

KONOE AND HULL: THE GREATER EAST ASIA CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE -- AN ACT OF BENEVOLENCE OR IMPERIALISM?

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During the turbulent 1930s, Japan issued the policy known as “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Japan proclaimed that it was designed to promote co-prosperity of the East Asia by ending the long-lasting western imperialism in Asia and establishing Asia for Asia. The western counterparts dismissed this proclamation by Japan, regarding it as Japan’s political propaganda to disguise her true intention to achieve the domination of Asia and also her sense of desperation to alleviate mounting difficulties regarding its economy and population.

This paper provides an account of political and economic backgrounds for Japan’s assertion of such policy and examines where such contrasting interpretations over it stem from with a close focus on two individuals who played pivotal roles in this crisis: Konoe Fumimaro, Prime Minister of Japan, and Cordell Hull, U.S. Secretary of State.

Konoe argued that Japan’s issuance of the policy of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere could not be fully understood unless one could see the unfairly structured world political and economic setting -- a source of the world division into “the Haves nations and Have-not nations,” -- as the fundamental causes of the world conflict. While accepting the existence of the sense of desperation in the state of Japanese economy and population as motivating factor, Konoe contended that Japan’s issuance of the policy was also to great extent attributed to her desire to end such inequality. Denying such assertions by Konoe, Hull argued that what caused the world conflict was not the structural problem of the world but the aggressive and unlawful acts of the nations such as Japan. It was, therefore, a mere absurdity for Hull to see the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere as an act of benevolence. To Hull, it was nothing but an act of Japanese imperialism.

One key issue that emerged during one of the most turbulent periods of modern Japan during the late 1930s was Japan’s assertion of an idea of creating solidarity of the East Asia, the so-called, “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere,” in order to promote co-prosperity of the East Asia as proclaimed by the leaders of Japan. The idea was, however, generally perceived by the Japan’s counterparts to be mere political propaganda of Japan designed to disguise Japanese aggression and domination of the

region as the honorable effort of Japan to liberate the East Asia from western imperialism and to establish Asia for Asians.

Such a perception seems far from falsehood. Japan's renewed aggression in China started in 1931 with the Manchurian Incident.¹ Despite the international condemnation against such aggression of Japan, the crisis escalated throughout the 1930s and developed into a major war with China in 1937 when the Japanese army got into another armed conflict with the Chinese troops at Marco Polo Bridge near Beijing, (the China Incident)² Although Japan clearly had military superiority to China, the conflict turned into a war of attrition. Showing no sign of ending, it took a great toll on Japan economically and politically.³

Most significantly, sensing a direct threat to their territorial and economic possessions and interests in Asia by Japan's further aggression in China, the western powers altered their positions in dealing with Japan from conciliation to confrontation. They began to put political and economic sanctions against Japan. Prospect of military showdown with the western powers, particularly the United States, was increasingly becoming a reality for Japan.

It was in the midst of this mounting difficulty and the sense of national crisis that Japan began to engage in the campaign for promoting an idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In the eye of Japan's adversary, this Japan's campaign, therefore, made no sense except seeing it as an act of political propaganda and deception coming from a sense of desperation.

Certainly it was difficult to deny such sense of the desperation existing in Japan's effort to find a way to alleviate her difficulty. From the perspective of Japanese leaders, particularly Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945), who played the most pivotal role by serving as Prime Minister during one of the most critical periods of modern Japan, 1937-1941, it fell short, however, from grasping a complete picture of the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, to see it as a mere political propaganda generated by the sense of urgency and deception. To Konoe, an implication of the idea of "Asia for Asia" went beyond Japan's interests and involvement in China.⁴

In his essay titled "Amend World Status-quo," Konoe wrote, "Japan is in a difficult position since the outbreak of the Manchurian Incident; Japan's actions in Manchuria have become a central issue at the League of Nations. It seems that Japan has been put as the accused at the world court in the name of world peace. Facing this setting, I think, we have to not only explain that Japan's action in Manchuria is essential for a national survival of Japan but also seek considerations from the western peace advocates by frankly expressing our belief of how to achieve a true world peace."⁵

As can be inferred from the above argument by Konoe, he truly believed that Japan's involvement in Manchuria was attributed to something more than merely Japan's need of alleviating the problems of economy and population. Konoe, of course, did not deny those factors that directly triggered the Manchurian Incident such as the worldwide

economic crisis caused by the stock market crash in 1929 and the rapidly growing Japan's population. Considering the magnitude of the sufferings Japan was going through, it indeed seems difficult not to see the incident as anything but Japan's action for the national survival. To Konoe, the Manchurian Incident, however, was not only an action for the national survival, but also more important for reaching his cherished desire, an establishment of true peace, by eradicating the existing inequality to which world problems such as economic difficulty and population problem were attributed.

Konoe contended that mankind had the greatest and ultimate duty to establish and maintain lasting world peace and to make a constant effort for progress of humanity; regrettably, despite the studies and the movements by the leading scholars and politicians of the various nations in past, there had not been much success, making it necessary to reexamine the previous way to achieve the world peace and to find a new way.⁶

Konoe asked, "Then, where is a flaw in the previous way of maintaining peace?" As an answer to his own questions, Konoe pointed out that what prevented the previous way of establishing true peace and maintaining it from being successful was too much consideration to setting up "an organization" to maintain peace but very little to eliminate "the fundamental roots" of threat to the world peace.⁷

After World War I, the League of Nations was set up in order to establish peace and to maintain it by bringing every nation together, followed by the various treaties in the 1920s and the early 1930s to make a mutual pledge for the non-aggression, to respect sovereignty and territorial integrity of each nation, to denounce war as means to achieve a settlement of any international conflict, and not to recognize a territorial acquisition by force. Konoe pointed out, all these, however, did not achieve the intended goal. The reason for the failure was obvious to him. As he saw the situation, all these were mere mechanisms to maintain the status quo, failing to address the elimination of the roots of threat to peace.⁸

Konoe argued that establishing true peace could be possible only when the world was structured in such a way that every nation was allowed to co-exist and co-prosper. Reality was, however, far from it. Among the various nations, Konoe continued, while some could easily exist, many others were hardly able to do so; what was significant to see here was that the demand of the barely surviving nations to have a right to exist was absolute; such demand was a "law" of nature; accordingly it was essential and indispensable not to fail to address such demand if there ought be any realistic chance to establish true peace and to maintain it.⁹

Then, to Konoe, what was important to heed was the existing inequality in matters such as territory, raw material, and world population. Konoe pointed out that Australia, a nation far richer in raw materials compared to a nation like Japan, was twenty times bigger than Japan in terms of territory. Yet her population of just six millions was equivalent only to that of one city of Japan, Tokyo. On the other hand, Japan, known for being absolutely poor in raw material, had to face reality of her limited territorial possession over which Japan saw around a one million population increase year after

year. In this instance of clear inequality, Australia had no intention, in order to protect her racial purity as a white nation, to allow any Japanese national as a colored individual to immigrate to her land. Konoe argued that this self-centeredness and unjust seen in Australian policy toward Japan was only a tip of the iceberg. The similar cases were ubiquitous.¹⁰

Konoe seems to have understood, however, that there was no such thing as absolute equality. In determining one nation to be rich or poor, nature played a more definite role than mankind. While some happened to be located where they were blessed with rich natural resources and huge territorial entity, some others did not. In this sense it was impossible to set up a world structure in which every nation would completely enjoy fair and equal benefit. No nation had the right to alter this inequality created by “nature.”

Facing this inevitability of inequality, Konoe believed, however, there were two things the world leaders could and had to do at least to alleviate such inevitability: one was an establishment of a completely barrier-less world commerce and the other an establishment of a free immigration practice. Konoe argued that these two were absolutely essential principles every nation had to recognize and accept if there ought to be any chance to establish true and lasting peace.¹¹

Despite Konoe’s desire to see a worldwide recognition of these principles, reality was quite opposite. First, as seen in history, the western powers utilizing their newly acquired technological and military superiority restructured the world political and commercial settings of the 19th and early 20th century by their territorial and economic conquests in order to remedy their own deficiencies with regard to their territorial possessions and raw materials. Upon their success in restructuring the world for their benefits, they shifted their focuses on how to maintain it. They had neither desires to share their newly established status as world hegemonic powers nor to take any policy that might undermine that status.

In this increasingly intensified world unfair structure, as can be seen in the case of Australian refusal to allow any Japanese national to immigrate or the 1924 U.S. immigration law that was subtly designed to shut out any immigration from Japan to the United States, there was almost no prospect of any improvement taking place with regard to the disproportional situation of world population, thus giving literally no leeway for a nation like Japan to alleviate the problem of overpopulation.

In terms of the free commerce, the situation was equally grim as seen in the failure of the settlement of WW I. Strong advocates of free trade such as Konoe Fumimaro and Cordell Hull put a high expectation on the WW I settlement as a rare and long-awaited chance to establish a world commerce system free from any trade barrier. Such expectations were shattered when the western leaders rejected the most pivotal part of Wilson’s Fourteen Points--achieving an absolute consensus among world leaders with regard to setting a free trade system by eliminating all the trade barriers.

As stated earlier, despite the failure in the WW I settlement, the following decade after WW I, the 1920s, was known as the decade of peace and democracy. The world leaders were eager to join the various treaties designed to maintain “peace” for which they paid enormous price to achieve. There was a strong expectation that this political peace would lead to economic freedom as well. It turned out to be, however, that expectation did not turn into reality. First of all, as Konoe believed, this hard-earned peace was nothing but like a castle build on sand. It was destined to be ephemeral. As stated earlier, all the international treaties that followed the Versatile Treaty were designed only to maintain the status quo. The Washington Conference took place in 1921-22. Through this conference, a series of treaties were concluded. First, in 1921, in the Four Power Pacific Treaty, the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan agreed to maintain the status quo of each nation in terms of their possessions in the Pacific. This was followed by the Five Power Naval Treaty (the above four nations plus Italy) in 1922. It was meant to achieve naval arms reduction. Lastly the Nine Power Treaty (the nations in the Five Power Naval Treaty plus Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, and China) was concluded to deal with the principles and policies regarding Chinese issues. Then, the Treaty of Locarno in 1925 was signed by France, Germany, and Great Britain as a mechanism to establish a mutual security. Under this treaty, Germany became a member of the League of Nations and pledged to settle any future problems in a peaceful fashion. The Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 followed the Treaty of Locarno. All major powers but Russia signed it. The Pact denounced all the wars except those for self-defense. Konoe pointed out, with a simple glance, one could easily see all these international agreements hardly addressed the root of world conflict, that is, the unfairly structured world setting. Instead, they were designed only to maintain status quo.

So, to Konoe, fundamentally the world remained the same as it was prior to WW I. In actual fact, the world setting was even worsened due to the unfair and poor treatment of the Central Powers in the settlement of WW I, particularly Germany. Forced to assume full responsibility for the war and to make reparations payments, Germany was stripped completely with regard to military power, colonial possession, and industrial capacity, creating further instability in Europe, and thus shattering Woodrow Wilson’s dream of making WW I as war to end all the wars. Inevitably, therefore, the “castle” many world leaders naively wished to remain standing was blown away almost in a matter of a blink of the eye when the stock market in New York crashed in 1929.

What followed next was the unprecedented economic crisis. Overwhelmed by this great economic crisis, instead of eliminating barriers for establishing free trade, the world leaders moved to the opposite direction by adopting further intensified idea of protectionism. Facing unparalleled economic crisis, the United States took a huge hike in tariff in order to protect ailing domestic market by adopting the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act in 1930. It was a soaring rate of 50 %. The U.S. trade competitors responded by taking similar actions.

Thus, the western leaders, contrary to Konoe’s wish, had no desire to share his vision of ending the unequal world structure—the fundamental root of world conflict—

by practicing principles of free immigration and free trade. Instead they were eager to maintain it.

Konoe argued that it was this setting of the world political and economic situation that made Germany, Italy, and Japan to come together to defy such eagerness of their counterparts to maintain the status quo of their political and economic hegemony. It was a challenge from the “*Haves not nations*: Germany, Italy, and Japan to the “*Haves nations*, particularly the United States and the Britain to eliminate this unequal world political and economic structure as a true source of world conflict and create a “New Order.” Along with the Manchurian Incident and the subsequent China Incident, Konoe argued that Japan’s issuance of “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” had to be seen in the same context. It was only then one could see the true nature of Japan’s intention.

Hull wrote in his memoir, “In June [1935] I gave a luncheon for Prince Fumimaro Konoye, president of the Japanese House of Peers, and we had a most cordial conversation. Konoye was supposed to be of the liberal as opposed to the military element in Japan. Yet it was while he was Premier of Japan that Japan invaded China in 1937, signed an alliance with the German-Italian Axis in 1940 and invaded French Indo-China in 1941. He committed suicide after American forces occupied Japan in 1945. He was an outstanding illustration of how fallacious it would have been to put all our diplomatic eggs in the Japanese liberal basket.”¹²

As indicated in Hull’s remark, having deep distrust toward Japan, Hull had a quite different perspective from Konoe about Japan’s issuance of “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Japan’s involvement in China and her alliance with Germany and Italy, was to Hull, nothing but political propaganda that stemmed from desperation and deception. It had only one goal, that is, to achieve Japan’s exclusive rights in China, by expelling all the foreign elements but her own from China.

Hull attributed his own perspective to Japan’s past diplomatic record, saying, “Japan’s diplomatic record was that of a highway robber.”¹³ Starting from the Sino-Japanese War to secure her hegemonic position on Korea, Hull pointed out, Japan took a road of aggression: the war against Russia to obtain a lease from Russia for the Liaodong Peninsula and also to secure the Southern Manchuria and the railway as her colonial possessions; the issue of the Twenty-one Demands against China by taking an advantage of the western powers tied up in WW I; and Japan’s violation of the Nine-Power Treaty by her invasion of Manchuria and establishment of a puppet government called “Manchukuo.” While Hull’s description of Japanese diplomatic record as a “highway robber” might be debatable, it is undeniably imperialistic, rendering Hull’s assertion far from off-point.

So, Konoe and Hull took sharply contrasting stances from each other over the issue of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and both claimed the legitimacies of their assertions. With regard to what made such contrast between Konoe and Hull, there is the noteworthy exchange that took place in 1934 between Japanese Ambassador Saito

and Secretary Cordell Hull, which might provide a trace regarding the different views between Konoe and Hull over this issue of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Saito made a proposal to Hull for a Japanese and American joint effort to establish stability and secure mutual interests for both nations in the Pacific by recognizing Japan's leadership as a stabilizing factor in the western Pacific and the U.S. leadership as a stabilizing factor in the eastern Pacific. Hull took this Saito's proposal as a political propaganda to establish Japanese version of the "Monroe Doctrine" in the Far East.¹⁴

Hull argues in his memoir regarding this Saito's proposal, saying that there was a fraudulent misrepresentation by Japan about the essence of the Monroe Doctrine; Japan was deliberately distorting the true essence of the Monroe Doctrine, which was to protect the securities and independences of the nations of the Western Hemisphere, not to conquer, occupy, and dominate political and economic interests in the region; on the other hand, Japanese version of the Monroe Doctrine was designed to do what was exactly opposite from the true essence of the Monroe Doctrine; and under the disguise of Monroe's proclamation for self-defense, Japan's Monroe Doctrine was designed to achieve her dominance in Asia and also in the Pacific politically and economically, shutting out any other foreign involvement.¹⁵

Also, when Army Colonel Iwakuro Hideo came to the United States in March 1941 to support the Japanese Ambassador, Nomura Kichisabro, in the U.S.-Japanese negotiations and met Cordell Hull, Hull made a similar assertion. Iwakuro said to Hull, "Since it is a traditional policy [of the United States] to adopt the 'Monroe Doctrine' in North and South Americas, no one dares to say anything against it. If that is the case, however, likewise there should not be any objection to Japan's assertion to adopt Japanese version of the 'Monroe Doctrine' from the point of view of defending and maintaining peace in the Pacific." Hull responded by saying, "American [Monroe Doctrine] is for defense not for aggression."¹⁶

So, to Hull the two doctrines sharply differed from each other in their natures. While the Monroe Doctrine was designed to defend sovereignty of each nation in South America, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was intended to establish Japan's absolute dominance of Asia: the former was an act of benevolence and the latter an act of imperialism.

In the mind of Hull, therefore, it was absurd to put the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere on equal stance to the Monroe Doctrine. Interestingly, however, despite such assertion of Hull, a close look at these two Monroe Doctrines reveals a quite different picture from what Hull desired to portray. The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, far from being contrasting, showed far more similarities to the Monroe Doctrine.

When the Monroe Doctrine was issued in 1823, the United States was deeply concerned with European involvement in South America. European dominance in regard of the foreign involvement in South America was clearly undermining the national security of the United States as a young nation still in the process of forming her national stability. Similarly the dominance of Asia by the western nations as imperial and colonial

powers was not just an economic obstacle for Japan but also closely related to Japan's national security. As a nation with few raw materials, Japan had been politically vulnerable due to Japan's almost complete dependence on foreign imports in terms of securing enough raw materials to sustain its economy. It was therefore essential for Japan to end the western imperialism in Asia in order to obtain free access to a region like Southeast Asia where ample raw materials were available, thus reducing Japan's political vulnerability. So, for both nations, national security was one major common factor to issue their doctrines.

While this security issue was a driving factor for their doctrines, both Japan and the United States claimed that they also had elevating motives for their actions, saying that their doctrines were also designed to establish and protect sovereign right of each nation in their concerned regions by replacing the old order with new one. Although the United States did not use the terminology, "order," as Japan did, it was obvious that the United States as a young nation had a strong desire to end European monopoly of politics and economy in South America to create "a level-playing field" (new order) for not only herself but also for her neighboring nations, particularly when such monopoly was taking place on her adjacent continent. Similarly, as claimed by Konoe, Japan wanted to end the old order of Anglo-Saxon dominated power structure in Asia and to replace it with a new one in order to liberate Asia from the western imperialism and colonialism and establish Asia for Asia.

These uplifting motivations, as claimed by both nations and despite some truth to what they said, had, however, little substance. The two doctrines fell far short of achieving afro-mentioned noble goals.

In his article, "Imperialistic and Now Outdated," a journalist, S. Gonionsky states that the United States recognized the independence of South American nations from Spain but at the same time had a clear intention to make them subjugated to; in short what the United States wanted to accomplish was to establish U.S. colonial empire in South America, which was already substantially weakened by the long lasting wars of liberation; it was part of a grand scheme of the United States to establish American political system in the western hemisphere. It was for that reason the Monroe Doctrine was issued; it was an arrival of a new era in the U.S. dealing with Latin American, the era of U.S. colonial expansion.¹⁷ Similarly, Mexican diplomat, Luis Quintanilla, argues that the Monroe Doctrine was originally designed to be benevolent to the Latin American nations by standing up against European colonialism in the Latin America but gradually changed its fashion from the policy of benevolence to that of "Machiavellian" to go well to suit the U.S. interest; the Doctrine became merciless tool for the U.S. imperialism and colonialism as later known as "Yankee Imperialism."¹⁸

As indicated by Gonionsky's and Quintanilla's remarks, contrary to Hull's assertion of the benevolent nature of the Monroe Doctrine, the South American nations in general saw the doctrine as nothing but American imperialism by establishing her hegemonic power over the claimed regions.

Likewise, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere had little substance regarding the liberation of Asia. Despite the long subjugation by the western imperialism and colonialism, the leaders of Japan's neighboring nations did not see Japan in the way Japan tried to portray herself, a liberator for the oppressed. Instead, from the very beginning of Japan's leadership to create a new order in Asia as proclaimed by Japan, they saw Japan as just another imperial and colonial power to exploit their lands and raw materials only for her own benefit.¹⁹ Japan's actions and behaviors in China or Southeast Asia substantiate such a negative and adversary image of Japan as a colonial power, not as a liberator. In addition to the economic exploitation, Japan enforced the policy of forcing her newly subjugated people to take the Japanese way of life style as their model such as adopting Japanese language as their mother tongue and accepting Japanese monarchical entity as Supreme Being for their spiritual guidance.

The point of all these is that, although the time frame during which each doctrine was issued was different, they were inseparably similar in the nature of their backgrounds, motivations and end-results, making the afro-mentioned Hull's assertion that the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was an act of imperialism while the Monroe Doctrine as an act of benevolence groundless. Then a question that should be raised here is that, contrary to such similarity, why Hull saw the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere so contrasting form the Monroe Doctrine.

One need not go far to find an answer for this question. It is in the contending views between Konoe and Hull regarding the sources of world conflicts. Konoe, as stated in the afor

-mentioned argument, saw the sources of world conflicts in something fundamental, the unfairly structured world setting. On the other hand, Hull considered it something more specific, that is, the aggressive and unlawful acts of nations as the sources. So, to Hull, true peace could be established only when a complete elimination of acts of aggression of any nation was achieved. Konoe asserted, on the other hand, that an eradication of acts of aggression--including Japanese aggressions--would be possible only when what was causing such aggression was eliminated. To him, true peace could be possible when the "source" of a problem was eliminated, not just by elimination of the problem.

Thus, having this contrary view from Konoe's regarding sources of world conflict, Hull did not see any credibility in Konoe's assertion that the world was unfairly structured, creating a division of the world into two groups: *Haves nations* and *Have-not nations* and, as a *Have-not nation*, Japan along with Germany and Italy was politically and economically facing inequality, insecurity, and vulnerability, thus legitimizing Japan's actions in China. In short, in the background of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Hull did not see what he saw in the background of the Monroe Doctrine, the clear threat to the national and regional security. Instead he saw Japan as a "source" of threat to stability and peace in Far East and the world as whole, rather than seeing Japan as a "victim." Consequently, to Hull, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere did not go beyond anything but Japan's act of desperation and deception

¹ On September 18, 1931, the small section of the Southern Manchurian Railroad in Mukden was blown up. The Japanese army in Manchuria called Kwantung army promptly issued a communiqué stating that it was the Chinese troops that were responsible for the incident. With its superior military power, the Kwantung army quickly put the whole Manchuria under their control and set up a puppet country, Manchuko, in the following year by appointing the last Emperor of Manchu, Pu Yi as a head. This action of Japan raised wide condemnation from the international community. When the League of Nation adopted the Lytton Committee report to condemn Japan as a guilty part for fabricating the incident, Japan withdrew from the League of Nation, thus isolating itself.

² The China Incident in 1937 was, unlike the Manchurian Incident, accidental. It was triggered by the accidental military skirmish. On the night of July 7, 1937, Japanese troops were conducting night maneuvers near the Marco Polo Bridge located in Beijing. After the maneuvers, one of Japanese troops was found missing. The search for the missing soldier was conducted by not only the Japanese troops but also the Chinese troops. Although the missing soldier was found, unfortunately during the search, shooting took place, leading into military skirmish. No one really knew who started it. Despite the efforts by both sides to settle the incident as a local matter, the minor skirmish quickly escalated into a major conflict, creating great concern from the western powers to the growing threat to their political and economic interests in China because of this development. Thus, significantly, this incident changed the nature of Japanese involvement in China from regional to global.

³ Japanese economy booming in early 20th century due to the strong demands of war goods during WW I began to decline when the war came to an end. Such decline of Japanese economy was greatly hastened by the natural calamity, so-called the Kanto Great Earthquake, in 1923, which almost completely destroyed Japan's industrial capacity by killing more than 100,000 people and wiping out the infrastructures of most of Tokyo and its surrounding areas. The worldwide economic depression triggered by the New York stock market crash in 1929 further devastated this already severely damaged economy of Japan, creating literally unbearable economic setting for the people of Japan to sustain their lives. Japanese economy was somewhat revived, however, in early 1930s due to Japan's Manchurian occupation as a result of the Manchurian Incident and the subsequent establishment of Japan's puppet government, Manchukuo. The recovery turned out to be short-lived. The escalation of Japan's aggression in China and the following war of attrition after the China Incident deprived of Japan any chance to have the lasting recovery of its ailing economy. In addition to the enormous hardship in life style that the nation was going through, this economic difficulty and ineptness of the government leaders to deal with it along with the mishandling of international affairs by the government in the aftermath of WW I as symbolized by Japan's low deal in the London Naval Arms Reduction Conference in 1930 also generated the enormous political discontent among the general public toward the government leaders, laying down the center stage for right-wing nationalism and militarism to rise. It was followed by one of the most turbulent decades of modern Japan, the 1930s, during which Japan was shocked by a series of assassination and coup d'état. One of the culminations of this turbulence was the assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi on May 15, 1932. The assassination of Inukai later known to be the May Fifteen Incident became a turning point in Japanese politics, shifting the power of politics from the hand of the political parties to that of the military. Until the incident, it was a political party that took a leading role in Japanese politics as known as "party politics." That all ended with the death of Inukai. He was the last leader of the political party (Seiyukai) to become Prime Minister in prewar era. From 1932 to the end of WW II it was military leaders mostly who were chosen as Prime Minister. Then in February 26, 1936 another significant incident that became a determining factor for the course Japan would take occurred. The young military officers who were the members of the imperial faction of the military carried out a coup d'état in order to renew Japan's political outlook by establishing a military government. Although the coup failed, like the May Fifteenth Incident, the political repercussion of this incident was significant. Until this incident, the military was evenly divided into two factions: the imperial faction and the control faction. As a result of the failure of the incident, the imperial faction almost ceased to exist, leaving the control faction as a sole dominant faction. The control faction who believed that Japan had to move southward in order to secure Japan's access to raw material in southeast Asia, thus ending Japan's perpetual dependence on the west, now had free hand from their counterpart, the imperial faction, who adamantly insisted that Japan had to move northward in order to defend national polity from the rising threat of communism. So, as Kono pointed out, it was this debacle of the imperial faction through the February Twenty-six Incident that to great extent set the direction of Japan into fatal end, bringing Japan into further military aggression first in north China and

then French-Indo China, which turned into not only military but also political quagmire internally and externally.

⁴ Although the idea of “Asia for Asia” became a focal point for Japanese politics internally and externally in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it was nothing new. It emerged much earlier, even before the turn of century. It is interesting to note here that Konoe’s father, Atsumaro, as a rising political figure in the late 19th century, was one of the initiatory figures in advocating the idea of defending Asia from the western imperialism when Japan began to emerge as one of the imperial powers by defeating China in the Sino-Japanese War in 1894-5. Since Atsumaro died when Konoe was fourteen years old and also Konoe did not develop his interest in politics until almost his graduation from the university, Konoe was not directly influenced by his father. As an heir of one of the most decorated court families and having such an influential politician as his father, it was, however, Konoe’s rather inevitable destination to share his father’s political thought and to become a central and driving force to promote an idea of “Asia for Asia.”

⁵ Konoe Fumimaro, *Seidanroku* (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo, 1936), 242-55

⁶ Konoe Fumimaro, *Seidanroku*, 225.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 225-6

⁸ *Ibid.*, 226

⁹ *Ibid.*, 227

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261-2

¹¹ Konoe was encouraged by finding that there were even some westerners who were supportive to Konoe’s viewpoints. When Konoe met Colonel House during his visit to Washington DC, House stated to Konoe that he recognized that the previous policy for maintaining international peace was not sufficient, and what needed to be done was by insisting New Deal among international community, to remove the root of threat to peace. See Konoe Fumimaro, *Sedanroku*, 229-30

¹² Cordell Hull, *Memoir of Cordell Hull* (New York: the Macmillan company, 1948), 286

¹³ *Ibid.*, 270-1

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 281-2

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282

¹⁶ Iwakuro Hideo, *The Record of Iwakuro Hideo Talks* (Tokyo: Japan Modern Material Study, 1977), 373-4

¹⁷ S. Gonionsky, “Imperialistic and Now Outdated” in *the Monroe Doctrine* ed. by Armin Rappaport (Berkeley: University of California, ----), 107-116

¹⁸ Luis Quintanilla, “Machiavellian Due to Corollaries” in *the Monroe Doctrine* ed. Armin Rappaport (Berkeley: University of California, ----), 99-106

¹⁹ This is particularly true in the way Chiang Kai-shek saw Japan. To him, Japan was becoming more like a western nation in Asia. This was one major factor for Konoe’s failure to have Chiang Kai-shek on his side in order to make joint efforts between Japan and China to end the western imperialism and colonialism for an establishment of Asia for Asia. See Chiang Kai-shek. *Generalissimo Chiang Assails Konoye’s Statement* (Chungking: The China Information Committee, 1939)

