

Internationalism, Regionalism and Nationalism in East Asia in the Inter-War Period

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- * Paper for the Symposium, *The Role of the United Nations in International Politic - A Historical Re-examination from the Member States' Perspectives*-, 20-21 December 2003.
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Introduction

In September 1931 the outbreak of fighting in Manchuria between Japan and China presented the League of Nations and the principle of collective security with its first major challenge. Over the following eighteen months it became evident that the League's moral power could not force a diplomatic resolution of the crisis and that the leading member states would not put the ideal of universal security before their own short-term national interests. However, many argued at the time that this did not mean that the dreams and hopes of post-war generation should be discarded for this was only a crisis in East Asia and the League was fundamentally a European body. On the whole international historians have been sympathetic to this perspective and have instead focused on Ethiopia as the real cause of the League's decline. There are, however, very good reasons not to discount the importance of the Manchurian crisis, for many of the problems that came into focus during this episode are difficulties that have bedevilled internationalism and collective security ever since. The crisis was, after all, not just about the conflicting security concerns that gripped the Great Powers from 1931-33 but also involved such crucial issues as the conflicting ambitions of regionalism and internationalism, and the degree to which Western values can be assumed to be universal. Indeed, it is a crisis whose course and consequences only make sense if they are viewed in the light of the broad themes that shaped the international politics of East Asia in the inter-war period and, in particular, the evolutionary development of internationalism as a normative value.

The Birth of Universal Internationalism

When, in the early days of the Great War, the original framers of what became the League of Nations first began their deliberations about what kind of international organization could be established to regulate the affairs of the world it was automatically assumed that such a body would extend beyond Europe. At first glance this might appear a surprising decision, for the need for such a body largely arose out of the desire to avoid any repeat of the carnage being caused by the European conflict. However, in a number of ways the ground had already been set for an universalist approach. After all, the Hague Conferences of 1899 and 1907 had been attended by a large number of non-European states, including Japan, China and Siam.¹ Moreover, it was undeniable by 1914 that the United States and Japan were Great Powers in their own right. Thus, when the Bryce group of liberal academics, journalists and politicians produced their *Proposals for the Avoidance of War* in 1915, it was already argued that membership should extend beyond Europe to the United States and Japan.² During the next three years this developed into a more strictly universal approach with both conservative and progressive internationalists in the United States arguing that any organization had to involve representatives from all nations.³ Thus when President Woodrow Wilson made his 'Fourteen Points' speech in January 1918, he referred explicitly to the need for 'a general association of nations'.⁴

This speculation about the establishment of a League of Nations had a profound effect on the region even before the opening of the Paris peace conference. In Japan the prospect of an Anglo-American internationalist agenda emerging shaped both political events and intellectual discourse. In the political field, this was particularly the case in regard to the Siberian intervention. In 1918 the Army supported a military campaign in Siberia partly in order to forestall the potentially detrimental effects of internationalism on the international environment and on Japan's domestic politics. Civilians such as Hara Takashi, the leader of the Seiyūkai party, interpreted events differently, fearing that unilateral intervention would be seen as an unwelcome throwback to outdated imperialism and lead to a clash with the West.⁵ Intellectually, internationalism also won some converts among the leading academic figures of the Taishō era. For example, Yoshino Sakuzō very quickly came to support its tenets and turned his back on his previous belief that Japan needed to act as the regional hegemon.⁶ However, at the same time the nature of the new Anglo-American internationalism led to profound concern among some thinkers. One of the leading figures who espoused such fears was, of course, the young politician, Konoe Fumimaro. In his famous essay published in December 1918 Konoe raised the suspicion that the new British and American stress on the importance of upholding peace was self-serving and likely only to perpetuate social injustice between nation-states. In making this criticism his concern was by no means a universalist one, but rather concentrated solely on what he considered to be the Anglo-Saxon effort to consign Japan to a position of perpetual inferiority.⁷

Meanwhile in China, President Wilson's pronouncements on self-determination provoked a great deal of interest and anticipation, for it suggested that a mechanism was being put into place that would protect the interests of weaker states and hinder further encroachments by the Great Powers. Specifically, it was hoped that the introduction of a more internationalist approach to international politics would allow China at the forthcoming peace conference to not only achieve a favourable outcome in regard to the future of German property in Shandong, but also mean that it could raise the issue of revision of the unequal treaties. Internationalism thus excited expectations that it would help to improve China's standing.⁸

However, while the values of and potential problems arising from internationalism were widely discussed, the League that emerged from the Paris Peace Conference failed to live up to expectations. One clear weakness as far as East Asia was concerned was that Japan's attempt to introduce a clause into the Covenant guaranteeing the principle of racial equality was rejected. Even more significant, however, was that Wilson's attempt to put the principle of collective security at the heart of the organization alienated American opinion with the result that the United States did not become a member. This obviously had important implications for East Asia, for it clearly raised questions about how collective security could be applied to the region if one of the major naval powers in the Pacific was not committed to take action. Moreover, the hopes for treaty revision that internationalism had sparked in China were frustrated, for the Big Five refused even to address the issue of the unequal treaties as this was not directly related to the future of the Central Powers.

Internationalism and Multilateralism in the 1920s

The spirit of internationalism had not, however, completely died in Washington and there therefore still existed the possibility that the United States might act to

encourage international co-operation in Asia through other means. This was not unthinkable, for as early as 1899 Washington had sought through its support of the 'Open Door' in China to encourage a multilateral approach towards international politics in the region. In the following years it had built further on this foundation, particularly in 1909-10 when it acted as a leading player in the establishment of an international banking consortium to regulate the provision of loans to the Chinese government. The Chinese revolution and the Great War had unfortunately thrown the sanctity of the 'Open Door' and the viability of the consortium into disarray but clearly by 1919 Washington and London were keen to see international co-operation revived.⁹ This desire arose for two reasons, first because of concern that China was heading towards internal anarchy, and second because Japan appeared to be following a unilateral policy to increase its influence by taking advantage of China's misfortune. In 1919 therefore the United States began to press for the revival of the consortium and, in addition, in May agreed with the other Great Powers to introduce an embargo on sales of arms to China in order to try to avoid adding further fuel to the civil strife in that country.¹⁰ Building on these foundations, it was possible to envisage the creation of a new international regime in East Asia that would involve co-operation between the Powers to assist China to return to peace and stability and which would at the same time act as a constraint on Japan's ambitions.

The eventual result of this thinking was the holding of the Washington conference in 1921-22 and the signing of the three treaties with which that gathering is associated. By getting all the Powers to respect China's sovereignty, by providing for mutual security through naval arms limitation, and by achieving the termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the conference appeared to create a viable framework for stability. This multilateral arrangement was one that emerged in parallel to the League, but it contained a number of elements associated with internationalism, such as the emphasis on disarmament and consultation. Indeed, one of the arguments used to attack the Anglo-Japanese alliance was that this old-fashioned military commitment had no place in the modern world. Thus by 1922 it might be said that internationalism in East Asia had become bifurcated. At one level was the high profile multilateral co-operation epitomized by what has become known as the Washington system, which had the responsibility for executing a gradual relaxation of the semi-colonial regime that existed in China. Relegated to a lower level were the activities of the League, which dealt with such matters as international co-operation to regulate and reduce international sales of opium and to crackdown on slavery. Thus the multilateralist strand of internationalism out-stripped internationalism based on the League.

The centrality of the League as the primary internationalist body was not just challenged in the field of practical politics and diplomacy, for, in addition, its tenets came to be questioned at the intellectual level. Originally the League had acted as the most important magnet for the aspirations of internationalists in the region due to the activities of national groups associated with the organization, such as the League of Nations Association in Japan. However, by 1925 a group of American Christians, businessmen and academic specialists in Pacific affairs created an alternative focus for internationalist activity – the Institute for Pacific Relations (IPR). This body, at least initially, focused on the idea of creating a sense of a Pacific community, in other words one free from the cynical European politicking that was seen as compromising the League.¹¹ This American interest in the Pacific as a distinct community or region was reciprocated by some academics and journalists in Japan, who also disliked the Euro-centric focus of the League. Among these figures was, ironically, the leading Japanese intellectual, Nitobe Inazō, who had acted as under-secretary-general of the

League from 1920-27, and the influential businessman, Shibusawa Eiichi.¹² Indeed, the Japanese enthusiasts took the arguments for a Pacific community even further than their American counterparts. For example, in 1929 at the IPR conference in Kyoto Nitobe argued in favour of the League devolving power to a number of regional congresses.¹³ Thus by the late 1920s there was already a shift away from the universalism of the League towards new ideals that instead emphasized the importance of multilateral co-operation between the interested powers in the Pacific.

Regionalism and Nationalism in the 1920s

Internationalism therefore had by the mid-1920s made a considerable impact on East Asia, even if this effect was rather muddled by the fact that it existed in two or three competing forms. East Asia, however, was a region that was traditionally marked by a strong sense of both regional and national identity. This naturally raised the question of whether the promise of internationalism, whether in its universal, multilateral or Pacific forms, would be strong enough to counter these alternative forces or whether the indigenous movements would sweep it aside.

In regard to regionalism, the problem was that international politics in East Asia had traditionally been defined by a hierarchical tributary system that revolved around China. Since the sixteenth century the Tokugawa regime had reduced the impact of Chinese influence on Japan, but outside of Japanese waters China still dominated and indeed had even expanded the area under its ultimate sway. However, the arrival of the West, with its superior military technology and its Westphalian emphasis on equality among sovereign states, had shattered both Chinese political power and many of the principles that underpinned the tribute system.¹⁴ Nevertheless, a variation on the traditional system continued to exist with the twist that it was now Japan that sought to place itself as the dominant political, military, economic and cultural force in the region, while, ironically, China now found itself in the position of trying to resist. In the era of European imperial domination this nascent Sino-Japanese competition had been largely obscured by the rivalry between the Great Powers, but from 1914-18, with the latter distracted by the war in Europe, it came to the surface with dramatic effect.

Japanese regionalism, however, was not solely based on beliefs derived from Asian civilization and culture, for the practice and theory of Western imperialism also heavily shaped its development, thus creating a hybrid out of Eastern and Western influences.¹⁵ For example, adopting Western ideas about the 'responsibility' of imperial powers to bring civilization to backward peoples, the Japanese regionalists, such as the conservative journalist, Tokutomi Soho, described their goal as establishing a 'Monroe Doctrine for East Asia'.¹⁶ As with the original American model, this included the idea that Japan had the right to veto the activities of foreign states if they risked bringing instability to the region through unwarranted intervention. In many ways this claim that Japan had exclusive rights within the region was completely contrary to the principles of internationalism. However, it could be portrayed as somewhat similar to Nitobe's concept of regional congresses, in the sense that the difference merely came down to the focus for regional action, whether it was Pacific-orientated, thus involving the United States, or East Asian, where Japan as the only indigenous Great Power and empire would dominate.¹⁷

Moreover, the path of international politics in East Asia was complicated by the fact that within both of the major indigenous powers there existed a strident form

of nationalism directed against the West. In Japan those on the political right believed that the West was incapable of treating Japan as an full equal; the refusal to accept a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant, the inferior ratio in naval armaments forced on Japan at Washington, and the American Immigration Act of 1924 being but the most recent expressions of this discrimination. Adding to this sense of injustice was the fear, as previously expressed by Konoe, that the Allied victory in the Great War had simply led to the creation of an Anglo-American combination that wished to use internationalism as a means of freezing the status quo in their favour. There therefore existed a group that was naturally inclined towards rejecting the West as hypocritical and seeing Japan's destiny as instead lying in Asia.

The result of this was that Japan's relationship with internationalism was always precarious. Indeed, it could be argued that the survival of the internationalist order rested on the ability of the Powers to persuade Japan to contain itself, and Japanese internationalists, such as Shidehara Kijurō, making the case that Japan had more to gain from co-operation than unilateralism. Important in this was that implicit in the Washington and League orders was the idea that all members might gain from a steady drift towards a greater volume of international trade. There were, however, few formal mechanisms in place to support this good intention.¹⁸

In China too, the internationalist order was threatened by a growing sense of national grievance. In the Chinese case nationalism was aimed squarely at the need for national revival and the end of the semi-colonial regime that the West had imposed on China, particularly in the treaty ports. In the 1920s it was this surge in Chinese nationalism, epitomised by the rise of the Kuomintang (KMT), that posed the greatest threat to the order established at Washington, as the international regime constructed at the conference had been predicated on the incremental evolution of the treaty port system rather than its rapid collapse. Reinforcing this threat, of course, was that from 1923 the KMT received both political and military support from the Soviet Union in the shape of the Comintern, which, needless to say, had its own revolutionary internationalist agenda.

Ironically, considering the popular image of the period, it was the Chinese, rather than the Japanese, challenge that brought about the first serious crisis for the international order in the region and which in turn led to division in the ranks of the Washington powers. For internationalism or multilateralism to work in a crisis, events have to be met with a united front whether one of resistance or flexibility. However, in the period from 1925 to 1928, as the KMT engaged in the Hong Kong/Canton strike and the Northern Expedition, there was no consensus on how to cope with Chinese demands as each imperial power sought to gain from the others' discomfort. Most notably, Britain felt aggrieved at the behaviour of the other powers, for it had been singled-out as a target of strikes and boycotts. The result was that in December 1926 Britain decided to make unilateral concessions to Chinese nationalism in the shape of the Christmas memorandum. However, once Britain broke free from the shackles of the flawed Washington regime, it proved possible, somewhat ironically, to put the order back together again. This came about because once the practice of making substantive concessions to China was established it made sense for the Powers to engage in parallel talks with the new Chinese government rather than trying to compete with each other. In this way a return to incremental change could be brought about.¹⁹

For China, however, this was a frustrating process, which led it to look for an internationalist alternative that would assist in its struggle with the Washington Powers. For a KMT government, which had from 1927 broken the link with Soviet

communism, this logically led to a greater interest in the League of Nations. China had played an important role in Geneva ever since the League's inception. On one level China was interested in raising its international prestige, and thus placed great emphasis on the need for it to be elected to the League Council of which it was a member from 1920-24 and from 1926-28. At another level, however, as a weak power it hoped that the organization might be able to assist with its efforts to overturn the unequal treaties and to defend the country should the imperialists act in a hostile manner. For example, in May 1928 it brought an armed clash with Japan at Tsinan to the League's attention and then in December 1929 tried to persuade Geneva to provide support when Chang Hsueh-liang's attempt to seize the Chinese Railway Railway (CER) backfired and led to Red Army incursions into northern Manchuria.²⁰ Although China's attempts to use internationalism to defend its interests in 1928-29 ended in failure, this did not lead to any reversal in its thinking. Indeed, the League Secretariat encouraged China in its new faith in Geneva by investigating the possibility of the organization providing technical assistance to help with the country's economic development.²¹ Moreover, in August 1931, after a three-year hiatus China returned as a member of the League Council. Thus, by the early 1930s, the League was gradually, after a period of eclipse, being brought back into Asian affairs.

China was, however, not relying on the League alone, for it also saw another internationalist venture as being of potential value, namely the Kellogg-Briand of 1928, whose signatories had agreed to renounce the right to launch an aggressive war. Notably in 1929 when China found itself under attack from the Soviet Union, the government in Nanking appealed to the United States under the terms of the pact, and for a brief moment the American Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, was tempted to consult with other states using the pact as a framework for action. Internationalism thus seemed to China to offer the prospect of protection during the difficult period in which it shed itself of its semi-colonial shackles.

Internationalism and the Manchurian Crises, 1929-33

In this atmosphere it is therefore no surprise that in September 1931 when the forces of the Kwantung Army went on the attack in southern Manchuria, Chiang Kai-shek decided to repeat the tactics of December 1929 and to appeal to both the League and the United States for mediation. Thus began the first major crisis for the League and the principle of collective security that it was founded to uphold. It was, however, not just a crisis for the League but also posed a challenge to the other internationalist order that shaped the region, the Washington system. In an environment in which both the League and the Washington order were subject to intense suspicion by powerful elements within Japan, this was then clearly a crisis whose outcome was likely to shape the future of the region for years to come.

For Japan the mere fact that its conduct in a bilateral affair was subjected to the critical gaze of an international organization was enough to raise its hackles. However, the Japanese disillusionment with the League was not solely caused by China's original appeal to Geneva for assistance, for it was also influenced by the way in which the organization and its key members handled the crisis. When looking at the evolution of the League's response it is hard not to conclude that it followed the worst of all possible courses. For it was not that the League did nothing, but rather that it acted in a half-hearted manner that produced an untidy compromise suspended

midway between the poles of traditional diplomacy and collective security. This problem is best illustrated by looking at the British response.

At the level of perceived national interest from 1931-33 many British diplomats and politicians were disinclined to take any coercive action against Japan. After all, China had been infringing international treaty obligations since 1925 and had on a number of times incurred British wrath. Furthermore, contemporary commentators observed that the Chinese government was little more than a fiction for, while it made abstract pronouncements about China's rights, in reality it held little sway over the country, and particularly over the north-eastern quarter beyond the Great Wall. As for Japan, many British observers believed that it would bring stability and prosperity to Manchuria in a manner that would echo the British experience in India and Egypt. This was reinforced by a recognition that Japan had to expand somewhere due to its rapidly increasing population and the sense that it was better for it to go north than advance south towards Australia. Moreover, its seizure of Manchuria was seen as useful because the extension of its authority in north-east Asia would act as a barrier to the expansion of Soviet influence, which had after all been one of the main destabilizing factors in the 1920s.²²

Based on the above, one might imagine that the policy of the British National Government would have been to have turned a blind eye to events in Britain's Far East and to concentrate on the innumerable problems closer to home. However, this was not a viable option. In order to understand why, it is important to note that the political 'home truths' expressed about the national interest were views largely contained within inter-Whitehall correspondence and private letters between important political and military figures. One did not find such opinions in public pronouncements of policy, for the very good reason that a concentration on national interest as the only measure worth using would have been treated as shameful cynicism that went against the tenets of the League and collective security. This was, after all, a time when at every state opening of Parliament a reference was made in the King's speech to his government's fundamental commitment to the League. This does not mean that Britain and the British public had become fanatically internationalist, but rather that a vague adherence to its values, without perhaps realizing the costs involved, was now the order of the day. This naturally permeated into the political class with the result that, in public at least, everyone, bar the most conservative, was an internationalist.

A good example of this phenomenon can be seen in the reaction to one of the few speeches that did view the crisis entirely from a traditional national interest perspective. In February 1933 the prominent Conservative backbencher and former Cabinet minister, Leo Amery, spoke in a House of Commons debate on the Manchurian crisis. The contents of this speech, in which he compared Japanese activities in Manchuria to British control over Egypt and stated that faith in the League was a delusion, have often been cited. What is more significant, however, is the reaction to the speech, for Amery provoked not just Labour MPs but also those on the government benches into vehemently denouncing his retrograde stance. Interestingly, though, we know from his diary that in private he received much praise for his position.²³

Government policy therefore had to sail a careful course between the requirements of national interest and the need to be seen to support the League. This meant that Britain could not be seen to be advocating sanctions against Japan, but rather that it had to stress the League's role as a mediator with the hope that the two protagonists could be persuaded to compromise. The correspondence between

Ramsay MacDonald, the National Labour Prime Minister, Sir John Simon, the National Liberal Foreign Secretary, and Stanley Baldwin, the Lord President of the Council and leader of the Conservative Party, starkly reveals this determination to take the line of least resistance. As Baldwin observed to Simon in December 1932 the latter's task was:

... to keep the ship on an even keel and do your best to keep the two parties together. The heat may come – well we must put our heads together. I want to avoid a Chinese boycott [of British goods] or war with Japan. I have faith that you will avoid both.²⁴

Simon, of course, did avoid both, but at a cost. In order to prevent an explosion of anti-British feeling in China and Geneva, Britain did vote to accept the Lytton report criticizing Japanese policy in Manchuria. Simon then appeared to go further by persuading his Cabinet colleagues to agree to a unilateral arms embargo. However, so as not to provoke Japan, this embargo was directed against both the Japanese and the Chinese – a diplomatic sleight of hand that brought only ridicule and a policy that lasted only a bare month before being dropped.

Collective security thus failed its first test, for none of the Great Powers was willing to honour its principles. If the belief was that this would protect the national interest, then that conviction was shown to be wanting over the coming years, for the act of condemnation at Geneva sealed the fate of Japanese internationalists and handed over the country's destiny to the regionalists and nationalists.

However, the international order based on the League was not the only one found to be wanting, for, in addition, the American-centred 'Washington system' also proved unable to contain Japan's ambitions. The problem was broadly similar to that in Geneva, namely that, although the government in Washington acknowledged the need to condemn Japan's actions, it went no further than saying that it would not recognize the fruits of aggression. In addition, in February 1932, when the short-lived fighting in Shanghai reached its peak, the American Secretary of State, Henry Stimson, showed some interest in convening a conference of the signatories of the Nine-Power Treaty. However, this proved to be only a transitory and vague allusion to the need for tougher action.²⁵

There is though the possibility that more might have been achieved had there not been two parallel internationalist structures at work. One of the problems that affected the working of the Washington order was that one of its main guardians, Britain, was also the leading member of the League. Thus, when Stimson called for joint action in the early months of 1932, Britain answered that it could not act in a coercive manner as this would be to prejudge the League's deliberations. The end result was that, although both the United States and the League endorsed the 'non-recognition' doctrine, they did so at different times thus blunting the impact of a gesture that might have had considerable impact if it had been adopted simultaneously.

Regionalism and the Failure to Revive 'Old Diplomacy'

The inability of the League and the Washington system to prevent the Japanese seizure of Manchuria naturally led to a reassessment of foreign policy and international politics in Japan. For liberal nationalists, such as Nitobe, the crisis reinforced their belief that international order in East Asia had to be based on some

kind of regional organization.²⁶ For those of a more extreme nationalist persuasion it confirmed that stability and progress could only be achieved by the establishment of a Japanese Monroe Doctrine over the region. The end result, almost inevitably, was that Japan threw off its previous willingness to live by the tenets of the League and that it now strongly veered towards regionalism. Within the Gaimushō it was decided that Japan should now base its diplomacy on bilateral relations with other states in order to bring about a new order that would recognize Japan's predominant position within the region.²⁷ This policy did not mean that Japan had adopted the pan-Asianist line wholesale, for there was no rejection of the right of the Western powers to have any role in Asian affairs. Rather the policy was to say that the West could continue to invest in East Asia but should accept the paramount position of Japan in regard to political and strategic issues. This would, in turn, allow Japan the chance to develop a new closer relationship with China which, denied the chance of running to the West for support, would acquiesce to Japan's dominance and learn the benefits of co-operation. Out of this therefore would arise a new and stable international order in East Asia untainted by the impractical universalism of the League.²⁸

There were many problems with this vision of the future. In the realm of practical politics it ignored important considerations such as the fact that the Soviet Union and Chinese nationalism were never likely to be reconciled to such an order. It was also compromised because the Japanese army, which was following its own agenda based on the achievement of autarky, undermined the efforts of the Gaimushō by launching its own divisive initiatives that destroyed all efforts to rebuild mutual trust with China. However, at an even broader level, Japanese diplomats made a more fundamental mistake, for they were too quick to assume that the failure of the League over Manchuria would lead conservatives in the West to accept a return to traditional, pragmatic balance-of-power politics.

This hope that international politics would revert to the pre-war order was misplaced because it ignored the degree to which internationalist norms had been accepted in the West. The irony here was that, although there proved in the Western democracies to be little substantial support for making collective security a reality, at the same time governments could still not afford to return to traditional diplomacy. In the case of the United States, in March 1933 Franklin Roosevelt entered office with his administration declaring that it would continue to adhere to Stimson's non-recognition doctrine. In addition, it refused to shift from support for the Washington order and thus continued to call for the upholding of the Open Door and for the need for naval limitation as the best means of ensuring peace in the Pacific. The strength of isolationist opinion and Roosevelt's need to concentrate on domestic economic recovery meant that little active diplomacy would be attempted, but at the same time acquiescence to Japanese regionalism was not on the agenda.²⁹

Japan seems to have had more hopes for Britain than America, but here too disappointment set in. Traditionally Britain has the reputation of engaging in pragmatic diplomacy in which one constant is its willingness to recognize realities. Accordingly, many conservatives in 1933-34, whether in Parliament, the media or business, called on the government to recognize the state of Manchukuo on the grounds that it was an established fact. Non-recognition, so the argument went, was a wasteful self-denying act, which simply meant that Britain's commercial rivals, including Japanese companies, would be left to reap the rewards from the rapid economic development of Manchuria. Moreover, it was held that non-recognition needlessly aggravated Japan with the result that Britain was forced to concern itself

with the security of its Eastern possessions, when it should be concentrating on Europe.³⁰

Conservative politicians within the National Government were not averse to such views, but again these were restricted to private letters and inter-Whitehall correspondence rather than policy pronouncements. Instead, in public the government remained distinctly wary of acting in contradiction to its commitment to the League, which would alienate liberal opinion at home and other important states abroad including the Dominions and the United States. After all, by voting to adopt the Lytton report the government had committed itself to continued non-recognition and it could only be freed from this pledge by a change in Chinese policy towards the issue. Thus, although many senior Conservative back-bench MPs called for recognition, it was never granted. This was not for want of trying. In particular, the famous Leith-Ross mission of 1935 attempted to break the stalemate over Manchukuo by bribing China into accepting recognition. However, outright coercion was not an option, for such behaviour, coinciding with the height of the Ethiopian crisis, would hardly have been well received.

Indeed, even as late as the period of the Sino-Japanese War, the League continued to exercise some influence over British policy. In February 1938 the League condemned Japanese aggression and called on members to assist China as best they could. Accordingly, one of Anthony Eden's last acts as Foreign Secretary was to meet the League's request for assistance by approving the building of the Burma Road, a communication link that was to prove vital to the Chinese war effort.³¹

It can therefore be said that one element in the deepening of Western-Japanese alienation was the fact that the internationalist norms continued to exercise an influence over government circles in the liberal democracies, which in turn meant that appeasement was never a serious long-term option. This was, of course, made abundantly clear during the denouement of the road to the Pacific War when the Hull-Nomura talks once and for all directly pitted the internationalism of the United States against Japan's regionalist vision of the future.

Internationalism Reborn

The fact that internationalism continued to exercise a lingering influence over British and American policy towards East Asia can also be understood as a response to the post-Manchuria debate among politicians, diplomats and intellectuals about what could be done to redeem collective security and the League. These deliberations dealt not only with studying what coercive powers should be available to an international organization, but also looked at what in the first place had led Japan to pursue the path of aggression.

Many liberal observers in the West believed that the basis for Japanese expansion was economic. Put simply, the argument was as follows: Japan was a nation that had an extra one million mouths to feed every year. It could not address this problem through emigration, as Japanese nationals were barred from settling in countries such as the United States and Australia. Nor were the imperial resources at its disposal sufficient to maintain a steady growth in the standard of living in the face of this population explosion. This meant that Japan's modernization was predicated on exporting finished goods, such as cotton textiles, to overseas markets and importing raw materials. However, with the arrival of the Great Depression, the Western economies turned inexorably towards protectionism, thus placing restrictions

on Japanese exports. Faced with this deterioration of its economic fortunes, Japan was therefore pushed towards territorial aggrandizement.³²

Combined with evidence that the same factors were leading to the territorial demands of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the perceived importance of economic factors led to a new critique of the League and the way in which internationalism had evolved ever since the end of the Great War. The general belief, which echoed the concerns originally expressed by Konoe in 1918, was that the League had become nothing more than an organization that existed to maintain the status quo. This was a problem because the Paris peace settlement was seen as containing a number of iniquities that were increasingly difficult to defend, such as denying Germany the right to possess colonies. One idea therefore was that more needed to be made of Article 19 of the League of Nations Covenant, which had stated that the organization ought to encourage 'peaceful change'.³³ The other criticism that was made was that the League had done too little in the economic field to encourage states to move towards freer trade and responsible management of currencies, with the result that had there had a general drift towards economic nationalism.

In particular, one assessment of contemporary problems believed that the matter boiled down to the fact that the current partition of the world between the imperial powers denied the 'revisionist' states, Germany, Italy and Japan, sufficient access to raw materials. The most influential book espousing this view, *The Price of Peace: The Challenge of Economic Nationalism* by Frank Simonds and Brooks Emery, included much discussion of Japan, noting that it raised a particular problem as the raw materials it needed were temptingly close to hand in continental Asia.³⁴ This thesis attracted much attention in both academic and political circles and in September 1935 the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, declared that the League should hold an inquiry into the issues raised. This resulted in the League holding an investigation in 1937, although the conclusion reached was that few obstacles existed to the purchase of raw materials, the problem rather being one of payment which arose because the revisionists were diverting too many resources to rearmament.³⁵ However, despite this adverse judgement, the idea that any future internationalist agenda should include a reference to equal access to raw materials became part of the progressive canon, and, indeed, was mentioned explicitly in the Atlantic Charter of August 1941.³⁶

Many of the leading academic authorities on international relations were as sceptical about the raw material argument as the League inquiry proved to be. However, there was far less dissension about the more general conclusion that the best way to restore international stability was for governments to reduce their reliance on protectionist measures such as high tariffs and quotas. In the case of Japan, this was seen as particularly important, because in the mid-1930s the restrictions on its exports were, if anything, still mounting, largely due to Britain's use of quotas to defend its imperial market against intense Japanese competition. Commentators such as Arnold Toynbee and Charles Webster were deeply critical of this policy, which they saw as simply feeding Japan's desire to expand in China.³⁷ In addition, the IPR conference at Yosemite in August 1936 saw a great deal of debate over trade issues and the issue was also discussed in the IPR's 'Inquiry' project on the Sino-Japanese War.³⁸

The feeling among intellectuals was that if the tendency towards protectionism was to be overcome then this required not merely action at the state level but also that a reinvigorated League of Nations should play a major part. Thus in 1937 the League called on the Belgian Prime Minister, Paul van Zeeland to investigate the possibilities of trade liberalization.³⁹ Again, though efforts to address these issues were ineffective

in the short term, in the long term the belief that protectionism was in part to blame for the descent to war became an important credo of those who were later to make plans for the post-war world. Accordingly, a key element of the internationalist agenda espoused by the United States in 1944-45 was that the United Nations needed to be complemented by international organizations, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the International Trade Organization.⁴⁰

Thus, although the Manchurian crisis and the further Japanese challenges to the international order that followed in its wake proved to be mortal blows to the League of Nations, at the same time these actions precipitated the rebirth and further extension of internationalism. Indeed, while the situation in East Asia grew more desperate by the year, ideas were brewing that would later be vital to the formation of the Bretton Woods system, which, ironically, contributed so much to Japan's economic success and stability in the post-war world.

However, internationalism also continued to influence events in East Asia in another way. In his book *Power and Culture*, Akira Iriye has noted that internationalist ideas played some role in shaping the way in which Japanese regionalism evolved in the period up to 1945.⁴¹ Iriye's main focus was on the way in which the language of internationalism can be found in the Greater East Asia declaration of November 1943, thus suggesting that even during the war the protagonists were moving towards the same goals. Critics might argue that, in fact, Japan's use of internationalist language was merely a cynical propaganda ploy suited to the conditions of 1943, but it is worth noting that this was a tactic that had a long history. After all, during the Manchurian crisis, Japan had not turned Manchuria into a colony but rather presented it to the world in the shape of Manchukuo as an expression of self-determination. In addition, the public pronouncement of the 'New Order in East Asia' in 1938 and later of the Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1940 did not dwell on Japanese control and the concept of hierarchy, but rather emphasized a desire for equality. Tomoko Akami has argued recently that the 'New Order' was so phrased in order that it might appeal to China and to the West, and that it needs to be seen in the light of Konoe's previous thinking about internationalism and the influence exerted on him by intellectuals such as Rōyama Masamichi.⁴² Another interpretation might be that Japan adhered to such language precisely because by doing so it brought attention to the hypocrisy of the West, which preached internationalism but did not necessarily put it into practice, particularly in the colonial sphere. Whatever the case, what is clear is that the principles of internationalism were a vital element in the public presentation of policy, thus demonstrating that the language if not the practice of internationalism had become an ingrained part of the international order.

Conclusion

The impression that is often given in general international histories of the twentieth century is that the intrusion of internationalism into East Asian affairs during the Manchurian crisis was an aberration, which brought benefits to neither the League nor the region itself. Such a view stresses that the League should not necessarily be judged by this failure for it was never envisaged that it would in reality hold sway outside of Europe, and this has led to the argument that the real trial came instead in Ethiopia.

However, this perspective fails to do justice to the complex role that internationalism played in East Asia during the inter-war period. Rather than being a *deus ex machina* that briefly appeared in the shape of the League on the East Asian stage from 1931-33, internationalism in its various guises had a profound influence on the shaping of the international order in the region both in terms of the power structures that were put in place and the language within which diplomacy was carried out. In the 1920s the initial failure of the League to develop a strong presence left a political vacuum that was filled by the multilateral Washington order and an ideological gap that the IPR sought to occupy. However, as this failed to satisfy Chinese ambitions, China then brought the League back into the region, a development that reached its peak with the Manchurian crisis. Following the League's second failure, it was now Japan that sought to define the international order by introducing its own regionalist model, which, while defining itself as the antithesis of Western universalism, still found it necessary to co-opt the language of internationalism. The result was that in a way one of the issues at stake in the 1930s and early 1940s was what definition of internationalism should apply to East Asia. For Japan, the answer was that security and prosperity lay in an hierarchical regional order. To the West, and indeed to China as well, this was unacceptable not just because of power considerations but because of the basic contradiction between Japan's proclaimed commitment to equality and its clear desire for a leadership role. The arguments about internationalism thus played an important part in the road to war, for they helped on both sides to define the nature of the enemy and of the struggle itself.

The debate, however, also had wider implications, for the need to understand the nature of the crisis in the East also forced politicians, diplomats and intellectuals to focus on the inadequacies of the League and its principles. Accordingly, much thought was expended on what improvements could be made, particularly in the economic realm, and with this key elements in the foundations of post-war internationalism began to be laid.

The Manchurian crisis should therefore be seen as a key development in the evolution of internationalism because it focused attention on the importance of economic order, of the conflict between universalism and regionalism, and the difficulty in ensuring cooperation between supranational and multilateral regimes. It was not a mere footnote in the history of the League, for these issues in different guises remain with us today as we wrestle with the problems of a new century.

¹ F.H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace: Theory and Practice in the History of Relations Between States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) p.141 & p.268.

² G.W. Egerton, *Great Britain and the Creation of the League of Nations: Strategy, Politics and International Organization, 1914-1919* (London: Scholar Press, 1979) p.9.

³ T.J. Knock, *To End All Wars: Woodrow Wilson and the Quest for a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) p.56 and p.66.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.144.

⁵ F. Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914-1919*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999) pp.154-203.

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- ⁶ D. Stegewerns, 'Yoshino Sakuzō: The Isolated Figurehead of the Taishō Generation', in D. Stegewerns (ed.), *Nationalism and Internationalism in Imperial Japan: Autonomy, Asian Brotherhood, or World Citizenship?* (London: Routledge, 2003) pp.114-32.
- ⁷ N. Shimazu, *Japan, Race and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (London: Routledge, 1998) pp.63-4 and T. Akami, *Internationalizing the Pacific: The United States, Japan and the Institute of Pacific Relations in War and Peace, 1919-45* (London: Routledge, 2002) pp.62-5.
- ⁸ Zhang Yongjin, *China in the International System, 1918-20* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991) pp.40-1.
- ⁹ For American policy, see A. Iriye, *Pacific Estrangement: Japanese and American Expansion, 1897-1911* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972) and N. Kawamura, *Turbulence in the Pacific: Japanese-U.S. Relations During the First World War* (Westport: Praeger, 2000).
- ¹⁰ See A. Waldron, *From War to Nationalism: China's Turning Point, 1924-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.68.
- ¹¹ Akami, op.cit. pp.33-58.
- ¹² T.W. Burkman, 'Nationalist Actors in the Internationalist Theatre: Nitobe Inazō and Ishii Kikujirō and the League of Nations' in Stegewerns (ed.) op.cit., pp.89-113, and Akami, op.cit. pp.65-86.
- ¹³ Burkman, op.cit. p.98.
- ¹⁴ See, for example, K-H Kim, *The Last Phase of the East Asian World Order: Korea, Japan and the Chinese Empire, 1860-1882* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
- ¹⁵ K.W. Radtke, 'Nationalism and Internationalism in Japan's Economic Liberalism: The Case of Ishibashi Tanzan', in Stegewerns (ed.) op.cit. pp.180-1.
- ¹⁶ For Tokutomi's ideas see A. Swale, 'Tokutomi Sohō and the Problem of the Nation-state in an Imperialist World', in Stegewerns (ed.) op.cit. pp.69-88.
- ¹⁷ Akami, op.cit., p.144.
- ¹⁸ A. Iriye, *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) p.26.
- ¹⁹ The best study of the Northern Expedition as a threat to international order is still Iriye, *After Imperialism*.
- ²⁰ J. Barros, *Office Without Power: Secretary-General Sir Eric Drummond 1919-1933* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1979) pp. 311-20, I.H. Nish, *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism: Japan, China and the League of Nations, 1931-33*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1993) pp.4-5 & 16-18, and Iriye, *After Imperialism*, p.205.
- ²¹ Barros, op.cit., pp.311-20.
- ²² C. Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933*, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972) passim and W.R. Louis, *British Strategy in the Far East, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) pp.174-5.
- ²³ Amery diary 27 February 1933, in J. Barnes & D. Nicholson (eds), *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries, 1929-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1988) pp.289-90.
- ²⁴ Simon papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, Mss Simon 75, Baldwin to Simon 21 December 1932.
- ²⁵ Thorne, op.cit., pp.248-63.
- ²⁶ Burkman, op.cit., p.98-100.
- ²⁷ I.H. Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869-1942: Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977) p.192 & p.199.
- ²⁸ See, for example, J.B. Crowley, *Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy 1930-1938* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).
- ²⁹ Thorne, op.cit., pp.387-92.
- ³⁰ See A. Trotter, *Britain and East Asia, 1933-1937* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) pp.115-16.
- ³¹ A. Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor: Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936-41* (London: Routledge, 1995) p.52.
- ³² For this argument, see H. Byas, 'Japan's Population Problem' *Asian Affairs*, October 1933, pp.662-7, J.E. Orchard, 'Economic Consequences of Japan's Asiatic Policy' *Foreign Affairs*, October 1933, pp.71-85, and A.E. Hindmarsh, 'The Realistic Foreign Policy of Japan', *Foreign Affairs*, January 1935, pp.262-70.
- ³³ See, for example, A.J. Toynbee, 'Peaceful Change or War? The Next Stage in the International Crisis' *International Affairs*, January 1936, pp.26-56. For the IPR and 'peaceful change', see Akami, op.cit., pp.213-14.
- ³⁴ F. Simonds and B. Emery, *The Price of Peace: The Challenge of Economic Nationalism* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1935) pp.222-50.
- ³⁵ Best, op.cit., pp.18-19 & pp.33-5.

³⁶ T.A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill in Placentia Bay* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 1991) pp.164-8.

³⁷ A.J. Toynbee, 'The Next War – Europe or Asia?' *Pacific Affairs*, March 1934 pp.3-13, and C.K. Webster, 'Japan and China' *Contemporary Review*, June 1934, pp.650-6.

³⁸ On Yosemite, see T. Yamakawa, 'The Yosemite Conference and Japan' *Pacific Affairs*, December 1936 pp.515-23 and G.E. Hubbard, 'Searchlight on the Pacific' *International Affairs*, January 1937, pp. 114-23. For one example from the Inquiry series, see N. Peffer, *Prerequisites to Peace in the Far East* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940) pp.93-7.

³⁹ P. Clavin, *The Failure of Economic Diplomacy: Britain, Germany, France and the United States, 1931-36* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) p.192.

⁴⁰ See, for example, R. Divine, *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During World War II* (New York: Atheneum, 1967).

⁴¹ A. Iriye, *Power and Culture: The Japanese-American War 1941-1945* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁴² Akami, op.cit., pp.231-7.