menace and resentment. Hence it was apparent, he added, that the USSR would take up a positive attitude if Japanese relations with western powers deteriorated and the USSR's capabilities recovered after its accomplishment of the industrial plan. From this viewpoint, Araki emphasized the necessity of national defense policy against the USSR in the next few years as well as multi-lateral friendly relations with powers other than the USSR.⁴⁹ On the other hand, the navy stood in a position quite contrary to the army at this conference. While maintaining firmly that it should be denounced if the American government took measures against Japanese national defense policy, while the navy remained moderate in its view of Russian policy. According to its view, the risk of a clash with the USSR should be avoided and it was necessary to settle pending problems by keeping up a friendly policy toward the USSR. Moreover, the navy demanded that some measures to turn the USSR's concern from the east to the south should be taken.⁵⁰

Saitō, Foreign Minister Hirota Kōki, and the Minister of Finance Takahashi Korekiyo succeeded in restraining both the army and the navy at this conference. The Five Ministers Conference decided Japanese foreign policy in moderate terms. In retrospect, however, this "success" was merely ephemeral and Soviet-Japanese relations had now become tangled.

2. "Anti-Comintern" Policy as a Means of Cooperation with Western Powers and China

Aware of its vulnerability in the Far East, the USSR made desperate efforts to settle its relations with western powers and to increase defense capabilities in the Far East. Little by little by the mid-1930s, the USSR's efforts were bearing fruit. Moscow's greatest success in international politics in the Far East was its ability to win American recognition at the end of 1933. While for Moscow it was a first step toward collective security in the Far East, for Washington it was an opportunity to reconsider the Washington system which had excluded the USSR.

Moscow and Washington found a point of contact in the non-aggression pact in the Pacific. In the conversation with Litvinov in November 1933, F. D. Roosevelt said that he was ready to give moral and diplomatic support to the USSR and offered the non-aggression pact in the Pacific.⁵¹ This matter was often discussed by the two powers from that time on. In the conversation with Maiskii, *polpred* to Britain, in November 1934, Norman Davis, the American delegate to the disarmament conference in London, said that while the Japanese government put forward the bilateral treaty with Britain, the United States, and the USSR respectively, it was rather harmful in the present international situation. He offered Maiskii the multilateral pact in the Pacific and Maiskii agreed to it, though only personally.⁵² There was little possibility that this multilateral pact could be concluded, but the resulting cooperation between the US and the USSR restrained Japan.

The rapid escalation of defense capabilities in the Far East changed the military balance between Japan and the USSR. Sokol'nikov, the Deputy Commissar for

Foreign Affairs, wrote to Iurenev, *polpred* to Tokyo, on the October 17, 1933, that the present situation was utterly different from that a few years before and that the USSR would not find itself defenseless in the case of the enemy's trial to reconnoiter the USSR.⁵³ It was also felt in Tokyo that Japanese military superiority had declined. Ironically, Ishiwara, who had taken a leading part in the Kwantung Army in the Manchurian incident, could not but admit, when he served as chief of Operations Section in the Army General Staff, that the incident made the USSR a power.⁵⁴ This perception was not limited to the army. In a conversation with Iurenev immediately after the inauguration, Hirota warned that the USSR's fortifications in the Far East irritated the Japanese people.⁵⁵

The USSR's emergence as a power in contrast with Japanese isolation after its withdrawal from the League of Nations put pressure on the Japanese government. Tani Masayuki, chief of Asian Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed his sentiments: "It is to our advantage that Russia remains red. If it turns white, all the European powers will have sympathy with the Russia. Thus, it is better for us that Russia remains unpopular in some measure."⁵⁶

Should Japan become entangled with the USSR alone, there were wide variety of choices for the Japanese government. Although the army remained hostile to the USSR, the influence of the "Imperial faction," which was the most antagonistic toward Russia in the army, declined after Araki's resignation of the army minister in January 1934. The army, however, embarked on another adventure in the spring of 1935 in North China, where western powers, notably Britain, shared vital interests. It was apparent that the army's activities in North China would strain not only Sino-Japanese relations but also Anglo-Japanese relations.⁵⁷

Faced with the developing conflict in North China, the Japanese government was in a dilemma. The army's obstinate assault undermined the government and some compromise with the army was unavoidable. However, the government nevertheless strongly felt that conflict with western powers should be avoided. It was in this context that Japanese Foreign Ministry took "anti-Comintern" (*bōkyō*) policy after the announcement of Hirota's "three principles" in the autumn of 1935.⁵⁸

This policy was a complex of various motives. First, although this policy was a concession to the army, the Foreign Ministry took the factional conflict in the army into consideration. Some groups in the army were opposed to the encroachment on North China from the viewpoint of defense policy against the USSR. Giving priority to the preparation for war against the USSR, Ishiwara firmly clung to this line. Araki was in the same line though opposed to Ishiwara in other issue areas. Both Ishiwara and Araki were not "liberal" in any sense. But the Foreign Ministry tried to make use of them in order to reorient the army's policy toward China.⁵⁹

Second, the Foreign Ministry did not want confrontation with the USSR, though it was evident that the "anti-Comintern" policy would irritate the USSR. The USSR's fortifications made it impossible for the army to run a risk of war against the USSR at least in the short run, and the Foreign Ministry was well aware of this. Without a series of conflicts in North China, the Foreign Ministry would not have taken this policy. The Foreign Ministry carried on negotiations concerning the sale of the CER to remove the grounds for conflict in spite of several interruptions. This effort bore fruit in the beginning of 1935, when the army's new adventure in China had not yet distinctly emerged.⁶⁰ Perhaps the Foreign Ministry found no other way than this temporizing measures in so far as it was impossible to restrain the army at least in the short run.

Third, the "anti-Comintern" policy was expected to serve as a means of cooperation with western Powers, notably Britain, and China, though its effect was somewhat dubious. In China, the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party continued, though quest for a united front against Japan was rising day by day. The anti-communist sentiments underlying Britain's appeasement policy were well known to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Japanese advocacy to strengthen the relations between powers committed to the Washington system against the "menace of Bolshevism" in the Far East was not unlike Britain's policy in the Northern Expedition.

This strenuous and somewhat acrobatic effort, however, was in vain. The army, which further strengthened its position after the *coup d'état* on February 26, 1936, took another "anti-Comintern" policy, independent of the Foreign Ministry. For the Foreign Ministry, the first western power for cooperation was Britain, not Germany. The Anti-Comintern Pact concluded on the November 25, 1936, between Germany and Japan not only made Soviet-Japanese relations extremely strained but also overshadowed Anglo-Japanese relations. The response to the efforts of Yoshida Shigeru, the ambassador to Britain, to find a base of understanding with the British government by building on its fear of Bolshevism was indifference.⁶¹

The Nanking Government also took a negative attitude. The Kawagoe-Chang Ch'ün talk in Nanking over joint defense against sovietization came to a rupture immediately before the Sian incident.⁶² Although Japanese policy toward China became less aggressive after the Sian incident, it was too late to recover the confidence of the Nanking Government. Moreover, the government's control over the military utterly weakened after the *coup d'état* on the 26th of February. The army and the navy pressed for their own defense programs separately and the government could not restrain either of them, nor could it even give priority to either of them.⁶³ In this situation, Stomoniakov wrote to Iurenev on the October 22, in 1936:

All Japanese policy came to a deadlock and its total collapse is in the near future.... The "divide and rule" policy toward China brought about its unification and resistance. The possibility of a great war with China becomes more and more real and, parallel to this, Japan is more and more afraid to be involved in the war, which would absorb all its resources, weaken it in relation to the USSR and other powers, and in the end confront Japanese imperialism with a catastrophe for realizing all its plans.⁶⁴

As Stomoniakov predicted, the "catastrophe" came in July 1937. Originating from a minor skirmish near the Lukouchiao bridge, the undeclared war between Japan and China became more and more protracted. The Foreign Ministry's desperate effort to cooperate with western powers and China totally failed, and Soviet-Japanese relations reached a new stage.

III. Conclusion

As I have discussed in the preceding pages, the Soviet factor had influenced the framework of Japanese foreign policy from the Washington conference to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war. Attitudes toward Russian policy were to some extent due to appraisals of the Washington system, which excluded the USSR. Pro-Russian groups did not regard it as an effective system, and searched for Russo-Sino-Japanese

collaboration as an alternative. Although Shidehara rejected “Rappallo” in the Far East, he did interpret the Washington system as a system antagonistic to the USSR; therefore before the Manchurian incident, there existed mutual images of stable relations between Japan and the USSR.

The Soviet factor also influenced the Kwantung Army’s activities in the Manchurian incident, which put an end to “Shidehara diplomacy.” Although the army’s activist Manchurian policy in 1920s was to some extent a response to the Soviet diplomacy at that time, the top leaders of the army regarded North Manchuria in the north of the CER as a Russian sphere of influence, and depended on the local government for the implementation of the North Manchurian policy. Alarmed at the beginning of the five-year plan in the USSR, the Kwantung Army forcibly sought to surpass this limit.

After the Manchurian incident, the army and the navy strengthened their positions, in parallel with the decline of liberals in Japanese political circles. Moscow was well aware of the discrepancy between the army and the navy over the direction of Japanese expansion, and made every use of it. In this sense, Moscow was fortunate to have two admirals, Saitō and Okada, as successive prime ministers after the terrorist overthrow of the Inukai Cabinet.

However, Soviet-Japanese relations had become tangled since 1935. The Foreign Ministry took the “anti-Comintern” policy, partly in order to improve relations with western powers and China, and partly in order to restrain the army’s activities in North China. The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war, however, extinguished the slightest possibility of this policy and the Foreign Ministry’s desperate effort resulted in vain.

Notes

- 1 See Kobayashi Yukio, “Taiso seisaku no sūi to manmō mondai,” in *Taiheiyō sensō eno michi* 1 (Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1963); G. A. Lensen, *Japanese Recognition of the USSR: Soviet-Japanese Relations 1921-1930* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1970).
- 2 Kitaoka Shin’ichi, “Gaikō shidōsha to shite no Gotō Shimpei,” in *Nenpō kindai nippon kenkyū-2; kindai nippon to higashi Ajia* (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1980): 83-88
- 3 *Nippon gaikō monjo taishō 14 nen dai 1 satsu*, dok. 423: 658.
- 4 *Suzuki Teiichi shi danwa sokkiroku*, jōkan (Tokyo: Kidonikki kenkyūkai, 1971): 63.
- 5 Tsurumi Yūsuke, *Gotō Shimpei* 4 (Tokyo: Keisō shobō, 1969): 391.
- 6 *Kabayama Sukehide den* (Tokyo: Kabayama Sukehide denki kankōkai, 1942): 428.
- 7 *Senshisōsho daihonei kaigunbu rengōkantai (1)* (Tokyo: Asagumo shinbunsha, 1975): 198.
- 8 Yoshimura Michio, “Nippon gun no kita karahuto senryō to nichī-so kokko mondai,” *Seiji Keizai Shigaku*, 132 (1977): 4-5
- 9 G. Z. Besedovski, *Revelations of a Soviet Diplomat* (London, 1931): 121.
- 10 Kobayashi: 249-50.
- 11 Regarding Shidehara’s view of Matsui, see *Minsei* 3, No.8 (1929): 105-6.
- 12 See Iriye Akira, *After Imperialism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1965), Part I.
- 13 Yamaura Kanichi, *Mori Kaku* (Tokyo: Takayama shoin, 1943): 537.
- 14 *Nippon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō monjo*, gekan (Tokyo: Hara shobo, 1965): 173-75.
- 15 J. Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy* (London, 1952), 2: 157-58.
- 16 Hosoya Chihiro, “Washington taisei no tokushitsu to henyō,” in Hosoya Chihiro and Saitō Makoto eds, *Washington taisei to nichī-bei kankei* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdaigaku shup-

- pankai,1978): 27-32
- 17 *Nichi-ro nenkan* (Tokyo: Nichiro tsūshinsha, 1935): 111-18.
 - 18 J. Degras, ed, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy* (London,1953), 3:57.
 - 19 *Nippon gaiko nenpyō narabi ni shuyō monjo*, gekan: 62.
 - 20 E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia: The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-23* (London, 1953), 3: 519-48.
 - 21 “Ro-shi kōsho to rōnō daihyō Karahan no hokuman ni okeru dōsei narabi ni kore ni tomonau seiijō,” in *Gendaishi shiryō (31) Mantetsu (1)* (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1966): 255-71.
 - 22 Ibid., 269.
 - 23 E. H. Carr, *A History of Soviet Russia; Socialism in One Country* (London, 1964), 3-II: 681-87.
 - 24 See Mitani Taichiro, “Tenkanki no gaikō shidō to sono kiketsu,” in Mitani Taichiro, *Nippon seiitō seiji no keisei* (Tokyo: Tōkyōdaigaku shuppankai, 1967): 294
 - 25 *Nippon gaikō monjo taishō 13 nen dai 2 satsu*: 766-67.
 - 26 Ibid.: 774.
 - 27 Ibid., dok. 581, 606.
 - 28 Ibid., dok. 671, 680-81.
 - 29 Matsuoka Yōsuke Denki Kankōkai, *Matsuoka Yōsuke; sonohito to shōgai* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1974): 171-72.
 - 30 Carr, *Socialism in One Country*, 3-II: 745-46.
 - 31 Banno Junji, “Seitō seiji to chūgoku seisaku,” in *Kindai nippon to higashi Asia*: 108-9.
 - 32 *Ugaki Issei Nikki*, 1 (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1968): 494.
 - 33 Usui Yoshimi, *Nicchū gaikōshi: hokubatsu no jidai* (Tokyo: Hanawa shobō, 1971): 77-80.
 - 34 *Yamamoto Jōtaro; denki* (Tokyo: Yamamoto Jōtaro ou denki hensankai, 1942): 559-60.
 - 35 It seems that here Tanaka’s attitude was connected with his diplomatic style characterized as “old diplomacy.” The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Russo-Japanese Treaty, though formally abolished, had some influence on the framework of the Tanaka diplomacy. See Hosoya: 27-32.
 - 36 Suzuki Teiichi later said it was the Soviet factor rather than the Chiang Hsüeh-liang’s anti-Japanese activities that caused the Manchurian incident. (*Suzuki Teiichi shi danwa sok-kiroku*, gekan: 297).
 - 37 Ogata Sadako, *Manshū jihen to seisaku no keisei katei* (Tokyo: Hara shobō, 1966) chap. 7.
 - 38 J. Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy: 1930-33* (London, 1983): chap. 7.
 - 39 *Dokumenty vneshnei politiki SSSR (DVP)*, 15 (Moscow, 1969) dok. 145: 214-17.
 - 40 Ibid., dok. 53: 69-70.
 - 41 J. C. Grew, *Tainichi 10 nen*, jōkan, trans. by Ishikawa Kinichi (Tokyo: Mainichi shinbunsha, 1948): 145-46.
 - 42 *Gendaishi shiryō (1) Sorge jiken(1)* (Tokyo: Misuzu shobō, 1962): 334-35.
 - 43 *Katō Kanji Nikki* (unpublished) 8 April, 1932.
 - 44 *DVP*, 15: note. 131: 765.
 - 45 Ibid., dok. 316: 464.
 - 46 Most of the Japanese officials in Manchukuo supported the non-aggression pact in order to win Soviet recognition of Manchukuo. Some diplomats agreed with them. Morijima Morito, *Inbō ansatsu guntō* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1950): 101-4.
 - 47 *DVP*, dok. 369: 534.
 - 48 *Nippon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō monjo*, gekan: 66-67.
 - 49 Kitsukawa Manabu, *Arashi to tatakau tesshō Araki* (Tokyo: Araki Sadao shōgun denkihensan kankōkai, 1955): 271.
 - 50 “Teikoku no taigaiseisaku kankei ikken; goshōkaigi,” (Gaimushō kiroku; file no. A.1.0.0.6-3).

- 51 *DVP*, 16 (Moscow, 1970), dok. 370: 658-89.
- 52 *DVP*, 17 (Moscow, 1971), dok. 399: 690-91.
- 53 *DVP*, 16 dok. 320: 574.
- 54 “Kaisō otōroku” in Tsunoda Jun, ed. *Ishiwara Kanji shiryō; kokubō ronsaku hen* (Tokyo: Hara shobō, 1978).
- 55 *Nichi-so kōshōshi* (Tokyo: Gannando, 1969): 327.
- 56 *Saionjikō to seikyoku*: 3 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1951): 169.
- 57 A. Trotter, *Britain and Far East; 1933-37* (London, 1975).
- 58 Hirota’s “three principles” consisted of political and economic cooperation between Japan, China, and Manchukuo; joint defense against sovietization; and the complete suppression of all anti-Japanese and anti-Manchukuo activities.
- 59 In regard to Yoshida Shigeru’s approach to Mazaki Jinzaburō, No.2 of the “Imperial faction” in the army, see *Saionjikō to seikyoku*, 4: 418-19.
- 60 G. A. Lensen, *The Damaged Inheritance* (Florida, 1974) chaps. 5-10.
- 61 J. W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath* (New York, 1979): chaps. 4-5.
- 62 Hata Ikuhiko, *Nicchū sensō shi* (Tokyo: Kawade shobō, 1961): 100-5.
- 63 The “Fundamentals of National Policy” decided by the Hirota Government in August 1936 was the outstanding case. In this decision, both the “nothern advance” and the “southern advance” were adopted without giving priority to either. *Nippon gaikō nenpyō narabi ni shuyō monjo*, gekan: 344-45.
- 64 *DVP*, 14, dok. 326: 510.