JAPAN ESTABLISHES AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM OF ITS OWN:
1941   1945

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Abstract

The paper first establishes criteria by which actors determine the centricity of an international system and by which a center in a system can be recognized as such. It disaggregates the term "international system" into sectors to discuss Japan's international system in separate terms of international military system, international political system, international economic system, and international cultural system. This facilitates identification of core actors who conceived a new international system for Japan from 1941 to 1945: the military (Sugiyama Gen, war factions); politics (Tojo Hideki, Konoe Fumimaro); economy (autarky, Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere idea); cultural/religious aspects (Shinto influence, hakko ichi u and kodo concepts), and the central figure of the emperor. The paper concludes with the example of the creation in 1942 of the Greater East Asia Ministry which eclipsed the Foreign Ministry, to use a new set of international laws with which to regulate political, economic, strategic, and cultural relations with all of Greater East Asia, from North China to New Guinea.

Introduction

It is sometimes said that there are as many theories of international relations (and historical international relations theories) as there are writers on the subject. This makes it difficult to follow established theoretical criteria in an exposition such as this. The various approaches notwithstanding, the attempt is made here to define a past "system" of international relations from the perspectives shaped by the mentalities of the "actors" at that particular time. The country under investigation is Japan, and the aim is to show how Japan established a system of international relations of its own from 1941 to 1945.

In tackling the problem of applying international relations theory to history, this paper restricts its frame of reference to the writings of two scholars--one an historian interested in international relations theory, the other an international relations theorist interested in history: Harald

Kleinschmidt and Barry Buzan, respectively.

Kleinschmidt points out that "systems" of international relations are definable as categories of perception within given "spaces of communication", and that they are also definable as the attitudes and "mentalities" of actors.[1] Therefore, changes in and of "systems" can be approached both, by focusing on changing perceptions of systemic spatial boundaries and temporal demarcations, as well as by focusing on changing patterns of interaction within and across these boundaries and demarcations.

The above point that "systems" of international relations are definable as categories of perception within given "spaces of communication" is relevant.[2] In this sense one can say that Japan's international relations system existed as a perception, that, in space, was delineated by the Asia Pacific regional boundaries, with its temporal demarcations the years from 1941 to 1945.

One of Kleinschmidt's approaches, moreover, suggests that a past "system" of international relations is defined from perspectives which are themselves shaped by the "mentalities" of the actors who conceived the "system". This approach is used here to determine the types of actors perceived as dominating a given "system" of international relations. For example, when we explore the central actors who conceived a new international system for Japan from 1941 to 1945, we are examining the mentalities of core actors such as the military (Sugiyama Gen   , Tojo Hideki   , war factions), politicians (Konoe Fumimaro   , the Foreign Ministry, the Greater East Asia Ministry); the emperor; as well as economic aspects (autarky, Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere idea), and cultural/religious aspects (Shinto influence, hakko- ichi-u   and kodo   concepts).

This historian's approach is welded to Barry Buzan's structural realist understanding of "system" (Waltz, Buzan, Jones, Little), and the paper asks here with Buzan of the 1940s: What type of interaction, and how much of it, is necessary to determine whether Japan established a system of international relations of its own from 1941 to 1945?[3]

In the 1940s, when Japan was at the apex of empire building, we also have to answer another question Buzan asks: Can one think of an empire as an "international system", or is this a contradiction in terms? Buzan answers this problem by stating that "the only way around this dilemma is to understand 'international system' as referring not only to a state of affairs existing at a given point in time, but as an historical phenomenon, residing durably across long periods of time".[4] This is good enough an answer for the purpose of this paper, since it assumes that the four years in which Japan attempted to establish an international system of its own is sufficiently durable in time to count, despite the relative short time in modern history.

For an international system in an imperial phase to qualify as an international system, Buzan

furthermore states that the area concerned must be substantially selfcontained in its interactions: "So long as it remains so, we can consider it to be an 'international system' even if it is in an imperial (hierarchic) phase. Once it begins to interact strongly with other areas, it ceases to be an international system in its own right and becomes part of a larger system."[5] This aptly describes the condition of our case under examination, when Japan was at the apex of its empire building in the 1940s.

I should also like to follow Buzan's recommendation to abandon the unqualified use of the term "international system", disaggregate the idea into sectors, and refer separately to international political system, international military system, international economic system, and international cultural system.[6] This approach may be wordy, but it clarifies the complex idea, allowing all of the sectors to stay in play.

Disaggregating the idea of "international systems" moreover facilitates Kleinschmidt's demand to define the criteria by which actors determined the centricity of a system, (and by which a center in a system came to be recognized as such). It also helps identify who the actors were in (a particluar sector of) a given international system, and the fields of activity they claimed for themselves (or were given by others). By using criteria of the above two scholars, the paper shows, in the five following sections, how Japan established an international system of its own, from 1941-1945.

1. The Military Actors

In the 1930s, Japan's organizing principle was one of hierarchy under a strong central government. In this central government, the military occupied the strongest position. For four years, it impacted with vehemence on the Asia-Pacific region and left behind permanent change. It rested on an army of the people, guided by a code that glorified frugal living, devotion to duty, and loyalty to a "divine" emperor that gave in death its last full measure of allegiance.[7]

The military system's center consisted of the board of field-marshals and fleet admirals (gensui-fu   ) and the imperial head-quarters (senji daihon'ei   ). The controlling actors were the minister of war, the inspector-general of military training, and the chief of the army general staff.[8] But even they were subordinate to the illustrious core at the very center. As one former Minister of War put it with fanatic earnestness: "The Japanese army is the army of his Imperial Majesty. It is led by the Emperor himself."[9]

Throughout the four years as Japan established its own international system, unlike other nations in which a king or a president was accorded nominal command as a formality without political consequence, the conception in Japan of an emperor personally commanding his army was deeply rooted in the thinking of the people.[10] It was unlike President Roosevelt's power as a titular commander of an army which in the last analysis was controlled by representative

government of the people. To the Japanese mind, the Army acted not as an instrument of state policy, subservient to the will of any civilian government, but in theory under a direct delegation of power from the Emperor --its Commander in Chief.[11] It was in this capacity that Hirohito opened and closed war.

The emperor, with his general staff, dominated the military complex. He was also at the pinnacle of the political government complex, and dominated the cultural system as the head and center of the Japanese empire.

2. The Political Center and Its Actors

This brings us now to look briefly at how political criteria defined Japan's international system of the 1940s. Here, too, the emperor was at the core of the political system. Even in the heydays of the party politicians in the 1920s, or again in the 1930s, when it was the military men and the anonymous, but experienced, bureaucracy (in the hands of the military) who gradually began to take politics into their hands, the emperor always remained the ubiquitous core figure at the center of the system. Policies were then not uttered by single statesmen. Rather, they were the result of long conversations between the general staffs, the army and the navy, the cabinet, and always, ultimately, the palace.

The movement for a New Political Order in October 1940, led to total political polarization in the establishment of a new political structure--a public organization called the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei yokusankai   ). This was the result of the antistatus quo minority movement (spawned by Konoe Fumimaro), that had gathered momentum in the 1920s, percolated in the 1930s, and realized itself as a new international system introducing a New Order in East Asia in the first half of the 1940s.

When Japan established a new international system of its own, the Japanese cabinet consisted of thirteen ministries. The largest and most pervasive one was the Home Ministry. It was in charge of local government, elections, police, internal security, public works, civilian defense, rationing, publication, censorship, Shinto shrines, tonarigumi   (neighbourhood associations), the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, patriotic organizations. Its officials, policemen, and agents represented the government's authority in every locality, controlling the population and deciding about its essential needs. All this was headed by Hideki Tojo as Home Minister and Prime Minister. But unlike other totalitarian countries at that time, he did not build himself a power base in his capacity as Home Minister.

The Home Ministry contained the nucleus of political action, and resented sharing power with the military or any other civilian branch. Strong, and influential, it was strengthened by the war. Conversely, the Foreign Ministry lost power, as we shall see later on. This was a significant phenomenon in our contention to show that Japan was setting up its own international system in

the 1940s. We leave here the political sector as a decisive actor, but shall return to it after now briefly reviewing the international economic system and the international cultural system.

3. The Economic Center and Actors

To qualify as an international system, the area concerned must be substantially self-contained in its interactions. So long as it remains so, we can consider it to be an "international system" even if it is an imperial phase,[12] writes Barry Buzan. Japan from 1941-45 was in an imperial phase at the apex of its imperial history.

And in the 1940s Japan embarked on large scale plans especially in the economic sector to become a self-sufficient nation. Japanese leaders chose to alter realities by reordering the economic structure at home.[13]

The Japanese government issued its New Order in East Asia Proclamation on 3 November 1938. The draft was written by Nakayama Masaru   . It posited the "return to classical East Asia". With its "agrarianist" notions, it was the antithesis to modern industrial society of the West. Japan was to accomplish its new international system by first of all destroying the order of international law of the European system of nationstates forced upon East Asian countries since the mid-19th century. Then it would replace it with an "international new order" in accordance with the "real force of history".[14]

Japan was determined to construct a Co-Prosperity Sphere in its part of the world. The old order of the world based on capitalist -imperialism was no longer tenable. The national structures, and the political and economic systems required readjustments.[15] Moreover, Japan sought in world history to create a "third civilization". It wanted to establish an economic bloc "which is a new trend in the world". Such thought of the Asianist Nakayama Masaru was incorporated into Prime Minister Konoe's proclamation of the New Order in November 1938.

The New Order in East Asia led in 1940 to the birth of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere concept imbued with scientific regionalism provided by Royama Masamichi   . This was seriously proclaimed by Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke   in a statement released at 12:30 p.m. on 1 August 1940:

> For years I have been propounding that it is the national mission of Japan to propagate to the world the way of the tenno   , the emperor of Japan. From the international political point of view, the way of the tenno is nothing but to allow every nation and every people to enjoy what is due to them. Applied to the present foreign policy of our country, it means establishing a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.[16]

These words appeared in the evening edition of the Asahi Shimbun. The same newspaper

headlined next day, that Soviet Foreign Minister "Molotov Views Japan's System as Profoundly Important".[17]

The Government after 1940 became ever more particularistic. It dropped the universally applicable designation for the country, "Teikoku   , the Empire", (still used in the November proclamation of the New Order In East Asia), in favour of the more particularistic name of "Kokoku, the Land of the Tenno". It was dropped for fear that its implications would be confused with those of its derivative, teikoku shugi   or imperialism, which had become a pejorative term for those Western nations which engaged in power politics. In its place, the name Kokoku, the Land of the Tenno, was chosen: it signified Japan as the one and only practitioner of the Way of the Tenno as the essence of the East Asian tradition of wang tao "upon which a league of East Asian nations must be built".[18]

In the documents of the early forties, we find many other examples of particularistic and ethnocentric terms and concepts, such as *kodo* (the Japanese Imperial Way) and phrases like *hakko ichi u* (the great spirit of founding the nation to bring the eight corners of the world under one roof). All of them indicated a move away from the kind of internationalization of advanced western nation states.

4. The Cultural Center and Actors

When we turn to the cultural sector and search for the criteria of actors in the cultural realm, we see a diffuse picture made up of the media, press, radio, educationalists--both military and civilian, and various propaganda and cultural agents.

When Japan set up its own international cultural system, we see that Japan's cultural impact operated for a short period over very long distances. For example, Shinto religion was exported to and enforced in Southeast Asia and the Pacific islands, where people were made to bow in the direction of the emperor's palace at certain times, and Shinto shrines were set up in Singapore and other places in the Asia Pacific region. This cultural domination lasted for the duration of Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere period of international relations.

The rapid transmission of Japanese culture was of course only possible by force. The war which made possible this cultural transmission was quickly given a name. The Japanese Information Bureau announced four days after the outbreak of the Pacific War: "The present war against the US and Britain, including the Sino-Japanese conflict, shall from now on be called the Greater East Asia War." It signified that the Pacific War was, from the beginning, conceived in terms of constructing a new East Asian world system.

The overall idea was that the Japanese culture stood at the apex of Eastern civilization and therefore was superior to the "decadent" Western civilization.[19] The moral superiority of Japan was

attributed to kokutai   , her unique national polity as a family nation with the emperor as its father.[20] The 1942 New Year issue of the influential and traditional magazine Bungei Shunju, heralded "the beginning of the Japanese century", a new era in which the world would be united "under one roof", with the guidance of Japan.[21] Essayist Hasegawa Nyozekan   wrote in the Nichi Nichi newspaper: "With the War of Greater East Asia as the starting point, the races of East Asia are going to establish a united cultural sphere, like the Europeans have created since the medieval ages."[22] It is not surprising that the Greater East Asia Literary Conference that met in Tokyo the following year in August 1943 adopted a resolution "to destroy American and British culture in East Asia, and create a new culture common to all East Asian nations."[23]

Therefore, the objective of the official Japanese language school, Kokusai Gakuyukai Nihongo Gakko, in Tokyo was to wipe out thoroughly the "Anglo-Saxon ideology" of exchange students (who visited from the Co-Prosperity Sphere), and to implant in them an awareness of being citizens of Asia in Japan's new international system. Nippon-go, the Japanese language, was to be the lingua franca of all peoples in the new international system, and inculcate in the student the diligence and studiousness which had facilitated Japanese modernization.[24]

Hasty theorizing of "cultural experts" concocted a Japanese cultural policy that would fuse modern technology with traditional Asian values and eventually create a new "world culture". A national policy plan issued in August 1942 spelled out in stark terms what Japan's new international cultural system was about:

> "Under the leadership of the Yamato people, morality shall be the foundation. We will try to mutually develop the peoples of Greater East Asia. We will realize the pre-ordained view of Asia for the Asiatics. We will obliterate ... the American and British world view. We will raise the Imperial Way."[25]

This "Way" was all-comprehensive, as the following phrase sums it up: "As the pivot of the Greater East Asia People's Cooperative Body, Japan will assume the central role in military, political, economic, and cultural spheres." [26]

5. The Greater East Asia Ministry

Now we return to the political sector, where we saw how the Home Ministry strengthened in proportion to the weakening of the Foreign Ministry between 1941 and 1945.

Nothing demonstrates better that Japan was establishing an international system of its own in the 1940s, than Japan's creation of the Greater East Asia Ministry   Daitoasho   ) in 1942. The discussions that surround its establishment show clearly the attitudes and "mentalities" of the dominating core actors who conceived Japan's new international "system" from 1941 to 1945.

The setting up of the Greater East Asia Ministry--always under the aegis of the emperor, of course--offers the main criteria by which actors determined the centricity of Japan's new international system. It became the controlling institution to realize the hakko-ichi-u (the world under one roof) principle. In setting up the ministry, the core of what constituted Japan from 1941 to 1945 (Japan: Tokyo: Emperor: Military: Cabinet)--the center in the new international system--came to be recognized as such.

The following brief review of how the ministry was established, will identify for us who the actors were in that given new international system of Japan in the 1940s, and the fields of activity that they claimed for themselves.

When in 1942 Japan set up the New Greater East Asia Ministry, it eclipsed the Foreign Ministry which from then on was retained only for "pure diplomacy" (international protocol and the formalities of concluding treaties) with the rest of the world.[27] The new ministry used a new set of international laws to regulate political, economic, strategic, and cultural relations with all of Greater East Asia from North China to New Guinea.[28]

The demotion of the Japanese Foreign Ministry to a mere organ for "pure diplomacy" relegated it, in effect, to a bureau of propaganda. It was only allowed to explain and justify Japan's military acts. Clearly Japan was turning away from the traditional established international system and replacing it, for itself, with a new international system with its own organs that defined "international" law for Japan.

The ensuing personal power play between the Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori   and Prime Minister Tojo Hideki is revealing. It crystallizes who held real power among the central actors, how they consciously set up Japan's new international system, and elucidates Japan's final step away from established international politics towards the setting up of its own international system, a system created on its own terms.

Foreign Minister Togo believed that it was Japan's mission to emancipate East Asia. But he believed this could be done without the philosophy of military dominance. Japan could set up the new order by co-operating with non-Asiatic states in the development of East Asia. When in May 1942 he heard of the impending establishment of the new Great East Asia Ministry, Togo strongly opposed the decision that "all political, economic, and cultural affairs" be put under the jurisdiction of the new ministry.[29]

He protested that this would exclude the Foreign Ministry from the most important parts of diplomacy of Japan. It was ludicrous for the Foreign Ministry to retain only the function of international protocol and the formalities of concluding treaties. For them to retain only "pure diplomacy" had serious legal defects.[30], Togo told Prime Minister Tojo.

The Prime Minister thereupon suggested to the Foreign Minister that he should resign. Rather than give in, however, Foreign Minister Togo fought all day in the cabinet meeting on 1 September 1942 for the retention of a fully fledged Foreign Ministry. At one stage he himself demanded the resignation of Tojo as Prime Minister. But to no avail. The real power center of Japan's new international system slowly crystallized as, all day, Togo received a stream of visitors, all bent on having him recant his view: Finance Minister Kayacame, General Sato and Admiral Oka, Directors of Military and Naval Affairs Bureau, and even Navy Minister Shimada as the personal emissary from the emperor. The military-politico, and economic core actors favoured establishment of the new ministry.

Clearly, Tojo, then, was at the center of the new international system, with the power of the emperor on his side. In the end, Tojo had an easy win. The National Mobilization Bill passed in 1938 gave him enormous blanket power as an advisor of the Emperor to govern by decree in time of war. He simply issued 78 Imperial ordinances and two Cabinet decrees. These established at one stroke the new Ministry of Greater East Asia in November 1942. It involved the absorption or abolition of 31 bureaus and 12 departments, including the Ministry of Colonies, the Asia Affairs Bureau, the Bureau of Manchurian Affairs, and the Asia Development Board. In turn it set up additional twenty-four Bureaus and one department.[31] The whole exercise affected 170,000 government officials, and clearly showed that the management of the new international system was concentrated in the Greater East Asia Ministry, and that it had very little to do with old style diplomacy.[32]

Conclusion

The kind of system that Japan established in the early 1940s was not one of those international systems that had slowly emerged over centuries, such as the Roman, Dutch or British Empires and their international systems. Rather it was a pressure-cooked and more consciously created new international system, one born of the "new world order" school of thought propagated by the "have-not" nations of the 1930s and 1940s. One that had a definite beginning in 1941 as well as an abrupt ending in 1945, when the invention of a new weapon drew up quite different parameters within which coming international systems would redraw themselves in the nuclear age.

NOTES

1 Harald Kleinschmidt, "Changing Concepts of 'System' in the History of International Relations", in H. Kleinschmidt, *METHODOLOGICA: Two Studies on Method in the History of International Relations*, SRPNIS Research Series No. 1, Tsukuba University, pp. 1-19; "The Conceptualization of Systems Change", in *Report of the Special Research Project on the New International System*, Tsukuba University, Vol. IV, pp. 393-414.

2 Kleinschmidt, "Changing Concepts", p. 19.

3 Barry Buzan, The Idea of International System: Theory Meets History, Paper, Convention of the Japanese Association for

International Relations, Kita Kyushu, October 1993, pp. 1-2.

4   Ibid., p. 20.

5   Ibid., p. 21.

6   Ibid., p. 17.

7   Hillis Lory, *Japan's Military Masters: The Army in Japanese Life* (New York: Viking Press, 1943), p. 2.

8   Ibid., p. 81

9   Ibid., p. 78.

10   Ibid.

11   Ibid., p. 79.

12   Buzan, pp. 20-21.

13   Michael A. Barnhart, "Japan's Drive to Autarky", in Harry Wray and Hillary Conroy, *Japan Examined: Perspectives on Modern Japanese History* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), pp. 299-300.

14   Kimitada Miwa, "Japanese Policies and Concepts for a Regional Order in Asia, 1938-1940", Research Papers Series A-46, Institute of International Relations, Sophia University, 1983, pp. 10, 12.

15   According to the article by the economist Kamekichi Takahashi, in The Japanese Times and Advertiser, 2 November 1942, in Joyce C. Lebra, *Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in World War II* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 50.

16   Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, evening ed., 2 August 1941.

17   Tokyo Asahi Shimbun, 3 August 1941.

18   Miwa, "Japanese Policies and Concepts", pp. 21-22.

19   Kita Ikki   , Kita Ikki chosaku-shu,   II, pp. 342-8.

20   Ben-Ami,Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 142.

21   The article was penned by the prolific nationalistic writers Hanami Tatsuji   , Izawa Hiroshi   , Mitsuda Iwao
        , and Nomura Shigeomi   , see Shillony, p. 143.

22   Japanese Times and Advertiser, 5 Feb 1942, in Shillony, p. 143.

23   Ibid., p. 143.

24   Akashi Yoji, "Japanese Cultural Policy in Malaya and Singapore, 1942-45", in G. K. Goodman, ed., *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991), p. 143.

25   "Plan for Leadership of Nationalities in Greater East Asia, General Staff Headquarters, 14th section, 6 August 1942", in Lebra, *Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, pp. 118-119.

26   Ibid.

27   See Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, *The Cause of Japan* (Simon & Schuster, 1956), in Lebra, *Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, pp. 82-87.

28   Toshitani Nobuyoshi   , "Kyokuto saiban ni arawareta Nihon no senji hotai sei,"
        in Tokyo Daigaku Shakai Kagaku Kenkyujo   , Fashizumu ki no kokka to shakai: Senji Nihon no hotaisei   (Nation and society in the machination of Fascism; Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppan, 1979), p. 86.

29   Togo Shigenori, in Lebra, *Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, p. 84.

30   Ibid.

31   Lory, *Japan's Military Masters*, p. 115; Shillony, *Politics and Culture*, p. 34; Andrew Grajdanzev, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 16,

1943, in Lebra, *Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*, p. 98.

32   Andrew Grajdanzev, *Pacific Affairs*, in ibid.