

The Crisis between Greece and Japan Immediately after WWI: The Japanese Policy to Advance to the Mediterranean World

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Introduction

The official relationship between Greece and Japan began since the conclusion of Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation between both countries (1899). But the Japanese legation in Athens established after 23 years, in 1922. This fact indicates the chronological change of Japanese interests toward Greece. At first, before the Russo-Japanese War (1904-05), Japan had no intention to make close relationship with Greece, but Japan adopted various politics to advance the Mediterranean World, including Greece in post-WWI period.

As the first step of this policy, in 1920s, the Japanese authorities (not only the Japanese Government, but also the Japanese Military and Officers) had the plan to advance to Egypt and Turkey, not Greece. Japan decided to establish the strong foothold in Egypt and Turkey. Both Egypt and Turkey also welcomed Japan as the trade partner for counter-measures on the European countries and America. At the second stage, Japan tried to affect the surrounded countries; both the Balkan countries (Greece, Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia and so on) and the Middle East countries (Syria, Iran, Iraq, Palestine and so on). Gradually Japan promoted the policy against the Mediterranean World. But the Great Depression after 1929 gave the great damage on this policy. Soon after the depression, the sharp decline in international trade caused in the world-wide scale during 1930's, and Japan was excluded from both trade and security of the Mediterranean World. Both Egypt and Turkey took up cold attitudes to Japan. At last later in 1930's, Japan was obliged to give up the both footholds in Egypt and Turkey and withdraw from the Mediterranean World.

In this short article, I would like to introduce the background of the Japanese attitude toward Greece, and the neighboring countries immediately after WWI, according to the Japanese policy to advance to the Mediterranean World.

*I. The first satage: Heimei-maru Incident*¹

Nowadays both Greek and Japanese people forgot this incident. On April 3, 1921, the Japanese private freighter, *Heimei-maru*, under the command of the Japanese Military Lieutenant Colonel *Yukichi TSUMURA*, entered into the Mediterranean via the Suez Canal and planned to go to Istanbul to send back the Ottoman prisoners of WWI and their families.² They were captured by Russia and prisoned in Siberia area. In 1918, the Japanese Military forces invaded into Siberian area to support White Russian forces. The Ottoman prisoners were not released from the prison. They were transferred from the Russian Military forces to the Japanese Military forces.³

On February 1921, the Japanese Military forces independently decided to send back the Ottoman prisoners to Istanbul by Japan without any requests of the Allied Powers. This is the demonstration to suggest that Japan has the right to advance to the Mediterranean World as one of the Allied Powers for the Ottoman Empire. There is the background behind sending *Heimei-maru* to Istanbul. Actually the Japanese Military mainly fought with the German Military in China during WWI. But in 1917, Britain and France requested Japan to guard Allied Powers' private ships against the German Submarine' attacks in the East Mediterranean area. So the Japanese Navy sent the Second Special Fleet to East Mediterranean area. They accomplished those duties based on Malta Island until 1919. Although the Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World was inconvenient for Britain, France, Italy and Greece, they could not express strong objection against Japan due to this debt. Then, Britain made the Greek Navy capture the Japanese *Heimei-maru* near Lesbos Island before her entering the Dardanelles Strait to Istanbul.

Although the Japanese rejected to hand over the Ottoman prisoners to Greece, *Heimei-maru* was captured in Greece for about 6 months. The Japanese authority and public opinion blamed Greece. The Greek authority was very astonished the vigorous attitude of Japan. This incident taught Greeks the crisis of Japanese intention to advance to the Mediterranean World.

1 For long time, this incident was forgotten in the Allied Powers countries. On the other hand, Turkish people handed down this tragedy from generation to generation. See (APUHAN 2005), (ATAMAN 1990), (TAŞKIRAN 1999), (TAŞKIRAN 2011). Unfortunately the name of the Japanese Lieutenant Colonel Yukichi TSUMURA was mispronounced as CHOMURA (ÇOMURA, ÇOMORA) in those works.

2 There are many Ottoman official documents about the Siberian prisoners, preserved in the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister (Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi) in Istanbul. In addition, the Japanese Official Archives (National Archives of Japan, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, the National Institute for Defense Studies of the Ministry of Defense of Japan and so on) has many official documents about *Heimei-maru* Incident. According to the Greek Archaeologist Mr. Konstantinos CHRISTOPOULOS, there are also many official documents about this incident in Greek Archives. It requires to promote the international academic project to investigate this forgotten incident.

3 For the details about the Siberian Intervention, see (White 1950), and especially Japanese policy, see (HOSOYA 1950), (DUNSCOMB 2011).

But the Greek authority found no effective breakthrough of this situation. In the same way, the Japanese authority also found no breakthrough with Greece. Furthermore, Britain and France rejected the Japanese request to solve this incident. At last the Japanese Government obliged to accept Italy's suggestion to hand over the Ottoman captures to Italy. The Japanese Military Lieutenant Colonel *TSUMURA* handed over the Ottoman prisoners to Italy, and Italy did not hand over them to the Ottoman Empire and confined them in Asinara Island for a long time. In this way, the Japanese Government failed to send back the Ottoman prisoners to Istanbul by the Japanese ship and demonstrate the Japanese power in Istanbul. Allied Powers (Britain, France, Italy and Greece) succeeded to prevent the first step of the Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World.

In this way, the first crisis between Greece and Japan after WWI was over. But the Heimei-maru Incident was not enough for Japan to abandon the ambition to advance to the Mediterranean World.

II. Sèvres to Lausanne

As the case of *Heimei-maru* Incident suggested, Japan showed the strong interests in the Mediterranean World after WWI. In wartime, Japan got the great success at the trade for European countries. Actually there were the great demands for the Japanese materials in European countries. Japan found the attractive market in the Mediterranean World, and desired to maintain the trade in the same scale, or if it is possible to extend the scale.

Due to these circumstances, Japan thought the Paris Peace Conference (18/01/1919-21/01/1920) as the important first step to advance to the Mediterranean World.⁴ Japan sent the big delegation to the conference as one of the Allied Victors. The Japanese delegation was composed of 64 members, headed by *Kinmochi SAIONJI* (1849-1940). Before the conference Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to restrict the territorial insistence on the only German territory in Asia. Although the conference was led by three 'Great Powers' (Britain, France and America), Japan insisted the equal rights of 'Five Great Powers' (Britain, France, Italy, America and Japan). This insistence was disregarded by 'Great Powers'. Although the Japanese delegation was dissatisfied with the course of the conference, Japan succeeded to get much more results. In exchange for no claim to territory of the Ottoman Empire, Japan succeeded to reserve the other rights on the Ottoman Empire. To make peace with the Ottoman Empire, Paris Peace Conference was followed by Conference of London (12-20/02/1920), under the leadership of British Prime Minister *David Lloyd George* (1863-1945). The Japanese Ambassador to Britain, *Sutemi CHINDA* (1857-1929), participated in this conference.

⁴ Actually Japan was not the main character in the conference, it is possible to trace the efforts in such as (TEMPERLEY 1920-24). For the viewpoint of the Japanese delegation, see (KAJIMA 1976-80).

Depended on the agreement of this conference, successively the San Remo Conference (19-26/04/1920) was held among Britain, France, Italy and Japan. The Japanese delegation was *Keishiro MATSUI* (the Ambassador to Italy, 1868-1946). As the results of these conferences, the Treaty of Sèvres was signed on August 10, 1920. Japan was one of the signatories, like other Allied Powers.

This treaty gave Japan the chance to advance to the Mediterranean World. First, the treaty guaranteed the diplomatic relationship between Japan and the Ottoman Empire, with the privilege of Capitulation, unilateral contracts with the extraterritorial jurisdiction. Second, the treaty allowed Japan to participate in the committee of Allied Powers about the twin straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles. Although there is no relationship with the straits, Japan got voice in this matter for the reason to control the international military balance. As Britain, France and Italy showed the deep attachment to divide their own respective zone on the Ottoman Empire, Japan succeeded to get the excuse to set up the foothold in the Mediterranean World.

Actually the Japanese main target was the Ottoman Empire, not Greece. The Japanese delegation did not.

But the Treaty of Sèvres had never taken effect. Neither Sultan *Vahdettin* (1861-1926) nor Grand Vizir *Damad Ferid Paşa* (1853-1923) of the Ottoman Empire signed the treaty. The Grand National Assembly under *Mustafa Kemal* disregarded the treaty and continued to develop the Turkish National Movements against the occupation forces of Allied Powers. British Prime Minister *David Lloyd George* was obliged to convene the Conference of London (21/02/1921-12/03/1921) again to reexamine the treaty. Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent *Sadatuchi UCHIDA* (1865-1942) as the Japanese Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Turkey, to the Conferences of London. After the Conference of London, *UCHIDA* arrived Istanbul on April 18, 1921, to find the solution of making peace. He tried to mediate between the Ottoman Empire and the Grand National Assembly with British agreement. He tried to put the control of anti-Britain sentiment of Indian Muslims on the agenda. Both the Ottoman Empire and the Grand National Assembly found this proposal is effective to get any British compromises. But his offers of mediation were rejected by Britain. The British Embassy to Japan demonstrated their dissatisfaction with *UCHIDA* to the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Immediately *UCHIDA* was ordered to abandon any actions. In such a way, Japan gave up the original mediation and decided to follow the British policy.⁵

Due to the agreement of the Conference of London, Allied Powers decided to convene the Lausanne Conference (21/11/1922-24/07/1923) to negotiate with the delegation of the Grand National Assembly headed by *İsmet İnönü*, about a new treaty to replace the Treaty of Sèvres. The Japanese delegation was composed 8 members, headed by *Gonsuke HAYASHI* (the Japanese Ambassador to Britain, 1860-1939) and *Kentaro OCHIAI* (the Japanese Ambassador

5 For the detailed account of this problem, see (ARAI 1994).

to Italy, 1870-1926). After so long tough negotiation, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed on July 24, 1923.⁶

According to this new treaty, all Capitulations were abolished. In this way, the Mediterranean World entered the new era according to new established Turkish Republic. Although Japan lost the chance of unilateral contracts with Turkey, the other European countries also lost the vested rights. According to the Treaty of Lausanne, the Republic of Turkey concluded the commercial treaties with 6 countries (including Japan) until August 1929. Thus it is possible for Japan to participate in the competition on the matters about Turkey with the same condition. Furthermore as the problem of the both straits were reserved, Japan was allowed to send the naval officer to the committee of control of the both straits. Successively the Japanese National Assembly approved the Treaty of Lausanne on April 17, 1924, and the Republic of Turkey on August 6, 1924.

III. Lausanne to Istanbul

For Japan, there were two important footholds in the interwar Mediterranean World; Egypt and Turkey.

The Japanese Consulate General in Port Said was established in 1920, as the first Japanese diplomatic establishment in the Mediterranean World. The Port Said located in the northeast Egypt under the British control, as the gate of the Suez Canal. As for Egypt, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs successively set up the Consulate General in Alexandria in 1926, and the Legation in Cairo in 1936.

The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs recognized the necessity to send an able ambassador to Istanbul to make this new established Embassy as the strong foothold of Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World. *Yukichi OBATA* (1873-1947) was appointed as the second Japanese Ambassador to Turkey (11/06/1925-11/10/1928). With the consent of Turkey, *OBATA* left Tokyo on September 19, and arrived to Istanbul on November 17. The staff of the Embassy; *Shiro HANAOKA* (Director, 18xx-1942), *Heiji NIHEI* (Director of the Branch Office in Persia), *Hitoshi ASHIDA* (the First Secretary, 1887-1959), *Nobuo WATANABE* (the Third Secretary), *Ushio MUNEMURA* (Investigator), *Chishu NAITO* (Translator, 1886-1984), and some clerks. There was also *Takazumi OKA* (The Japanese Navy's Lieutenant Commander, 1890-1973). Later *Kingoro HASHIMOTO* (The Japanese Army's Major, 1890-1957) was assigned. Especially *OBATA* entrusted *ASHIDA* completely.

Unlike the former Ambassador *UCHIDA*, he had no political interests on Turkey and the other countries. He had the strong intention to establish the trade business between Japan and Turkey.

⁶ About the activities of the Japanese delegation at the Lausanne Conference, see (the GREAT BRITAIN 1923).

OBATA was so eager to make Istanbul the strong foothold of the Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World, especially through the trade business. He proposed the Japanese authority to establish the permanent commercial museum in Istanbul as in Cairo.

While *OBATA* was in his post, the Japanese Navy sent two frigates, *YAKUMO* and *IZUMO*, to the Mediterranean Sea for the training the cadets in 1926. They were welcomed warmly by the Turkish Government. The Captain *Eisuke YAMAMOTO* (1876-1962) was granted an audience with the President *Mustafa Kemal* (1881-1938) in Ankara. It was one of the evidences of the good relationship among the both countries.

After *OBATA* went back to Japan in October 11, 1928, *Hitoshi ASHIDA* was promoted from the First Secretary to Chargés d’Affairs ad interim. He succeeded to *OBATA*’s economic policy faithfully. After the retirement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he became a politician and finally became the Prime Minister in 1948. As his later career suggested, he was very active and able diplomat.

The Japanese Government, especially Ministry of Commercial and Industrial Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, had started the project to establish the Japanese Commercial Museums in both Cairo and Istanbul, for the assistance of the private trade business.

The Japanese Ministry of Commercial and Industrial Affairs constructed the Commercial Institute of Japan in Cairo (or so called “the Japanese Commercial Museum in Cairo”) in 1928. The management of the institute was cosigned to the Japan Industrial Association, one of the private trade business associations. Later, *KASAMA*, the former First Secretary of the Japanese Embassy of Turkey, become the manager of the institute.

In the same way, it was planned to establish the Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (or so called “Japon Sergi Sarayı” in Turkish). But the establishment was delayed because there was the struggle for the management between the Association of Japan and Turkey (Tokyo) and the Association of Trade Business between Japan and Turkey (Osaka). Finally, on September 29, 1928, the Japanese Ministry of Commercial and Industrial Affairs decided to consign the management of this new museum to the latter. This private association was established in the Osaka Chamber of Commerce in October 1925, in expectation of future trade business with Turkey. The association was directed by *Katsutaro INABATA* (the chairman of the association, 1862-1949) and *Torajiro YAMADA* (the chief director of the association, 1866-1957).⁷ *INABATA* was the chairman of Osaka Chamber of Commerce. *YAMADA* was the private businessman who had long career as the manager of *NAKAMURA* Store, the first Japanese store in Istanbul (1893-1914). Due to the struggle for management, it wasted time to prepare the museum. According to the order from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *ASHIDA* himself devoted to assist the association, such as inspection of lease tenant, contract, application and so on. At last, in April 1929, the Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul

7 For the detailed career of *YAMADA*, see (MISAWA 2012) and (MISAWA 2017).

was established at the *Karaköy* Square at the edge of the *Galata* Bridge, the commercial center of the city near the foreign port.

In this way, during *OBATA* and his successors held the post in Istanbul, the Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World achieved the brilliant success.

IV. Japanese Approach to Greece

Although Allied Powers imposed the restriction upon the Japanese advance to the Mediterranean World, but they obliged to grant her the floor about two straits of the Ottoman Empire. It would be the foothold for Japan to intervene in the various affairs in the Mediterranean World.

But the Japanese success did not last so long. Soon after, Great Depression, originated in New York on September 4, 1929, changed the situation the Mediterranean World. Turkey, Egypt and the Balkan countries did not welcome to the trade business with Japan to protect own industries.

According to this situation, Japanese authority obliged to escape from the bad situation. *Torajiro YAMADA*, the chief director of the Association of Trade Business between Japan and Turkey, found the clue at the International Fair in Thessaloniki in 1930. In this year, *YAMADA* was sent to both Greece and Turkey to improve the bad trade situation by the Japanese authority. Although he was the pioneer of the trade business between Japan and Turkey, he could not find any breakthrough in Turkey. Later he made the exaggeration in his biography that he was welcomed by the President *Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK* at the party of the Turkish Republic Day held in Ankara. It was completely false representation. If it was true, he had no need to approach to Greece. Actually he decided to give up the partnership with Turkey, he decided to switch Turkey to Greece.

YAMADA and his association tried to approach to Greece. The first Japanese Consul (as the Envoy Extraordinary) in Greece, *Shintaro KAWASHIMA* (1880-1957) also agreed this idea. In this course, according to the Greek official request, *Torajiro YAMADA* became the honorary Greek consul in Osaka, the second largest and commercial center city in Japan, in 1933. *YAMADA* was proud of this position. The Japanese authorities (including Military, Officers and Politicians) overlooked this breakthrough.

But the plan of *YAMADA* and the association were all vain efforts. Great Depression could not be showing any signs of restoration. The bad influence was expanded to the all of the Mediterranean World. At last, the Japanese Commercial Museums in Cairo and Istanbul were obliged to give up the business. Years of aforementioned Japanese labor had come to naught. On the other hand, in 1936 Allied Powers, of course including Japan, concluded Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits with Turkey. This agreement gave Turkey control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits and regulated the transit of naval

warships. So Japan lost the foothold in Turkey. The Japanese Government decided to withdraw from the Mediterranean World until 1936 or 37. Japan was excluded from the network of the Mediterranean World. The crisis was over.

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Figure 1 The demonstration of the Japanese Second Special Fleet at Malta Island (1918 or 1919)



Figure 2 The demonstration of the Japanese Training Fleet at the Taksim Square in Istanbul, TURKEY (1937)



Figure 3 The Commercial Institute of Japan in Cairo



Figure 4 The staff of the Commercial Institute of Japan in Cairo



Figure 5 Akio KASAMA, Yukichi OBATA, Hitoshi ASHIDA



Figure 6 The Report of Commercial Institute of Japan in Cairo, No. 110, the pamphlet of the Japanese exhibition (1926) organized by Ambassador OBATA and the Report of the Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (Constantinople), No. 1 (1929)



Figure 7 The Japanese Commercial Museum in Istanbul (1929)



Figure 8 the article of the first Japanese Consul in Athens KAWASHIMA



Figure 9 Torajiro YAMADA, the Greek honorable Consul in Osaka and his official letter with the letter head of the Greek national flag

