

Japan and the Regional Security Complex in the Asia-Pacific region 1931-1945

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyse the Regional Security Complex (RSC) in the Asia-Pacific region from 1931-1945, from the perspective of the Empire of Japan. Along with the rise of Germany, the rise of Imperial Japan in the Asia-Pacific region is crucial to international relations. The challenge that Imperial Japan posed to the Status Quo in the region has had lasting effects that molded the current RSC. The RSC of the Asia-Pacific has risen to be critically important to the International System at large. With so many eyes peering in its direction, the importance of examining its past challenges is of utmost importance to orient present and future decision making. Afterall, the past is not dead, it's not even past. The hipothesis of this paper is that internal factors (such as faulty institutions struggling to adapt to new social conditions, militarism, extremist politics and a lack of responsible leadership) were as important to the destabilisaton of the RSC in the Asia-Pacific region as the general disruption to the balance of power. The analyzes stresses out the importance of adopting a regional perspective and focusing not only on states but also on other security actors. Data will be used interpretatively; meaning that the focus will be on understanding events in a comprehensive/holistic way.

Keywords: *Regional Security Complex Theory, balance of power, soft power, international relations, foreign policy.*

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Introduction

The Empire of Japan was the major native revisionist power exerting its influence in the Asia-Pacific region from its rise in prominence during the second half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th. Changes to the RSC of a region tend to be mostly violent in nature when the different actors in the complex are at loggerheads with each other and when the structure of the complex does not offer mechanisms or institutions to mediate between the different parties with the aim to facilitate a transition to a new balance of power. To understand the grievances that the Empire of Japan had with the existing *Status-Quo*, this paper will examine how the policy makers and the Japanese public viewed their role in the existing RSC. The case of Japan is a clear illustration of the importance of internal factors in the process of transition from politics to policy.

The Jupiter of the Asia-Pacific region was Imperial China. It had the largest concentration and raw number of population, an extensive agricultural economy to support it and an extensive artisan and even manufacture base (pre industrial of course). China's influence also extended into the cultural aspect. It acted as a model for all the surrounding states and it exported ideas to them while maintaining nominal overlordship over them. China's influence was more based on trade and soft power. Japan on the other hand is a relatively small island nation that lacks in resources. For centuries it had a "little brother-big brother" relationship with China. Here we also see one crucial aspect of Japanese culture and mentality; when faced with another state whose power greatly exceeds its own, Japan would try to learn what made them so successful and try to implement the lessons all the while tinkering with them to adapt them to its society and culture. During the Yamato, Nara and the Heian periods, Japan would not only import goods from China but also ideas. The Imperial institution itself was a remodelling of the Chinese one and Confucianism gained widespread popularity as a system of ethics.

Medieval Japan was a very militaristic society where local warlords (the daimyo) had their own retinues of warriors that would battle each other for territorial gain and honor. When the clan controlling the institution of the shogun would weaken, there was no lack of potential challengers that would seek to acquire that authority.

The Tokugawa period is important to study because large parts of the culture and tradition of modern Japan was molded and finally took shape in that period. The ultranationalists of the 20th century would look at this period for a lot of the ethics and moral codes that they felt would "restore the country to prosperity". While it is true that the worship of the emperor as the ultimate authority had its roots in the earlier periods, the romanticisation of the samurai class and its

moral code (the bushido) would start during this period. The idea that a warrior class would always put principle before pragmatism does not withstand historical scrutiny. *“The popular belief nowadays is that samurai were men of absolute loyalty. Many undoubtedly were, and sacrificed their life for their lords. However, it was also very common among samurai of the Middle ages to switch sides”* (Henshall, 2004, p 40).

This period is called the closed country because Japan would close its ports not only to trade but also to any contact with the western world. Trade with China and Korea would continue but it was to be done under government sanction. Many seeming contradictions of contemporary Japan that so puzzle the outside world can be traced to the gap between the formal institutional structure of Tokugawa Japan and what was actually going on. It is also in the Tokugawa period that we can find the roots of a culture that, on the one hand, would carry loyalty and self-abnegation. (Murphy, 2016, p 43-44)

Japan would emerge forcefully from its self-imposed isolation in the 1860s. The world that it would find was much changed from the one familiar to it, it was a world dominated by what had been largely irrelevant states from Europe. To the far west of Japan, across the Pacific, a new state was starting to exert its influence first in its regional sphere and with time across the ocean, the United States. It is ironic that it was the United States that were responsible for opening up Japan. Like other western powers, the United States had tried diplomatically to engage with Tokugawa Japan to no avail. Like they had done previously to China and many other states in East Asia, the western powers imposed unequal treaties on Japan.

The Renaissance, the declining importance of the church and the separation of powers, the scientific revolution, the french revolution and all the intellectual ideas of the Enlightenment, Liberalism, Democracy, Socialism, even Marxism were all groundshaking events that caused quite a stir in the social fabric of Europe. Japan could pick and choose so to speak. It could import and integrate the model that it thought would best fit it. It didn't have to invent, it had to tinker and adapt but it had to do so fast before the colonial powers could de facto render it a subservient state.

Asserting itself in the International System

The Asia-Pacific normally is analysed in smaller chunks that we call subcomplexes. It is particular of this time period that it is necessary to analyse it mostly as a whole because of the weakness of its native actors and the preponderance of strength and influence wielded by external actors. China, the former Jupiter of East-Asia was now in shambles. The Qing dynasty wasn't capable of protecting its territory and its

sovereignty from the incursion of the European powers. The Opium Wars were a real wake up call for the Chinese about how much had the world changed. During these wars, the advanced fleets of Britain were able to control not only the Chinese coast but also its navigable rivers. The technological advantage was insurmountable at that time but it has to be stressed that it wasn't only a technological challenge that the native powers of the Asia-Pacific faced when engaging the armies and navies of the Western powers. The failing Ottoman Empire was proof that even when one could buy the technology, one needed to know how to use it and to produce it on their own.

Remarkably, Western models were also used to portray the frustrations and failures of those Japanese unable to cope with the bustling dynamism of the Westernisation process itself. The Russian literary concept of the 'superfluous man' appealed particularly to those Japanese who felt bewildered and left behind by all the changes. The superfluous man in Japan was a loser in a tough world of winners and losers, a world where people were suddenly left largely on their own to succeed or fail on their own strengths. The rigidly prescribed orthodoxy of the Tokugawa era had at least meant that people had a fixed place, and were told how to think and act. That security had now gone. Freedom proved a two-edged sword (Henshall, 2004, p 81).

The Reins of Power

While on the surface the restoration of the Emperor to his place as the supreme authority and the head of state was a *fait accompli*, the reality was that the internal power structure of Japan was much more complicated and chaotic than it may seem at first glance. The models that Japan could choose to copy as a blueprint for societal structuring were varied. It could go the British way and create a Constitutional Monarchy but that was not to the taste of the more royalist elements. Furthermore, it has to be remembered, the imperial household as an institution was supposed to act as a medium between the "old traditional" Japan and the "new" Japan thus granting legitimacy to the new system. The American model and the French model were also not feasible for these very same reasons. Japan had not experience with democracy, parliaments and political parties and as a consequence they were sceptical about them. It must be remembered that the nobility would play a crucial role in the governing of Japan therefore it was in their interest to preserve their access to power and influence.

Germany or more precisely Prussia was found to be a fitting model for Japan. Prussia constitutionalism was seen as a fitting model to expose an outer form of democratic rule while in reality the inner substance was much more oligarchic.

The First Sino-Japanese War 1894

Between 1871-73 , Japan would send some of its leading statesmen and scholar on a tour of the the great powers of the world at that time. The Iwakura mission is a fascinating window into the way of thinking of some of the decisionmakers of the Meiji period since some of the genro/oligarchs were part of it. The way the members of the mission would react to what they saw in the capitals of the western powers illustrates the “clash of civilisations” as Huntington would call it. The ideas and values that the delegation members had clashed with what they saw. What is even more fascinating is that the participants would themselves write about their experiences and thoughts during this mission. The most remarkable encounter that the mission had was (in my opinion) that with prince Bismarck. Ever the orator and the realpolitiker, Bismarck would “cut to the chase” and in one of his famous dialogues would explain the way he saw the international system. What at the time was the future course of japanese foreign policy would conform largely to his way of thinking but applied to a different region.

Nations these days all appear to conduct relations with amity and courtesy, but this is entirely superficial, for behind this facade lurks mutual contempt and a struggle for supremacy. ... However, small nations like ours would assiduously stick to the letter of the law and abide by universal principles, not daring to transgress these (Kunitake et al, 2009, p 306).

One of the aims of the mission was to begin preliminary renegotiations for the unequal treaties imposed on it hence what Bismarck said about the international law conformed to what Japan was learning. At that time and I would argue even today, international law is not applied universally to all states. The power of a state influenced how and when it would in essence submit to international law meaning that it was really the balance of power that would dictate and constrain the behavior of states and not international law.

Both China and Japan had undergone extensive military reforms and most foreign observers expected the chinese to win the war with Japan, afterall they had more manpower and resources at their disposal. The problem with the military evaluations of the time was that they had not taken into account the impact that extensive corruption had taken on the Qing army (something that foreign observers also did earlier this year with their evaluation of the offensive potential of the russian army during the invasion of Ukraine) and the system of banners that they had adopted was inferior to the division based organisation of the japanese army. On the seas, the japanese navy would maul the chinese navy so badly that

China would not build another relevant naval contingent up until the Cold War. On land, the Japanese army would likewise inflict several defeats on the Chinese forces and push them deep into Manchuria. They would conquer the Liaodong peninsula (where the key port city of Port Arthur would be located) and would prepare for a push deeper into Chinese territory. Seeing the writing on the wall, Qing China sued for peace terms. The Treaty of Shimonoseki was a decisive and historical win for Japan. Articles 1-5 of the treaty would stipulate:

- 1) China recognises definitively the full and complete independence and autonomy of Korea, and, in consequence, the payment of tribute and the performance of ceremonies and formalities by Korea to China, in derogation of such independence and autonomy, shall wholly cease for the future.
- 2) China cedes to Japan in perpetuity and full sovereignty the following territories, together with all fortifications, arsenals, and public property thereon:
 - a) The island of Formosa, together with all islands appertaining or belonging to the said island of Formosa.
 - b) The Pescadores Group, that is to say, all islands lying between the 119th and 120th degrees of longitude east of Greenwich and the 23rd and 24th degrees of north latitude. (the Penghu islands that are still a source of friction today between China and Japan).
- 3) China agrees to pay to Japan as a war indemnity the sum of 200,000,000 Kuping [Gubing] taels; the said sum to be paid in eight instalments. (at the time this was roughly 4 times the annual Japanese government budget)
- 4) All Treaties between Japan and China having come to an end as a consequence of war, China engages, immediately upon the exchange of the ratifications of this Act, to appoint Plenipotentiaries to conclude with the Japanese Plenipotentiaries, a Treaty of Commerce and Navigation and a Convention to regulate Frontier Intercourse and Trade. The Treaties, Conventions, and Regulations now subsisting between China and the European Powers shall serve as a basis for the said Treaty and Convention between Japan and China. From the date of the exchange of ratifications of this Act until the said Treaty and Convention are brought into actual operation, the Japanese Governments, its officials, commerce, navigation, frontier intercourse and trade, industries, ships, and subjects, shall in every respect be accorded by China most favoured nation treatment. (USC US-China Institute, <https://china.usc.edu/treaty-shimonoseki-1895>)

While it was victorious, Japan had learned that it also needed to play the diplomatic game with the Great Powers if it wanted to keep what the sword had

conquered. Surprisingly, this victory over the once hegemon of East-Asia, China, had come at a very low cost in lives (around 1500 casualties in all). This would create the false sense that wars in the region would not cost too much blood and treasure for a modernised Japan. Japan now also had its first colonies (Korea would be officially annexed in 1910) in Taiwan and Korea. For the other Great Powers, newly acquired colonies would not contribute that much to their overall economic strength but that would not be the case for Japan. In 1934, its colonies which by that time included also Manchuria, would account for 25% of its overall trade (23.1% of imports and 22% of exports) (*Morgenthau et al., 2005, p 118*).

As for entrepreneurialism, this could clearly not be left to foreigners. It should be Japanese people themselves who established and kept ownership of at least the major modern industries. In general the merchant houses from the Tokugawa period were not especially willing to take up the challenge of establishing modern industries, which they saw as too risky. Mitsui and Sumitomo were in fact the only major houses to do so. Rather, in most cases entrepreneurial initiative was taken either by the government itself or by the same 'class' of lower-ranking samurai – often with peasant associations – who formed the government (Henshall. 2004, p 97).

The main problem was that this injection of cash also increase the appetite of the government for war. Historically speaking, empires have found it much easier to keep their internal stability when they can finance themselves through war and plundering (the Roman and the Ottoman Empire are perfect examples of this trend). When the costs of war rise beyond the benefits or when the ability of the state to wage war is limited, its internal organisational and social defects can no longer be ignored and need to be adressed if the state wants to maintain a healthy economy. So it was that when the Roman and the Ottoman Empires could not count on huge profits from conquest that they began the painful process of reorganising their economical and social structure to a more effective equilibrium. Japan would suffer the same dilemma as those empires when it would rely on the profits of conquest to compensate for its internal incapacibilities to keep the economy going and finding markets for its products. This would become apparent by 1905 during the Russo-Japanese war.

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905

Immediately after the end of the first Sino-Japanese war, the intervention by Russia in particular would increase tensions between it and Japan. In 1900, an anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion broke out in northern China which would be quelled only after 8 nations would send troops in to protect their interests in China. After the quelling of the rebellion, Russia would refuse to withdraw its troops from China and would

engage in extensive rail track building in order to gain the ability to move troops and extend its influence in the area. Conflict between Japan and Russia now seemed inescapable although as with the war against China, to western observers it seemed like a very lopsided rivalry. Although Japan had made a lot of progress politically, diplomatically and economically, we must remember that this was the late Victorian Era with its views on race and ethnicity. Japan was seen as a rising asiatic nation but by no means a contender against a western nation or in the case of Russia simply a “white” nation (because Russia couldnt be deemed a western nation the argument fell back on good old racial prejudices).

The tripple intervention taught Japan the need to have allies so in 1902 it signed an alliance treaty with Britain. The aim of this alliance was to curtail the expansion of Russia in China and Korea. From the British perspective, this alliance proved useful in finding another state that could help contain Russia and remove some of the burden from Britain who was already engaged in containing Russia in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, Iran, and Afghanistan. From the perspective of Japan, according to Henshall (2004), *“the alliance did not recognise Japan’s control of Korea, though it did recognise its ‘special interests’ in that country. Nor did it mean that Britain would fight alongside Japan if and when it went to war with Russia. But it did give Japan the confidence that other western powers would be unlikely to act against it in such a war”* (p 94).

In order to finance this war, the japanese government borrowed heavily from their british allies and from the United States. The battles of the this war became sources of great national pride for the japanese armed forces. Nonetheless, the army especially, had to learn some hard lessons from this conflict and unfortunately for Japan it was not prepared to assimilate the knowledge that was gained at such a high cost in blood and treasure. The most famous Meiji novelist, Natsume Soseki would write in his *Sore Kara (And Then)* in 1909, when Japan was arguably at the peak of its international prestige:

“Look at Japan She tries to force her way into the company of world class powers She is like a frog trying to grow as big as a cow. Of course, she will soon burst. This struggle affects you and me, and everybody else. Because of the pressure of the competition with the West, the Japanese have no time to relax No wonder they are all neurotics They think of nothing except themselves and their immediate needs. Look all over Japan, and you won’t find one square inch that is bright with hope. It is dark everywhere.” (Henshall, 2004, p 101)

Japan was now at a crossroads , it could sense it but it would take the coming decades for it to realise the extent of the precarious position that it was in , be that internally and externally.

The Taisho Period, World War One, Attempts at Democracy and Government by Assassination

1912 would be a fateful year for East Asia; in China the Qing Dynasty would be overthrown and on the 1st of January, a Republic was formally established with Yuan Shikai as the first president. The Japanese system of governance relied on the image of a strong and healthy Emperor to act as the centrepiece of the national polity (the Kokutai) even if in practice his powers were more limited than they seemed. The Emperor was the commander in chief of the armed forces and he would recommend a successor prime minister when the unstable cabinets would fall from power. Yoshihito was not up to the task to discharge his duties.

Less than one month after Yoshihito's accession to the throne, at the start of the new Taisho era (1912–26), the press reported the appointment of extra doctors to the court. In December 1912 Adm. Yamamoto Gonbei told genro Matsukata Masayoshi that when it came to recommending a successor prime minister, Emperor Yoshihito "is not [of the same caliber] as the previous emperor. In my view it is loyal not to obey the [Taisho] emperor's word if we deem it to be disadvantageous to the state (Bix, 2016, p 40)

While most of the Great Powers were focused on Europe, during the WW1, the Republic of China would collapse again into a state where different warlords would control different provinces in the country. The president Yuan Shikai tried to have himself declared emperor to the displeasure of the Kuomintang and the revolutionaries that had overthrown the Qing in 1912. While his attempt at centralising power failed, different governors and commanders of military forces gained de facto control of the provinces which they ruled as their personal fiefs. The Kuomintang of Sun Yat Sen would retreat south where they would consolidate their forces and wait for an opportunity to reunify and stabilise China. Japan had in fact supported the cause of the Chinese revolutionaries for a time. Their view was that the western powers were not well disposed towards Japan therefore closer ties to a revived China could prove useful. The hopes of the liberals for an anti-colonial alliance between China and Japan were dashed mainly because the Japanese government was not willing to sacrifice its gains in Manchuria for an alliance with China. It was in this context that Japan issued its "21 demands" on the Chinese government.

The United States were very interested in the recent developments in China partly because they viewed it as "*the product of American missionary and education*

work” (Jansen, 2002, p 517). The US secretary of state at the time (William Bryan) would issue a statement that would warn Japan that the United States would not recognise any actions that would violate Chinese sovereignty. Japan would back down, this time. This formula would once again be adopted by the US in 1933 when Japan created its puppet state of Manchukuo. In 1916 Yuan Shikai would die leaving behind a China that was truly destabilised, where local warlords wielded true power thus opening it up to interference from without, namely from Japan.

World War One would lead to the eventual breakdown of the British-Japanese alliance since in the new balance of power, Britain needed the support of the United States to secure its vital interests in Europe itself. The more Japan pushed in China, the worse its relations got with the USA and by effect also with all the other powers that were eager not to antagonise the USA. The war also unleashed a swath of ideas into the world and it tore down the old regimes, mainly the monarchies. It is understandable that Japan was really worried about the future of the imperial system. Monarchies seemed to be going the way of the dodo by the end of the war. The historian Herbert P. Bix further elaborates that: *“Extremist thought” may be read here as a metaphor for ideas of democracy, antimilitarism, socialism, and communist revolution that had swept over Japan and the world following World War I.*” (Bix, 2016, p 91).

The restrictions involved only capital ships and in fact there was some leeway that the naval powers could play with with regard to the decommissioning of old ships and building up their replacements. An important detail to note is that the Washington Treaty banned the signatories from building fortifications beyond what existed at the time. This meant that besides Singapore, Hawaii and the Japanese home islands, no new fortifications were built in the region up to the outbreak of World War Two. Not everyone in Japan agreed that a foreign policy bent on internationalism and arms limitation treaties was conducive to the interests of the state. In 1921, as a result of the reaction caused by the Washington Treaty, prime minister Hara was assassinated in his office by ultranationalists belonging to the “fleet faction”. This would inaugurate a period that historians refer to as government by assassination.

The assassination of the three prime ministers in office was in each case related to problems of foreign policy. Hara fell victim to a rightist who objected to the way the prime minister had forced compliance with the naval limitations being worked out at the Washington Conference, Hamaguchi too had overruled navy opposition to reductions worked out at the London Naval Conference, and Inukai was murdered by young naval officers newly returned from the violence at Shanghai that the government had managed to stop. The flash point of violence was particularly low whenever civilian interference with military prerogatives was involved (Jansen, 2002, p 504).

Tensions and instability at home made the job of the government extremely difficult to carry out. Not only did it have to deal with the remaining genro, the zaibatsu, the army and the navy, the political parties and the unrest that would blow up as a result of the post war constriction of the economy, the 1927 bank collapse and the Great Depression. Now, fanatical youth were also liable to shoot a prime minister if they didn't agree with the decisions. One of the political mavericks of the time made some interesting observations:

Ozaki Yukio, who had his own brushes with violence without having become prime minister, later reflected on this in his memoirs. Military men, he remarked, liked to be thought of as men who put their lives in danger for the sake of the nation, and derided civilian leaders and politicians as power hungry, selfish, and often corrupt. But in fact, he thought, the cases were quite opposite. In the military, the higher one's rank the less the likelihood of personal danger, for top commanders were usually kept at a prudent distance from the violence of the battlefield. It was quite the reverse with civil leaders; the higher the post, the greater the individual's personal danger. The office of prime minister was perhaps the most dangerous of all (*Jansen, 2002, p 503*).

The violence would reach a boiling point the 15th of May 1932 when a group of young naval officers would shoot the prime minister to death, hurl grenades at several police offices, at the Bank of Japan and at the headquarters of the Seiyukai party. Tokyo would look like a warzone that day. The assassins published a manifesto: "Look straight at the present state of your fatherland, Japan! Where, we dare ask, can you find the genuine manifestation of the godliness of the Imperial Country of Japan? Political parties are blind in their pursuit of power and egoistic gains. Large enterprises are firmly in collusion with politicians as they suck the sweat and blood of the common people. Bureaucrats and police are busy defending the corrupt politico-industrial complex. Diplomacy is weak-kneed. Education is rotten to the core. Now is the time to carry out drastic, revolutionary change. Rise, and take action now!" (McClain, 2002, p 416)

In a situation such as this how can a government carry out its proper function? How can a society go about its daily business? The rise of tensions in Europe, associated with the rise of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy could provide an opportunity. With time, the navy too started to think in terms of expansion but to them the southern route of expansion was preferable. This would involve conquering the Philippines, Indonesia, Indochina and Burma. This resource rich area would provide (according to the navy) the resource base that Japan lacked. It would also be a surefire way to precipitate a conflict with Britain and the US.

Revolution in Military Affairs and the Asia-Pacific Theater of Operations

War is the continuation of politics with different means. It is important to differentiate between politics and policy although they are linked. *“Politics refers to the distribution of power through dynamic interaction, both cooperative and competitive, while policy refers to the conscious objectives established within the political process”* (Corps, 1997, p 23). In relation to war, it is paramount that warfare and by extension warfare theory must serve policy and not the other way around. One of the failings of Imperial Japan during the interwar period and World War Two was that the armed forces would impose what they thought was a reasonable set of policies on the political structure that was supposed to generate policy. The whole process was backwards owing not only to the power and influence that the army and navy had but also to the weakness and disarray of the political structure.

When evaluating the impact that technology and new weapon systems have on warfare, we must not fall on the trap of considering only the “hard factors” but also the “soft factors” and the intangibles (which by definition are the hardest to estimate). Let us take a tank as an example. When one thinks of a tank the first things that come to mind are armor, cannon plus machine guns and its ability to move across difficult terrain. While undoubtedly these are important factors to consider, other factors such as ergonomics have to also be taken into account. Does the internal structure of the tank allow the crew to operate comfortably? Do the sights allow for good vision in combat? How much maintenance work does the tank require? Logistics and procurement have to also be factored into the equation. For the United States and Japan to wage war outside of their national borders, all of their equipment and troops have to be transported by sea therefore, when designing said equipment, transport and maintenance have to be taken into account. The fighting in the Pacific during World War Two between the US and Japan took place mainly on islands. This meant that the equipment destined to these warzones had to be maintained at or near the site of combat thus imposing an additional design requirement on the equipment and the troops that had to fight and maintain it.

Access to resources is another important factor that impacts weapon system design thus in turn impacting force organisation. Not all oil is extracted or refined equally! High power engines require fuel that is energy dense therefore, access to high octane fuel can determine the engine design that a state can reasonably afford for its armed forces. This in turn has a dramatic impact on aircraft design thus resulting in very different designs by different countries for weapon systems that

in combat fulfill the same role. To put it in simpler terms, since Japan and also Germany had problems in general with fuel access and specifically with access to high octane aviation fuel, the design of the aircraft reflected this constraint. Thus when evaluating the combat performance of the famed Japanese Zero fighters and the German Messerschmidt vs their counterparts, the American Corsairs and Wildcats, we have to keep in mind the resource access of the nation that designed said aircraft. As we can see, an objective evaluation is very difficult thus to this day there are debates about the effectiveness of this or that weapon system used in World War Two.

During World War One, the western front was characterised by trench warfare which denied the opponents the main way that, according to the doctrine of the combatants, was required to gain the upper hand on the enemy; namely turning his flank. Tanks, in this context, were seen as weapons which could ease a breakthrough of the enemies lines. During the interwar period, the role of the tank would change drastically. The tank would become the weapon system that would “find the flank”, exploit it and wreak havoc in the enemies rear forcing either a collapse or a disorderly retreat. Advancements in technology and weapon systems often make “old” doctrines applicable again but with some updating to adapt said doctrine to the new conditions of war. Thus, the mass employment of tanks together with other arms such as artillery, motorised infantry, air support etc in a combined arms doctrine was not a revolution in the traditional sense. It didn't change the “what” was to be achieved, it updated the “how” it was to be achieved. The concept of mobile warfare was not something new to the Germans but the way in which they could apply it with modern arms was novel. With regards to the activity of the Japanese army during World War Two, in the China theater of operations, they would employ armor in a way that facilitated mobile warfare but owing to the logistical difficulties and the terrain, it would not play a massive role. In the campaign in Malaya though, the Japanese would defeat the British garrison numbering more than twice their number mainly by applying the same principles of mobile warfare that had come to define the early engagements in western Europe. By using their armor (which the British lacked in this theater of operations) and fast moving troops they were able to force a breakthrough or find an open flank whenever the British forces tried to form a defensive line thus leading to the capture of Singapore in 1942.

The weapon system that really revolutionised warfare in the sense that it changed what was possible, was the airplane. I would go so far as to say that the defining weapon system of the Asia-Pacific theater of operations was the airplane. When we think of World War Two in the Pacific, the first image that comes to mind is the island fighting that characterised this conflict. A lot of blood was shed by the Japanese and the allies in order to either conquer or defend small island or

coral atolls that would seem totally irrelevant to the traditional thinking of the pre interwar period. These battles were fought because these islands were big enough to host an airbase that would allow either the allies or the Japanese to project their air power into the surrounding areas. By building up a network of air bases on these islands it became possible to form an interconnected web that would prevent the enemy from using their naval forces without them incurring the risk of heavy air attack. The airplane coupled with torpedos (torpedo bombers) or bombs dropped on a target while the plane is on a dive (dive bombers) had become the greatest threat and asset in naval combat. As a result, the aircraft carriers would displace the battleships as the queens of the seas.

Even after the surrender in 1945, there were still units actively resisting the allies. During the late 40s to early 50s, whole companies and even some battalions would still emerge from the jungle with their heavy weapons to finally surrender. In the Philippines, soldiers in small groups like Hiro Onoda and his squad would resist till the early 70s. Finally, in 1974, Onoda would surrender only after the Japanese government had found his old commanding officer and flown him to the Philippines to order the by now old soldier to lay down his arms. In a book recounting his experience he would say:

“The search party left behind newspapers and magazines. Most of them were recent, and a lot of them contained articles about the crown prince’s marriage. The newspapers, which covered a period of about four months, made a stack nearly two feet high. We thought they were reprints of real Japanese newspapers doctored up by the American secret service in such a way as to eliminate any news the Americans did not want us to see. This was all we could think so long as we believed that the Greater East Asia War was still going on. And in a way the newspapers confirmed that the war was still going on, because they told a lot about life in Japan. If Japan had really lost the war, there should not be any life in Japan. Everybody should be dead” (Onoda, 1999, p 99)

The cultural and moral carrots and sticks had combined to create in Imperial Japan a “death cult” as some historians term it. The total unwillingness to surrender came what may bordered on suicidal. Onoda continues: “When I arrived in the Philippines in 1944, the war was going badly for Japan, and in the homeland the phrase *ichioku gyokusai* (“one hundred million souls dying for honor”) was on everybody’s lips. This phrase meant literally that the population of Japan would die to a man before surrendering. I took this at face value, as I am sure many other young Japanese men my age did. I sincerely believed that Japan would not surrender so long as one Japanese remained alive. Conversely, if one Japanese were left alive, Japan could not have surrendered. After all, this is what we Japanese had all vowed to each other.

We had sworn the we would resist the American and English devils until the last single one of us was dead. If necessary, the women and children would resist with bamboo sticks, trying to kill as many enemy troops as they could before being killed themselves. The wartime newspapers all played this idea up in the strongest possible language. “Struggle to the End!” “The Empire Must Be Protected at Any Cost!” “One Hundred Million Dying for the Cause.” I was virtually brought up on this kind of talk” (Onoda, 1999 , p 100-101)

Expecting no mercy for themselves, it was customary during the war for the Japanese armed forces to not extend mercy to the enemy and their captives either. The warcrimes that the IJA and the IJN inflicted on prisoners of war and civilians are well known and a stain on the record of the nation. In terms of naval power also, Japan would lag far behind the US in production output.

1945 saw the introduction of an era defining weapon and so far, fingers crossed, it was only used twice. Atomic weapons are a gamechanger in the system. Having access to them and the delivery systems that can project their destructive power is a defining feature of any security complex since 1945. As has often happened in the history of civilisation, technological advancement creates new conditions that societies and states have to adapt to.

Conclusions

Similar to the rise of Germany, the rise of Japan changed the dynamics of the security complex in the region. The old security complex gave way to a new arrangement in the post 1905 years when Japan was the most influential and powerful actor in the region. Owing to the internal structure of the body polity of Imperial Japan and the culture of the Japanese people at the time, the challenges they and the region faced resulted in an evaluation process that was very much influenced by internal considerations, inability to agree on politics and formulate policy that could result in a well thought out long term grand strategy. Imbalances in the security complex precipitated more and more military escalation which in turn tended to paralyze political decisionmaking in favor of military decisionmaking. After 1945, Japan and the RSC of the Asia-Pacific would resemble the RSC of pre Meiji restoration. The main actors would be foreign state actors with the ability to “roam” (as Mearsheimer likes to put it) and project their power into the region.

The class between the Western and Eastern blocs led by the two superpowers (the US and the Soviet Union) would cause a widespread competition for influence in the region. The Korean war, the Vietnam war, the multitude of wars that resulted from the retreat of the colonial powers and the clash for power within the newly freed colonies; all these would result in an instable RSC. The rise of Japan from the

ashes of World War Two during the post war period allowed it to exert a limited amount of influence in the region mainly through soft power and economic interactions. The new constitution imposed by the US on post war Japan makes it clear that Japan would renounce war as an acceptable means of solving disputes in the international system. In essence, Japan was not allowed to rebuild its hard power capabilities such as its army and navy. For decades this was in the interest of Japan also since it focused exclusively on its economy. The recent disturbances in the security complex caused by the rise of a much more assertive China could change that. The rearming of Japan, like the rearming of Germany would be an important moment and a real test for the international system. Have the former “troublesome new arrivals” learned not to overrely on their military might? Can they balance their foreign policy by being assertive but not overbearing? These are the questions that will get an answer in the decades to come.

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