

The first sino japanese war



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The Japanese government had always had nationalist ideas of expansion, and were determined to conquer territory on the Asian mainland. The Sino-Japanese War was not the first attempt at invading their closest neighbouring country of Korea; during the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1600), Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate government attempted to defeat Korea by invading the peninsula in 1593, which turned out not to be a victory as Japan was not economically or militarily strong enough. By the 1850's, Japan's population was rapidly increasing, and the influence of western societies had led to modernisation.

The Tokugawa government was falling apart, and Japan was seeking expansion onto the mainland, which resulted in a demand for war. Rather than a series of random events, the build-up during the 1870's and 1880's which lead up to the first Sino-Japanese war was more a series of carefully planned moves by Japan to lead China into the war as a part of a successful economic and territorial program, the Meiji Restoration. Halliday, J (1975) stated, 'It is no accident that Korea, Japan's nearest geographical neighbour, was the first object of Meiji Japan's expansionism,' which is certainly true; Japan was interested in Korea for the supply of raw materials for their developing industries, and for land and food for their rapid growing population. Geographically Korea was also positioned perfectly for Japan; it could provide a bridge to attack both China and Russia, gaining support for the government. The most nationalist and aggressive Japanese leaders, such as Itagaki and Saigo, demanded war instantly, and in 1873 they obtained permission to send a military expedition to Korea. However, this attack strategy was abandoned because of

opposition from the individuals returning from the Iwakura mission, which was an expedition in 1871 to study the West to attempt to obtain treaty revision. The members of the Iwakura mission believed that their plan was more important; internal improvements to the nation were said to be a higher priority.

In 1875, the Koreans attacked a Japanese warship which was surveying the coast of Korea. This gave Japan quite a valid excuse to demand a military response right away. They sent a mission to Peking (Beijing), as well as a mission to Korea which was assisted by one of their strongest naval forces. China denied any responsibility for the attack, and asked Japan to negotiate this with Korea instead (which would soon turn out to be a mistake.) Following this incident a year later in 1876, Japan and Korea signed the Treaty of Kangwha – a deal to establish diplomatic relations with each other, opening up two ports to Japanese trade. This led to Japan's realisation of Korea's independence, indicating it was no longer tributary to China. Unable to change this, China proceeded by opening Korea to Western powers such as Britain, France, Germany and Italy, who all signed similar treaties with Korea in between 1882-1886. The treaties assisted in gaining control for Korea later, strengthening the independence of the country. In 1884, while China was occupied in war with France over Vietnam, a group of reformers called The Progressives, led by Kim Ok-kyun took this opportunity to seize the King (with the assistance of Japanese troops.

) However, Chinese troops repelled the Japanese away, leaving Kim Ok-kyun to flee back to Japan. Korea apologized by a convention signed in 1885, and agreed to rebuild the Japanese legation quarters which were burned. These

events showed Japan and China that they had to come to agreements with their disagreeing interests for Korea; neither was truly ready to go to war over Korea. Modernisation was more important for Japan at the time and China believed that they could increase their control over Korea in time. The Treaty of Tientsin in 1885 provided for mutual troop withdrawals and advance notification of any new troop movements into Korea, settling the issue for the time being. As discussed by historian Halliday, Russia was also one of the biggest threats to Japan; Russian territorial gains from 1858 in China made them one of Japan's biggest enemies.

Russia was a real problem for their plans; Russian marines occupied an island between Japan and Korea, Tsushima, as well as the waters (however they lost this position because of British opposition). In 1884, an agreement was made between Korea and Russia, which enabled an ice-free port on the east coast of Korea to be used in return for training the Korean army.

However, the King of Korea was convinced by China not to agree with this plan, and was therefore overruled. In 1891, Russia announced their plans to build the mighty Trans-Siberian Railway. This was the worst news for Japan; building this railway could lead to Russia having control over Korea, destroying Japan's ideas completely. Japan had to move quickly, and the only way to stop Russia's eastward expansion was to have Korea under their control. They knew they did not have much time left to resolve any matters with Korea and China before the completion of the railway would finish Russia's eastward expansion; before it would alter the balance of power in the Far East and preclude any Japanese influence in Korea.

China would not give away their domination of Korea; so therefore, war was the only option left. The first cause of the war was due to the rebellion of an anti-government and anti-foreign religious group, the Tonghak, in March 1894. Notifying Japan (due to the Li-Ito Convention agreement), China sent a force of around 1500 men to assist Korea in defeating the rebellion. Japan reacted by sending a larger troop of around 7000 men; Japan was doing so because they feared that China could possibly gain more control over Korea while defending them from the rebellion. Both the Chinese and Japanese troops were requested by China to be brought back shortly after, as Korea was capable of stopping the uprising by themselves, however, Japan refused to bring back theirs as they believed they were now determined to exploit the situation; they were strong enough to go to war. On July 23 1894, Japanese troops seized the royal palace, after the King of Korea did not accept Japan's programme of reforms. Only two days after this, Japan sank a Chinese-troop ship carrying reinforcements to Korea, the Kowshing.

Japan's actions had made war no longer stoppable, and on August 1 1894, the first Sino-Japanese War was officially declared by Japan. Since China's government, too, was under domestic pressures, there was from this point no hope of avoiding war (Beasley, W. G. 2008).

) As the war was declared, it was thought that Japan simply had no chance up against China due to the difference in size and power of the armies. China had a rapidly larger army and navy than Japan, however, they were still using the traditional weapons; swords and spears. Japan had kept up with the times, and after the Meiji Restoration the Emperor of Japan had decided to Europeanise his country, which meant first modernising his army.

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They used modern weapons which were far more superior to China's; Japan was armed with repeating rifles, designed by a Japanese colonel from European models.

The Japanese navy was also copied from Europe; the dockyards were thoroughly equipped with the best vessels. The equipment of the Japanese Imperial Army easily pushed China's troops out of Korea, and without the railways, most of the battles were only possible at sea. Historian Beasley W. G (2008) stated, "By the end of September 1894" to the surprise not only China, but also the world "the Japanese army controlled most of Korea, while they had command of the Yellow Sea, which is no doubt true; it was not expected that Japan was capable of destroying China with such a small army. But once the Japanese Imperial Navy attacked the Peiyang fleet in the Battle of the Yellow Sea, China and the rest of the world realised that the weapons Japan had access to were fast and accurate; Japan were weakening the Chinese, who by this stage had run out of ammunition and were no longer prepared for war with Japan. The Japanese had the powerful military that China never had expected, and never were prepared for. In early 1895, the Japanese armies progressed to Peking, and they couldn't be stopped. China asked for peace, they were defeated and had nothing left to defend themselves and fight back for the control over Korea.

On 17 April 1895 Li and Ito signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki; accepting Japan's harsh demands and conditions, and officially ending the first Sino-Japanese War. After more than six months of continuous success by the Japanese army and naval forces, China surrendered. After the Treaty of Shimonoseki, China recognised the full independence of Korea, ending its

tributary status. Japan was therefore able to strengthen her influence in the country further, and immediately pressured the Korean government to carry out a reform programme, which they did not accept.

With the support of Russia, the Japanese-instigated reforms were cancelled by the King. So the battle for control over Korea was still present, but only between Japan and Russia. Japan gained many advantages from the Sino-Japanese war. Not only did Japan have more influence on Korea afterwards, but extraterritorial rights were also granted to Japan, and they also received an indemnity of 200 million taels of silver from China, being a great economic benefit to the nation. The Sino-Japanese Commercial Treaty in 1896 also put Japan on an equal footing with the Western powers in China, gaining the same privileges. Japan also earned the right to participate in industry and manufacture in the treaty ports, which were to be excused from taxes. This was absolutely dreadful for the Chinese economy.

Although Japan had achieved what it had set out to accomplish, that is to end Chinese influence over Korea, Japan reluctantly had been forced to abandon the Liaodong Peninsula, in exchange for an increased financial indemnity. While having no objection to the other sections of the treaty, Russia did feel that Japan should not gain the Liaodong Peninsula, for they had their own ambitions in that part of the world. Russia persuaded Germany and France to join her in applying diplomatic pressure on the Japanese, resulting in the Triple Intervention of 23 April 1895. In 1898, Russia ended up obtaining a 25 year lease of the Liaotung Peninsula, which brought Japan and Russia closer to armed conflict. However, even though this infuriated the Japanese, they were still more concerned with Russian encroachment toward

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Korea than this. The victory for Japan proved their ideas for expansionism , militarism and modernisation. .

An armaments programme was launched to increase Japan's prestige army and navy; to make them a leading military power. It improved financial, economic and industrial activities in the country as well as increasing foreign trade, including merchant shipping. Navigation and shipbuilding in Japan also made great progress.

The First Sino-Japanese War stimulated Japan's national pride and power through their victory; it lead them to the world-power status they have today. For the first time in over 2000 years, regional dominance in East Asia had shifted from China to Japan, leading to China suffering a big loss and absolute victory for Japan..

The Japanese success was all due to the modernisation and industrialisation they had successfully embarked upon in the past decades beforehand.. The victory for Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War contributed to establishing Japan as a dominant power of Asia in the modern period today.