

The Political, Social and Military Status of Japan at the End of 19th Century and Beginning of 20th Century (The Grounds of Japan-Russian War and its Global Consequences)

Golnaz Saeidi
Faculty Member, Payam Nour University
No. 5, Yazdanfar Alley, Salman St., Sohanak, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: The Bourgeoisie Revolution or Japan's National Return during 1867-1868 paved way for the relatively fast growth of capitalism in Japan. The dispersion of Feudalism was a history and large factories were being built all over the country. The state officials who were under pressure of farmers who were protesting the feudalism relationship had no way than making some reforms in agriculture. According to one of these reforms during 1872-1873, only the ownership of those would be recognized who had been an owner in advance; that is, those who had inherited plots of lands. The mortgage lands were owned by those who had paid money for mortgage. This reform gave important benefits and privileges to the landowners and rich villagers, merchants and usuries who had taken villagers' lands on lien. The villagers lost their ownership right on one third of the lands they used to possess: common lands, including forests, ranges and pastures were put in possession of emperor and changed him to the most powerful landowners of the territory. The owners of small lands and village units who were indebted in all their properties and an increase in land tax had made their burden heavier immediately found out that they were not able to keep the lands they had obtained in recent reforms and thus, they changed into lease villagers with no ownership right. Their lands were owned by large land owners and rich farmers and for all their lives, they had to be depended to those wealthy landowners.

Key words: Political, social and military status, Japan-Russian war, Global consequences

Introduction

This transformation and changes implied that capitalism could only grow slowly in a semi-feudalist country. This was one of the main reasons of slow progress of capitalism in the industries sectors in the first years following reforms. Nevertheless, at the same time, as the bourgeois played greater role in state affairs, the government started an active participation in industrial products and invested large amounts in the new industries. During 1880-1889 the first monopolies appeared in Japan and in the light of benefiting from old traditions of business firms which had been survived from feudalism, started expansion and development.

Progress in the industry was followed by a usual growth of labor class. The first labor unions of Japan were formed at the end of 19th century. These unions were the product of activities undertaken by labor unions organization societies who was led by intellectual labors, run and led by Katayama (1859-1933) who spent efforts and endeavors in this path. For the first time in the history of Japan, in 1898, the Labor Day – May 1st.

To control the development of Labor Movement, the Japanese government passed a law in 1900 as "Law of Maintaining Order" according to which, any riot was prohibited.

In 1901, a wave of labor protests was initiated. The modern intellectuals and leaders of labor movements like Katayama, Kotoku and Kawakami concluded that it was a vital need to establish Labors Socialist Party and in 20 May of the same year, the Social Democrat Party was officially established. The memorandum of the Party only marked public methods of political struggle and obtaining voting right for all people was titled as its main aim. Besides, there were other demands such as decreasing the number of army, dissolution of noble parliament and starting elections. The government immediately announced the party as an illegal one.

The rulers of Japan did not refrain from spending as much money as they could to develop and complete a full-armed military. Korea was one of the goals of the Japanese militarists of that time and plans were being prepared to occupy that Island. With the same goal, in 1894, Japan attacked China and tasted a rapid victory over its large neighbor. This military victory and the huge war indemnity which was taken from China was a powerful force in the progress of capitalism in Japan. Victory over China also brought with it a great wave of chauvinism propagation. The ruling class of Japan undertook preparation of great plans to expand the colonies of this Country and initiated propagation on establishing the Great Empire of Japan that would include Korea, Northern provinces, East China, Mongolia and Eastern Siberia. For the Japanese Bourgeois, the Tsarian Russia who planned to have parts of China and Korea was major competitor in Japan's challenge to achieve superiority in Asia.

After being assured of Britain's support which has signed a treaty with Japan against Russia in 1902 and benefiting

Saeidi: The political, social and military status of Japan at the end of 19th century

from the supports of the United States of America, finally, Japan attacked Russia in 1904. The progressive labors of Japan, alike the progressive labors of Russia, were quite aware that the main motive of this war was to fill the pocket of bourgeois class and the only gift of the war for oppressed people of both countries would be hardship and deprivation.

Pelekhanov and Katayama received each other with friendship and hugged each other like two friends in the Second International Congress in Amsterdam in 1904. However, the labor organizations of that time had no power to put pressure on Russian and Japanese governments and as a result, the war continued. Russia experienced an insulting defeat from Japanese militarists. To surpass revolution inside Russia, Tsarian government tried to maintain order inside the country for any price and was therefore forced to sign Portsmouth Treaty with Japan in 1905. According to this treaty, considerable privileges were given to Japan. South Sakhalin was given to Japan and consequently, Russia lost its only port in Pacific Ocean. Communication with Kamchatka and Chokotka was put under supervision of Japan. The Portsmouth Treaty led to an imbalance of power in far east after a few year. In 1906, the Japanese militarists forced more ambitious plans for expansion of its land and marine forces.

The issue of German's powers in 1871 was one of the major problems of Britain in its global diplomacy. The strategy of a United Germany was founded by Bismarck. In 1902, Britain was busy with Boers problems in South Africa. Boers were Dutch migrants who had almost transformed into local people and called for independence. Britain surpassed the movement with maximum harshness and force and for this reason; Britain was facing a public hatred in the European political classes. At the same time, Britain offered a secret and confidential military and defense union but due to the bad name of Britain in public diplomacy, German rejected the offer. On the other hand, Britain found the European atmosphere an unsafe one and tried to clear the German's position through getting closer to France and escape this isolation.

On the other hand, France was afraid of Germany and was searching to find a powerful friend and both countries- England and France- who had international problems and both were looking at Germany as a threat tried to solve many of their problems in their colonies and for the first time in history, become allies regardless their long history of enmity. Therefore, France became put step forward and solved its problems with Britain in the Egypt and Sudan issues. It gave Egypt to England and in turn, England approved French domination on Morocco. On the other hand, France was the first western country which had industrial investment in Russia and had a traditional relationship with this Country. Thus, both countries tried to have Russia in their own side and develop a united front. However, both Russia and England had colonial problems on their domination over Afghanistan, Tibet and a part of China. Russia observed the pressure Britain was enduring and knew how worry that country was for Germany. Therefore; it did not yield to a compromise with Britain and the British government which was very worried of this subject and felt unsafe, did whatever it could to make a compromise with Russia and seek the help of France, the traditional friend of Russia, to interfere in this task and find a way to settle British and Russian's problems particularly on Iran's issue. The efforts failed.

The British found out that Russia's Achilles' heel was in the southwest; that is, Sakhalin region and Coril Peninsula. Therefore, they tried to develop the most secret and confidential diplomacy of the history of world and thus, initiated negotiations with the Japanese and the treaty was signed by England and Japan in 1902. As noted before, the agreement was a very confidential one and the basis of it was to facilitate Japan in military field. Being essentially talented people, the Japanese, owing to their previous preparation and their enmity with Russia achieved highest military level and in this path, used the contributions of Marine Force of England and was thus equipped with the most advanced military systems.

With respect to the disputes of Russia and Japan over Sakhalin and Coril, a widespread war broke between the two countries as noted above. As a result, for the first time in recent century, a non-European country succeeded in defeating a powerful European country. This war took 7 to 8 months and taught a great lesson to the history of world, particularly weak nations by the military support of England and strong will and faith of Japanese officers. The defeat of Russia prepared ground for the first revolution in Russia and the revolution of 1905- known as Trotsky Revolution- occurred in that year.

During this revolution Lenin who had fled Russia in 1900 returned Russia in secret; however, by Trotsky's failure, Lenin left Russia again through Finland. In any event, the grounds of next Russian revolution was paved. A point should be noted that in those years when Russia was surrounded by the frozen North Ocean and Siberia (the frozen and impenetrable land) the only region which had been left for it was Sakhalin and Coril that would enable this country to have access to the Yellow Sea, China and the rest of East Asia.

The Russians tried to get close to China and make investments there and following this plan, they developed Manchuria Railroad. This important and strategic railroad was under possession of Russia for a long time.

The Russia's effort was focused on reaching Korea via China. On the other hand, the shortage of land in Japan had motivated Japanese to believe Korea as inseparable possessions and with respect to the short distance between

Saeidi: The political, social and military status of Japan at the end of 19th century

South and North Korea, this country was close to Japan and Japan had always planned to have this country. These were the issues that had generated the ground for dispute of the two countries in East Asia; the issue of sovereignty and domination over East Asia for one of these two great countries. This struggles even affected the political history of Iran.

The last decade of 19th century witnessed the arrival of two new powers into the global politics; America and Japan. The rise of Japan as a powerful country will be discussed in studying Russia-Japan war; however, it is necessary to study America's appearing in the international politics arena.

The Americans who had the habit of reading New York Journal in the 1890s had developed a taste of hearing about tumults since William Randolph Hurst, the owner of the newspaper was fond of exaggerated reports. Nevertheless, the news published in the February 16, 1898 edition surprised even the readers of this newspaper. It seemed that the American warship Main had been exploded by the Spanish in a place near Cuba and it seemed that the invaders had used a "secret evil machine" to do so. Two hundred and sixty American navy were killed in the explosion. The newspaper set fifty thousand Dollars reward to any person who could give some information on this explosion. Publishing this news and in that form rose a wave of anger and outrage in America. The Americans, particularly the Republicans called for war with Spain; however, Kenly, the then- President of that Country showed doubt in doing so and this tensed the uneasiness. Theodore Roosevelt, one of the leaders of Republican Party insulted the President by saying "You do not have stability of even a pie cake". Despite his will, Mc Kenly agreed with the war and the Spain-American war broke out.

As before, the newspaper's report was not free from exaggeration. Since 1895, the Cuban revolutionaries were fighting to free themselves from Spain's domination. Close distance of Cuba and America and investment of American capitalists in sugar industry of Cuba had encouraged Americans to follow the fight with much interest. Most American businessmen preferred Spanish colonialist stay in Cuba in the same way as the Americans and continue an unjust utilization. However, the ordinary Americans were supporting Cubans. They were witnessing fights of a nation who was struggling for independence, reminding the Americans of their own independence war with England in 1775. At last in 1898 it seemed a balance of force had been established between the parties; that is, the revolutionaries were dominating villages and the Spanish the cities. Everyday in his New York Journal, Hurst gave news of the tragedies caused by Viler, the army commander of Spanish army. When Main warship exploded, New York Journal claimed that Spanish army had done the act. There was no evidences for this and on the contrary, Spain had not slightest wish to enter into a war with America. The experts could not discover the reasons of explosion and even today, the subject has not been solved. However, the report of the Newspaper which named Spaniards as the cause of explosion was a strong factor in break out of war.

American arrived into the war with high motivation; still without order and discipline. Their soldiers headed towards a tropical region with thick and wool uniforms and out of date armaments and unconventional foods. The Spaniards were no better than they were. All American forces landed without noticing any resistance while the Spanish army had been informed of a probable attack for six weeks. The Americans submerged the old Spanish fleet near Santiago port. The American soldiers and their rough cavalry, led by Theodore Roosevelt, attacked the Spanish trenches in Saint John Hill.

The American army's success brought Roosevelt high enough to be taken as a national hero. Later on, Americans attacked the Philippines Islands in Pacific, which belonged to Spain and the Spanish naval force was destroyed in Manila Gulf. The Americans could take the Philippines, Guam and Hawaii in Pacific Ocean through a peace treaty. In addition, they obtained the right to interfere in Cuban affairs and maintaining harbors to load coals and keep marine bases in Cuba. The whole event was then known as "the Small Excellent War". The result was very satisfying for Americans; however, the fact was something else. The Cuban revolutionaries were not satisfied. They wanted to defeat the Spanish colonialists all by themselves and now they were feeling the honor had been taken away by the Americans. The statistics were disappointing, for each soldier who had been killed in war, thirteen soldiers had died of yellow fever. The Americans' loss in the Philippines was even more serious. The rebels who were fighting Spaniards fought Americans as well. It was a hostile fight, which continued for two years and caused a great loss to the American army. This loss worried American people. They could not figure out for what reason their country suddenly turned into an Imperialist power.

Now America had 3141 Islands in the Pacific Ocean which had seven millions population. Six months before, many Americans did not know if Philippine was an Island or a fruit, but now they had taken it away. When America started imperialism, it was difficult to stop. One event led to another. Since America had a coat in Atlantic and one in Pacific ocean, he needed marine forces in two oceans and to strengthen any of them, they had to make a turn around Horne Cape. This was often a risky act. Americans became interested in Panama Canal. When people of Panama rebelled against Colombia in 1901, they received America's support. When they won, the new government rewarded America by handing over Panama Canal to this country. The American engineers soon established a canal and at the same

Saeidi: The political, social and military status of Japan at the end of 19th century

time, the American soldiers made strongholds in the region.

The events of 1898 and 1901 made it even more difficult for America to step away from war. At the same time, there was another country, which stepped into the global arena. Japan. For centuries, Japan was living a medieval life. The ruling class was Samurais who owned the land and in turn, defended the country. Their ethic principles taught them to die for their family and class. Their leaders were called Shogun who was in fact rulers of Japan. He was respected by the Emperor but had no political power. There were farmers, workers and merchants after Samurais.

However, the labor class was the one needed. Farmers had also particular importance since they grew rice, which was using for tax instead of money. Merchants were not respected since they were only after money. Nevertheless, all of these classes would bow before the stern Samurai with a sword in hand.

The Japanese habit of closing their gates to foreigners had made the class system a rigid one. There were a few who could enter Japan and for two centuries, no Japanese had left his country. They had imitated the Chinese traditions and codes in previous centuries but now, there was no one to imitate its traditions. Life was almost monotonous. Like an artificial flower, Japan was always beautiful, but monotonous. As a result, in 1800, Japanese were even more backward than Ottomans in industry and their country stood at far east Asia like a far off and beautiful castle.

Fairy tales say the Sleeping Beauty was awakened by a prince's kiss; however, Japan's awakening was not as pleasant as hers. Russians in 1804, British in 1842 and Americans in 1852 stepped into this country one by one and asked for establishing business relationship. When Japanese refrained from doing so, the foreign powers threatened them to war. The Japanese stubborn policy of refraining from establishing any business and political relationship looked ridiculous for the Americans. In 1853 and 1854, Navy General Perry of America used to appear around Japanese borders with a greater fleet each time. Facing the mouth of the modern gun barrel, Japanese thought of no solution than surrender. The American Imperialism entered Japan by force. China, the Japan's neighbor had shown more conservation and had shown the consequences. Many Chinese ports had been already occupied by the European navy and merchants during 1840 and 1860. Chinese had experiences insult to its laws and people. The emperor's palace had been put in fire. Japan was a smaller and more disciplined country. Although the Samurai warriors were outrageous for these acts, they did not waste time by complaining, but still, tried to understand the factors of Western's superiority and at last, they found out that the superiority had come for European's vessels, armaments and army. The Japanese tested many of the European tactics. One of the warriors even made a metallurgy furnace and started molding a cannon. The first Japanese steam boat was launched in 1855. Japanese established their naval force two years later. In 1868, Shogun was overthrown and new rulers tried to force Japan in 19th Century.

Changes occurred with a magnificent speed. In 1873, the Gregorian calendar replaced the lunar calendar of China and seven years later, education system was copied from west.

In 1890, the semi-German government- emphasizing on Emperor's power- was adopted and cash tax system replaced rice payment. Japanese were after the best and knowingly copied whatever they found good and useful. The British planned Japanese navy and Germans re-organized their land force. The telegraph wires, railroads and factories changed the beautiful face of this pleasant land. Some Samurais such as Iwasaki Yataro established Mitsubishi Shipyard and others founded silk factories, cement plants and mines workshops. The government gave the companies to private sectors. To provide the costs of this development, Japanese started exporting as much goods as they could, particularly cloths.

The Japanese handling foreigners was not because of their heartfelt admiration towards foreigners; but instead, they wanted to learn skills in order to dominate those who had started their interfere in a rude way. They never asked any European to stay in Japan longer than what was necessary. Immediately upon receiving sufficient training, they discharged him from service. For this reason, Japan was never a colony and took the new power in its own hand. Furthermore, the priority was given to war crafts. In 1894, Japan had twenty seven modern vessels, an equipped shipyard, factories to manufacture powerful cannons and torpedoes. One third of the country's budget was spent for army and navy. The school children singed epic songs such as "Come you enemies, come" and all male adults had to fulfill military service. A patriot had to show full obedience to the emperor. Shinto, the ancient religion was revived since according to Shinto, emperor was the grandson of one of the Gods. Thus, the Shinto's battle traditions were taught to all.

China was the first country which suffered from this preparation, In 1894, the two countries had grown disputes on Korea. In a short time, war broke out between the two country. The Japanese army tasted a fast victory over Chinese and not only Korea, but Manchuria and a part of China were attacked. China surrounded when Beijing, the Chinese capital city faced the threat. According to Shimonoski Treaty, Formosa (present Taiwan) and Port Arthur in Liakhov Peninsula were transferred to Japan and Korea became independent from China. Japan was surprised of hearing that France, Russia and Germany had not accepted the conditions. Russia, in particular, was not happy with Japanese's arrival into Manchuria. The three countries forced the tired Japan to give Port Arthur to Russia.

Saeidi: The political, social and military status of Japan at the end of 19th century

This tripartite interfere enraged Japanese and this country concluded that the three countries had plans for China. The Japanese reacted by deciding to build more vessels and wait for a time when they could settle the matter with Russia.

Russia-Japan War: Japanese found an excuse very soon since Russia kept expanding its power in Middle East. Russia occupied Manchuria in 1900. Britain was worried of this victory and to confront Russia, it signed a treaty with Japan. This was a great accomplishment for the Japanese since for the first time, a western country had been considered in the same level as a small eastern country. Japan was so strong now that asked to have an agreement through which, the Russian's rights in Manchuria and Japan's rights in Korea would be respected.

Russians did not accepted to start negotiations with the Japanese- called as "small monkeys" by Russians and instead, attacked Korea. Japan showed a serious reaction. At the evening of February 9, 1904, the American navy fleet attacked Port Arthur. Russians were taken in surprise. Their vessels turned their lights on since now it was time to make peace and surrender to an unseen power. Their cannons were wrapped in canvas. The Japanese destroyed a warship by one torpedo in a serious marine war. After only forty years, Japanese were fighting one of the great powers. All factors were in favor of Japan, a small country. Japan was challenging a big Russia with its strong fleet. Japan was able to dispatch its troops to a war zone easily and fast; but Russia was only relying on a 8000-kilometer railroad which passed through deserted areas. Japanese soon reported this advantage and superiority to their officials. The Japanese ships defeated Russians near Port Arthur and at the same time, the Japanese soldiers passed Yalo River and put steps in Manchuria. When the Japanese naval superiority became evident, Japanese could land other forces in Liao Tong.

Port Arthur tasted a fast surrender. Russia had a serious situation. Its soldiers had traveled the whole Asia in the open cattle wagons for six weeks. For them, war was nothing than staying away from home. Dissatisfaction could be seen even among officers. In a letter to family, one of the officers writes:

"The goal of this war, its reasons and even the way it goes on are so disgusting for me."

However, on the opposite, Japanese were fighting with rigor and motivation. They were intended to defeat the Russians.

By Fall, Port Arthur fell in the hands of Japanese and Russians were forced to retreat. The winter in that year was so cold that froze guards in their post. The severe winds passed through the plough lands and brought with it clouds of dust that made sky dark, entering into the soldiers' eyes, noses and throats and made their guns unusable. There was no way than carrying facilities on back of man and animals since no wheeled tool could move in that deserted place.

Nearly one million soldiers were fighting a long war in such a disastrous conditions.

The cannons never stopped in days and ultimately, after three months, Japanese won. The final defeat of Russia occurred in Sea. When war broke out, Russia had much larger naval force than Japan; however, it was spread all over the world. One of the fleets was defeated by Japanese and another one in Black Sea was not allowed to leave that spot according to Berlin Treaty. The third fleet was in Baltic with 17000 kilometers distance from war front. Thus, Russians decided to dispatch Baltic fleet to the other part of globe. A German Company agreed to supply their coal in different spots. This long journey was going to come to an end in the beginning. When Russians were passing English Canal, they passed through a few British fishing boats and imagining them as their warships, put fire n them. The vessel received a small damage. A fishing boat was drowned and a Russian warship was hit with a cannon shell. However an uproar appeared on British since Japan was popular there. The British fleet- which was more superior than the Russian one- followed the Russians fleet for a time. However, no exchange of fire occurred. The coal loading faced to be a difficult problem. In the tropical region, sailors had to work twenty hours a day in a hot weather where sailors had to put cotton in their mouth to help breathing. The coals were loaded in the ship in such a great quantity that the armor belt of the ship would go below. The mass of coals could be seen everywhere even on the deck. The vessels were left waiting in Madagascar more than any other places since Russian government had decided to join another fleet to this one. The fleets arrived Far East when 1905 had already started and Port Arthur had fallen completely.

Only a marine victory could make this long journey for the Russians tolerable. On May 27, 1905, the tired Russians faced a Japanese fleet in Tesoshima strait. The slow moving Russian vessels could not stand the modern fleets.

Rear Admiral Togo, the Japanese commander could pass beyond Russians lines and start fire on them. This was the best type of attack for a steam warship and the victory was almost final. The Japanese cannon shells destroyed the Tsar's warships and only in one hour, eight Russian vessels were drowned. After Nelson's victory in Nile 1798, Togo had earned the greatest marine victory.

The defeat of Russian army and navy force led to a revolution in Russia in 1905. Potilov Steel Plants labors rioted in Leningrad. The sailors of Black Sea rebelled. When a group of 150,000 people led a peaceful march to see Tsar on

Saeidi: The political, social and military status of Japan at the end of 19th century

January 22, 1905, the soldiers put fire on them; however, the Bloody Sunday forced Tsar to yield to peace in order to solve its foreign problems. A treaty was signed in Portsmouth of New Hampshire by assistance of American government. The Japanese domination over Korea was recognized and Southern Sakhalin was given to Japan. It was an end to the Russians' influence in Manchuria and Liana Tong; nevertheless, Russians did not accept paying any war indemnity. Japanese who hoped to receive war indemnity from Russians were angry, but did not continue war for the fatigue they felt.

The effects of these victories on people was similar to the effects of France and Prussia on Germans. In only forty years, Japan had progressed so much that had become able to defeat a great European power. By a long leap, this country transformed into an imperialist power with colonies on the other part of the sea and at the same time, became the definite hero of Asia in front of West.

Japanese people dreamed of a great future. They worshipped their armed forces for bringing them such a sweet victory and in conclusion, Japan stepped into the 20th century with a dangerous spirit.

References

Zoghi, 1997., in Educational Groups of District 3- Education Ministry, May

Taken from Brief History of World by a team of Russian writers, translated by Mohammad Taghi Faramarzi, October 1980

Taken from Brief History of Word Translated by Taghi Faramarzi

History of Asian and European Countries in Contemporary Age, State Publication, Political Publications, 1949 .

Brief History of World by a Group of Russian Writers, translated by Mohammad Taghi Faramarzi Donya Publication, 1980, 4th edition .

Hakimi, Mahmoud, 1999. A Review on the Contemporary history of World or the Crisis of our Time, Tehran.

Lecture of Dr. Ali Bigdeli, 1999. (Civilizations Dialogue) Session,

Bigdeli, textbook, M. A. Degree Course, 1997, Islamic Azad University and An Implication Great Events in Contemporary History by Jacque Piren, translated by Mashayekhi, Tehran, 1977 Mariners, 63, 2nd Year, 1984.

Hakimi, Mahmoud, A Review on the Contemporary History of World....

Persian translation of the Soviet Union's Great Encyclopedia, Moscow, 1968, II, taken from A Review on the Contemporary History of World or the Crisis of our Time, Tehran 1999 .