

# OUR FAR EASTERN ASSIGNMENT

## CHAPTER I

### JAPAN'S INESCAPABLE PROBLEMS

The newcomer to Japan, even before he sets foot on the great concrete landing stage at Yokohama, will gather two impressions which sojourn in the country serves only to strengthen and to amplify. One is the nervous restlessness of the people, first brought home by the quick click-clack of numberless *geta*, or wooden clogs, on the hard surface of the dock. The other is the ruthlessness which lies behind the smiling face of nature in these islands. The feathery plume of smoke rising from volcanic Oshima at the mouth of Tokyo Bay gives the visitor his first ocular demonstration of this last characteristic, but this does not prepare him for the desolation of Yokohama, after three years only beginning to rise from the utter ruin wrought by the earthquake of September 1, 1923.

Between these two impressions there is probably a definite connection, since the characteristics of every people are moulded by geographical factors in their environment. The climate of Japan is mild, the landscape lovely, the seasons rich with natural beauty from early February, when the plum blossoms appear, until November, when the chrysanthemums fulfill the honor paid

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them as the national flower. Behind these natural assets, conducive to geniality, optimism, and love of beauty, lie the essentially barren nature of the country, the prevalence of shattering earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, destructive floods, and typhoons. The conditions of life in Japan are much more charming and much more uncertain than they are with us. So the Japanese, to quote a generality by one of their own publicists, "are more children than men, more prone to enjoy their circumstances than to alter them."<sup>1</sup> Clever, energetic, and adaptable, their minds are more mobile, and at the same time perhaps less persevering, than our own.

This conclusion is so contrary to the impression generally prevalent in America that its gradual fruition in the mind of the visitor comes with difficulty. When an American newspaper man of long Oriental experience told me during my first week in Tokyo that "the Japanese are more to be pitied than feared," I smiled to myself at what I thought his lack of political sophistication. Yet, wider experience served to show that it was not this carefully formed opinion, but the more common American viewpoint, dating from coinage of the mischievous "yellow peril" phrase, which is naïve. We are prone to distrust Japan primarily because she has imitated our ways so successfully. At least, that distrust should be tempered by consideration that facility in imitation itself indicates a lack of the originative qualities which alone make nations truly and enduringly great.

America has never had to face the two essential, harassing problems before Japan: the first, how to find a livelihood for her crowded population without disturbing the rights and sensibilities of other races; the second, how to complete the transformation from feudalism to democracy without losing the basic spiritual

<sup>1</sup> DR. S. WASHIO, in an article on "The Earthquake and Japanese Psychology," Japan Year Book, 1924-1925.

values inherited from a less prosaic and competitive era. It is important to realize how thoroughly these problems are absorbing the energies of Japanese minds, and how little the solutions which are indicated point to the possible war between Japan and America so loosely talked about in both countries.

The one inescapable fact about Japan is that in a group of mountainous volcanic islands, with less than 20 per cent. of their 140,778 square miles subject to cultivation, smaller in area and far less fertile than the state of California, are crowded sixty million people who somehow, somewhere, must make their livings. These people entered the stage of world politics too late to succeed in an openly imperialistic policy. Indeed, it was not until 1911 that they succeeded in eliminating the last of the restrictions on their own sovereignty imposed by the white powers, as somewhat earlier in the case of China, by the unilateral treaties of 1858. It is true, of course, that, as a result of the war with China in 1894, Formosa and the adjacent Pescadores were annexed by Japan. Following the war with Russia a decade later, the Tokyo government resumed sovereignty over the southern half of the island of Saghalien, acquired Russia's leasehold on the Liaotung Peninsula as well as the South Manchurian Railway, and established the protectorate over Korea which preceded outright annexation in 1910. But none of this aggrandizement in immediately adjacent territory was as pronounced an extension of national authority as that taken by our country in assuming control of the Philippine Islands, lying more than six thousand miles from the coast of California.

An economic urge far more acute than that which forced our own pioneers westward to subjugate the Indian tribes was primarily responsible for Japanese expansion between 1894 and 1914. Statistics do not support the claim that there has been no sizable movement of

population to the acquired territories. The census of 1922 showed 386,493 Japanese in Korea, more than double the number there in 1910. In Formosa, in 1922, there were 177,953 Japanese. In the Philippines, acquired by the United States four years after Japan took Formosa, and having approximately eight times the land area of the latter island, there are only about 7,000 Americans. Even the small leased territory on the Liaotung Peninsula had a Japanese civilian population of 81,573 in 1922, while inclement Saghalien then counted 117,782 Japanese settlers. Considering the strength of the religious, social, and sentimental ties binding the Japanese to the parent islands, the present rate of migration within the empire must be regarded as high.

As a consequence of the World War, however, Japan for a period of some years adopted a policy of outright aggression which properly stimulated the suspicions prevalent in the United States. If Japan is frequently embarrassed nowadays by the hostility expressed toward her in many parts of China, she certainly invited hatred by the notorious "Twenty-one Demands," issued as an ultimatum to Peking early in 1915, shortly after Japanese troops had captured the German leased territory of Kiaochow, in Shantung.

By these demands, characterized at the time by Foreign Minister (later Premier) Kato as "absolutely essential for strengthening Japan's position in Eastern Asia," the military caste sought to make Japanese influence predominate permanently, not merely over South Manchuria and Shantung Province, but even throughout all China. The last group of the demands, for instance, insisted that the Chinese government obligate itself to employ Japanese as political, financial, and military advisers; to give Japan a share in the police administration of certain Chinese cities; to purchase from Japan as much as 50 per cent of any munitions China might re-

quire; to let the Japanese construct important railways in the Yangtze basin; and to give Japan priority rights in supplying foreign capital for the economic development of Fukien Province, opposite Formosa.

Without question it was the intention of the Okuma ministry, then in power in Tokyo, to seize the moment when all the great powers of Europe were engaged in a war of doubtful outcome in order to shackle the young Chinese republic to the wheels of Japanese ambitions. Actually, the Twenty-one Demands were much modified before the residue was unwillingly accepted by China, special privilege in South Manchuria and extension of the expiring leasehold on Liaotung Peninsula until 1997 being the only points on which any permanent gain has accrued to Japan. But they caused a serious shock to good relations between Japan and the United States, the only power to inform Tokyo that agreements impairing the political or territorial integrity of China would not be recognized.

The conception behind the Twenty-one Demands, with their implicit faith in the tactics of the bully, was so crude as to substantiate the theory that acumen and foresight are not outstanding characteristics of the Japanese mind. Japan's second blunder of the period with respect to China—the so-called Nishihara loans—was scarcely less stupid. Millions of dollars were advanced on exceedingly slim security; nominally, for such purposes as furthering Chinese participation in the World War, perhaps to secure a lien on Chinese resources which might eventually lead to some form of sanctions. Whatever the real design, most of the money went to line the pockets of venal war lords and led directly to the Consortium Agreement of 1920, whereby the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan agreed to advance money to China only through an international combination of banking groups approved by the four govern-

ments. The net result of the Nishihara loans for Japan appears to have been a considerable loss of money, an increase in foreign and Chinese mistrust, and no tangible benefit except the uncertain allegiance of a few disreputable politicians and generals in China. All recent efforts to secure these loans on Chinese revenues have naturally aroused resentment among the patriotic in that country.

Nor is the tale of Japanese diplomatic folly during the war period complete without reference to the Siberian expedition of 1918 to 1922. To be sure, some of the blame here rests with the United States, which sponsored the invasion of Russian territory intended partly to assist the escape of the Czechoslovak troops and partly to test out the strength of Bolshevism. America, however, confined her military participation to the suggested quota of 7,000 troops, Great Britain, France, and Italy taking an even smaller part in the uninvited intervention. Japan, by official admission, threw 70,000 soldiers into Siberia, engaged in extensive warfare with the Russians costing her over 12,000 casualties in battle, and squandered approximately \$350,000,000 on this utterly fruitless venture. Not until October 25, 1922, four years after the Armistice, did the last Japanese regiment leave Vladivostok. The annexation of the Siberian littoral adjoining Korea on the northeast seems to have been contemplated in some Japanese quarters as long as the initial weakness of the Soviet government made the ambition tenable.

The Siberian expedition, however, is the last aggressive action to which critics of Japanese foreign policy can point with effectiveness. Even before its termination, in the summer of 1921, Japan had accepted President Harding's invitation to the Washington Conference on Limitation of Naval Armaments. With this conference still

recent history, a new and optimistic era in Far Eastern relations was successfully initiated.

The 5-5-3 ratio in capital ships agreed upon by the United States, Great Britain, and Japan is probably, to most minds, the outstanding achievement of the Washington conference. Certainly, its value in breaking up a repetition of that unrestricted naval competition which preceded the World War is hard to overestimate. Yet, from the more limited viewpoint of better Japanese-American relations, other gains secured at Washington are equally striking.

One was the termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, which had unquestionably made the weaker partner feel more secure in taking the assertive steps recounted above. Another was the Four Power Treaty, by which the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan agreed to take under joint consideration controversies "arising out of any Pacific question" not satisfactorily settled by ordinary diplomatic negotiations. A third was the restoration to China of all the German privileges in Shantung acquired by Japan during the war, leaving the Tokyo government's mandate over the former German Pacific islands north of the Equator as its only territorial gain from participation in the hostilities. At the same time the greater part of the Twenty-one Demands were tacitly withdrawn.

Still a fourth advance toward better Pacific relationships was the Nine Power Treaty, in which Italy, Belgium, Holland, Portugal, and China participated, pledging the signatories to respect the sovereignty of the latter nation, to refrain from seeking special rights or privileges there, and to hasten action looking toward complete tariff autonomy for China and the abolition of foreign extraterritorial privileges in that country. These last two important issues will be discussed in detail in the chapters which consider Chinese problems.

Since the adjournment of the Washington conference the Japanese government has not shown, by word or action, any disposition to renew the aggressive note characteristic of the nation's foreign policy during the war-time period. It has, on the contrary, through the League of Nations, the World Court, and lesser international associations, shown a much more active desire for patient constructive cooperation with other countries than our own government can claim.

Toward China in particular, a scrupulous forbearance, often in the face of most serious provocation, has been maintained during the last few years. Since 1923, moreover, Japan's share of the Boxer indemnity, with other funds, has been applied to forwarding educational work in the neighboring Republic. The explanation given by certain Japanese statesmen—that the significance of such actions as the Twenty-one Demands was always exaggerated abroad, is not conclusive. That there has been a real change of policy in Japan, a definite liberalization of the national attitude, can no longer be doubted. Nor is it difficult to appreciate the major factors which have combined to bring about that change.