

Japan and Portuguese Timor in the 1930s and early 1940s

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The term “Austro-Asia-Mediterranean” was a geopolitical concept widely used in Japan during the 1930’s onward until 1945. This chapter takes up the Portuguese Timor which was at the core of this concept then and later annexed by Indonesia from 1976 to 1999, to examine how the Imperial Japan approached this territory and how Portugal and other countries with direct and indirect interests in the island responded to Japanese overture. For the first time in the politico-diplomatic history of modern Japan, the area called “Austro-Asia-Mediterranean” or “Inland seas between Australia and Asia” came to receive high light in Japan. This, in turn, gave serious security threats to the Western powers concerned who perceived that the “Portugal-Timor issue”

was tantamount to “Japan problem” .

1. Japan’s southward-advance policy and the Austro-Asia-Mediterranean area

Japan showed only minor interest in the Portuguese Timor until the mid-1930's and its basic stance was well demonstrated when an official dispatch to the Dutch and Portuguese governments at the end of 1921 pledged to “respect the right (of these two governments) regarding the Pacific area” .¹ It was after March 1933, when Japan withdrew from the League of Nations, that it started to show keener interest in Portuguese Timor from political, military and economic viewpoint. By 1934 Japan's view on Portuguese Timor had become clearer: it was to ‘occupy an important position for both strategic and transportation purposes, lying between Asia and Australia, as a diplomatic cable from Japanese minister in Lisbon to Japan’s Foreign office described it.²

For Japan, especially the Navy, the driving force of southward advance, Portuguese Timor was important for the following reasons. The first was of the natural geo-political nature because of its location at the center of eastern part of the Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia), which was a major target of Japan’s policy to push southward. It was also close to Australia, possibly splitting it from the British colonies in Southeast Asia. Secondly, since Portugal was the weakest colonial power and neutral power at that, it was an easy prey for Japan politically as well as militarily. The third was Japan’s interest in oil and other mineral reserves allegedly abounding in Portuguese Timor, although much less than in the Dutch East Indies.

However, Japan’s Imperial Navy did not itself undertake to approach Portuguese Timor but acquired as an instrument of the Government policy a certain company by the name of Nanyo Kohatsu Kaisya (the South Seas Development Company), often dubbed as the Mantetsu (South Manchuria Railway Company) of the south, which was founded in November 1921 by Matsue Haruji an influential southward-advance advocate. The Navy drafted a confidential memorandum in the summer of 1936 on its policy vis-a-vis Portuguese Timor, where four-point instruction to Nanyo Kohatsu were enumerated because “it was essential, in view of the delicate situation in and out of the country, that a cautious first step must be taken and no initial mistakes are to be

made.”³ First and foremost, the memorandum gave a ‘free hand’ to Nanyo Kohatsu so that it would be able to take ‘effective measures in gaining a foothold in Portuguese Timor.’ Secondly, initial actions should meet the desires of the local Timor authorities so that a solid foothold would be secured in their increasingly pro-Japanese attitude before further actions were to be contemplated. Thirdly, detailed surveys of Portuguese Timor should be carried out only after the initial foothold is secured, and no survey missions should be sent frequently. Fourthly, the basic policy should be ‘no talk, all deeds.’ The intentions of the Navy in acquiring Nanyo Kohatsu should be divulged under no circumstances,’ its assistance to Nanyo Kohatsu should be provided discretely, and its ‘effective influence’ in Timor should be the aid.

2. International circumstances surrounding Portuguese Timor

Let us now see how Australia and other countries in the region viewed and responded to Japan’ s advance into the Austro-Asia-Mediterranean, especially, Portuguese Timor.

Of particular interest here is the view of the British Consul General in Batavia (Jakarta), Henry Fitzmaurice. The information he obtained in the East Indies and his analysis seem to have exerted a big influence on British Commonwealth’ s attitude toward Japan on this issue. Fitzmaurice became ever more concerned over Japan's advance toward Austro-Asia-Mediterranean in 1938. In his official cable to Foreign Minister Anthony Eden he pointed out that Japan’ s ultimate goal was far bigger than the Dutch East Indies and Timor (suggesting Australia), and that her design would be materialized at an uncertain future, precise timing dependent on the development of event.⁴

Fitzmaurice saw the principal Japanese actor in its southward advance in a hard-line faction (“the fleet faction”) within the Imperial Navy headed by Kato Kanji and Suetsugu Nobumasa, and characterized Nanyo Kohatsu as a ‘pet foster-child’ of the Navy. He further says “If, for instance, her activities in Portuguese Timor are not inspired by commercial motives, still less likely is it that Portuguese Timor constitutes a Naboth's vineyard on its own merits. Little doubt is left, therefore, that Japan’ s real interest in Portuguese Timor is but the move of a pawn in a big game of southward expansion, to be followed by moves of more aggressive pieces when the time seems propitious, Australia being the real objective.”⁵

(1) Nanyo Kohatsu Kaisya, Inc.

Concerned countries such as the UK, Australia, and the Netherlands took the formation of a joint venture company by Nanyo Kohatsu with an influential Portuguese firm (SAPT) as the first step of serious intent by Japan. Nanyo Kohatsu carried out three surveys of the area in January, August and December of 1936, and finally in September 1937 formed this joint venture company with Portuguese and Japanese participations of 550,000 guilders and 500,000 guilders respectively. The new company was registered in Lisbon on September 8, 1937, with its Headquarters in Dili of Portuguese Timor, branch offices in Tokyo and Lisbon, and an agency in Palau, a central island of the South Seas islands which became the mandated territory of Japan since the end of World War I. It managed 15,800 hectares of an estate to produce coffee, rubber, and cocoa among others, and eventually came to wield substantial influence in trade and shipping. As of 1937, this company

handled as much as 25 percent and 37 percent respectively of the total export and import of Portuguese Timor.⁶

Regarding such aggressive activities of this new company, Fitzmaurice cites the view of A.H.J Lovink, Director of East Asia Bureau of the Dutch East Indies government, that “Japanese interests are engaged in a move to corner the coffee crop of Portuguese Timor, presumably with the apparent intention of gaining a position in which they can exercise influence over the Government of that Colony” .⁷

We also see an editorial entitled ‘Pacific Penetration’ in the Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad of November 24, 1937, indicating how the Dutch community in the East Indies understood the Japanese inroads into East Timor:

“It has recently been emphatically shown that no illusions may be cherished that Japan’ s expansion on the mainland of Asia and the incidents which that involves are reducing interest in the development of the southward “life-line”One of the last objects of Japanese interest in a southerly direction is Portuguese Timor. Japanese penetration is never impressive at first. It begins modestly, but is more effective than many undertakings commenced on a large scale. Not long ago, neither Japanese,nor Japanese interests, were to be found in Portuguese Timor, but conditions have changed. It began, as usual, with the Japanese shop, a “mark of goodwill” , often wrongly regarded as a quite innocent and in any case unimportant affair. In the middle of this year, however, the cards appeared on the table, and it appeared that they did not wish to confine themselves to the sale of piece goods and small wares. A Japanese economic magazine Toyo Keizai spoke for the first time of the establishment of an agricultural enterprise with a capital of 5,000,000 yen The lilliput-government of Portuguese Timor is naturally not able to work up much of a resistance against such a big concern. This is happening at our door..”

The above article in the Dutch language newspaper is a candid expression of the deep suspicion against Japan held by the Dutch community in the Netherlands East Indies who now regarded toko Jepang as a Trojan horse after witnessing Japanese armed aggression in China and observing the situation occurring in the nearby Philippines where the city of Davao is virtually ruled by the Japanese enterprises.

(2) The Air Route Issue

As the military and economic importance of high-speed air transportation became recognized around the beginning of World War II, Japan's aviation industry started to develop rapidly. In August 1939 a private company, Dainippon Koku Kaisya (the Greater Japan Air Line Co.), was transformed to a special semi-public corporation to reflect the Government’ s keener interest in aviation.

This corporation extended its air routes to Manchuria and China in collaboration with the Army, but also played an important role in developing air routes in the south jointly with the Navy. In November 1939 Japan’ s first international air route agreement was signed with Thailand, and in March the next year the Yokohama-Saipan-Palau route(4,180km) was opened. In April 1940,

the Japanese Government officially applied to the Portuguese Government through diplomatic channels for the Palau-Dili route (the extension of Yokohama-Palau route) to be opened. Japan demanded that Japanese aircraft be allowed to travel to Timor, and that air routes be opened in Timor to be operated by a joint venture company with Portugal.

The Portuguese Government, however, took a negative attitude to these high-handed demands. An official Japanese document says that "Since the Portuguese side merely procrastinates in giving us reply, we proposed that a test flight be made also as a way of prompting progress in negotiation."⁸

In the meantime, the second Konoe Cabinet was formed in July 1940, and its Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke (he was the Japanese delegate when Japan withdrew from the League of Nations) launched the concept of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. In September the same year the Tripartite Pact was signed between Japan, Germany and Italy, and Japan effected a quick turn southward as it made inroads to the Northern French Indochina. The air route issue with Portugal assumed symbolic importance as a clear indication of Japan's new posture, heightening the sense of alarm on the part of those who were afraid of Japan's southward interest.

The Allied came to know of Japan's moves in July 1940 for the first time as is revealed by a Australian cable of July 12 mentioning a Japanese cable from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tokyo to its minister resident in Portugal dated July 5, 1940 obtained through a 'confidential but highly reliable' source. This cable, although patchy and vague, using such indirect expressions as "the so-called air routes within the island," did mention a "possibility of extending (them) to Australia being considered," which Australians took to mean that the subject was Timor.⁹ However, they did not know at this juncture that the air route mentioned involved Palau on the other end. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs also instructed its representatives in Lisbon to keep it strictly confidential that a test flight would be made. On the basis of such information, the Australian High Commissioner in Britain recommended an early conclusion of the Australian-Portuguese negotiations on air routes which had been deadlocked since April.

An aero boat belong to Dainippon Koku Kaisha, the Ayanami, arrived at Dili on October 23, 1940. Immediately the Australian foreign office received an official dispatch from its High Commissioner in Britain, although they had to wait until the end of November to know of the Palau connection. I quote this dispatch:

*"According to recent information Japanese aircraft has already carried out flight to Dili, certain Japanese mechanics have landed there with permission of Portuguese Government, and spares and equipment may have been dispatched to Dili about the end of the first week in October. Moreover, it seems probable that continued pressure is to be put on Portuguese authorities at Lisbon to facilitate the use by the Japanese of air facilities at Timor. In view of the very recent developments in the situation in the Far East it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the motive underlying the Japanese action in Timor is connected with military plans against the Netherlands East Indies. Please therefore do anything possible to persuade Portuguese to withhold or at least delay granting of any concessions to the Japanese in Timor."*¹⁰

The Australian-British Governments both expressed regret at the conciliatory attitude of

the Portuguese Government in the face of stiff Japanese demand. British Ambassador at Lisbon replied to an inquiry from his home office by saying "I fear they (i.e., the Portuguese Government) must lack courage in face of Japanese pressure. I will see what can be done by giving them a serious jolt" .¹¹

The Aviation Agreement between Japan and Portugal was signed in Lisbon on October 13, 1941, only two months before the Pacific War began. Almost at the same time the Japanese Government opened the Consulate General in Dili which was to be closed at the end of war.

The concerned parties showed immediately strong signs of rebuff, seeing their worst fear now materialized. A letter from the Australian External Affairs Department addressed to its Prime Minister, while nothing German hands behind it, summarizes Japan's offensive intentions as follows:

"I am sure that you will fully appreciate the fact that, on the decision of Japan to withdraw from the League of Nations, she ceased to be entitled to the Territories mandated to her after the last Great War, an action which she refused to recognize, and to-day she is making use of the mandated island of Palau, to serve her offensive, her ulterior motives, but definitely contrary to the best interests of Australia. She has absolutely no right whatever to be intruding into portion of the earth's surface of great strategical importance to the British Empire, to Holland and to China..." ¹²

The author of this letter went on to say that "it will be most unwise to let the matter rest at this," and urged the Prime Minister to "take immediately such necessary steps to put (Japanese intentions) in their places."

Interestingly enough, this same diplomat had proposed the following tough policy toward Japan earlier:

".... Japan, at long last, are exhibiting evidence of taking action to pursue a policy of expansion long since conceived.... It is quite clear that their threat will be largely against the Dutch East Indies.... We are at war; war to the death, and there must be more offensive on our part, defense does not win wars. Physical action is the only language that is understood by the Japanese. It is idle indeed to think that we can sit down and discuss matters with such an enemy and to treat with them; such an attitude is not only foreign to their mentality, it conveys them a sense of weakness..." ¹³

The government of the Netherlands East Indies, a neighbor of Portuguese by the border line that runs through the island of Timor was alerted and its economic minister van Mook declared embargo on export of gasoline oil to the east Timor on November 5th immediately after the conclusion of the Japanese-Portuguese aviation agreement. The following is the Java Bode's statement concerning the embargo. The article entitled "Japan and Timor" in this influential newspaper referred to the old Dutch-Portuguese territorial agreements concerning determination of the border line on Timor which stipulated that neither party was to provide coal or naval base to a third nation. "It is interesting to see how this stipulation would be compatible with the Japanese-Portuguese aviation agreement which is bound to permit installation of Japanese base for aero boats ... For the time being there are no talks about Japanese "base" in Timor. The question concerns Japanese air route for "private" planes. However, as in the case of Palau, Timor

is a place not worthwhile to be included in a communication network. For the Japanese navy Palau is the southernmost air base, but has no value at all in non-military sense. The same thing can be said of Portuguese Timor. Native population is about 450,000 and there are only several hundreds of white men in this small island, Japan could not have an economic interest here. What is the real reason? It is easy to guess.”¹⁴

Now let us briefly review the British Government attitude on the same issue. A cablegram from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs dated October 17, 1941 summarized the issue in the following manner:

1. His Majesty's Ambassador at Lisbon ... reported that after having spun out negotiations as long as possible the Portuguese Government could no longer postpone concluding a Commercial Aviation Convention with Japan.
2. In view of the insignificance of Japanese interests in Timor, the Portuguese authorities regarded the determination of the Japanese to open this line as dictated by purely strategic considerations.
3. His Majesty's Ambassador also learned from a confidential source that matters were brought to a head when the Japanese Minister at Lisbon addressed a note early in October to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcing that a Japanese Delegation of 13 persons would arrive in Timor by air on 13th October for the purpose of concluding the Convention direct with the Government. The Portuguese Government decided however at least to insist on signature at Lisbon.
4. The Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also confirmed to his Majesty's Ambassador the report that the Japanese Consul and 7 other officials will shortly arrive at Dili. From a good source his Majesty's Ambassador has also learned that several other Japanese officials including a General have been resident for some months past at Dili, presumably as the advance party for the Consul.
5. This being so we regard it as urgently necessary that a British Consular Office should be set up at Dili with the least possible delay. We are, however, still faced with the difficulty of finding a suitable career officer who can reach Dili. In these circumstances it has occurred to us that a possible way out might be if the Commonwealth Government were prepared to give David Ross (Qantas representative in Dili) Consular rank temporarily in order to meet the position during the next few months.¹⁵

In November 1941 British Consul General in Batavia sent a detailed message to the home office on the question of the air route. He admitted that he was not in the position to find fault with the neutral Portuguese government that chose to conclude a treaty with a friendly nation but continued as follows:¹⁶

“At the back of Japan's plan to connect Palau and Dili there lie broader objectives than mere commerce alone. But we have no need to fear that Japan will get permission to build a large scale air base at Dili even though Japan will endeavor to do so. In case of war with Japan—the Netherlands East Indies and Australia are

likely to be involved —it is necessary to forestall Japanese plot to occupy Dili ...” Recent establishment of the Japanese consulate-general at Dili has— even though Japanese activities may be limited to urban areas alone— a grave danger of Japanese infiltration into the territory which has the first-rate strategic importance for both Australia and the Netherlands East Indies.”

Next, let us look at the view of the Portuguese Government on this Aviation Convention. We really need an in-depth empirical study on this with the use of Portuguese primary sources, but for our purpose the statement of the Governor of Portuguese Timor in an interview with a Dutch journalist is very useful. The Governor said, :

*“I do not understand why the international press shows so much interest in the grant of a concession to establish an airline between Palau Island and Timor Dili. This concession does not differ in any way from those granted to other foreign airlines in Portugal and her colonies. ... I can state that my Government has certainly considered all the possibilities that this Japanese airline may be a source of danger for friendly Powers. On July 15th, 1940, the first talks began and the fact that it was only 15 months later that the Government at Lisbon reached an agreement with the Japanese Government shows with what care my Government considered all the international circumstances of the case.”*¹⁷

We can see here how the Portuguese Government tried to maintain its neutral position within the international constellation: On one hand it tried to refuse the criticism by the UK, Australia and the Netherlands as being too soft and appeasing to Japan, while it was cautious not to give the Axis powers any excuse which might be used to accuse Portugal as deviating from neutrality. In the end, however, Japan would accuse Portugal as being too close to Australia, the UK and the Netherlands to claim neutrality. This would be pretext upon which Japan would occupy Portuguese Timor when hostilities began.

3. The Portuguese Timor Issue during the War

(1) Attack on Dili

The Japanese armed forces, once having initiated the Greater East Asia War, planned an attack only on Dutch Timor, excluding Portuguese Timor. This was because Japan was afraid that attack on Portuguese Timor would prompt the neutral Portugal to side with the Allies with consequent damages to the interests of the Axis powers. Another factor was the substantive political role Portugal played in the international community far beyond its small size implied. For instance, the war-time Minister resident in Portugal, Morishima Morito, states in his memoirs that he exercised all the care to avoid termination of diplomatic relations with Portugal. His stated reasons are two: one, the international position of Portugal; and two, the importance of Lisbon as an information-collecting base.¹⁸

However, the stationing of the British, Australian and Dutch forces in Portuguese Timor on December 17, 1941 drastically changed Japanese policy to this island territory. From the point of view of Japan, the stationing of these forces itself, irrespective of possible Portuguese protest, constituted a breach of neutrality, fully justifying Japan's freedom of action.

By the time an important liaison meeting between the Government and the Imperial headquarters took place on January 20, 1942, the Imperial Army and Navy were arriving at a common view on Portuguese Timor. At this meeting, both the Chief of Staff, Sugiyama Hajime, and the Chief of the Naval General Staff, Nagano Osami, strongly advocated attacking Dili, while the Foreign Minister, Togo Shigenori, pointed out the need to give “a prior warning to Portugal to un-necessitate Japan's advance,” in the same way Japan dealt with Thailand, thus placing the maintenance of diplomatic relations with Portugal above strategic needs. Sugiyama, however, refuted the Foreign Minister by saying that “prior warning could endanger the planned forced landing at Kupang,” while Nagano also insisted on the need to attack Portuguese Timor to clear the way for the landing at Kupang of Dutch Timor.¹⁹

In the end, the option of the armed forces prevailed. It was decided on January 23 that “no prior diplomatic measures” would be taken vis-a-vis Portugal, and the Dili operation was approved. On this day, January 23, however, another issue was raised as to what would happen once the military objectives were achieved in Portuguese Timor. While Prime Minister Tojo Hideki, who was also the Minister of the Army, advocated “speedy withdrawal” once the objectives were achieved, while the Navy insisted that Japan should continue to control Portuguese Timor if only to secure “a base of operations for Australia.”²⁰

From the late January into the early February, a heated debate took place on this issue among the top political and military leaders of Japan. It was in a liaison meeting between the Government and the Imperial headquarters on February 2 that the decision was formally made on the military operation vis-a-vis Portuguese Timor. An accompanying document on ‘the actions to be taken vis-a-vis Portugal in relation to the operation against Dutch Timor’ was adopted suggesting the continued occupation. The document in part said the following: “After eliminating the British, Australian, and Dutch forces, if Portugal guarantees neutrality, the Imperial forces will withdraw. However, the area may continue to be used as a base for operation in view of the Portuguese attitude and general military situation.”²¹

Five days later, on February 7, the Imperial Army and Navy instructed their Southern forces to execute the operation to advance to Portuguese Timor. The actual moves were made on February 18, and in two days almost the whole Portuguese Timor came under Japanese control after light fighting. On the same day, on February 20, the Japanese Government announced in and out of the country that these military actions were taken for the purpose of self-defense to eliminate the British, Dutch, and Australian forces on Portuguese Timor, that they in no way violated the Portuguese sovereignty, and that Japanese forces would speedily withdraw following the accomplishment of the self-defense objectives so long as Portugal maintained neutrality.

The following passage is taken from the Asahi's editorial²² concerning the operation in Portuguese Timor which evoked a great domestic concern as a preliminary skirmish of the southward advance toward the Netherlands East Indies and Australia:

“In the expanding southward-advance operations of the Imperial forces the movements of the enemy forces in the neutral area became increasingly troublesome for the Imperial forces...so the Empire was obliged to embark on the recent landing operation in dire need of self-defense in order to thoroughly crush the

Anglo-Netherlandish forces. It is our hope and belief that the Portuguese authorities will fully recognize the current international situation, understand the Empire's true intentions and will willingly take cooperative attitude to our present steps."

It was declared that the hostilities were over, but the Japanese forces continued to be on the alert to the battles against the remaining troops of the allied forces composed mainly by the Australians and aerial strikes lay the Australian air force until the end of 1942; and later from the mid-1943 on to the full-scale aerial counter strikes from the allied forces. The Japanese military left the following memos on the military situation in East Timor in the latter part of 1942 as follows:

"The remnants of the defeated troops in Timor seems to be hiding and moving about in the deep mountains of the central part but they are nothing compared with the frequent aerial attacks from enemy planes from Australia. Between June 1 and July 10 they made 21 attacks by a total of 43 planes," 23 " They seem to have about 70 planes in northern Australia with fighters and bombers half and half. They use mostly bombers to attack Timor with the seeming interest of disturbing our measures in and around Timor island ...at present they seem to have no capability of counter attacks with ground forces from northern Australia." 24

(2) Negotiations over Sovereignty

Although Japan did uphold the principle of respecting Portuguese sovereignty in Portuguese Timor, it in fact ignored it. Portugal insisted, therefore, that Japan should show this principle by deed. Diplomatic bargaining, so to speak, over sovereignty in words and sovereignty in deeds subsequently came to be the biggest issue over Timor during the war.

The Japanese Government attitude officially maintained that the Portuguese sovereignty in Timor was respected. In defending its actual violation of the sovereignty, however, it came up with the following four points: 1) Portugal had neither will nor capability to fend off the 'invasion' by the British and Dutch forces; 2) there were unbroken chain of Portuguese nation's action to benefit the enemy and inform the enemy since the Japanese advance; 3) Timor Island was strategically very important, necessitating all possible military measures; and 4) the Portuguese Governor-General sought asylum in the Japanese armed forces in the face of native upheaval.

In order to buttress the official respect of the Portuguese sovereignty on the island, the Japanese Government repeatedly asserted the following: 1) Japan served notice to the Portuguese Government at the time of advancement that it would guarantee territorial integrity; 2) Japan was allowing Portuguese Governor-General to remain in Timor, and diplomatic process was going on with the Consul-General from Japan; and 3) Japan would accept a Portuguese observation mission to visit the island.

The Japanese government agreed the minister Morishima's proposal and decided to accept this observation team as a means to remedy its relations with Portugal, and the decision was formally transmitted to Salazar by Morishima on December 22, 1943.

Japanese-Portuguese negotiation was continued at Lisbon along the line of the basic understanding above. The Japanese side stated that they had "no objection to the Portuguese

observation activities so long as the military operations of the Japanese troops are not hampered” as Timor is located in an important operation area of the Japanese forces.²⁵ However, the Japanese side repeatedly stressed that the Japanese side want to determine the route of the movement of the observation team, the area to be observed, and the length of time of their stay in the island.²⁶

The final decision on the observation tour of Portuguese officials in Timor was passed on February 5, 1944 at the joint meeting of the Imperial Headquarters and the government as the “outline of observation tour” which was to take place one month later in the following March. Captain Silva Costa, the chief secretary of the Portuguese government at Macao was designated as the official observer.

He was first official observer of the Portuguese government to visit its authentic territory under the Japanese occupation, and it was a matter of course if he demanded maximum freedom of movement. The Japanese side, however, especially the military on the spot required severe restrictions on the length of observation, the area of inspection etc. on the ground that the area was an important site of operation. In the end Captain Costa was able only to visit the Portuguese territory for one week between March 19 to March 25 under surveillance of the Japanese troops. The Costa party was accompanied by Sone Eki, chief of the 2nd political affairs section, Foreign Ministry, who left a detailed report on the trip in the Timor island. In concluding his 40 page report Sone wrote hopefully “I feel now that Costa’s report will not be too disadvantageous to our side judging through my contacts with him. It is not very different from our presumptions but it seems to be more certain now.”²⁷

However the Costa report sent to Lisbon in summer was contrary to Sone’s wishful thinking. Premier Salazar met minister Morishima after carefully analyzing the Costa report and expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Japanese stance. He protested saying that despite Japanese assertions so far Timor is placed under the Japanese military administration with the Portuguese sovereignty and the administrative rights utterly disregarded. For the first time he stated that it was the time to discuss Japanese military withdrawal which is the basic issue for normalization of the relation between Portuguese and Japan. In view of the war situation in the Pacific area, he pointed out that possibility of Japanese military operations in Australia is entirely gone; thus reducing Portuguese Timor’s military value for Japan and there is no more reason for Japan’s continued occupation of the land.

The protracted negotiation over the sovereignty in Timor continued for three and a half years, but came to an abrupt end not through a negotiated settlement but through a natural evaporation of the issue as Japan was defeated on August 15, 1945. But it was only in November the same year that Japan officially notified the Portuguese Government on “temporary reversion of the administrative rights and withdrawal of our forces.”²⁸

Japan maintained that her occupation of Portuguese Timor was solely for self-defense and she had no intention of violating the Portuguese sovereignty, as indicated by term “temporary administrative rights.” The Portuguese Government literally accepted the Japan’s standpoint at its face value, thereby to assure the allies that the sovereignty in Timor was continuously in the Portuguese hand and that Japanese occupation was an infringement of Portuguese territory and violation of the neutrality.

And the Minister resident in Lisbon, Morishima Morito, who played the most important role in this series of negotiations, did receive from a Portuguese Government official a special message from Prime Minister Salazar to the effect that it was to be congratulated that the two Governments were able to maintain normal relations until the last minute and the Prime Minister was “convinced that this would contribute greatly to the normalization of relations in future.”²⁹ We might say that the nature of the ‘strange alliance’ between the two countries during the War years is suggested in those words.

4. Concluding Remarks

I have examined the problem of Portuguese Timor prior to and during the War years. Hopefully this will close a gap in the studies of diplomatic relations and of Japan's southward advance during the last war. I said the bilateral relationship between Japan and Portugal was a ‘strange alliance,’ but it also had some aspects of a ‘strange confrontation.’

During World War II Portugal had two overriding objectives: security of the mother country and maintenance of her colonies. It proclaimed neutrality in order to achieve two aims. When the Japanese armed forces effected a de fact occupation of Timor, it repeatedly protested officially against Japan both because of her avowed neutrality and in consideration of her relations with the Allies. But she could not go any further: it was impossible for Portugal to resort to physical forces to regain the colony, and the Allies, particularly the UK, saw no need to mount a positive offensive against Japan in this matter. Portugal, therefore, had to succumb to the de fact occupation of Timor by Japan, while officially maintaining its sovereignty over it.

When on 1944 the military balance tipped against Japan, this dilemma could have been solved through Portugal declaring war on Japan. But Portugal opted out of such a radical solution but intentionally went along with Japanese pace of events by continuing to use the diplomatic means to peacefully demand Japan's withdrawal.

On the other hand, there were some elements in Japan, particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, that were afraid of possible adverse effects of the occupation of a Portuguese colony on the bilateral relationship. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs steadfastly maintained diplomatic relations due to the value of Lisbon as an important source of information in Europe, possible impact on another Portuguese colony, Brazil, and the request from Germany. In the final analysis, however, Japan accepted its military's view and did become an effective ruler of Portuguese Timor in spite of her official insistence of respecting Portugal's sovereignty on it. For Japan, too, it was a case of maintaining the facade while effectively pursuing another cause, if in a different way from the Portuguese counterpart did. Because the real interest of the two parties concurred in certain essential ways, the political status of Portuguese Timor during the War was frozen until the War came to an end in the summer of 1945.

It can plausibly be argued further that this made it easier for Portugal to regain its sovereignty once the War ended. It was naturally due partly to the Portuguese diplomatic savvy in insisting the legal continuation of her sovereignty over Timor, this making it possible to refuse any intrusion from the Allies. It should be pointed out that there was hardly a rise of nationalism to demand autonomy throughout the days of Portuguese and Japanese rule. This meant that with

the termination of W.W.II, eastern part of Timor slid back into the realm of the Portuguese colonial empire regardless the will and wishes of its inhabitants. It was after the Indonesian annexation of Timor in 1976 that the Timorese nationalism for decolonization and independence was touched off. And in all the Timorese people were give an opportunity to opt for self determination at the UN mediated “referendum” held on August 30,1999.

Notes

- 1 Gaimusho Gaikoshiryokan ed., Nihon Gaikoshijiten(Encyclopedia on the Japanese diplomatic history), 1979, p.34.
- 2 Dispatch from Kasama Akio(Minister Resident in Lisbon) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Hirota Koki, “ General situations of Portugal ” , June 30,1934. Diplomatic Record Office (DRO).
- 3 Kajimaheiwa-kenkyujo ed., Nihon Gaikoshi 22 Nanshinmaondai(Japanese diplomatic history 22 Southward advance)(Tokyo:Kajimakenkyujo-syuppankai,1973), P.22.
- 4 Consul-General H.Fitzmaurice to Mr.Eden, No.17 Secret, January 15,1938 (Australian National Archives, ANA).
- 5 Ibid..
- 6 A Report from Matsue Haruji(President of the Nanyo Kohatsu) to Inoue Kojiro (Ministry of Foreign Affairs),“ Heisya Sotonanyojigyo nikansuruken ”(On our company ’ s activities in Southeast Asia) January 6, 1939(DRO).
- 7 Consul-General Fitzmaurice to Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, no.196E, Confidential, November 25, 1937(ANA).
- 8 “ Sumitsuinkaigihikki ” (the Privy Council ’ s records), October 1, 1941(Japanese National Archives).
- 9 Department of External Affairs, Decypher of telegram received from the High Commissioner, London, July 12, 1940, most secret(ANA).
- 10 Ibid..
- 11 Dept. of External affairs, Decypher from External Affairs Officer, London, Feb. 14, 1941(ANA).
- 12 H.B.Marks to the Prime Minister,“ Japanese intrusion ” , October 16, 1941(ANA).
- 13 H.B.Marks to the Prime Minister,“ War in the Far East ” , August 1, 1941(ANA).
- 14 Java Bode, October 16, 1941.
- 15 Prime Minister ’ s Department, Decypher from the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London, October 17, 1941(ANA).
- 16 Consul-General H.C.Walsh to Principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Foreign Office, no.149, Secret, November 7, 1941(ANA).
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