

CROSS-CURRENTS



EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

China's Xinhai Revolution and Political Fluctuations in Japan

Book synopsis by author Sakurai Ryōju (Reitaku University)

Translated by Christopher D. Scott

In this book, I take up the Xinhai Revolution of 1911—a critical event that signaled the de facto start of political disorder in China—and its influence on later Japanese politics. Japan's policy toward China became confused during the 1910s and veered off course during World War I, in part because of the instability of the Chinese political situation. With the outbreak of World War I, Japan's policy toward China disengaged from international cooperation and became more active. At the same time, Japan's involvement with China also became more diversified. Thus, the government and private citizens of Japan reacted to the ups and downs of the Chinese political situation by trying to secure their influence over China while displaying either so-called “autonomous” or “cooperative” responses vis-à-vis the great powers, which were being either “coercive” or “friendly” toward China. This was a departure from the fundamental policy of Japanese diplomacy following the Russo-Japanese War, which was to gradually expand influence over China while maintaining a foundation of cooperation with both Britain and Russia.

Mine is not the first study to deal with the relationship between the Xinhai Revolution and Japan. Earlier studies have shown, for example, that Japan became a base for the revolutionary movement due to the fact that some Japanese people (such as Miyazaki Tōten and Umeya Shōkichi) supported the Xinhai Revolution and many Chinese exchange students had come to Japan before the revolution. Other studies examine the relationship between Sun Wen (Sun Yat-sen), who became the provisional president of China after the revolution, and Japan. What I have laid out in this book, however, concerns the overall impact that the revolution had on Japanese politics. After presenting issues such as the theory of support for revolutionaries in China, which earlier studies have brought to light, the book is organized around three main

issues. First, I look at how the Japanese government responded to the Xinhai Revolution—specifically, the impact the Chinese revolution had on Japan’s foreign policy. Second, I examine Japan’s attitude toward the chaotic situation in China through its changing foreign policy toward the United States and the European powers. Finally, I analyze the influence the Xinhai Revolution had on Japanese domestic politics, particularly fluctuations in administrations.

In part 1, “The Outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution and Japan’s Response,” I look at the Japanese government’s response to the revolution by using data from historical documents concerning the Foreign Ministry’s Ijūin Hikokichi and the General Staff Office’s Utsunomiya Tarō. I also illuminate the responses from the Japanese government and the side of the Diet through an exploration of the circumstances surrounding the question of whether to send troops to China.

The outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution and the ensuing chaos in China spurred interest in China among people both inside and outside the Japanese government, giving rise to various policy movements. Among those, the active countermeasures promoted by Ijūin Hikokichi (envoy to the Qing Dynasty) and Utsunomiya Tarō (second division chief, in charge of overseas intelligence) did not represent the Japanese government or the army right away, but they did anticipate the later split in Japan’s China policy. Envoy Ijūin saw a chance for Japan to take the lead in fostering the development of the situation in China and demanded direct action from the government. However, after late November 1911, when it became clear that the Japanese had lost that chance, he encouraged the government to apply diplomatic pressure on Yuan Shikai. At the same time, Ijūin sought to maintain international cooperation by denying plans to send troops or engage in other strategic moves so that no one would suspect Japan of breaking away from the pack. Ijūin’s stance showed that a movement had appeared within the Foreign Ministry to use the revolution as an opportunity to take an active part in the situation in China. It was also a harbinger of the Foreign Ministry’s increasing receptiveness to anti-Yuan measures during World War I.

On the other hand, historical documents reveal that Second Division Chief Utsunomiya’s efforts to build up a Sino-Japanese relationship favorable to Japan went beyond simply supporting the revolutionaries, as scholars are aware, but were a part of a wider scheme that set its sights on all of China. In promoting support for the revolutionaries, he not only recruited

people connected to the army into schemes for building the sort of groundwork that would make it possible to expand Japanese influence in the northeastern part of China but also sent out emissaries as far as Guizhou and Yunnan. The latter program was partially Utsunomiya's pet project, and he even procured funds for it. This later offered the chance for the General Staff Office to become involved with China on many levels through multiple channels. In Utsunomiya's actions, it is possible to identify the movement that would lead to the Twenty-One Demands later on.

However, Utsunomiya's plans came to an end at the height of the revolution, mostly without fruition. This is basically because the cabinet at the time (the second Saionji administration) took a line of cooperation with Britain and put a lid on the aggressive activities of the army. Nonetheless, after Utsunomiya left the position of second division chief and World War I began, his subordinates, who took over the General Staff Office after him, began to carry out his plans in earnest. In this way, the army also saw the birth of a policy toward China that used the revolution as an opportunity to increase Japan's breaking away from international accord, its individuality. One could say that foreign policy within the Japanese government had diversified.

In part 2 of my book, "Trends in the North China Garrison Army Before and After the Xinhai Revolution," I analyze the international relations among the great powers (namely Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and the United States) regarding China, and Japan's response to these relations. Specifically, I analyze trends in the North China Garrison Army, which the various powers placed in Beijing and Tianjin. This army was established under the provisions of the Peking Final Protocol (Boxer Protocol) of 1901, and consultations about the size of its troop strength and other matters were brought up and conducted at the International Legations Conference and the Army Commanders' Conference in response to changes in the situation in China. In other words, the North China Garrison Army formed an important element in the system of international cooperation regarding China.

In the period following the Russo-Japanese War, Japan reduced its troops in the North China Garrison Army while taking into account the trends and advice of other nations. When the Xinhai Revolution broke out, the powers agreed to simultaneously increase their troop strength in the North China Garrison Army. The Japanese government increased its troop strength in the

Beijing and Tianjin zones and dispatched troops to Hankou in a joint operation with Britain and Russia. However, Japan was unable to realize its goal of sending troops into southern Manchuria separately, which Yamagata Aritomo and the Army Ministry wanted to do. The second Saionji administration turned them down, claiming that doing so would damage international cooperation. In other words, the Xinhai Revolution reaffirmed the fact that the military operations of the great powers in mainland China were bound by the terms of the Peking Final Protocol, which had been decided ten years earlier. Contained by agreements between many nations, China had become a region where it was not permissible for one country to break away from the others. After the Xinhai Revolution, Japan also cooperated with the other countries and conducted troop reductions in the North China Garrison Army.

Reacting against the growing solidification of this kind of system, a movement arose within Japan insisting on a foreign policy that was more autonomous from the great powers. After the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution, there were stronger claims that Japan should be especially involved not only in southern Manchuria but also in China proper. These claims started to appear as the theory of Sino-Japanese cooperation and the Japanese Monroe Doctrine for Asia, which placed importance on the unique relationship between Japan and China. During World War I, Japan was able to develop an autonomous policy toward China without being swayed by the tendencies of the great powers. For example, when Yuan Shikai died in June 1916, only Japan increased its troops in the North China Garrison Army. In addition, the unit dispatched to Hankou at the time of the revolution remained separately stationed in China until 1922. These factors were largely due to the circumstances of World War I.

However, these developments eventually incurred a backlash from the Chinese government that resulted in proposals to withdraw the North China Garrison Army at the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Washington Naval Conference (November 12, 1921 to February 6, 1922). At the conferences, the withdrawal from Hankou was not resolved, but the system of international cooperation was rebuilt, as seen in the Nine-Power Treaty, which was founded on respect for Chinese sovereignty. After the conferences, Japan withdrew its troops from Hankou. In this way, the North China Garrison Army ended up being placed back in the system of international cooperation.

Part 3 of the book, “The Development of the Situation in China and Political Conditions

in Japan,” deals with the influence of the Xinhai Revolution on the development of political conditions within Japan. As mentioned in part 1, various policies toward China were debated in Japan, and the policy confrontations surrounding this issue became a focal point of politics. This resulted in cabinet changes and the reorganization of the financial sector. The fact that the first republican government in the Far East had appeared as a result of the Xinhai Revolution revitalized the movement to promote democracy within Japan. That revitalization found expression in the First Movement to Protect Constitutional Government (hereafter, First Movement) and the Taishō Political Crisis, which lasted from the end of 1912 to the following year.

It has often been pointed out that there was a connection between the Xinhai Revolution and the First Movement, as many of the figures outside of government who supported the revolutionaries were also active in the First Movement. They superimposed their own anti-*hanbatsu* (anti-feudal) stance onto the figures of the revolutionaries fighting against the conservative Qing dynasty. What started it all was the second Saionji administration’s rejection of the army’s demands for military expansion. The army minister resigned, which in turn forced the cabinet to resign en masse. Katsura Tarō, a former army general, took over the succeeding cabinet. However, the public perceived Katsura’s reappearance (the third Katsura administration) as army tyranny. Further, the fact that Katsura issued excessive imperial edicts before forming his cabinet (that is, used the emperor for political purposes) was seen as a threat to constitutionalism. Thus, the wide-ranging antigovernment movement called the Movement to Protect Constitutional Government was formed, centering on parliamentary politicians and journalists, and many members of the general public held demonstrations to oppose the government. As a result, the Katsura administration lasted less than two months, with all members resigning en masse on February 11, 1913. This coup, the Taishō Political Crisis, was the first time a popular movement had brought down an administration in Japan, and it is widely viewed as having advanced democracy in the country.

The influence of the Xinhai Revolution did not end there, however. The split in foreign policy caused fluctuations in Japan’s framework of political power based on various political interests. In the book, I point out that Katsura Tarō, the target of the First Movement, also proposed a new political plan for carrying out new foreign policies. Katsura was dissatisfied with

the Japanese government's management of diplomacy after the Xinhai Revolution, so he grabbed the reigns of government again and planned to conduct diplomacy by forming a new political party and marshaling the power of the citizenry. Katsura was a veteran politician who had led Japanese politics from the Russo-Japanese War to the period after the war, and who had managed to secure Japan's heightened position in the world through victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

The rebuilding of foreign policy was something Katsura had kept to himself before his third administration. In particular, regarding the problem of China, he aimed to expand Japan's role among the great powers—in other words, to adopt a more autonomous foreign policy—while coordinating the interests among the great powers to an extent that did not jeopardize cooperation with them. The real issue was the resolution of the Manchu-Mongol problem, which refers specifically to the extension of Japan's management rights to the Southern Manchurian Railway and Japan's lease on the Kwantung (Guandong) Territory, both of which were set to expire soon. They were trying to do something fairly difficult: to accomplish this in the midst of cooperation with Britain and without damaging friendly relations between Japan and China. Due to Katsura's short-lived administration and his later illness and death, however, this was never realized.

Although the new political party that Katsura established did not win a majority, it did attract people with high hopes for Katsura's diplomatic leadership. These people fell into two factions, broadly speaking. The first faction consisted of pan-Asianist supporters of the revolutionaries, mostly long-standing party members. Sun Wen's visit to Japan in 1913 was orchestrated by the third Katsura administration, but the pan-Asianists were the ones who pushed for it. The second faction consisted of people who placed importance on cooperation with Britain and the United States. Most of the former bureaucrats who would go on to hold core positions in the party after Katsura's death, such as Katō Takaaki, were of this inclination. This factionalism later produced a struggle within the party over differences in foreign policy, which went on to create political fluctuations after the second Ōkuma Shigenobu administration. The period from the second Ōkuma administration (1914–1916, when Katō Takaaki was foreign minister) to the Terauchi Masatake administration (1916–1918) fell during World War I, and under that unique condition, Japan's form of diplomacy was fairly autonomous. Should Japan take an active role in

China, or should it take a policy of nonintervention? Even in the case of responding to China under the pretext of cooperation, opinion was divided regarding which policies to support. While it practiced diplomacy that significantly deviated from strong concerted action, as in the Twenty-One Demands (which settled negotiations in May 1915), the Ōkuma administration interfered in China's domestic affairs, adopted anti-Yuan policies, and supported the revolutionaries in the south. In direct opposition to this, the Terauchi administration developed a policy of supporting Duan Qirui.

As described above, there was wide fluctuation in the Japanese government's policy toward China after the Xinhai Revolution. After the Xinhai Revolution, the northern and southern parts of China were virtually separated, and political interests in Japan supported both groups. Thus, one might say that the situation produced lines running in different directions, which were tied to fluctuations in the administration, especially during World War I. Although cooperation with the great powers had been taken into consideration, there was actually little need to consider those powers, except for the United States. Moreover, Japan's frequent interferences in China's domestic affairs (including both things done under the pretext of support and more strategic moves, as seen in the theory of Manchu-Mongol independence) became an important element in exacerbating the confusion in China.

As a result, by the end of World War I, Japan had lost the trust of both the Northern Factions and the Southern Factions in China. More important, in Japan's relations with the great powers after the peace treaty of World War I, it became difficult to exhibit autonomy again in diplomacy with China. And as for Japan's cooperative partners, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which had been a mainstay of Japanese diplomacy, was abolished at the Washington Naval Conference, and its other key alliance, with Russia, was lost because of the Russian Revolution. As a result, the importance of the United States grew, while Japan, which was escalating tensions in its China policy, was put on the defensive and headed toward long-term isolation.

In summary, then, this book examines how, beginning with the Xinhai Revolution, Japan became deeply involved in the situation in China, resulting in the confusion of Japan's foreign policy and eventually in turmoil in Japanese politics.

Sakurai Ryōju is professor of Comparative Civilization and Culture at Reitaku University in Kashiwa, Japan.