Why Did Japan Intervene in China?

EAST ASIA REVIEW

VOL. 4, NO. 2 (May 25, 1940), pp. 1-4
Why Did Japan Intervene in China?

Propagandists, pro- and anti-Japanese; apologists, both Chinese and Japanese; political students of all races and creeds, and last but not least, the ordinary man in the street, have all endeavored in some form or other to advance their own theories, arguments or opinion as to the whys and wherefores of Japan's intervention in China.

The result of all this hodge-podge has been a miscellaneous bag of misconception and misinformation which has only served to cloud some of the fundamental reasons for the intervention. The protagonists of Japan, while declaring their country's aims, have been perhaps too solicitous of the susceptibilities of the Chinese people to publicize certain facts; while the Chinese themselves naturally would not admit their own shortcomings.

In trying to arrive at a clear understanding of the reasons which caused Japan to intervene in China, it is necessary to separate the purely material from the moral reasons. As it is not the object of this article to dilate on the material reasons, we will dispense with this point by simply stating that China constitutes Japan's life-line economically, and that the geographical propinquity of the two nations is the most pungent reason for closer co-operation between them in the field of trade and commerce. Furthermore, this is the point which has received most attention from the publicists of both countries and readers have most probably obtained a sufficient knowledge of the factors involved in this respect to require any further enlightenment.

And now for the moral reasons. To begin with, the Chinese and Japanese are kindred races. This racial affinity has been the fundamental factor in Japan's actions in China. This affinity is also the basis of Pan-Asianism and of the New Order in East Asia.

Westerners may then argue: If China and Japan are brothers, why has Japan gone on this rampage in China? A perfectly reasonable question, with a perfectly reasonable answer. If one brother should become degenerate and sully the good name of his house or family, it is up to the other brother to chastise the wrong-doer and restore the honor of the house or family. Such action is traditional not only in the East but in the West as well.

Resting on the laurels of her 4,000-year-old civilization, China was content to let time slip by, without consolidating the good created by past leaders or improving her status in keeping with the rest of the advancing world.
In time, the Western Invaders paid their attention to the land of Cathay. They came in small groups at first, and were easily repelled. They came in larger groups later, and with them they brought modern weapons which the decadent Chinese could not withstand. After they had established themselves at a few ports, the Westerners not only consolidated their gains with their modern arms, but devised other means to subjugate the Chinese. Opium was one of those means.

China, the colossus, the giant, could not resist the arms and the wiles of the Westerners. It had degenerated into an empty shell, and its age-old civilization stood for naught against a more virile and modern civilization.

China was not the only target for Western expansion. To the northeast of China's shores, a sister nation — Japan — also received the attentions of the Western Invaders. But while Japan accepted the Westerners, she did not succumb to their pressure as did China. Instead, she learned the ways of the West and assimilated their civilization, and in the process she acquired a new-found strength which enabled her to oust the Westerners and establish her complete independence.

Japan grew rapidly after this Western incursion and soon after the dawn of the twentieth century she pitted herself against one of the most powerful Western states, Russia. Imperial Russia was humbled in the dust by Japan, and this great victory paved the way for still greater expansion.

Meanwhile, China had come more and more under the domination of the West, until she could no longer claim real self-government or independence, and the status of the nation degenerated into that of a semi-colony. As China became weaker so Western influence became stronger.

The growth of Japan demanded greater sources of supplies of raw materials, but Japan's desire to draw closer to her sister-nation across the Japan Sea received constant set-backs from the Powers who desired to monopolize China for themselves.

As China sank deeper and deeper into the mire of her own weakness and of foreign domination, Japan's resentment against the shameless Western exploitation of her sister-nation increased. She pointed out to China this distressful state of affairs, but China did not heed the warnings. Her leaders were, furthermore, too involved in Western machinations to pay much attention to more patriotic endeavors. The Chinese masses groaned under the terrible sufferings and hardships caused by this domination of the foreigners and of some of their false leaders, but there was no salvation for them from within.

The climax came in 1937. After repeated warnings that their policies were ruining China, the Chiang Kai-shek clique decided to plunge their country into still greater misery. They chose to obey the dictates of their Western "friends" rather than to co-operate with Japan. There was no
alternative left for Japan but to destroy a regime which was false to the trust reposed in it by the Chinese people. It was a painful operation for China, but in the interests of the future peace and prosperity of East Asia Japan was in duty bound to undertake the task, however unpleasant it may be.

The operation commenced in 1937 and for nearly three years Japan has steadfastly pursued her objective: Today, thanks to the gradual re-awakening of the Chinese masses, the operation seems likely to bear results. The masses in China now realise the significance of being under foreign domination but Japan holds out to China the opportunity of regaining her rightful place in the family of nations untrammelled by international bonds and free to work out her destiny in cooperation with her sister-nation.