

WHITE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST JAPAN: BRITAIN, THE DOMINIONS AND THE UNITED STATES, 1908–1928

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During the first half of the twentieth century, Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders were as “racist” towards Japan as were Californians. “White Australia” and “White Canada” evoked as much protest from Japan and were condemned by General Tojo as provocative.¹ These sparsely populated Pacific Rim settler societies continually required their Atlantic Rim rulers to allow them to exclude Japanese and sometimes to permit discrimination against Japanese citizens within. However their London and Washington rulers were wont to preach fair play in a fair field and deprecated the settler societies’ mounting fear of a Japanese “invasion,” either peaceful or armed.

Each society was torn between the dilemma of wishing to assert its “racist” identity while recognizing that its power was inadequate, and that it depended for security on the great white fleets of the UK and the USA. Thus there were centripetal and centrifugal elements in the political systems. Ultimately, the British Dominions were obliged by their lack of defence capability to defer to London. Yet occasional upsurges of sentiment and incidents compromised Anglo-Japanese relations. Thus, in 1926, Canadian demands for exclusion were so peremptory that the important *Kokumin* newspaper said that Gaimusho (Japanese Foreign Office) was apprehensive of a period of “grave consequences,” where diplomatic relations would be very strained.² The Dominions were the Achille’s heel of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, as important as the USA in maintaining “an invisible colour line” around Japan, which checked its legitimate expansion, and denying that “evasive ambition of the recognition of racial equality.”³

The paper may serve a useful function in shedding light on a gap in our historical knowledge. The struggle for mastery in the Pacific before 1941 has too often been perceived as centering on the rivalry of the three sea powers

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¹ *International Military Tribunal Far East*, University of Canterbury Library, Proceedings Nov 30, 1947 pp 36430–34. General Tojo cited exclusion policies as a cause of war. The University of Canterbury has perhaps the best collection of this Tribunal in the world.

² *Kokumin Shimbun*, June 28, 1926.

³ Roy H. Akagi, *Japan’s Foreign Relations, 1542–1936, A Short History*, Hokuseido Press, Tokyo, 1936, p. 431.

(that is Great Britain, the USA and Japan) and reprehensibly merely upon the United States and Japan. All too belatedly, there has been a suggestion that the pentagon is important, i.e. Japan, United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia⁴. But few scholars have followed up this thought, and the 1920's are neglected. The scope of this paper is quite broad. It will indicate the creation of White Australian and Canadian policies and a resultant Anglo-Japanese *modus vivendi* c.1911. There will follow an analytical narrative of events such as the Paris Peace Conference, and the subsequent development of the Singapore base whereby "white" policies irritated Anglo-Japanese relations. The paper focuses finally on the dangerous Japanese-American war scare of 1924–1926. London monitored this dispute exhaustively, partly because it thought the Dominions might be involved. Britain did not collude with the United States, as some Japanese nationalists had expected; rather it disapproved of the Americans and feared that the Dominions might be inveigled into making common cause with the Americans and, in the words of Foreign Secretary Austen Chamberlain, "be detached from the British orbit"(see note 26, below).

JAPANESE MIGRATION POLICY

Compared with other major nations, very few Japanese migrated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In part it was because the Government did not permit migration until the 1890s for fear that its people would be treated as coolies. The nation's priority was survival in a racist and imperialistic world and it did not wish to become embroiled with major powers on matters of secondary importance. However, in the mid 1890s a policy reversal occurred, in keeping with other policies which transformed Japan's orientation from a "continental" to a "maritime" outlook. Japan looked to the world economy for its future growth. The decisive event was the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1894, the first equal treaty, which in Article One conferred reciprocal rights of travel and residence. Following the fashionable theories of naval historian Alfred Thayer Mahan, Japan's policy was to acquire a battle fleet, a heavily subsidized merchant marine and an offshore fishing industry. This was accompanied (in 1897) by a fully convertible currency. Migration was to play a full part in this strategy of growth. It would stimulate shipping with freight and fares. Remittances would enrich the nation. Migrants would encourage external trade by locating the best and cheapest of raw materials and help to sell exports. The Emigration Protection Act of 1896 showed Japan was alive to this potential. Japanese capital was now sufficiently mature to exploit imperial opportunities. Many emigration companies were formed with links to Japanese shipping and foreign companies. Migrants were regulated in health, and had to post a

⁴ Hosoya Chihiro "Some Reflections On The Conference From The Japanese Side," in Ian Nish (ed.), *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919–1952, Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 282.

surety before getting a passport. The high calibre of Japanese migrants was guaranteed yet they met obstacles not put before the illiterate indigents of Europe when they migrated to settler societies.⁵

WHITE REACTION TO JAPANESE MIGRATION

When Japanese migration began in earnest it quickly encountered attitudes and obstacles already in place against Chinese migrants. The British Dominions and the United States had already enacted legislative and other restrictions upon Chinese. Even when migration was permitted it was on humiliating terms which included a poll tax. These white settler societies had begun to assert racial superiority. Indigenous peoples, whether Indians, Maori or aborigines were swept aside, often onto reserves (where it was assumed they might die out) and “coloured” people were resisted on the grounds that they were “undesirable” settlers who would either inter-marry with local residents or remain aloof. Both possibilities were intolerable. Intermarriage would “lower the quality of the blood,” while aloofness would mean the creation of ghettos of people, unassimilated and unworthy of citizenship, but, nevertheless capable of unfair competition in labour retail and industry. A Royal Commission in Canada in 1900 found Japanese did not contribute to settlement by helping schools and churches. Indeed, they drove whites out of fishing and timber industries. They were of the “least possible value to the country” as their presence delayed “real” settlement of Europeans by deterring intending settlers.⁶

The Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty horrified the future Dominions. Only Queensland signed it. Alerted by the treaty, other Australian states hastened to close the doors against Japan. Thus, in 1896 Kato Takaaki called upon Lord Salisbury at night “impressed with the outrage” of New Zealand excluding Japanese even though there were none resident in the country. Kato resented the insulting language used in Parliament and the use of “Japanese” in legislation. He left a note, the first of hundreds, threatening that “good relations ... might be injuriously affected.”⁷ London held this matter over till 1897 when it could explain to Dominion leaders, at an Imperial conference, the benefits of the Treaty and the value of Japanese friendship and migration. It misjudged the mood of the leaders, who made clear their determination to exclude Japanese by a legislative barrier regardless of the objections of London and Tokyo.

Nevertheless, in most settler societies there was some opposition to exclusion. These societies were not absolutely racist. There were objectors on moral grounds. Others followed London’s wishes loyally. Most effectively,

⁵ For a fuller treatment see N. R. Bennett “Japanese Emigration Policy,” in C. Inglis, S. Gunasakaran and G. Sullivan (eds.), *Two Asians in Australia*, Institute of South East Asian Studies, Singapore, 1993, pp. 23–43.

⁶ Canadian Parliament: *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese and Japanese Immigration*, Session Paper No 54, 1902, Resumé, pp. 389–397.

⁷ Public Record Office, London Foreign Office Mss (hereafter FO) 46/548, Memo by Lord Salisbury, Nov 2, 1896, p.10. Also *Kato-Salisbury*, July 7, 1897.

large capitalists had an interest in Japanese labour and used their influence in Parliament and the media to uphold the liberal interest. The prospect of Japanese trade was also a useful card. In each society the struggle for exclusion became ingrained in other political issues – between labour and capital, free trade and protection, autonomy and imperialism, local and imperial defence and often tipped the balance. The white ideal had won primacy by 1900 and became the symbol of nationalism. Some institutions assisted in this transformation, notably a popular press (e.g. The Hearst press in California) and electoral institutions at every level of political activity. It rarely hurt a political candidate to stand for a policy of exclusion. In the Canadian case, British Columbia passed many laws discriminating against the Japanese but the Federal and Imperial authorities over-ruled these provisions. Canada, given false assurances by a Japanese consul on strict migration control, briefly adhered to the commercial treaty with Japan in pursuit of the hope that Japanese would forsake rice for bread.⁸

Like British Columbia, the Australasian Dominions passed legislation offensive to Japan. Japan finally accepted that some restrictions were inevitable, but remained vigilant about the means of exclusion. Japan objected to her subjects being named in legislation as if her citizens were in the same category as Chinese, Negroes or Kanakas. London readily accepted that exclusion by race was unacceptable. Thereafter London and Tokyo agreed that labourers might be excluded by the operation of an education test: the Natal test. When Australia passed the Immigration Restriction Act in 1901 (the “White Australia Act”) Japan protested against the test employing a “European” language instead of “English.” So sharp were Japan’s protests that Britain feared that the Anglo-Japanese alliance was endangered. Having pressed London to the limit, the Gaimusho (Foreign Office) changed tactics. It removed the issue as far as possible from direct Anglo-Japanese relations, and negotiated directly with the Dominions. London tolerated this unconstitutional practice in the hope of improved relations. Canadian-Japanese relations did improve for some years until the Vancouver riots of 1907. Australia became extremely apprehensive of Japan. By 1905 the Dominions feared invasion by Japan, and in 1907 Canada suggested that immigration was a tool to “Japanese” the Pacific by systematic invasion.⁹

By 1908 Japan had to contemplate the “bitter fruit” of the virtual exclusion of its migrants from the British Empire and the United States. Firm diplomacy had won respectful treatment of some tourists and a small number of merchants. But merchant visas were grudgingly given. For example, when a Japanese consul attempted to gain permission for Japanese wives to accompany Japanese merchants to Australia, the most senior Australian official claimed that he had to protect his country “against a flood,” and [while] “we have no wish for husbands and wives to be separated ... we would prefer to see them united in their own country, not ours.” If wives were permitted entry, he explained, any children born would be British, who would either “take white wives or are we to permit them to introduce wives of their own

⁸ N. R. Bennett “The White Canada Policy: British Columbia and Oriental Exclusion, 1897–1911,” in J. H. Acheson (ed.), *Regionalism and National Identity*, Christchurch, 1985.

⁹ Public Archives of Canada, *Grey of Howich Mss*, Grey to Elgin, Dec. 27, 1907, pp. 3868ff. Earl Grey was Governor-General of Canada, Elgin the Colonial Secretary.

blood?”¹⁰ Canada was more tolerant initially, but British Columbia behaved with contumacy. The province passed anti-Japanese legislation every year, which Ottawa dissolved. However, it was understood that Japanese migrants would be closely scrutinized, be of good character, and limited to a maximum of 200 a year.¹¹ When these controls broke down in 1907, Canada and Japan, with British assistance negotiated the Lemieux Agreement. Secret clauses in this first “gentlemen’s agreement” rigidly limited migration to 400 a year. Canada included wives and children in the quota. The USA made a similar agreement a year later. Both agreements survived until the 1920s. Japan could not admit domestically that its migrants were closely restricted, but the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced in 1910 that Japan’s policy was to encourage migration only to the Japanese Empire and Manchuria.

Dominion antipathy to Japan became so intense that in 1911 Britain was compelled to consult them and win their approval for a renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. Australia and New Zealand had shown their support for the United States in the Californian Crisis, 1906-1908, by rapturously welcoming America’s Great White Fleet. By 1909 they had contributed two dreadnoughts and were contemplating adopting compulsory military service to defend themselves against Japan! As the Dominions were pursuing a crippling expensive defence policy against Britain’s ally, there was a need for coordination. When consulted, the Dominions revealed a secret fear that Britain might try to force them to accept Japanese migrants. Sir Edward Grey, a man of impeccable integrity, assured them that these fears were groundless, and that the Alliance moderated Japan’s demands.¹² Thereafter Dominion apprehensions were soothed but their defence preparations were not relaxed.

AUSTRALIA AND JAPAN

The Great War rekindled Dominion fears owing to, for them, adverse changes in the balance of power. British power in the Pacific declined, as all forces were concentrated against Germany. This decline was apparent immediately when Japanese warships escorted the first Anzac troops to Suez. Japanese power increased markedly through territorial acquisitiveness: aside from expansion into Korea and Manchuria, Japan seized several German possessions in 1914, extended its rights in China in 1915 through the infamous 21 Demands, and occupied Siberia in 1917. Japan also grew in strength through industrialization, acquiring enough capital to invest in overseas projects (yen diplomacy could compete with dollar diplomacy), and an ability to exploit opportunities through trade, shipping and financial services. The Dominions

¹⁰ National Archives Australia, *Atlee Hunt Mss*, Vol. 52, Hunt-Foxall, Dec. 8, 1908, p.1313.

¹¹ The Diplomatic Records of Japan, Gaimusho, Tokyo. MT 3/8/2/20 is a massive correspondence. See, for example, *Consul Nosse-W. Laurier* (PM), Feb. 3 & July 18, 1903, pp. 3107–8, 3113–18.

¹² N. R. Bennett, “Consultation or Information? Britain, the Dominions and the Renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1911,” *New Zealand Journal of History*, 4, 2, 1970.

unspoken fear was the price Japan would exact for her “protection.” Diplomats took horse-trading as a fact of life, and the Dominions’ fears were not ungrounded. In 1915, Britain, France, and Russia planned to dismember the Turkish Empire, with assistance from the Japanese Army. As an inducement to Japan, France proposed a loan of 20 million pounds and a “solution of the race question in the British Dominions.”¹³ These fears were also confirmed in 1916 when Japan offered naval assistance in return for the Dominions joining the commercial treaty and thereby conceding the principle of open migration. Kato Takaaki, the Japanese Foreign Minister, explained that Japanese public opinion would resent Japan paying to defend countries which discriminated against them.¹⁴ Canada was sympathetic but Australia was not.

This episode has not been published. It has not been known before that Kato’s approach seemed especially menacing to Australia because it had held secret discussions with Japan in 1915 through the Japanese Consul General. This practice was illegal as Australia did not have sovereignty in external affairs, and dangerous as it was inexperienced in external affairs and lacked the normal diplomatic protections. As it did not inform Great Britain of the conversations it was impossible to verify Japan’s intent, and the consul’s veracity through the usual ambassadors. Consul-General Shimizu asked Prime Minister Fisher to lunch, during which he invited Australia to adhere to the commercial treaty. Shimizu explained this would remove “hindrances” on Japanese migration, guarantee Australia most-favoured-nation status in the Japanese market, and contribute to “cordiality” between allies.¹⁵ The Fisher Correspondence shows Australia was determined to maintain the power to impose “hindrances” and Australia was not cordial to a Japan which had expanded alarmingly towards them in the Marshalls, Marianas and Carolines. Japan had insisted on keeping Yap, which Australia had been poised to invade. Australia did not want Japan in possession of the islands and resented the exclusion of her traders.¹⁶ Rightly or wrongly Britain also began to share Australia’s view that Japan was predatory and would desert Britain in the event of a German victory.¹⁷

Australian-Japanese relations, arguably the weakest link in the Alliance chain, almost snapped during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Prime Minister “Billy” Hughes became a hate figure in Japan by contesting Japan’s bid for the inclusion of a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant. Hughes’ opposition was important because it forced a long

¹³ FO 371/2381 (1915), Memo by Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary, Jan. 1, 1915, File 5241. This remarkable document has not been quoted elsewhere. Many schemes to obtain Japanese troops were discussed. In File 163972 Grey mooted Japanese troops in Persia to the horror and objections of the India Office. Grey did not tell Japan fully of allied plans for war gains: he feared Japan increasing her demands, *Grey-Greene* (Tokyo Sep), 1915, File 138698.

¹⁴ FO 410/65 *Grey to Greene*, Feb. 21, 1916.

¹⁵ National Archives, Canberra, *Andrew Fisher Mss*, 2919 Shimizu Aide-Memoir, June 10, 1915. File 6/100.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Memo by H. Ferrands, External Affairs, Dec. 12, 1915. File 6/149.

¹⁷ *Infra*. Scholars will find it rewarding to examine private letters of Foreign Office personnel, e.g. F.O. 350/15 *Jordan Mss* (Jordan was British Ambassador to China 1911-17). *Longley (London)-Jordan*, April 4, 1915, said Grey partly sympathised with the infamous 21 Demands “as the Japanese were excluded from our colonies”.

argument during which Woodrow Wilson, with an ear attuned to anti-Japanese sentiment on the West Coast, gradually shifted to a negative position.

Eventually Wilson was the individual most blamed for Japan's humiliation.¹⁸ Hughes's military advisors resented his attitude as being needlessly irritating to Japan. They argued that, if Hughes obtained American support, Japan would be driven into the arms of Chinese anti-foreignism and Russian communism. If Hughes failed to win American support, an isolated Australia would be the brunt of Japan's anger. These fears were enhanced when Baron Makino (who learned very quickly how to use press publicity) appealed directly to the Australian people for sympathetic treatment, while also warning that otherwise Australia would be held accountable for discrimination. When Hughes returned home he was pressured into a change of heart and he became a supporter of the Alliance.¹⁹

Australia's attempts immediately after the Peace Conference to mend relations with Japan went badly wrong. Australia sent Major Piesse, an intelligence expert, on an informal mission to clear the air. He stirred up a hornet's nest, receiving the most severe and forthright telling off that this writer has ever seen in diplomatic relations. The matter is interesting on several accounts, initially because Piesse met Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Hanihara, who is regarded by Japanese as very mild and doveish, but who dealt with Piesse and the Americans in 1924 in a very firm manner. Hanihara's formal letter of admonition is quite well known, but I expected to find much discussion of the Australian Mission in the Japanese archives, knowing that the episode is still of enormous interest to historians. I made a considerable search, aided by several friendly archive experts and we found no mention in Japan of the mission. These lacunae cannot be explained.

In December 1919 Major Piesse told the Japanese that Australia was "deeply apprehensive" of them. His mission was based on the belief that a frank exchange would clear "misunderstandings." This was naive because Piesse claimed that he had evidence that Japan had spied on Australian defenses to prepare for an invasion! He also said that Japan had been aggressive to China and in absorbing former German colonies, and that many Japanese seemed to support the idea of a "Southern Advance" towards Australia. He justified the White Australia policy as a social experiment, claiming that its motivation was not racial. He also guaranteed that any Japanese admitted to Australia would be esteemed and treated with great dignity. There is reason to believe that dispatching a bluff soldier to do a diplomat's job in a country of great cultural sensitivity was inappropriate.

Hanihara's retort was so devastating that the Australians abruptly left Japan. Hanihara delivered a memorandum that vigorously denied Japanese espionage and unjust behaviour in China: "Japan has done nothing ... which was not done by [the] western powers before," yet Japan was criticized because it was "not one of the White Powers." Japan had "the misfortune to be a non-Christian and non-white power," and "suffered unendurable humiliations." If Japan had fair treatment and equal opportunity, then

¹⁸ Shimazu Naoku, "The Japanese Attempt to Secure Racial Equality in 1919," in *Japan Forum* 1990, pp.93–100.

¹⁹ It is difficult to cite all of the documents here. Scholars might peruse National Archives, Canberra, *William Morris Hughes Mss*, 1538, Series 15, 19, 21 & 25.

Australia would “have little reason to fear anything from southern expansion.” Mr. Hanihara’s statement could be interpreted as a threat that unless Australia changed the White Australia policy, Japan might attack.²⁰ Perhaps this exchange did indeed remove some misunderstandings, but it did not contribute to cordiality.

Australia tried to maintain correct relations with Japan in the 1920s and was very careful not to become involved in anti-Japanese incidents in Californian. Some low-level irritants persisted. One difficulty was the frequent attempts by the Australian Workers Union to deny work to the few Japanese who has become resident before the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. Japan delivered extremely vigorous protests against the actions of the Queensland Arbitration Court in prohibiting “coloured labour” in the sugar industry; prohibiting “coloureds” holding a liquor license; or working in hotels in close association with “white women and girls.” Western Australia insulted Japan by denying the franchise to resident Japanese on the grounds that they were “aborigines,” though of Asian or African extraction. Japan’s protests against these irritants usually obtained satisfaction from the Federal Authorities²¹.

The historian who reads deeply in the Gaimusho files becomes conscious of events, which did not lead to protest, but which were deeply irritating to diplomats. One finds page after page of press cuttings about the white Australia policy covered with Japanese red ink. There can be no doubt that Gaimusho staff deeply resented the Australian Immigration Act (1925) by which Britain provided 20 million pounds to encourage the migration of settlers to strengthen white Australia.²² It was manifestly galling to Japanese that Australia and Britain subsidized settlers in order to improve their defences against Japan. Billy Hughes made matters worse by articulating the affront: “we have to fill our vacant spaces with men and women of our own race,” because Japan’s “overcrowded, half-starved millions” would one day make a great trek south. The same file has extensive notes on the episode where Lord Leverhulme stirred up a storm by saying coloured migration was necessary to populate the Northern Territories, and that Mr. Lang, the Labour Party leader, asked Leverhulme if he would “be agreeable to marry your daughter to a Chinese or Japanese.”²³

The evidence indicates that Australians were as prejudiced against the Japanese as Californians, but their Government had learned to treat Japanese sensibilities with great care. They were so successful in this, that one Japanese consul became so overcome by goodwill on one occasion that he endorsed the white Australia policy as a social experiment, adding that it was not anti-Japanese. The British Diplomatic Service noticed this with amazement.²⁴

²⁰ Documents on British Foreign Policy (HMSO London) Series 1, VI, pp.953-66. National Archives, Canberra, *Piesse Mss*, 882, Series 2, 5. See also D.C.S. Sissons, “James Murdock, (1856–1921): Historian, Teacher and much else besides,” *Transactions Asiatic Society of Japan*, Fourth Series 2, 1987, pp.1–58, esp. pp.50–53. Piesse relied heavily for advice on James Murdock.

²¹ MT 3/8/2/357 *Shimizu-Bruce* (Acting PM, Queensland) July 8, 1919; *Tamaki-Theodore* March 3, 1921; May 31, 1922; Aug. 4, 1923.

²² MT 3/8/2/357 pp.462-4, 490ff.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.132.

²⁴ FO 371/12517, Memo, July 21, 1927.

Having digressed in Australian-Japanese topics, it will now be convenient to return to the 1924 crisis.

BRITAIN'S POLICY AND CONCERNS IN THE 1924 CRISIS

What were Britain's preconceptions? In March 1924 British officials denied that Japan had been a loyal ally or a "romantic and naive friend." In the War, Japan was "preparing to be unfriendly had the fortunes of war gone against us," and her attitude was so equivocal, that the Alliance would not have survived a British defeat. The official thought the outlook was grim: "an intensification of Japan's efforts to undermine our prestige and interests in China and gradually oust us from our position in the Far East."²⁵

There was equal suspicion of the United States. During the 1924 crisis, the Foreign office assumed that America used immigration policies, naval visits, and even meetings of the Institute of Pacific Studies "to withdraw Canada and Australia out of the British orbit."²⁶ British wariness of the USA can be detected in Pacific defence policy. This has three strands. The first was the establishment of a Pacific fleet, which it had promised in 1909. Towards this it had received two dreadnoughts from Australia and New Zealand, which had been actually deployed in the North Sea.²⁷ In 1919 the Dominions vigorously supported Admiral Jellicoe's plan for a large, fast fleet based on Singapore.

The second problem was qualitative: new Japanese and American post-Jutland ships potentially outclassed Britain's fleet. In a Committee of Imperial Defence meeting of December 12, 1920 Prime Minister Lloyd George posed what was, he said, the most difficult question of his career: "what kind of navy would they need to defend the Empire in the future?" Churchill advised naval supremacy, plus a Japanese Alliance, although Australia had "strong racial objections" to it, and might support the USA "in certain contingencies." Admiral Beatty forthrightly demanded 9 new super dreadnoughts to reply to the 12 new American vessels. Lloyd George feared a disastrous arms race with the USA and put reliance for security partly on the Japanese Alliance. Churchill insisted on recording his dissent as "no more fatal policy could be contemplated than that of basing our naval policy on a possible combination with Japan against the USA." Lloyd George argued that a more fatal policy would be "one whereby we were at the mercy of the United States." Beatty won a partial victory. Britain decided to order 4 dreadnought of the new Lion class. The Lions would have completely outclassed any existing Japanese or American vessels, and might have intensified the arms race.²⁸

The third strand was the need to build a new base in the Far East to protect Imperial Interests. Britain decided to build an imperial base at

²⁵ FO 371/10299 *Palraiat (Tokyo)-FO (Tel)* March 4, 1924, p.46. The telegram reported remarks by the Japanese Vice-minister of Marine. Officials wrote an unusually long minute, discussing policy.

²⁶ FO 371/12514 file 1059, pp.345-8. It will be discussed further below.

²⁷ N.R.Bennett "The Naval Pivot of Asia: An Examination of Hong Kong in British Far Eastern Strategy, 1900-14," *Journal of Oriental Studies*, 7, 1969, pp.63-75.

²⁸ Cabinet Papers, CAB 2/3 "Most Secret" Minutes of 134 Meeting of Committee of Imperial Defence, Dec. 12, 1920.

Singapore irrespective of the renewal of the Japanese alliance. The base was justified partly on racial grounds, and partly on logistics:

The most likely war was between the white and yellow races. It was no longer possible to rely upon a treaty about to be terminated at far shorter notice than the period for providing adequate defenses. [Moreover] the Dominions would expect something more tangible than reliance upon the Alliance. It would be disastrous to the prestige of Great Britain if she were to abandon the Pacific by neglecting to take the steps necessary to permit of the Fleet operating there, and that we should be failing in our duty were we to take such a course.²⁹

This defence policy implied a deep conflict with Japan on several grounds; a new fleet of superior size and quality would operate out of a new base to defend the interests of white policies.

Having decided first that a main fleet would operate out of a new Singapore base, the empire discussed the future of the Alliance with Japan. Canada took the lead in denouncing the Alliance but was criticized by Hughes of Australia and Massey of New Zealand for putting American concerns before British. The Anzacs and the British had a smouldering resentment against the American policy of ending the Alliance without giving any compensating guarantees. The Imperial Conference of 1921 set some difficult tasks; there was an inclination to renew the Alliance, but also try for new means of security by means of a Pacific Conference. Events moved quickly to combine security and pacific issues at the Washington Conference.³⁰

Despite other arguments, Britain held fast to its new policy of basing its main fleet on new facilities in Singapore.³¹ There was opposition. Lord Balfour suggested that Sydney was preferable to Singapore: he also maintained that the danger to Australasia was “illusory,” as was the fantastic image of “the vision of the teeming population of Japan anxiously looking for an outlet overseas.” It seems that the languidly aristocratic Balfour overstated his case, for the Committee was not convinced of American support if Japan attacked Britain. Lord Beatty denied both American goodwill and capability: the USN was “incapable of fighting in the West Pacific.” Beatty also raised suspicions of Japan, that he alleged was building oil tankers so that it could be in “a position where it could expand at out expense if it so desired.” Churchill deprecated this: Japan was too sagacious, he said, to attack the UK and the USA, which had “180 million of white population, not to mention coloured races, besides mechanical and material resources infinitely superior to Japan.”³² But Beatty carried the day, and contracts were ordered for the development of

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Minutes June 10, 1921. See also S. W. Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars*, London, 1968.

³⁰ CAB 32/2, Meeting of Imperial Conference.

³¹ Britain had to give up the Lion class at the Washington Conference. The Admiralty deeply resented this and the concession of naval parity to the USA. *Vide* CAB 2/3, 149 meeting of CID Nov. 14, 1922.

³² *Ibid.*, 137 and especially 161 Meeting of CID, July 28, 1922. See W. David. McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base*, London, 1979.

Singapore. The Japanese press vociferously opposed the Singapore base, but London went full steam ahead on the project because it was the only irritant in diplomatic relations and Beatty added that any hesitancy might induce Australia “to turn to the United States for protection against Japan.”³³

BRITAIN AND THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN CRISIS

The British Foreign Office was shocked by the emergence of the exclusion crisis, even though it was not a bolt-out-of-the-blue. Ambassador Sir Charles Elliot warned London in January 1924 that, at the opening of the Diet, unprecedentedly strong language had been used about American treatment of migrants.³⁴ On April 10, Baron Matsui warned the USA of the “grave consequences” it was risking by changing unilaterally the basis of Japanese migration into the USA from the satisfactory “Gentleman’s Agreement” to the legislative Johnson Act, which practically prohibited Japanese immigration. However, London was informed that Matsui was unperturbed, because he believed Secretary of State Hughes’ views “would prevail in the end, and that nothing would be enacted prejudicial to the international status and dignity of Japan.”³⁵ Four days later Matsui was “grave and despondent,” having lost confidence in the American administrations friendship. He acknowledged that if the Johnson bill proceeded the consequences would be “unpleasant,” but he would not yet use the word “serious” as that implied a diplomatic rupture. Matsui tried to enlist Britain’s understanding by explaining that Japan’s ambassador in Washington, Baron Hanihara, had warned the USA of grave consequences on his own initiative, but Japan fully supported his strong language. Matsui was outraged that American Senators were prepared to insult Japan for a trifling domestic political advantage. The matter had got worse because Hanihara had been advised by the American ambassador in Japan to try to explain his grave consequences note.³⁶

There was considerable empathy between the former allies that summer, through mutual disapproval of American conduct, but also because of political change. The first British Labour Government halted the construction of the Singapore base as a goodwill gesture to Japan,³⁷ and welcomed the appointment of Kato Takaaki as Prime Minister and Shidehara as Foreign Minister.³⁸ China was not an irritant until Chamberlain’s “Christmas Message” of December 1925 left the Japanese feeling betrayed by Britain’s attempt curry favour with the Chinese.³⁹ Shidehara had some faith in

³³ FO 371/10299, *Palariat-FO (Tel)* Feb.19, 1924. Also Minutes by FO on Cabinet paper, March 5, and 1924 pp.39–41. As it happened Britain made a goodwill gesture to Japan by suspending construction in 1924 and went slowly thereafter.

³⁴ FO 371/10303, *Eliot-Lord Curzon (Tel.)* Jan. 23, 1924.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, *Eliot-Curzon* April 10, 1924.

³⁶ FO 371/9586, *Eliot to MacDonald* April 25, 1924, Telegram.

³⁷ Matsui expressed pleasure in FO371/10299 *Eliot-MacDonald*, April 23, 1924.

³⁸ FO 371/10303, Minutes on *Eliot-MacDonald*, June 19, 1924.

³⁹ Hosoya Chihiro “Britain and the US in Japan’s view, 1919-37,” in I.H.Nish (ed.) *Anglo-American Alienation, 1919-52*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p.12.

American decency, but most were appalled and resolute: the Ambassador was recalled, and the Diet unanimously reaffirmed the “grave consequences” message.⁴⁰

Japan’s stance ought to be questioned. Did it protest too much? The writer is reminded that Japanese Foreign Minister Shidehara once asked the great Lord Bryce, scholar and diplomat, why he had not protested against the USA’s Panama Bill in 1912. Bryce replied that Britain’s policy to the USA was non-belligerence. As Britain was determined to avoid war with the USA, it avoided confrontation. Bryce added that he deprecated taking diplomatic courses which increased tension or ill feeling. He asked if Japan would go to war over migration issues, and warned against “justifiable but dangerously strong position in negotiations.”⁴¹ This writer has seen perhaps fifty occasions when Japanese diplomats warned some imperial British institution that unpleasant consequences would attend some legislation if it became law. Petty consuls did this several times a year in British Columbia alone. It was a formula and perhaps it was ill considered. In 1924 it reaped a whirlwind, deepening antagonism in Japanese-American relations.

Japan was also diplomatically clumsy, not only in its “grave consequences” protest, but also in not trying to get a group of other nations interested in making a joint protest. No Japanese diplomat enquired how Britain would address the inimical changes of the Johnson act, much less try to make common cause. As it happened, Britain protested against some effects upon her shipping interests, but did nothing about the restriction of Indian immigrants despite strong lobbying from the Indian office.⁴²

London was extremely vigilant during the Japanese-American crisis. It collected voluminous material. The writer believes there were three areas of major concern. Primary attention was given to detecting the earliest hint of an outbreak of hostilities. The diplomats in Washington and Tokyo had an exceptional number of interviews with decision-makers. In this activity Britain was pursuing its main interest in preserving the peace, and the diplomats were fulfilling their function of avoiding surprises. A second massive enterprise was to monitor Japanese public opinion to gauge if the crisis had thrown Japan off-balance. Not only was the Embassy extremely energetic but it took the unique course of asking its scattered consuls to write political analyses. The consuls relished this responsibility, and consulted many Japanese, including bankers and retailers.⁴³

The crisis coloured interpretation of other events, for example, an ordinance limiting consumption of luxuries was interpreted as revenge against foreigners who treated Japanese as “inferior.”⁴⁴ A third concern was to find out precisely what it was what Japan objected to. London was concerned by the implication for the Dominions and directed that Baron Shidehara be closely questioned on the point. London also noted that Japan had responded to criticism that its migrants always remained Japanese by passing a “Dual

⁴⁰ FO 371/9587, *Eliot-FO*, June 27, 1924.

⁴¹ N.M.Bamba, *Japanese Diplomacy in a Dilemma: New Light on Japan’s China Policy, 1924-29*, Minerva Press, Kyoto, 1972, pp.151-3.

⁴² FO 371/9586, *IO-FO* May 12, 1924; *Board of Trade-FO* May 25, 1924.

⁴³ FO 371/9586, *Eliot-MacDonald*, June 20, 1924.

⁴⁴ FO 371/10303, *Eliot-FO* July 11, 1924.

Nationality Act”, which London hurriedly translated and circulated to the Dominions.⁴⁵

Careful monitoring and observation convinced London that Japan was not about to go to war with the USA, but it was bitterly offended. Ambassador Eliot reported, “No international question has stirred the Japanese so deeply as the present issue.” Moreover that Japan would never “forgive and forget,” indeed if the USA were ever embroiled with another powerful state in the future, Japan “would seize the opportunity to assume a hostile attitude.”⁴⁶

Although Britain wished to avoid involvement in the crisis, it could not remain entirely detached. The possibility of a Japanese-American war naturally led to an appraisal of current defenses, and the exposed position of Singapore. Thus Singapore became a thorny issue again in November 1924, when a new Conservative Government informed Japan that work would resume on the base.

Austen Chamberlain assured that Japanese that the base would not be used aggressively: its development was to guarantee imperial communications. Privately the FO saw the base as promoting “white prestige”; it was also vital in a Japanese-American war as the Australasians might turn to the USA for support.⁴⁷ Moreover, the Empire needed a base if the Dominions remained provocative to Japan in their migration policy. In December 1924 Kato and Shidehara warned that Singapore had affected relations, as the Japanese people feared an Anglo-American combination against them, but Japan would not lodge a formal protest as Britain was acting within its rights to build a base on its own territory.⁴⁸ Canada also raised a grave issue by threatening to introduce exclusion legislation (see below), and the USA caused great anxiety by repeating its 1908 tactics of sending a “white fleet” to Australasia. London not only resented USN ship movements but was naturally anxious not to fuel Japanese fears of Anglo-Saxon collusion.

Given these exceptional concerns, London went to unusual lengths to warn the Dominions against alienating Japan. Austen Chamberlain took the rare step of sending a circular dispatch that warned “a series of events has stirred up feelings of suspicion and resentment towards us among the Japanese people”. This could lead to a lack of cooperation in China; and there was no action “more likely to destroy all possibility of co-operation than a revival of the Japanese immigration question. ... the Canadian Government should be warned of the serious consequences when nationalist and anti-foreign feeling is running very high in China and is being exploited against us by Soviet influences. The Canadian Government is threatening Japan with action which would inevitably drive her sympathies towards alliance with those forces which aim at the destruction of British power in Asia.”⁴⁹ This vigorous communication was reinforced by patterns of loyalty and patronage from the

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, *Eliot-FO* July 27, 1924. Dispatch and extended minutes.

⁴⁶ Source as Note 43 above. Eliot agreeing with Takayanagi.

⁴⁷ FO 371/10299, *Chamberlain-Eliot* Nov. 14, 1924. For defence matters see CAB 2/4 CID meeting Jan. 5, 1925, Secret.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* Shidehara requested a press statement affirming a “special friendship”, and a revival of special naval ties.

⁴⁹ FO 371/10959, *FO-CO* March 9, 1925. Some files may still be secret as the record is interrupted.

crown via governor-generals and other links to close ranks in the Empire. Britain helped Canada obtain reassurance on Japanese migration. Thus the Empire avoided embroilment in the 1924 crisis.

The Canadian problem required very adroit handling. In May 1925 Canada peremptorily requested a cessation of Japanese migration pending negotiation of a new agreement within a month. Failure to reach a satisfactory diplomatic agreement would lead Canada to adopt legislation.⁵⁰ Britain cooled the matter down, and long negotiations resulted. These reached an impasse in 1926 when Japan attempted to link migration and fishing rights. British Columbian attempts to exclude 8000 "Asiatics" from the fishing industry were scotched by the Privy Council. The government-favoured *Kokumin Shimbun* newspaper tediously threatened "grave consequences."⁵¹ Agreement was reached in 1928.

London carefully monitored Japanese-American relations throughout the period. Diplomatic dispatches on the topic were circulated to the Cabinet and the King. For example, Kato declined to invite an American fleet on a mission through the Pacific, because the Immigration Committee of the Senate had called for Pan-American legislation to exclude Japanese. As a Senator also wanted Australasia in the common front,⁵² Chamberlain naturally detected a crude American attempt to "remove Canada and Australia out of the British orbit."⁵³ Even in 1927, the Embassy dutifully collected statements by eminent Japanese that the USA would never be forgiven.⁵⁴ Ambassador Eliot also reported that Japanese dockyards had been told to prepare for war within three years. When asked for their opinion, the British military and naval attaches doubted Japan's capacity to defeat the USA, especially as her finances "called imperatively for peace." Eliot's conclusion was that "war-talk was prevalent and not discouraged" by the Government.⁵⁵ This secret dispatch was discussed "in-house" before being forwarded to Cabinet. Craigie believed Japan was not aggressive and had not prepared for war, while Ashton-Gwatkin believed "Japan would like to fight if they thought they could but they know they cannot." Wellesley thought Japan was preparing, not for war, but so that she could enforce a policy of "Hands off Asia." Japan was getting ready "to say, if and when she wants to do something in the Far East contrary to the wishes of other powers, come and stop us if you can."⁵⁶ It was as if Wellesley had a premonition of the 1931 Manchurian Incident.

CONCLUSION

This study indicates that the Dominions were as inclined as California to discriminate against Japanese migrants. Japanese sentiments were bruised by settler society. However, London had more power than Washington to curb the excesses of its dependencies. Moreover, London perceived that the

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, CO-FO June 2, 1925. There are vast files here.

⁵¹ FO 371/11700, *Tilley-FO* June 2, 1926.

⁵² FO 371/10634, *Eliot-FO* Feb. 17, 1925; *Howard(Washington)-FO* Feb. 16, 1925.

⁵³ FO 371/12516, *Chamberlain-Tilley(Tokyo)* Nov. 16, 1927.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* *Tilley-FO* Oct. 14, 1927.

⁵⁵ FO 371/10634, *Eliot-FO* March 27, 1925, Secret.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Chamberlain supported Wellesley. Such debates were rare.

Japanese-American crisis could get out of hand, and avoided any hint of collusion with the United States, which might have inflamed Japanese feelings of insecurity. Its sympathy was with Japan. It did not, as this paper has done, question whether Japanese diplomats were too eager to warn other people of the “grave consequences” of their actions. It knew that the 1924 crisis was a watershed, and the Japanese-American relations were permanently impaired. But it also pursued its own interests. The great Lord Salisbury would have approved. Some time before he opined that:

All the talk about the inveterate enmity of a rising nation is moonshine. Nations neither love nor hate for ten years together. Whatever we do now, Japan will always do to us precisely what at any moment she thinks it her interest to do – neither more nor less.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ FO 46/265, *Memo by Lord Salisbury*, April 16, 1879, p.327.