

IMPERIALISM IN A NUTSHELL: CONFLICT AND THE “CONCERT OF POWERS” IN THE TRIPARTITE INTERVENTION, 1895

Urs Matthias Zachmann

Abstract: Shortly after the end of the Sino-Japanese War in 1895, Russia, France, and Germany forced Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China (the so-called Tripartite Intervention). The event had an immense impact on Japanese public opinion and considerable consequences for Japan’s future course in international politics. However, the question still remains why Japanese decision-makers of the time did not foresee such an intervention, or if they did, why they thought they could resist. The present study tries to answer the question by reconstructing the knowledge upon which the Japanese leaders acted, and so understand their decisions as the rational application of rules that prevailed in those times of late high imperialism. The study argues that the Tripartite Intervention was a constellation of conflict and consensual action typical to international power politics. Judging by what the Japanese leaders knew or could know of the constellation, their calculations might have been correct. However, a series of events that would have been hard to predict even for Western observers – especially the accession of Germany to the Russian plans for intervention – proved fatal to Japan’s hopes of overcoming a possible intervention.

I. INTRODUCTION

In late November 1894, in the midst of the Sino-Japanese War, the Second Division of the Japanese army took the strategically important fortress of Lüshun (Port Arthur) on the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula on mainland China. The Japanese population was delirious with joy over yet another success in the war. Expectations of the permanent acquisition of this and other territories ran high. With much reluctance, China ceded the peninsula to Japan in the Shimonoseki peace treaty of April 1895. However, barely a week later, the western powers of Russia, France, and Germany presented the Japanese government with the “friendly advice” to return the peninsula for the sake of peace and stability in East Asia. When news that the government had accepted the advice was broken to the Japanese people in mid-May, the general feeling was one of shock and anger. The anger, however, was less directed at the intervening powers, but concentrated on the “incompetence” of the Japanese decision-makers who should have foreseen the intervention and spared Japan the humiliation.

The incident, known as the Tripartite Intervention of 1895, is considered “one of the watersheds in history”, spanning a bridge between European and East Asian history (Nish 1982: 204). Many studies of diplomatic histories have dealt with the European side of the story, and the motives and machinations of the powers involved have therefore become sufficiently transparent. However, far less has been written about the Japanese side of the story. Thus, the incident still bears some riddles that await resolution.

The scant attention paid so far to the Japanese side is all the more surprising because the Intervention had a tremendous impact on public opinion and political discourse, even growing as time passed. After all, the retrocession of Liaodong provided a most powerful argument for advocates of a strong foreign policy on the eve of the Russo-Japanese war, and the die-hard slogan *gashin shōtan* [sleeping on firewood and licking bile], which called for revenge at all costs, became a stock quotation of chauvinist propaganda ever after.

The most puzzling problem, which troubled Japanese commentators from the very first days of the affair¹, was this: how could the Japanese leaders let the Intervention happen? Why did they not foresee the Intervention, or if they did, how could they have been so confident about overcoming an intervention, given the massive diplomatic and military pressure the Japanese government eventually had to face?

The problem becomes even more mysterious when studying the sources. After all, Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), prime minister at the time, and Mutsu Munemitsu (1844–1897), his foreign minister, *did* anticipate an intervention almost as a certainty. During the Sino-Japanese conflict, Britain repeatedly had tried to mediate and intervene, and the rather harsh peace terms Japan proposed to China were likely to provoke the opposition of at least *one* Western power. And yet, the Japanese government did not reduce its demands to a more modest size. The leaders merely agreed to delay the almost certain intervention by keeping the peace terms secret to the western powers for as long as possible. However, one could not say that Itō or Mutsu did not care for the rules of the “Great Game”, either. The pervasive impression of the Sino-Japanese War is that the Japanese leaders tried as hard as they could to fight a “modern” war, accompanied by “modern” diplomacy, so that the only element that would look outdated was the Chinese enemy (cf. Keene 1971; Paine 2003). What, then, went wrong in the calculation?

¹ See for example the famous controversy between the journalists Kuga Katsunan (1857–1907) and Asahina Chisen (1862–1939) in the months of July and August 1895 about the “responsibility” of the government (the so-called *sekinin-ron*).

Unfortunately, the Japanese leaders do not necessarily give the answers themselves. Mutsu subtly shifted the responsibility to Itō, to whom he deferred in the decision to keep the peace terms secret from the Western powers (Mutsu 1982: 147). Itō later blamed Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914), the Japanese minister to Germany, for having misled him and Mutsu about the situation in Germany (Lepsius 1923: 330; Aoki 1970: 349–350). Aoki, in turn, harshly criticized the foreign policy of both his enemies, Mutsu and Itō, for having alienated the western powers, especially Germany, to the point that Germany turned its back on Japan at the last moment (Aoki 1970: 280–85). Hayashi Tadasu (1850–1913), the vice foreign minister at the time, contented himself with the cryptic statement that such an intervention had been anticipated, but not its “direction” or “extent” (Hayashi 1915: 74), an explanation which leaves the reader no wiser.

The following study tries to elucidate the problem by analyzing the incident as the regular product of conflict and consensus in the latter days of high imperialism. The study first establishes the sequence of events leading up to the Intervention and reconstructs the basis of knowledge on which the Japanese leaders made their decisions. In a second step, the study tries to understand the decisions as the rational application of rules of conflict and consensus which prevailed during the late high imperialism of the time. Circumstantial evidence suggests that these rules also lay at the basis of the actual decisions of the Japanese leaders. The study eventually argues that their basic calculations had been right, but were foiled by a series of western events that were hard to predict, even for observers in the West. The accession of Germany (and to some extent France) to the Intervention proved especially fatal to Japan’s hopes of overcoming a possible intervention.

II. THE FACTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE TRIPARTITE INTERVENTION

1. War and the Peace Treaty

On August 1, 1894, Japan formally declared war on China. The declaration claimed that China had violated the Tianjin Treaty of 1885 by having sent troops into Korea without the consent of Japan. However, as the Japanese foreign minister Mutsu Munemitsu stated in his report, this comparatively minor breach merely served as a pretext to decide once and for all a long-standing rivalry between the two countries over control in Korea (Mutsu 1982: 32). The majority of the public in Japan, however, subscribed to the view that Japan was fighting a “just war”, protecting Korea’s inde-

pendence against powerful and oppressive China (cf. d'Anethan 1967: 19–20).

The course of the war almost immediately proved favorable for Japan. On September 17, the combined Japanese fleet sank five battleships of China's much feared Northern Fleet during a battle in the Yellow Sea. On November 21, the Second Division took Lüshun (Port Arthur), the strategically important fortress on the Liaodong Peninsula.

The Chinese government soon tried to enter peace negotiations, and in November 1894 requested the American Minister to China, C. Denby, to mediate. Due to Japanese objections against the formal authorization of the Chinese delegation, it was not until March 20, 1895, that the peace negotiations really began. The negotiations in Shimonoseki were conducted by Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909) and Foreign Minister Mutsu as representatives of Japan, and Governor-General Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) as Plenipotentiary of China. The parties first discussed the conditions of an armistice. Japan had not yet made known its demands for the actual peace treaty, either to China or to any of the western powers. The ostensible reason for this reticence had been that Japan would reveal its terms only to a delegation also qualified to conclude the actual treaty, which would certainly include the independence of Korea, territorial cessions, and the payment of a war indemnity (Nish 1989: 98). However, as Itō stated during an imperial conference in Hiroshima on January 27, 1895, an intervention may be inevitable once the full extent of the demand became known (Kunaichō 1968–77, 8: 650). Itō and Mutsu therefore agreed to withhold the demands for as long as possible (Mutsu 1982: 147). Japanese diplomats believed that, as long as exact details of the peace treaty remained unknown, the western powers would not decide on specific measures (cf. Gaimushō 1953: 3–4).

However, on March 24, 1895, Li Hongzhang was shot at in an attempted assassination, and the Japanese tried to salvage the situation by granting an unconditional armistice. Thus, on April 2, 1895, Mutsu finally informed Li of the Japanese demands for the peace treaty (Mutsu 1982: 181, 293). The demands included not only the independence of Korea, the payment of a huge indemnity, territorial cessions of Taiwan, the Pescadores, and the Liaodong Peninsula, but also a commercial section, which stipulated the opening of additional ports and extensive shipping, trading, and manufacturing rights in China. Since the commercial section fell under the most-favored-nation clause, other countries, especially Britain (as China's most important trading partner), benefited from it, too.

Probably to avoid misinformation by the Chinese side, the Japanese government on April 4, 1895 finally informed Britain, France, Russia, and the United States of its peace terms. For Britain, Japan took special pains

and sent its London minister, Katō Takaaki (1860–1926), to convey the full details of the commercial section to British foreign secretary Lord Kimberley (1826–1902) (Nish 1989: 177). However, Japan made no effort to communicate the peace terms to Germany.

On April 17, 1895, China and Japan signed the Peace Treaty of Shimonoseki, only two weeks after Mutsu had submitted his draft to Li Hongzhang. The terms of the treaty were essentially identical to those of the draft, especially regarding the cession of the Liaodong Peninsula and the commercial terms. However, on April 23, 1895, Russia, France, and Germany gave Japan the “friendly advice” to retrocede the peninsula. Britain neither opposed nor supported the Intervention.

2. The Intervention

The European powers had closely followed the Korean crisis, the development of the war and the peace negotiations.² At the beginning, they did not expect any significant consequences from the outcome of the war, thinking China would win, and they therefore remained neutral. Only the British government, realizing that the war would have a disruptive effect on China and British commercial interests there, no matter what outcome, tried to mediate and intervene at an early stage. Britain’s efforts failed to gain the support of the other powers (Maruyama 1955: 86–87), and Mutsu and Itō were able to overcome British opposition by simply ignoring it (Mutsu 1982: 130–136).

However, Japan’s series of stunning successes in the war made another intervention by Britain (or Russia) ever more likely. The German emperor Wilhelm II. (r. 1888–1918) feared that, in the event of such an action and the ensuing “realignment” of territories, Germany might be left out. On November 17, 1894, shortly before Japan took Port Arthur completely, he sent a telegram to his chancellor von Hohenlohe (in office 1894–1900) which would mark a significant change in Germany’s Far Eastern policy:

There are indications which seem to suggest that Britain soon will become active in the Orient. [...] Otherwise we may assume that she will bring into her possession Shanghai and several strategically important positions without consulting the other powers. [...] This event will, without doubt, result in Russia and France likewise occu-

² Cf. the *Times* April 23, 1895: “So vast a change in the political relations, actual and prospective, of the Far East must, of course be watched with the keenest interest by the European Powers” (Kokusai Nyūsu Jiten Shuppan Iinkai [henceforth abbreviated as: KNJSI] 1990: 621).

pying important positions in China. Under no circumstances we must miss to get our fair share or be caught by surprise. We, too, need a permanent position in China, where our turnover amounts to about 400 million. To this end, I would propose Formosa [...]. (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 245–246)

Britain and Russia indeed conferred about cooperation concerning the situation in the Far East (cf. Nish 1989: 37–38). At the beginning of February, the British minister to Russia related to Kimberley a message from Count Kapnist, the head of the Asiatic Department in the Russian foreign ministry, to the effect that the “Russian Government [...] would welcome an exchange of ideas as to the line which might be advisable to adopt in view of the changed condition of things in the Far East, and he [Count Kapnist] repeated the earnest desire of his Government to act in perfect harmony with England in this matter. He understood that the same applied to the French Government, who were also interested in the question, though to a less [*sic*] degree than England or Russia” (Nish 1989: 50).

Three days after receipt of this message, Kimberley met the German ambassador von Hatzfeldt in London to discuss the Far Eastern situation (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 250–251; Wippich 1987: 104). Kimberley repeated the Russian message to him and indicated that, in the event of a “substantial realignment of territorial settings”, Britain would welcome Germany’s taking a more active role in attending to its significant commercial interests in the affair. The German ambassador soon afterwards clarified Germany’s position by pointing out that, in case a third party should take advantage of China’s current state of weakness, Germany would “confidently stand side by side with Britain. We [Germany] would therefore not in principle oppose the idea of a joint intervention” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 251). Germany later repeated the same offer of assistance to Russia. The Russian Foreign Minister Lobanov-Rostovsky (in office 1895–1896) welcomed the offer and assured the German Chargé d’Affaires in St. Petersburg that the young czar Nicolas II (r. 1894–1917) would be highly pleased (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 258–259; Nish 1989: 150).

From the start of peace negotiations with Japan, the Chinese tried to engage the support of the western powers for “moderate” peace terms, but met with little success. The most articulate response came from Germany. At the beginning of March 1895, the German ambassador in Tokyo, von Gutschmid, received instructions to communicate the following message to the Japanese government:

European powers have been requested by China to intervene; some of them are principally determined and have come to an agreement to do so. The more they can ask of China in return for their interven-

tion, the less remains for Japan. For the latter, therefore, an immediate, fair settlement would be comparatively the most advantageous. [...] Based on the news we have had so far, Japanese demands of territorial concessions on the continent would be the most likely to provoke an intervention. (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 253)

Contrary to what the message said, there existed no such determination or agreement to intervene among the western powers, yet. After all, the European powers still did not know the extent of the Japanese demands and therefore remained undecided. However, the message clearly related the fact that the possibility of territorial concessions on the continent troubled the powers most. The Japanese ambassador in Berlin, Aoki Shūzō (1844–1914), repeatedly indicated that Japan would demand Port Arthur, although not Taiwan (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 255–256; 260). The German chancellor von Hohenlohe explained to Wilhelm II that Port Arthur in the hands of Japan would mean “Japanese dominion over the Gulf of Tschili and therefore a permanent threat to the Chinese capital” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 256). Britain generally did not object to the cession of Taiwan, but as late as April 4, 1895, Kimberley told the German ambassador von Hatzfeldt that he personally agreed that “the cession of Port Arthur in its consequences would amount to a protectorate over China and imperil the existence of it, as much as it would invite cessions of territory to other powers” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 262). The Japanese minister to Russia repeatedly tried to sound out “whether there would be any objection on the part of the Russian Government, if one of the peninsulas jutting out into the Gulf of Pechili were annexed by Japan”, to which the Russian foreign minister Lobanov eventually replied that “he was under the impression that complications might arise if any demands for annexation on the mainland were made” (Nish 1989: 144). Lobanov further told the British minister that the “possession of either of those peninsulas by the Japanese [...] would, in his opinion, put Peking completely at their mercy” (Nish 1989: 144).

If the powers remained undecided as to the possibility of an intervention while the peace terms were still unknown, they took only four days to make up their minds after Japan made its peace terms known on April 4, 1895. The differences between Russia and Britain became apparent right at the beginning. On April 5, 1895, Lobanov informed the British minister in St. Petersburg that he thought the Japanese occupation would “compromise the independence of Corea, and be a standing menace to Peking” (Nish 1989: 175). However, the British minister replied that it was his personal opinion that “England would not enter upon hostilities with Japan. [...] it was, perhaps, also felt [in Britain] that to make an enemy of the

rising Power in the East would be impolitic.” Britain was suddenly having second thoughts about an intervention. This became apparent in an interview the German ambassador in London had with the Foreign Secretary Kimberley on April 6, 1895 (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 264–265). At this point, Kimberley argued that Russia’s concerns about the independence of Korea and the safety of Beijing could be allayed if Japan would limit itself to “a small part of the southern peninsula of the province Liaodong”, meaning, of course, Port Arthur. Moreover, the Chinese government could minimize the security risk by moving its capital to the old capital of Nanjing. The German ambassador reacted with incredulity. Merely two days ago, Kimberley had agreed with him that Japan’s presence in Port Arthur would have the effect of establishing a protectorate over China. In the interim, however, on April 5, the Japanese minister Katō had acquainted Kimberley with the details of the peace treaty’s commercial stipulations.

The final rift between Britain and Russia came on April 7, 1895, when Lobanov circulated a note which suggested that the powers would “exprimer au Japon, sous la forme la plus amicale, l’opinion que l’acquisition du Port Arthur deviendrait aussi bien une menace permanente pour le maintien de la paix en Extrême-Orient qu’un obstacle aux bonnes relations entre le Japon et la Chine” (Nish 1989: 178). On April 8, the British cabinet decided that “Her Majesty’s Government have no grounds for interference” (Nish 1989: 180). On the same day, Kimberley sent a telegram to the British minister in China, in which he explained: “Much importance is attached by Her Majesty’s Government to the commercial stipulations which the Japanese Minister communicated to me” (Nish 1989: 181).

Germany, on the other hand, accepted the Russian proposal of an intervention on the very day it was received (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 265). The diplomat Max von Brandt (1835–1920), who had long been ambassador to Beijing and was now consulted as an expert in matters of the Far East, stated the reasons for joining the intervention in two memoranda (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 265–268). The reasons were economical as well as political in nature. A China dependent on Japan would weaken its economic relations with other countries. A joint action with Russia might be the only way to render China “grateful”, which could be converted into the lease of a base for use as a coal station and harbor for the German fleet. Von Brandt also stressed the impact of a joint action on European politics: if France joined as well, this might loosen the ties between Russia and France somewhat; also, since Britain could not very well stand aside, a European unity in China politics would be guaranteed. Moreover, the intervention would commit Russia more to Asia, which would ease off the tension in the West.

Russia's stance in the affair (and, by extension, much of Russia's future Far Eastern policy) was decided during a conference on April 11, 1895. Britain's refusal had weakened Lobanov's determination for an intervention. The British minister to Russia reported: "[...] it was his [Lobanov's] frank opinion that the decision of Her Majesty's Government had greatly complicated the question, as it would certainly encourage the Japanese to persist in their demands" (Nish 1989: 182). Thus Lobanov during the conference argued that Russia should tolerate Japan's presence in Port Arthur and seek compensation in Korea (e. g. Port Lazareff), instead (Seton-Watson 1967: 582–583; Nish 1982: 212–213). Finance Minister Sergei Y. Vitte (1849–1915), however, strongly opposed Lobanov and demanded an intervention. In 1891 Vitte had persuaded the former czar Alexander III (r. 1881–1894) to start building a railway across Siberia into Manchuria. Vitte saw the strategic aims of the project greatly endangered, if Japan was to keep Port Arthur (Seton-Watson 1967: 582). He prevailed with his arguments for an intervention, and the conference finally adopted a resolution of his proposition to "advise Japan in a friendly way" to give up the southern part of Manchuria and, if Japan refused to do so, "to declare to Japan that we [Russia] reserved complete freedom of action and would act in accordance with our interest" (Nish 1967: 213).

Meanwhile, France had waited to see how Russia would decide (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 268–269). When the decision favoring the intervention finally came, France could not help but join as well. Foreign Minister Albert A. Hanotaux (in office 1894–1898) later justified France's participation primarily as a pledge of solidarity with its new alliance partner, Russia. France had only recently (1894) formed a military alliance with Russia, which was intended to counterbalance Germany's alliance with Austria and Italy.

Several attempts were made by Russia, Germany, and France to make Britain reconsider its decision and join the intervention. The French minister to Britain, for example, received instructions to point out "the responsibility, which the same [Britain] would assume, if it would leave the European concert regarding the disapproval of the Japanese peace terms as initiated by Russia" (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 268–269). However, Britain adamantly refused to reconsider its decision.

On April 17, 1895, the same day China and Japan signed the Peace Treaty in Shimonoseki, the Russian government issued a note to Germany and France, declaring that the "desertion of Britain" now forced Russia to take independent action to guard its interests, "which were identical with Europe's interests". Lobanov therefore "definitely" hoped that Germany and France would join Russia (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 269). On the same day, the German Foreign Office instructed its minister in Tokyo, von Gutschmid,

to deliver the “friendly advice” together with his Russian and French colleagues (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 270)³.

All the while, the Japanese remained oblivious to the imminent threat. The foreign representatives in Tokyo barely communicated with Itō and Mutsu in Hiroshima and Shimonoseki (d’Anethan 1967: 46). The Japanese minister in Russia sent reports from time to time, but with no specific warnings (cf. Gaimushō 1953: 3–4). Aoki Shūzō in Germany claimed that until the middle of April, the German government had maintained a friendly appearance towards Japan and only suddenly, without warning, changed its attitude (Aoki 1970: 283). Although Aoki clearly tries to defend himself against charges of “diplomatic malpractice”, it certainly seems that he was deliberately left in the dark until the very last. When Aoki declared that Japan would demand the Liaodong peninsula “as a sort of Gibraltar for the Gulf of Petschili” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 260), his German counterpart did not indicate any objections. On April 9, the British minister in Berlin reported to Kimberley that he had met Aoki: “Without in any way alluding to Prince Lobanoff’s suggestion [of an intervention], which Baron von Marschall had mentioned to me this morning, I asked his Excellency [Aoki] whether he thought Russia would agree to the cession of Port Arthur and the Liao-tung Peninsula” (Nish 1989: 187–188). To this Aoki replied that Japan had done nothing, or demanded nothing to provoke an intervention, “and it was too late now for Russia to step in, and refuse to allow Japan to reap the fruits of her victory”. It was as late as April 18, 1895, one day after the conclusion of the Peace Treaty, that Aoki finally noticed the changed attitude of the powers. Aoki visited the state secretary of the German Foreign Office, von Marschall, to communicate to him the news of the conclusion of the peace treaty (on whose terms Aoki still claimed to have no details) (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 271; Gaimushō 1953: 2–3). Unsuspectingly, he expressed his hope that Japan could count on Germany’s goodwill (*Wohlwollen*) in the future, as well. To this, however, von Marschall coolly replied that, since Japan had not reciprocated Germany’s goodwill in the past and especially had not heeded the advice it had given Japan earlier on, it would now have to bear the consequences. He closed with the remark that the world surely would not move according to the wishes or commands of Japan (Gaimushō 1953: 3). Two days later Aoki sent a telegram to Mutsu with the details of the interview, to-

³ The course of events as described so far does not support the central thesis of Ikle that Germany “originated” the Intervention (Ikle 1967: 122). Britain and Russia conferred independently about possible actions, and Germany merely played a secondary, albeit important, role. The question of what Germany’s accession meant for *Japan* is a different one.

gether with a harsh critique of his superiors (Itō and Mutsu) for neglecting Germany, and especially for failing to inform the German government of the peace terms.

By then, however, it was too late to make any adjustments. On April 23, 1895, the Russian, French, and German ministers separately visited the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs Hayashi Tadasu to deliver their “friendly advice” (*conseil amical*). The wording of the diplomatic notes in their central passages was, with minute variations, identical (Gaimushō 1953: 15–17). The intervening nations therein stated the belief

[...] that the possession of the Liaodong Peninsula is a threat to the capital of China, that it would render illusory the independence of Korea, and that it would be a perpetual obstacle for pacifying the Far East.

The notes closed with the advice “to renounce the definite possession of that peninsula”. The advice was unequivocally couched in friendly terms. However, just to make sure that the imperative nature of the “advice” was not lost on Japan, the German minister, after having delivered himself of the common part of the note, appended an explanation to the effect that “the government of His Majesty [...] will be sure to enforce its protest, if necessary, with due measures. Japan therefore can yield [*kann nachgeben*], since fighting the great powers would be hopeless” (Hayashi 1915: 78; Gaimushō 1953: 15–16; Wippich 1987: 136). With this, the minister exceeded his instructions, but nonetheless succinctly made clear where Japan was headed, if it rejected the advice.

3. Reactions of the Japanese Government

After the three powers had delivered their advice, the Japanese decision makers tried to coordinate their response (see Mutsu 1982: 203–220; Nish 1982: 217–218; Fujimura 1974: 185–186). The deliberations were dominated by two factors: fear of the Western powers, and fear of the people.

The threat of military action, if Japan did not comply, was all too real. Russia had enlarged its Pacific fleet during the Sino-Japanese war. Japanese newspapers recorded in the days following the intervention a conspicuous increase in activity of Russian battleships in the ports of Nagasaki and Kōbe.

Even more frightening was the possible reaction of the people of Japan, especially of the soldiers abroad and afloat, if Japan gave in (Fujimura 1974: 185). Mutsu feared that, even if the hostile actions of the intervention powers could be mitigated, this was not possible for the hostile reactions within (Mutsu 1982: 206). The frenetic war-enthusiasm in the public had

let the expectations soar high, and newspapers were already publishing fully developed plans for governing the newly acquired territories.

However, the Japanese leaders had to find a solution. At the Imperial Council, Itō presented three options for dealing with the situation. The leaders of the army and navy ruled out the option of rejecting the advice and risking war. Japan had sent all of its troops abroad, and the navy was exhausted (Fujimura 1974: 185). The Council would have chosen the option to hold an international conference, but Mutsu vetoed it. He argued that this would involve even more powers, who would claim their own shares (Mutsu 1982: 208). Thus, it was finally decided that Japan must accept the intervention. On May 5, 1895, the Japanese government declared its unconditional acceptance of the “friendly advice” to the three ministers of the intervening states (Gaimushō 1953: 81–82).

III. CONFLICT AND THE CONCERT OF POWERS IN THE TRIPARTITE INTERVENTION

1. Conflict: Expansion in the Age of High Imperialism

The annexation of the Liaodong Peninsula and the Tripartite Intervention took place in what is now called the age of “high imperialism”. High imperialism was characterized by the return of expanding nations to traditional forms of colonial expansion and methods of formal rule in the newly acquired territories (Schöllgen 2000: 47). France and Britain initiated the phase with the institution of the French protectorate in Tunisia in 1881 and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882. Thus, the occupation and annexation of the Liaodong Peninsula and Taiwan in 1894–1895 may be seen as yet another instance of this diplomacy of high imperialism.

However, the time of the Intervention also brought some new developments in the mechanisms of imperialism. The extensive “dividing up” of the world had left only a few spaces into which to expand, most notably the Ottoman Empire, China, and Korea. Nations with recent imperial aspirations pushed into the “open space”, primarily driven by a quest for prestige and the ambition to equal the old empires, and thus join the “general, object-independent, compulsive, nationalistic competition of expansivities” (Vagts 1935, 1: xiii)⁴. This ambition would manifest itself negatively as a fear of being “squeezed out”, and justify itself as “defense by

⁴ State Secretary Bernhard von Bülow (1849–1929), when defending Germany’s occupation of Jiaozhou in 1897, coined for this ambition the famous phrase that Germany also demanded its “spot on the sunny side” (*Platz an der Sonne*).

aggressive means” (Wehler 1975: 197; van Evera 1984). Empires of long tradition, on the other hand, tried to consolidate their acquired status, or reclaim lost prestige (Schöllgen 2000: 3).

We might see the Tripartite Intervention, therefore, as a typical case of conflict in the age of “late high imperialism”. Three nations (Japan, Germany, and Russia) with comparatively new imperial aspirations in the Far East competed among each other, each driven by the desire for imperial status and the fear of being shut out from its “resources”. On the other hand, Britain tried to consolidate its present position as an “old” imperial power, a goal best served by not joining the Intervention. Finally, France joined the intervention in order to reclaim some of its lost status by consolidating its new joint security framework with Russia.

a.) *Japan*

Japan entered the “imperial competition” at a relatively late stage in the history of imperialism. We may leave unanswered the question of whether Japan’s drive to empire manifested itself first in the so-called *Seikanron* [Debate on invading Korea] of 1873, or in the abortive Taiwan expedition of 1874 (see Eskildsen 2002), or after the Korean crisis in 1882, when a military conflict with China became ever more likely and Japan launched a program of military expansion (Iriye 1989: 753). The Sino-Japanese war, in any event, was fought with imperialist motivations. The Sino-Japanese war was initially begun to tip the balance of power on the Korean peninsula in favor of Japan. However, in October 1894, when Japan had scored its first military successes and Mutsu drew up a first plan for future peace negotiations, it became apparent that Japan was fighting not only for power, but for tangible possessions as well (cf. Mutsu 1982: 131).

Expansionist policy in Meiji political discourse, when not veiled by idealism, was invariably rationalized as defense: Only by developing itself through expansion (and thereby accruing prestige), it was believed, would the Japanese nation be able to emerge as a power in the world and cope with the expanding powers in the West (Iriye 1989: 762). In application of Herbert Spencer’s Social-Darwinism on international relations (cf. Nagai 1954), it was either expansion or collapse or, as it was commonly phrased: “The flesh of the weak is meat for the strong” (*jakuniku kyōshoku*). Ambition and fear thus dominated Japan’s drive outward. In the case of the Sino-Japanese War, it was the fear that Japan would lose against China. However, for some, behind China lurked Russia, and Korea was considered Japan’s “line of interest” in the defense against Russia (Mutsu 1982: 29; Iriye 1989: 763–764). The fear was fueled by Russia’s move eastward: across Siberia with the railway and over the Pacific with an ever growing fleet.

b.) *Russia and Germany*

Like Japan, Russia and Germany were motivated by territorial interests in the Tripartite Intervention and the fear of being left out. In the case of Russia, the eastward expansion was inseparably linked with the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, begun in 1891. The huge project opened a new stage in Russia's Far Eastern policy (Seton-Watson 1967: 581). In a memorandum of 1893, the chief advocate of the project, Count Vitte promised the czar that Russia

[...] from the shores of the Pacific and the heights of the Himalayas [...] would dominate not only the affairs of Asia but those of Europe as well. (Seton-Watson 1967: 581)

It was foreseeable that the Trans-Siberian/Manchurian Railway would need an ice-free port on the Pacific coast other than Vladivostok, which was inaccessible from December to mid-April every year⁵. However, it should be noted that, until Russia actually occupied Port Arthur in December 1897, the choice of port was contentious and not limited to Port Arthur. Ports in Korea (such as Port Lazareff) would have served the same function and were being considered. Thus, when the decision came for an intervention on April 11, 1895, the overriding argument was not that Russia must have *Port Arthur*, but that *nobody* must have it *now*. Count Vitte vehemently argued that if Port Arthur went to Japan, this would give Japan such a strong strategic position in the region as to virtually close off Manchuria, as well as China and Korea, from any other foreign influence, especially that of Russia (Rosen 1922, 1: 134). In this respect, the Russian arguments for an intervention were very similar to those of Germany.

Germany's offer to assist Britain and Russia in a possible intervention was first motivated by the fear of being left out in a probable "realignment of territories" in China. By participating, Germany hoped to acquire a base of its own in the Far East. Until then, Germany had limited its interests in the Far East strictly to the economic sphere (cf. Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 251). The need to have a base in the Far East had been felt in Germany since the end of the 1860's (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 255). However, no decisive measures had been undertaken. Thus, the decision of the German emperor to take part in the "realignment of territories" in China seemed so momentous that the German chancellor, when first told, requested some time before he would comment on it (Lepsius *et al.*, no. 2219). Later on, when Germa-

⁵ Thus, it seems highly improbable that Japan indeed thought to prevent Russian protest by 'offering' the acquisition of Northern Manchuria with access through Posyeta Bay, as the German state secretary reported (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 262). All ports in the Peter the Great Bay had the same "defect".

ny discovered that Japan would claim Port Arthur, a new fear of being “squeezed out” by Japan added to the old one of being “left out” of the competition among the European powers. In this context it is quite revealing that the German state secretary, on at least two occasions, described Port Arthur as the “second Gibraltar” or “the Gibraltar of that part of the world” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923, no. 2232; Nish 1989: 178). For a country that had only just begun to contest British supremacy on the seas, it must have been most disquieting to see a similar strategic dilemma emanate from the Far East. Incidentally, von Marschall may not himself have invented the phrase describing Port Arthur as the “second Gibraltar”, but may have adopted it from the Japanese. When the Japanese minister Aoki first declared to a German diplomat that Japan would demand the Liaodong peninsula together with Port Arthur, he added the explanation that this strategic point would have the function of a Gibraltar “for the Gulf of Petschili”. Without possession of this territory, he said, the independence of Korea would be rendered illusory (Lepsius *et al.* 1923, no. 2231). Thus, ironically, Aoki gave the best argument for an intervention himself.

c.) France

France joined the intervention not to expand in the East, but to preserve its security framework in the West, whose keystone was the new Russo-French military alliance. On June 10, 1895, in the Chamber of Deputies, foreign minister Hanotaux rose to defend France’s actions regarding the situation in the Far East, arguing that France was “unwilling to leave Russia to struggle alone with difficulties which might influence the general policy of the republic. France, he said, remained faithful to her allies” (*New York Times* 11.06.1895: 5 in Langer 1965: 446). The Russo-French military alliance formed in 1892/94 ended France’s political isolation of almost twenty years and became the core of France’s security policy until 1914 (Schöllgen 2000: 166). Its preservation, therefore, was of the greatest importance for the empire. Germany, the non-allied power, had declared itself willing to join the intervention against Japan. Thus France, the alliance partner, could not very well stand back (Nish 1982: 215–216; Wippich 1987: 120). Otherwise, France would have preferred to remain neutral, or might even have opposed an intervention (Nish 1982: 215–216).

d.) Britain

The course of events described above indicates that the British cabinet refused to join the intervention largely to protect its economic interests in the Far East. In that respect, its decision was popular. Thus, the *London Times* commented on April 23, 1895 (the day of the intervention):

The commercial interests of England in the Far East are vastly greater than those of any other Power, greater even than those of all other European Powers combined. Her political interests are fully as important, at present and prospectively, as those of Russia herself. *If China could have been guaranteed to remain in a torpid condition, if Japan had not suddenly awakened to consciousness of her naval and military strength and begun to use it, we should perhaps, have been better pleased to go on as we have done for two or three generations. But this is past praying for.* A new world has been called into existence in the Far East. [...] We cannot see, however, any stipulations [in the Peace Treaty] so seriously and directly menacing to British interests that we should think it necessary to compel their withdrawal possibly at the cost of making irreconcilable enemies of the Japanese. [...] It would ill become a nation that prides itself on being the standard-bearer of free trade to raise any objection to fair rivalry in open markets. (KNJSI 1990: 621; emphasis added by the author)

It was for its economic interests that Britain first wanted to prevent war between China and Japan, and thus maintain the *status quo* (the “torpid condition”). However, with Japan’s success in the war, the initially hostile attitude towards Japan in the British press changed (Mutsu 1982: 106–109), and so did the position of the British government, as Britain had to arrange itself with the new power in East Asia. Moreover, the commercial stipulations which Japan incorporated in the peace treaty were “calculated to conciliate the good will of Europe” (*Times* 08.04.1895 in KNJSI 1990: 607), but most especially of Britain. This effect was clearly foreseen and intended by Japan. Mutsu argued that the commercial stipulations would benefit the European powers much more than Japan, since their commercial and entrepreneurial presence in China was much more developed than Japan’s (Gaimushō 1953: 6). That this applied foremost to Britain is obvious, given the size of its interests in China. Thus, the Japanese government specially instructed its British minister to acquaint the British government with the commercial benefits of the treaty (Nish 1989: 177). On the other hand, the Chinese feared that the commercial stipulations would discourage the European powers, and especially Britain, from intervening and wanted to keep them secret (Mutsu 1982: 172, 239). Thus, when the Chinese informed the western powers of the treaty terms, it deliberately withheld the commercial stipulations (cf. Nish 1989: 173; Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 261)

Britain’s interests in the affair thus were fundamentally different from those of Japan and the Continental powers. The difference in interests at the same time coincided with a difference in the means and forms of imperialism with which the various countries pursued their interests: Brit-

ain's economic position in East Asia required and *enabled* Britain to limit itself to the means of *informal* imperialism, whereas Russia's and Germany's position left them only with the choice of pursuing their interests with the means of *formal* imperialism.

It is well known that even prior to, but also during the age of high-imperialism, less formal means of extending control were applied. The "Imperialism of Free Trade" (Gallagher and Robinson 1953) was the most effective. This kind of "informal imperialism" was directed especially to those areas (i. e. China and the Ottoman Empire) which to date had been spared subjugation through formal means of control (Schöllgen 2000: 48). By the time of the Tripartite Intervention, Britain had already established itself in China through the informal means of "free trade" much more firmly than all the Continental powers combined, as the *Times* article proudly stated. According to the principle of the British free trade-empire ("trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary", Gallagher and Robinson 1953: 13), joining an intervention was not necessary because trade with informal control in China was possible, even if Japan gained influence through formal imperialism. The stipulations of the peace treaty did not harm British interests, as the most-favored-nation-clause guaranteed that all the trading rights would go to Britain as well, and its superior position on the Chinese market would thus be left untouched or even enhanced. Therefore, to consolidate its position even further, it was quintessential that Britain not interfere with Japan's formal expansion, as this could only be detrimental to its own informal expansion.

Russia and Germany, on the other hand, had neither a commercial power base comparable to that of Britain, nor a hope to acquire one in the near future given the overwhelming competition of Britain, now made even fiercer by Japan. Being denied the option of informal expansion, the Continental powers therefore had to resort to formal expansion. To realize this at a later stage, they had to keep the space open by barring Japan from occupying it. Britain did not need not to worry so long as the space it could dominate, the market, remained open. Thus, the Tripartite Intervention not only shows powers with new imperial ambitions competing among themselves, but also reveals a rift between empires at different stages, with different possibilities for imperial expansion.

2. Consensual Action and the "European Concert"

So far, the Intervention has been viewed as the typical "product" of the imperialist conflict of the time. However, the Intervention illustrates another set of principles which evolved during the age. These applied to the

necessity of consensual action or, negatively speaking, the inviability of unilateral action. The combined perspective of conflict and consensual action finally enables us to answer the question of why the Japanese government, with its unilateral annexation of Port Arthur, chose to run the risk of an intervention.

It has been observed that in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the extreme density of imperial power relations around the globe and the scarcity of “open space” forced imperial nations to coordinate their moves regarding the remaining space (Schöllgen 2000: 3). Thus, as a rule, there were only two methods left to appropriate economically, politically, or strategically important territories at the periphery of Europe: either the same region was appropriated by *all* powers at the same time (as was done in the “Scramble for Concessions” 1897/98), or one power *alone* proceeded with the (tacit) agreement of all other nations concerned (Schöllgen 2000: 3). We see the latter case in the occupation of Libya by Italy in 1912. All other unilateral occupations failed, such as that of the Sudan by France 1898, or of Morocco by Germany in 1905 and 1912, as they did not have the consent of the other imperial nations.

The annexation of the Liaodong peninsula, too, must be seen as a typical illustration of the rule. Japan did not succeed, as the annexation did not find the approval of Russia and Germany. The time was not yet ready for the division of China. During the deliberations in the conference on April 17, 1895, Witte stated as rationale for Russia’s intervention that Russia must prevent *all* annexations (not only Japan’s) of Chinese territory until the Trans-Siberian Railway was completed, and Russia would be able to make its strength felt in the Far East (Seton-Watson 1967: 582). Thus, Mutsu wrote that Russia did not show any particular bias against Japan, but merely that “she took as her main priorities the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Far East, and the elimination of all obstacles which might prevent her from attaining her ultimate goals when she felt ready to pursue them” (Mutsu 1982: 221).

Yet, we may extend the rule of consensual occupation also to its *actus contrarius*, the intervention (and probably all kinds of “formal” action), in the sense that all effective interventions required the consensus of all affected countries, implicit or explicit, with no nation intervening on its own. We can see an example of a failed intervention in the Britain’s move to intervene in the Sino-Japanese War in August 1894. Britain could have forced its “kind offices” on Japan militarily, as it had enough naval power in the East. However, it chose not to, since Germany, Russia, and the U. S. remained distant to the idea of an intervention. Thus, the reasons for eschewing unilateral action were primarily of a strategic, and only indirectly of a military, nature.

The British incident also gives us the best account of what at the time was considered the strategic rationale for preferring consensual to unilateral action: its effectiveness and its confidence-building nature in an atmosphere of rising mutual suspicion. The British Prime Minister Rosebery (in office 1894–1895), while being harshly criticized for the diplomatic debacle of the abortive intervention in the Sino-Japanese War, defended his policy in a speech held at the Cutlers' Feast in Sheffield on Oct. 9, 1894. He said:

“Why”, you may say, “consult other Powers at all? Proceed on your peaceful mission alone and unaided”. Well, I think the answer is tolerably clear. In the first place, in a great catastrophe of this kind the more Great Powers you have engaged in policy-making the better for peace (Cheers). *The next reason is this, that in all great international concerns a concert of Powers, when it can be obtained, is increasingly valuable.* In my belief, the object of every Foreign Minister of the country should be the aim, whenever he can, to secure a concert of the Powers [...]. [The more mediators, the easier it is to mediate between the combatants.] The other reason – the last reason – is this, and it is one which I am sure will come with a sort of shock to the innocent inhabitants of Sheffield. Gentlemen, it may be news to you *that the Great Powers of Europe, the Great Powers of the world, are profoundly suspicious of each other (laughter) and of innocent Great Britain [...].* You cannot open a paper abroad which does not point to every convulsion in politics, and possibly to some convulsion of nature, as due to British influence. (Laughter.) But certain I am of this – *that in the jealous condition of things produced by the war between China and Japan it would have been madness for this country to have gone alone and attempted to act as bottle-holder between China and Japan without incurring the suspicion of every Power concerned – and all Powers are interested – in the East.* (Cheers.) (*Times* 10.10.1894: 10; emphasis added by the author)

In the age of high imperialism, consensual action remained the only means to achieve positive and lasting results. Since all powers were interested in the East (Near and Far), the concentration of interests diminished the relative authority of one single “streak” against the bundle of other interests involved, hence the need to tie up one’s interests with those of others in order to make one’s position stronger. In a sense, this was no more than the concept of the balance of power tuned to new exigencies. However, it helps to explain the conspicuous increase of the forming of coalitions and alliances in the latter half of high imperialism (Schöllgen 2000: 3).

Effectiveness was one aspect of consensual action. Another, maybe even more important function, lay in its nature to build confidence and allay sus-

pitions among the powers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the debate over the necessity to “act in a European concert” which started after Britain declared its abstention from joint action. As Rosebery observed, the war between China and Japan had produced a general “jealous condition of things” among the European powers. The German state secretary von Marschall, for example, feared that the conflict would escalate: “Such excessive demands [as the annexation of Port Arthur] would bring to the fore the question of China’s future existence, as well as the question of territorial acquisitions by European powers, and thus does not rule out the considerable danger of war for those immediately concerned” (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 262). Thus, there was a strong sentiment among “those immediately concerned” that – at least in matters Far Eastern – they should act together and not exacerbate the “jealous condition of things” by pursuing unilateral action. This conviction accounts for the close coordination between Britain, Russia, and Germany in the initial phase of the Intervention. Incidentally, much of the alarmist propaganda about the “threat of the East” which originated in Germany at the time may have come from the wish to step up external pressure and override internal European jealousies. Kaiser Wilhelm’s advisor von Brandt, in a book published shortly before the Intervention, even invoked the idea of a “United States of Europe” as the only effective means to counter the threat of the East:

What merchant and entrepreneur in East Asia can demand of their governments at home could be summed up in the phrase: “joint protection of shared interests”. [...] The idea of a “United States of Europe” is often being made fun of, yet such a union of European powers is the best means for such purposes, if not the only possibility to protect the commercial, industrial as well as political interests against East Asia.⁶

The message is even more obvious in the notorious “Knackfuss-painting” that was executed according to designs by Kaiser Wilhelm sometime during the summer of 1895. It shows archangel Michael leading the European powers against the “yellow peril” (cf. Gollwitzer 1961: 211–213); one of the powers nudges a visibly reluctant Britannia to join the rally.

However, Britain eventually decided against acting in a “European concert”. The frantic efforts of the continental powers to pull Britain into the “boat” at the last minute have already been described above. Moreover, the rather harsh reaction of the continental press, which began to vilify

⁶ *Die Zukunft Ostasiens: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und zum Verständnis der ostasiatischen Frage* (Stuttgart: Strecker und Moser, 1895), as quoted in *Frankfurter Zeitung* 30.3.1895 (KNJSI 1990: 601).

Britain as soon as Britain's abstention became public, testifies to the fears such a *sonderweg* provoked among the public (KNJSI 1990: 621, 626, 631).

Rosebery's speech and the subsequent developments show that statesmen at the time were very well aware of the altered circumstances of their time, and of the rules which these required. Mutsu's comments on Rosebery's speech show that this awareness was not limited to Europe, but that Japanese statesmen understood these rules as well (cf. Mutsu 1982: 135).

3. The Failing Syllogism of Imperial Diplomacy

The above reflections finally serve to answer the question of why the Japanese decision-makers, considering the factual circumstances, concluded that they could overcome western opposition to the peace terms. Judging the situation from the Japanese perspective, it is most likely they arrived at the conclusion by applying the right rules, but to the wrong factual assumptions.

Acting in the tight web of consensus required transparency of the interests involved. Of all the western powers, Britain and Russia were the powers most likely to intervene, as they obviously had the greatest economic and strategic interests in the area (cf. d'Anethan 1967: 42). Britain had repeatedly tried to mediate or intervene during the war. Russia, too, had tried to contain Japan's activities in Korea (d'Anethan 1967: 21, 24). During the war, Russia "always watched events with great vigilance, relentlessly searching for some opportunity to turn matters to her own advantage". Thus, Mutsu was "convinced throughout that the Russian government's intentions posed a threat to" Japan (Mutsu 1982: 45, 52).

However, several factors made a joint intervention by Britain and Russia unlikely. Vice Foreign Minister Hayashi stated that the ratification of the new treaty with Britain shortly before the outbreak of the war convinced the Japanese leadership that Britain had a generally favorable stance towards Japan (Hayashi 1915: 72–73). Moreover, Britain's initial opposition to the war had gradually weakened, and the commercial stipulations of the peace treaty, "conciliated" Britain's good will. Finally, according to the Belgian minister to Japan, Albert d'Anethan, the Japanese leadership relied on the traditional rivalry between the western powers, especially between Britain and Russia (d'Anethan 1967: 25, 38) to pre-empt a possible "concert" of the two powers.

Thus, Russia seemed isolated. Conspicuously, the terms of the peace treaty benefited Britain, but blatantly ignored Russian interests (a fact which was commented upon in the newspapers, e. g. *Times* 21.04.1895 in KNJSI 1990: 616). Russia had made it sufficiently clear on several occasions that it would not accept the cession of any mainland territory to Ja-

pan. Nobody imagined that France would assist Russian interests in a “concert of powers”, to say nothing of Germany.

France had remained neutral throughout the war, up until the Tripartite Intervention, and had not signaled any willingness to intervene before (Mutsu 1982: 55–56; Hayashi 1915: 71). Thus, France’s participation in the intervention at first puzzled commentators. The *Times* wondered why the continental acquisition of Japan mattered to France (or to Germany), “save in the most indirect way. [After all,] Nations, like individuals, have the utmost repugnance to pulling the chestnut out of the fire for their friends to eat” (*Times* 25.04.1895 in KNJSI 1990: 623). It should be noted that, at the time, the nature and scope of the military alliance between France and Russia was still largely unknown.⁷ The Belgian diplomat d’Anethan still described the alliance as “cordial relations”, which would not extend to military cooperation (d’Anethan 1967: 49), least of all in the Far East. However, the participation of Germany in the intervention had made it an imperative matter of “European politics” for France to join.

The relations between Japan and Germany, until the Intervention, traditionally had been good as well. Germany had opposed Britain’s attempt to intervene in October 1894 (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 244). Mutsu remembered that from “the very outset of the Sino-Japanese War, the actions of the German government were equivocal, to say the least” (Mutsu 1982: 237). While it is true that the German Foreign Office instructed its minister in Japan, von Gutschmid, to warn the Japanese government against demanding territorial cessions on mainland China, the ambiguous wording of the warning did not indicate any involvement of Germany: “European powers have been requested by China to intervene; some of them are principally determined and have come to an agreement to do so”. Considering the previous amicable relations, the warning must even have given the impression that Germany was positively *not* involved. Von Gutschmid also was the first minister to congratulate Mutsu on the signature of the Peace Treaty (Hayashi 1915: 75), and he obviously did not expect that his superior, von Marschall, would confront the Japanese representative in Berlin with the “consequences” of the treaty on the very next day.

Moreover, even if German opposition was expected, the Japanese government thought it would relate to commercial matters only. After all, the world assumed that Germany would continue its traditional course of commercial expansion in the Far East, and did not suspect it to have *strategic*

⁷ In fact, the *New York Times* (11.06.1895: 5) even claimed that Hanotaux’s defense of France’s participation in the Intervention had been the first instance of acknowledging the alliance as such. Russia, until 1897, was even more reluctant to acknowledge the “alliance” in a formal sense (Langer 1965: 446).

interests. When the diplomat d'Anethan reviewed possible opponents of the Peace Treaty shortly before the Intervention, he remarked: "Germany does not seek to exercise influence in Japan. She has only commercial interests there" (1967: 47). Thus Mutsu, two days prior to the Intervention, could not have imagined that German opposition went beyond economic matters, and he observed to his deputy Hayashi that Germany could be easily convinced that the commercial stipulations of the Treaty profited Germany as much as Japan, perhaps even more so (Gaimushō 1953: 5). Mutsu believed that the same tactics used with Britain would apply to Germany as well. And indeed, the "British option" was considered in Germany (Lepsius *et al.* 1923: 267–268). However, the Kaiser categorically stated that, in his eyes, the political side of the conflict prevailed.

Thus, the Japanese decision makers were completely unaware of the "political side" of German interests in the affair. This also explains to some extent why the Japanese government did not even bother to inform the German government of its peace terms. The German government first learned the details of the peace treaty (except the commercial stipulations) from the *Chinese* foreign office. Aoki Shūzō, who blamed Mutsu and Itō for their generally "inconsiderate" policy towards the powers, saw this as another example of the Japanese government's "coldness", especially towards Germany, which in the end provoked Germany to take revenge and join the Intervention (Aoki 1970: 284)⁸. However, this is merely what the German state secretary, von Marschall, wanted Aoki to believe. Internal German documents do not speak of such sentimentalities, and other Japanese diplomats did not accept them as true reasons. Even Hayashi, much later, found the German explanation "strange" and "incomprehensible" (Hayashi 1915: 76).

Thus, the Japanese government did not expect serious opposition from any powers other than Russia, least of all from Germany. An isolated Russia was, according to "common sense" in the diplomatic realm, much less likely to risk unilateral action. If it did, the effort would fail diplomatically, as Britain's had failed before. Finally, even if it came to blows, Western as

⁸ Another reason why Germany had been "left out of the loop" might have lain in the disastrous relationship between the Japanese minister in Germany, Aoki, with Itō and Mutsu in Japan (cf. Aoki 1970: 349–350). The two sides were openly hostile towards each other. This certainly did not help the flow of information between them (one day after the signature of the Peace Treaty Aoki still did not know its terms, whereas his German partners had known for two weeks). However, the fact that the statesmen could not overcome their petty animosities towards each other only accentuates the impression that none of them thought the situation in Germany was worth the bother.

well as Japanese diplomats thought Japan capable of resisting Russia alone (d'Anethan 1967: 45; Nish 1989: 187).

One might wonder what would have happened if the Japanese government had not adopted its strict non-disclosure policy, and informed the powers earlier about the extent of its demands. The course of events shows that, given the interests involved, a multipartite intervention would have been inevitable, and probably no less unpredictable from the Japanese viewpoint. However, the timing of the intervention might have been somewhat more auspicious. The Belgian diplomat d'Anethan observed:

The foreign intervention created the more difficulties for the Government by coming only after the signing of the peace [treaty], when the Emperor had already proclaimed it and in letters, made public, had expressed his satisfaction to his Ministers. Under the circumstances it was twice as hard for the Sovereign to state in a new rescript "His intention to accept the *friendly* counsels of the Powers." (d'Anethan 1967: 50, italics in the Original.)

Thus, the real loss of the Tripartite Intervention was not the Liaodong peninsula, which was lost anyway, but the disillusionment of the Japanese public and a growing radicalization of views on foreign politics.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Tripartite Intervention convinced Japan that diplomacy without real power was too precarious a game. As a consequence, the "postwar administration" carried out an ambitious armament expansion program. The financial, economic, and domestic problems which this program entailed forced the Meiji leaders to abstain from continental "adventures" for the duration of the program. Thus Japan, much to the chagrin of parts of the public, remained passive in the Far Eastern Crisis of 1897/98, when the powers, led by Germany and Russia, procured leases of bases on the Chinese coast (among them Port Arthur). The Japanese government only reluctantly, and in response to British pressure, left its self-imposed isolation and sent expeditionary forces to the continent during the Boxer War in 1900. The Japanese leaders feared that a continental engagement would have implications hard to contain. In a sense, the fear reflected the experience of the Tripartite Intervention. The engagement in the Boxer War eventually led Japan into war with Russia (spurred on by public opinion). The Russo-Japanese War claimed incomparably more victims and ended with an even greater disappointment for the Japanese population than the

Sino-Japanese War. Thus, it is a melancholy fact that, although the Tripartite Intervention has once been called “Japan’s Lesson in the Diplomacy of Imperialism” (Ikle 1967), the experience eventually did not prevent history from repeating.

REFERENCE WORKS

- D’Anethan, Albert (1967): *The d’Anethan Dispatches from Japan, 1894–1910: The observations of Baron Albert d’Anethan Belgian Minister Plenipotentiary and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps.* (Transl. and ed. by George Alexander Lensen). Tallahassee: The Diplomatic Press.
- Eskildsen, Robert (2002): Of Civilization and Savages: The Mimetic Imperialism of Japan’s 1874 Expedition of Taiwan. In: *American Historical Review* 107.2 (April), pp. 388–418.
- Fujimura, Michio (1974): Nisshin sensō [The Sino-Japanese War]. In: Shino-bu, Seizaburō (ed.): *Nihon gaikōshi 1853–1972* [A history of Japanese foreign policy 1853–1972]. Vol. 1. Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, pp. 184–191.
- Gallagher, John and Ronald Robinson (1953): The Imperialism of Free Trade. In: *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 6, 1, pp. 1–15.
- Gollwitzer, Heinz (1961): *Die Gelbe Gefahr: Geschichten eines Schlagwortes. Studien zum imperialistischen Denken.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.
- Gaimushō (ed.) (1953): *Nihon gaikō bunsho* [Documents of Japan’s foreign policy]. Vol. 28, bk. 2: Jan. – Dec. 1895. Tokyo: Nihon Kokusai Rengōkai/Gaimushō.
- Hayashi, Tadasu (1915): *The Secret Memoirs of Count Tadasu Hayashi.* (Ed. by A. M. Pooley). London: Eveleigh Nash.
- Ikle, Frank W. (1967): The Triple Intervention: Japan’s Lesson in the Diplomacy of Imperialism. In: *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, 1–2, pp. 122–130.
- Iriye, Akira (1989): Japan’s drive to great power status. In: Jansen, Marius B. (ed.): *Cambridge History of Japan.* Vol. 5: *The Nineteenth Century.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 721–782.
- Keene, Donald (1971): The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 and Its Cultural Effects in Japan. In: Shively, Donald (ed.): *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 172–175.
- KNJSI (Kokusai Nyūsu Jiten Shuppan Iinkai) (ed.) (1990): *Gaikoku shinbun ni miru Nihon* [Japan as seen through foreign newspapers]. Vol. 2 (*genbun*): 1874–1895. Tokyo: Mainichi Komyunikēshonzu.
- Kunaichō (ed.) (1968–77): *Meiji Tennō-ki* [A Chronicle of the Meiji-Tennō]. 12 Volumes, Index. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Langer, William L. (1965): *The Diplomacy of Imperialism.* 2. ed. New York/London: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Lepsius, Johannes, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy and Friedrich Thimme (eds.) (1923): *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette, 1871–1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes*. Vol. 9: *Der nahe und der ferne Osten*. Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte.
- Maruyama, Kunio (1955): Sangoku kanshō mondai to rekkyō no taido [The Tripartite Intervention and the attitude of the western powers]. In: *Rekishi Kyōiku* 3, 1 (Jan.), pp. 84–89.
- Mutsu, Munemitsu (1982). *Kenkenroku: a Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–95*. (Ed. by Gordon Mark Berger). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nagai, Michio (1954): Herbert Spencer in Early Meiji Japan. In: *Far Eastern Quarterly* IV, pp. 55–64.
- Nish, Ian (1982): The Three-Power Intervention of 1895. In: Davis, A. R. and A. D. Stefanowska (eds.): *Austrina: Essays in Comemoration of the 25th Anniversary of the Founding of the Oriental Society of Australia*. Sidney: Oriental Society of Australia, pp. 204–225.
- Nish, Ian (ed.) (1989): *British Documents on Foreign Affairs. Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part I, From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War. Series E, Asia, 1860–1914*. Vol. 5: *Sino-Japanese War and Triple Intervention, 1894–1895*. Frederick: University Publications of America.
- Paine, S. C. M (2003): *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895: Perceptions, Power, and Primacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosen, Roman Romanovich (1922): *Forty Years of Diplomacy*. 2 Volumes. New York: A. A. Knopf.
- Schöllgen, Gregor (2000): *Das Zeitalter des Imperialismus*. 4. Aufl. München: Oldenbourg.
- Seton-Watson, Hugh (1967): *The Russian Empire, 1801–1967*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Vagts, Alfred (1935): *Deutschland und die Vereinigten Staaten in der Weltpolitik*. 2 Volumes. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Van Evera, Stephen (1984): The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War. In: *International Security* 9, 1, pp. 58–107.
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich (1975): *Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, 1871–1918*. 2. Aufl. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Wippich, Rolf Harald (1987): *Japan und die deutsche Fernostpolitik 1894–1898: Vom Ausbruch des Chinesisch-Japanischen Krieges bis zur Besetzung der Kiautschou-Bucht: ein Beitrag zur Wilhelminischen Weltpolitik*. Stuttgart: Steiner-Verlag.