

## **US-JAPAN ESTRANGEMENTS IN THE PREWAR PERIOD**

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### **Abstract**

The present paper aims to critically examine the embittering aspects of US-Japan relations in the prewar period starting from 1905 to 1921. It identified the causes of their friction that are deeply embedded in the two countries' divergent national interests, their history, culture, tradition, social structures, psychological perceptions and finally foreign policy orientations. The paper holds that their mutuality has been tied with their perceived interests that emanate from their politico - strategic and geo-economic calculations. Various aspects of the estrangements of the US and Japan have been discussed in which it was evident that their relations have been guided by their perceived national interests. This article spelled out that the US-Japan estrangements were the outcomes of their disagreements with regard to the China question, immigration issue, economic interests, and rivalry over imperial attitudes in the Asian region. The article concludes that throughout the history of the US-Japan relationship, conflicts of their interests, grown at various times, out of their distrust and disliking towards each other, have always been a dominating feature. Thus, the failure to resolve their differences on various issues including the China factor, immigration and racial issue, both countries' expansionist competition, pursuance of their economic and geo-strategic interests and finally America's dictated and imposed decisions on Japan in the Washington Conference contributed to the US-Japan estrangements in the prewar period, which led them to go to war in 1941.

This work has been based on mainly secondary source of materials. To conduct the present study, information and relevant materials have been gathered from various sources like libraries (MLIC library of International University of Japan) and research centres (Centre for Japan-

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US Relations, International University of Japan), which have substantial information and data on Japan-US relations.

Structurally and content wise the paper consists of an introduction and three sections. In section two there is a critical analysis of how US and Japan looked at each other in determining their Pacific strategy. The third section along with all its sub-sections is the core focus of the present article where the elements and determinants of US-Japan estrangements during 1905-1921 will be examined. Finally, the study will come to an end with some concluding remarks.

### **1. Introduction**

The estrangements of the US and Japan that follow the twists and turns in every junction of their bilateral relationships have often been the reality in the interaction of the two Pacific powers (Welfield, 2003). The purpose of the present paper is to critically examine the embittering aspects of US-Japan relations in the prewar period starting from 1905 to 1921. The causes of their friction are deeply embedded in the two countries' divergent national interests, their history, culture, tradition, social structures, psychological perceptions and finally foreign policy orientations.

An "uncertain friendship" (Neu, 1967) that dominated the US-Japan relations in the first two decades of the twentieth century has been labeled as "Pacific Estrangement" (Iriye, 1972) in the dictionary of international relations. Writers on US-Japan relations at different times conducted intellectual investigations into the deep-rooted conflicts that have kept the two nations at odds right from the moment of the mid 1850's Commodore Perry's arrival into Yedo Bay with a letter from President Millard Fillmore inviting the emperor of Japan to open his insular to the US.

Their mutuality has been firmly tied with their perceived interests that emanate from their politico-strategic and geo-economic calculations. Although the initial fifty years since Perry's mission marked a kind of strategic warm relationship, the onset of the twentieth century stirred up their journey with a severe jerking. Both countries' competition for expansionism and securing geo-strategic and economic interests during this time is the most important reason of their strained relationship during the period and from that perspective, Japanese expansionism on the continent - especially the annexation of Korea, the

formalisation of a sphere in Manchuria, and, later, the seizure of Germany's former sphere in Shantung during World War I, and the Twenty-One Demands made by Japan upon China in 1915 - was threatening to American interests.

## **2. Japan in US Pacific Strategy and US in Japanese Pacific Strategy**

In this section, we will examine various perspectives of Japan in US Pacific strategy and US in Japanese Pacific strategy during the 1853-1901 period and explain how their perception about each other had contributed to the US-Japan estrangements that dominated the discourse of their bilateral relationship since 1853.

In the beginning, commerce with China was the heart of American East Asian relations. Without it, there would have been almost no American living on the Asian continent and little in the way of incentive or accommodations to draw Asians to the eastern side of the Pacific. Along with commerce, a second persistent characteristic of the American-East Asian relationship has been evangelism and search for Christian converts. A third objective of the US policy objectives towards Japan and Pacific was to secure coal in the depths of the Japanese islands for newly innovated US steamships sent to the Pacific region. The US relationship with Japan and China was also important in the US Pacific strategy in order to search for a new "western frontier" in Far East. As a great maritime power, America easily occupied much of the North American continent in the second half of the nineteenth century and emerged as a great world power. Despite the horrible civil war, America grew more powerful than before and began to expand its horizon in the Far East that badly needed the opening of Japan.

Japan appeared more important in the US Pacific strategy after 1840 when Shanghai was open to trade. The captains of the US ships preferred the shorter way from California to Shanghai via the north circle route that brought them close to Japan. After the US conquests of the California ports in the Pacific during 1846-48, Asia was considered as their neighbour with a placid intervening ocean inviting American steamships upon the track of commerce greater than that of combined Europe. Following the first trade treaty with China in 1844, the US started looking at Japan with a careful and strategic calculation. The initial US policy sought for Japan focused more on trade and access to Japan for all nations, rather than obtaining US privileges or religious purposes and in that way the American policy makers thought to attain their foreign policy