

Course title: US-Japan Relations and Military Alliance

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Summary: The Quest for International Justice and Asianism in a “New Order in East Asia”:
Fumimaro Konoe and his vision of the World. By Shoji Jun ‘Ichiro

In the mid-nineteenth century , under the Qing Dynasty the worldview in East Asia was a Sino-centric world order, which divided the world into two groups: the Chinese and the barbarians.

Japan having passed for pressure from the Western Powers to became open to the world and incorporated into the modern Western international, Japan passed for a period of changes.

In 1938, Japan issued its proclamation of the ‘ New Order in East Asia’, a policy promoting an alternative world order. Modern Japan’s first independent formed and publicly announced grand strategy, this policy was also significant in that it served as a strigger for the Pacific War. Fumimaro Konoe, who, as prime minister, was the former of the concept of ‘ New Order in East Asia’ in 1930s.

Historians have seen the phrase , the ‘ New Order in East Asia’ as little more than a slogan to justify and glorify the Sino-Japanese War and as an ideological skeleton and governmental vision of Asianism. The ‘ New Order in East Asia’ policy, however, also brought to fruition Konoe’s advocacy of overturning the status quo, which in turn led to the Pacific War.

This phrase served as catchall for Asianism, the “New Order in East Asia” brought a reversal of the conventional archetype of Japanese diplomacy-namely, an idealistic approach adopted by the general public and a pragmatic approach adopted by government the purview of those primarily outside of the government, the government transformed Asianism into official policy for the first time in modern Japanese history in the form of proclamation.

Moreover, Japan was in a stage that placed it geographically in the East Asia yet also on the edge of the West's international system, thus placing it simultaneously on the 'fringe' of two major world orders. "The New Order in East Asia" was therefore a new ideological worldview that sought to define modern Japan's position, while attempting to subjugate the dilemma it faced as a force belonging to neither world order, by preserving unity and reconciling the two.

The Manchurian Incident triggered an impasse between modern Japan's expansion, which from the perspective of this policy focused primarily on the mainland, and the international community and China, an impasse that became increasingly intense as expansion brought Japan into confrontation with both the Washington System and Chinese nationalism.

Japan advocated two fundamental principles to resolve its dilemma with these two forces: **Internationalism** and **Asianism**.

The principle of Internationalism argued that the international community as inequitably divided into "have" nations (with an interest in preserving the status quo) and "have-not" nations (with an interest in overturning the status quo); Japan as a have-not nation with the right to insist on insuring its own survival.

Thus Japan take a "Japanese-centric" stance in its foreign policy. An awareness of Japan informed by a sense of a crisis generated by the country's small size, excessive population, and less-than abundant resources .

Understanding, however, that the tenor of international relations was shifting away from the use of force and toward the ideology of justice, Konoe argued for the significance of the principle of "just humanity". He advocated taking a positive stance, within certain prescribed limits, toward the new international climate evident in the post-World War League of Nations, Wilsonian idealism, and the new tone of diplomacy as a means of making a just humanity a reality. Similarly, the idea of "rejecting economic imperialism" and "opposing discrimination against yellow people" .

He made a distinction between the young "idealistic" United States and the major colonial power of "imperialist" Britain , he denounced the "highhandedness of the major powers" in Europe, of

which Britain formed the nucleus, rather than standing “*Ei-bei Hon’I no Henwa Shugi wo Haisu* (opposed to Anglo-American-Centered Pacifism)”.

The principle of “just humanity” is not only applied to the international community, Konoe applied the principle to Japan past as well, he criticized the “invasive and militaristic” policies of Japan toward the Asian mainland following the Japan-Russia War as a policy maintained by a military clique of “thugs”.

The second principle is Asianism. since Japan intended East Asia in its expansionist, Japan needed a rational explanation to justify both at home and abroad the reason it felt compelled to expand into East Asia, and China in particular, as well as related regions.

Thus, Asianism was the principle invoked to support this policy. Asianism comprise diverse archetypes, the advocacy of solidarity among Asian countries as a means to counter pressure from Western Powers, as Yoshimi Takeuchi asserts “No matter how disjointed, one cannot discount a shared orientation toward solidarity among Asian countries(setting aside the issue of whether invasion is the means advocated)”.

With the desire to counter the strong sense of crisis posed by the threat of the “inroads made by the Western Powers in the Far East”, seen advancing from Europe and North America at the beginning of the Meiji Period, Asianism was initially defended by other Asian countries, particularly the Qing Dynasty.

The Asianism advocated a sense of solidarity based on racial, cultural and geographical homogeneity. This sense of solidarity, though easily accepted as a natural affinity created by innate characteristics, lacked an affirmative understanding of other Asian cultures.. Japan was subsequently the only in the region to modernize. As a result, the concept of moving beyond its borders onto the Asian mainland, as articulated by “Great Asianism” and “the liberation of Asia”, began in nationalistic ideology that advocated expansion beyond Japan’s borders. The sense of Asian solidarity born of shared innate characteristics tied in with a feeling of Japanese superiority. Thus, it justified Japan’s taking a leadership role in East Asia under the banner of defending Asia against Europe.

However, With the danger from the West receding, and chaos in China as the Qing Dynasty collapsed, on the other hand, Japan found itself without a sovereignty nation in Asia able to serve as an equal political and military partner. Moreover, Japan came to be a major power with colonies in Korea and Taiwan. Left with no alternative to maintaining friendly relations with Europe and the US, as a result Japan's in quest for cooperation began. This scenario invalidated Asianism as a political policy.

The withdrawal of the Asianism encouraged nationalism in Asian countries, and at the same time, the gape widened between the ideology of Asianism and realities that followed the Russo-Japanese War, which had established Japan as an empire. Japan found itself caught in the trap of "anti-imperialism", opposing a Western invasion of Asia, but emerging as a colonial power itself.

Japan faced expectation both at home and abroad. Thus, the new prime minister Konoe underscored "true peace based on international justice" and "true peace based on an alternative to simply maintaining the status quo. He asserted that if international justice were not extended to the issue of fair distribution of territory, justice of this magnitude was nothing more than a "flight of fancy". The focus should be on instituting "a next-best policy", which necessitated three basic conditions: the freedom to acquire resources, the freedom to open new markets, and the freedom of movement of the workforce.

As the conflict between Japan and the international community, specifically with the League of Nations, intensified, voices were raised in the autumn of 1938 for Japan to sever completely the cooperative relationship it had maintained with the League of Nations beyond its withdrawal from the institution. Moreover, Japan began to reevaluate the conventions it had previously supported, namely the Nine-Power Treaty and other aspects of the Washington system. Thus the isolation from the West that Japan experienced after the Manchurian Incident occasioned the nation's "return" to Asia, which then greeted Japan with defiance.

On November 3, 1938, the Konoe cabinet issued the proclamation for a "New Order in East Asia" in an attempt to resolve this dilemma. The "New Order in East Asia" possessed two main pillars. The first was a "new peace mechanism" (a new order) rooted in the principle of international justice. The second was the "construction of a new structure of autonomous

solidarity based on a truly moral foundation” among the countries of Japan, Manchuria, and China.

The Asianism advocated in the “New Order in East Asia” was a concept constructed on the principle of solidarity between Japan and China as equal partners. It was supposed to rest on a fixed set of traditional East Asia values, as symbolized in the evocation of morality.

In the other hand, Western nations registered their objections to the “New Order in East Asia” as a policy that rejected the Washington System. They concerns that it would result in the creation of a closed bloc that would exclude the Western Nations. For its part, China denounced the policy on the grounds that it would be rendered a “servile nation”. At home, while Konoe boasted at the Imperial Diet, “ for the first time in history the resolution of a military conflict between two nations has been predicted on moral grounds”, the prevailing view within the assembly was that the peace conditions offered for concluding the war in terms of territory and reparations were far too generous.

Conclusion

The fait accompli of Japan’s policy toward the mainland from the perspective of the right to ensure the nation’s survival, the idealistic elements expressed in the “New Order in East Asia” could only possess a marginal status. Restrained by these limits, the Japanese never confronted the issue of Chinese nationalism directly, and the attempt to built a “New Order in East Asia” was therefore “a modern myth that would end as mere dream”

The “ New Order in East Asia” was also characterized by an attempt to resolve the dilemma of modern Japan’s policy toward the mainland by introducing the principles of international justice in relationship to Washington System and Asianism in response to Chinese nationalism, both of which were novel arguments meant to replace imperialism and colonialism.

As a G7 member under a structure in which it is a full member of the West nor of Asia, Japan’s situation remains essentially unchanged, and debate erupts frequently over two alternatives: of “American-Japanese cooperation”, existing as a “member of the free world”, or “returning to Asia”.

