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Japan's Status-Driven Restraint Despite Racial Humiliation, 1921–1936

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Abstract

According to recent theories on the intersection of status and race, a combination of a rising power's pursuit of status and its encounter with the racial hierarchy at the international level does not bode well. This is the case because one can assume that such moments drive a rising power to be more aggressive. Given Japan's racial humiliation associated with the rejection of its racial equality proposal at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 and the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 in the United States, why did Japan concede to an inferior ratio in naval size and remain committed to the Washington naval system from 1921 to 1930? Why by the early 1930s did Japan profoundly overturn its status policy and not earlier? Drawing on critical appraisals of the theories that address a rising power's status and its racial anxiety, this article argues that Japan's orthodox foreign policy idea prioritized its higher civilizational status relative to the Western great powers and the rest of East Asia, which generated an elite consensus among civilian and military leaders on accepting the trade-off between reduced military capabilities and increased status from 1921 to 1930 despite racial humiliation. Japan's status-driven restraint persisted until this elite consensus collapsed and the political-economic consequences of the Showa Depression defeated social expectations.

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According to established and burgeoning research on the intersection of status and race, a combination of a rising power's pursuit of status and its encounter with the solid racial hierarchy does not bode well.[1] The majority of the existing literature on a rising power's status highlights the ways in which a rising power's status concern produces destabilizing effects during a power transition.[2] For instance, Steven Ward and Rohan Mukherjee notably suggest that the immovable racial hierarchy at the international level either would unleash domestic and social forces that propel a more revisionist foreign policy or constitute the institutional closedness or procedural unfairness that pushes a rising power to defy the existing international order.[3]

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1 Steven Ward, "Race, Status, and Japanese Revisionism in the Early 1930s," *Security Studies* 22, no. 4 (December 2013): 607–39; Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Rohan Mukherjee, *Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022); T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *Status in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (Summer 2016): 513–50; Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017); Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, *Quest for Status: Chinese and Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019); Joslyn Barnhart, *The Consequence of Humiliation: Anger and Status in World Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Zoltán I. Búzás, "The Color of Threat: Race, Threat Perception, and the Demise of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–1923)," *Security Studies*, 22, no. 4, (December 2013): 573–606; Daegyeong Kim, "Anti-Asian Racism and the Racial Politics of U.S.-China Great Power Rivalry," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University California, San Diego, 2022, San Diego, CA; Bianca Freeman, Daegyeong Kim, and David A. Lake, "Race in International Relations Beyond the 'Norm Against Noticing'," *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (May 2022): 175–95; Philip Streich and Jack S. Levy, "Information, Commitment, and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 489–511; Enze Han, "Racialised Threat Perception within International Society: From Japan to China," *Chinese Journal of International Politics* 15, no.1 (Spring 2022): 272–88; Jonathan Mercer, "Racism, Stereotypes, and War," *International Security*, 48, no. 2 (Fall 2023): 7–48.

2 Paul K. Macdonald and Joseph M. Parent, "Review Article: The Status of Status in World Politics," *World Politics* 73, no. 2 (April 2021): 358–91; Elias Götz, "Review Essay: Status Matters in World Politics," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (March 2021): 228–47.

3 Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, p. 607; Mukherjee, *Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions*, pp. 4–7, 15–19.

As such, Japan's restraint raises questions in light of the existing literature on status and race. Given Japan's racial humiliation associated with the rejection of its racial equality proposal at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 and the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 in the United States, why did Japan concede to the inferior ratio in the size of its navy and remain committed to the Washington naval system from 1921 to 1930? Due to the racial hierarchy unmistakably demonstrated in 1919 and 1924, Japan might have foregone its commitment to the Washington naval system earlier than 1930. But Japan did not do so. An indirect exchange of correspondence between Matsudaira Tsuneo, then the Japanese ambassador to Britain, and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt in November 1934 well illustrates the nature of this puzzle.

When Norman H. Davis, the chair of the U.S. delegation at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, reassured Matsudaira that "the hostility of Japanese people to the inferior ratio was due to a misunderstanding," Matsudaira retorted that "the real cause of the hostility in Japan to the naval ratio originated in their resentment at the Immigration Act." He added that "Japan considered [it] to be a deliberate effort to brand them as an inferior race," and that the Japanese saw this as "reflected in the inferior naval ratio."[4] Japan's demand for naval parity confounded Roosevelt, who was not convinced. He wrote "that continued reference to the Immigration Act is, in my judgment, nothing more or less than a smoke screen – whether it be laid by Japanese militarists or by Japanese Ambassadors."[5] The U.S. leaders were baffled since Matsudaira was the very negotiator on behalf of Japan in 1930 when Japan and the United States concluded the Reed-Matsudaira agreement at the London Naval Conference.

Drawing on critical appraisals of the theories that address a rising power's pursuit of status and its racial anxiety, this article presents a constructivist-realist explanation[6] of Japan's status-driven restraint *in spite of* the moments of racial humiliation in 1919 and 1924 and why Japan profoundly overturned its status policy by the early 1930s and not earlier. Michelle Murray observes that a rising power's "power maximization" is not an uncommon strategy that aims to "obtain recognition and stabilize the insecurity inherent to identity

4 Quoted in Edgar B. Nixon (ed.), *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 2: *March 1934-August 1935* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), 250–51.

5 Quoted in ibid., p. 263.

6 Constructivist realism acknowledges that human interactions and interpretations shape social reality, while also recognizing the existence of objective realities and structures that can constrain human action. J. Samuel Barkin, "Realist Constructivism," *International Studies Review* 5, no. 1 (March 2003): 325–42; Patrick Thaddeus Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, "Constructivist Realism or Realist Constructivism?," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 1 (March 2004): 337–41; Richard Ned Lebow, "Constructive Realism," *International Studies Review*, 6, no. 1 (March 2004): 346–48; Jonathan Kirshner, *Appeasing Bankers: Financial Caution on the Road to War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

formation in anarchy."[7] Nevertheless, Japan's sense of racial alienation among the Western great powers did not result in such a practice of power maximization until the early 1930s.

In short, this article argues that Japan's orthodox foreign policy idea prioritized its higher civilizational status relative to the Western great powers and the rest of Asia, which generated elite consensus among civilian and military leaders on the trade-off between reduced military capabilities and increased status from 1921 to 1930 despite racial humiliation. Japan's status-driven restraint persisted until this elite consensus collapsed and the political-economic consequences of the Showa Depression defeated social expectations in a way that compelled the majority of elites and the public to perceive that a whole set of the orthodox policies, including foreign policy, had failed them and to find an alternative foreign policy idea – status-driven assertion – more appealing after the Great Depression. It demonstrates that domestic economic instability and the U.S. immigration Act of 1924, or the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, had challenged the orthodox idea, but had not resulted in the collapse of the elite consensus until the early 1930s.[8]

Japan could not have faced the status ceiling of the racial hierarchy more clearly than when the United States joined with other nations at the Versailles Conference in 1919 to prevent inclusion of Japan's racial equality clause proposal into the Covenant of the League of Nations and the U.S. Congress passed the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924 that completely prohibited Japanese immigration. As the arguably first non-white great power after World War 1, Naoko Shimazu explains, Japan was uneasy about "its position" within the white great power club,[9] and proposed a racial equality clause to the preamble of the League of Nations at the Versailles Conference. Unfortunately, Australia and the United States misperceived it as a device to validate the Japanese immigration. Britain, partly in response to Australia's prodding, also opposed it. President Woodrow Wilson imposed a unanimity rule to ensure rejection of the proposal. While Wilson vetoed it to "prevent the isolation of Britain" and "ensure the survival of the League of Nations," Shimazu reports,[10] both the U.S. and British delegations were hostile to the Japanese proposal.[11]

7 Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition Before the First World War," *Security Studies*, 19, no. 4 (October-December 2010): 658. See also, Robert S. Ross, "Nationalism, Geopolitics, and Naval Expansion from the Nineteenth Century to the Rise of China," *Naval War College Review* 71, no. 4, (Autumn, 2018): 11–44.

8 Chris Suh, *The Allure of Empire: American Encounters with Asians in the Age of Transpacific Expansion and Exclusion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

9 Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality: The Racial Equality Proposal of 1919* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 112.

10 Ibid., pp. 162–63.

11 Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 287.

Prince Saionji Kinmochi wrote to Japan's emperor that "although we put up a good fight in the Committee on the League of covenant, there was persistent opposition from the British colonies and the Anglo-American delegates finally went back on their earlier acceptance."[12] Five years later, passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 was unambiguously another humiliating moment for the Japanese. As the scale of immigration from Eastern and Southeastern Europe raised racist sentiments on the East Coast of the United States in the 1920s, anti-Asian agitation simultaneously brought about a series of Alien Land Laws on the West Coast, to say nothing of the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that Japanese were ineligible for citizenship in 1922.[13] Until 1924, Japan adhered to the informal Gentlemen's Agreement of 1908 with the United States, where the United States would not prohibit legally the Japanese from immigrating to its country, as it had excluded the Chinese after 1882, in exchange for Japan's voluntary restriction in the number of immigrants from its country to the United States. However, the Immigration Act of 1924 imposed a national origins quota that limited immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and totally excluded immigrants ineligible for citizenship, such as the Japanese.[14] The Immigration Act of 1924 added the Japanese to other Asians that the U.S. Congress already had excluded.

Why does a rising power sometimes pursue its status through military restraint despite such humiliating moments? To make sense of a rising power's voluntary sacrifice of military interest, this article conceptualizes two different ways a rising power claims its great power status. According to Martin Wight, powers can assert prestige in two divergent fashions. On one hand, a great power may "deliberately refrain from using its power or aggrandizing itself," which he calls "the wise enjoyment of prestige." When it "prefers the advantages of not exploiting its power," it can seek status in a manner that voluntarily limits its military buildup. Conversely, a great power may attempt to "force others to admit its power on every occasion," which he understands as "an extreme policy of asserting its honor and interest."[15]

The author in this article refers to these two ways in which great powers pursue status as restraint and assertion. If a great power envisages the advantage of aggregating military capabilities to compel others to recognize

12 Quoted in Ian Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942: Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 287.

13 Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 521–22.

14 Ibid., p. 522; Ryuji Hattori, *Japan at War and Peace: Shidehara Kijuro and the Making of Modern Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2021), 120–21.

15 Martin Wight, *Power Politics*, Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (eds.) (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), 98–99.

its status, the pursuit of status will manifest in the form of assertion. Most established works on status largely focus on the mechanism through which status-driven assertion eventually leads to an armed conflict and war except in a few instances.[16] This is in part because scholars have not observed a rising power's voluntary restraint except in a few cases. This article focuses on the motivations of a rising power's military restraint and how foreign policy ideas and elite consensus play a key role in enabling a rising power's military restraint.

Alongside a status-based motivation, as illustrated in the Table 1, a rising power also may have an interest-based incentive for military restraint, insofar as there is a similar trade-off between military capabilities and other components of material interests, such as economic, financial, industrial, or technological ones. If a rising power seeks a long-term financial, industrial, or technological interest from cooperating with the leading power, a rising power has an interest-based motivation for restraint, too. A rising power's restraint is most likely if it has both status-based and interest-based motivations.

In particular, Japan's status-based motivation for restraint was exceptionally salient, as it faced the racial hierarchy at the international level in the 1910s, yet

TABLE 1 Two Motivations and Relative Priority of Restraint and Assertion

foreign policy ideas	**motivations**	**observable loss**	**observable gain**	**relative priority**
restraint	status-based	military capabilities	international recognition and status	symbolic interest
	interest-based	military capabilities	non-military interest (economic, industrial, and technological)	non-military interest
assertion	status-based	suboptimal composition of military capabilities	maximization of observable military capabilities	symbolic interest
	interest-based	None	maximization of security interest and spheres of influence	military and economic interest

16 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*.

strongly desired recognition as more civilized than the rest of Asia, including China.[17] Japan simultaneously had an interest-based motivation for restraint because it had to rely on international loans to further its industrialization.[18] Japan was not the only example of a great power that exhibited a status-based motivation or an interest-based motivation for restraint, but most of its calls for restraint were not reciprocated frequently.

Drawing from a constructivist-realist framework, this article argues that a rising power is likely to opt for status-driven restraint if a dominant set of orthodox collective ideas enable elite leaders to legitimize the sacrifice of military capabilities and there is a consensus among elites on the acceptability of the trade-off between military capabilities and status.[19] The author follows Jeffrey W. Legro's definition of collective ideas, which "refers to concepts or beliefs held by groups" and "cannot be reduced to individual ideas, belief systems, cognition, or psychology." Collective ideas do not indicate "a monolithic homogenous entity that all societal actors advocate." Individuals are likely to have divergent views on the orthodox idea.[20]

Yet, Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell contend that collective ideas, or "collective assumptions and expectations," can be "deeply entrenched and constrain a state's behavior and freedom of action by defining what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices." Besides, "the impact of major historical events, or the imposition by foreign occupiers" can dismantle or reformulate such collective ideas "due either to the conscious agency of national governments."[21] On the other hand, consensus is critical in that elites are social actors who turn a dominant foreign policy idea into a concrete policy decision for the sacrifice of military capabilities even in the face of political opponents that advocate the alternative foreign policy ideas.

The continuity of U.S. isolationism after World War I, the American shift to internationalism during the years of World War II, the Japanese shift from international seclusion to active modernization in the late 19th Century, and the anti-militarism of Germany and Japan after World War II are notable examples. American isolationism and the idea of Japan's anti-militarism after

17 Fukuzawa Yukichi, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, David A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst (trans.) (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1973), 13–23.

18 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, pp. 289–90.

19 Randall Schweller, "Unanswered Threat: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing," *International Security* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 170–75.

20 Jeffrey W. Legro, "The Transformation of Policy Ideas," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (July 2000): 420.

21 Norrin M. Ripsman, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67–68.

World War II help elites rationalize a foreign policy of restraint on the basis of either non-military interest or enhanced status. When such foreign policy ideas become orthodox ones and the majority of elites coalesce around the acceptable trade-off between military capabilities and either non-military interests or great power status, a rising power is more inclined to accept military restraint.[22]

During a period of the steady erosion of the orthodox collective idea that favors restraint, a rising power still, at times, could maintain restraint insofar as leaders do not choose to overturn the existing elite consensus. When the political-economic consequences of critical events deviate significantly from the social expectations of the majority of societal actors and the public, however, unmet social expectations compel the majority of domestic actors to engage in collective actions on the basis of an alternative idea, such as status-based assertion, and delegitimize the acceptable trade-off that the orthodox collective idea assumes.[23] In this case, whether the orthodox policy actually caused catastrophic political consequences of historical events is not as consequential as whether the majority of societal actors begin to put the onus on an entire set of orthodox collective ideas for starkly undesirable outcomes. It is entirely possible that a certain level of elite consensus remains even when undesirable events disgruntle the majority of the public for a moment. However, if an explosive event totally defeats social expectations and precipitates interactions between some elites that have opposed the orthodox policy and the majority of the disillusioned public, the existing elite consensus could crumble and an alternative policy would replace the existing one.

Granted, not all political-economic crises initiate a transformation of the pre-existing foreign policy. As Barrington Moore Jr. suggests, "economic deterioration by slow degrees can become accepted by its victims as part of the normal situation," especially when "no alternative is clearly visible." Nonetheless, "the significant point is that under these conditions individual grievances in a flash become apparent as collective ones."[24] If a political-economic crisis immensely devastates the social expectations of the majority of societal groups and there is an alternative idea, the opponents of the existing

22 Ibid., pp. 68–69; Jeffrey W. Legro, "Whence American Internationalism," *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 255–62, 268–76.

23 Legro, "The Transformation of Policy Ideas," pp. 424–26; Jeffrey W. Legro, *Rethinking the World: Great Power Strategies and International Order* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 29–41.

24 Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 474–75.

policy idea gain "enhanced leverage in public debates" to effect a change in foreign policy ideas.[25]

In this respect, a constructivist-realist framework better grapples with the continuity of Japan's status-driven restraint until the early 1930s than the existing accounts on Japan's status and race. Further, it accounts well for the shift in Japanese foreign policy from status-driven restraint to status-driven assertion in the aftermath of the arrival of the Great Depression. In the Japanese case, an alternative foreign policy – status-driven assertion – emerged as early as 1920–1921. Yet, the orthodox foreign policy idea was entrenched among the elites, and the previous immigration crisis of 1924 did not upend Japan's status-driven restraint until the Showa Depression dealt a severe blow to social expectations in the early 1930s.

Ward argues that "the appearance of permanently obstructed status demands" can "push states toward radical revisionist policy combinations." Put differently, the shared sense of racial status immobility "unleashes social, psychological and political forces" that make it harder for "moderate leaders to justify policies that participate in the status quo institutions" and create "political advantages for hardliners." His account appeals to "social and domestic political mechanisms to explain how permanently obstructed status ambitions" drive "radical revisionism" that differs from a "distributive revisionism" that does not negate the status quo order but seeks to change the distribution of resources within the status quo system.[26]

As such, a rising power's military restraint and assertion are comparable to Ward's distributive and radical revisionism. However, indices of a rising power's status immobility possibly can be numerous, as Ward traces "the rise of status immobility in Japan" from the Meiji Restoration and the Manchurian invasion in September 1931. For instance, Ward contends that "withdrawal from the League was the consequence of the developments that seemed to confirm that Japan's ambition to join the Western great power club faced a glass ceiling in the form of racial discrimination."[27] But Ward does not clarify the reason

25 Legro, *Rethinking the World*," pp. 30–34.

26 Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, pp. 16–21, 33–34.

27 Here, although Steven Ward follows the conventional account that attributes Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations to the publication of the Lytton Report in the fall of 1932, the Japanese leaders were not fully determined to walk away from the international organization until the Japanese Army's invasion of Rehe in February 1933, which they expected to bring about economic sanctions and the almost inevitable expulsion from the League. Ibid., p. 101. This fact empirically undermines Ward's argument. Katō Yōko, *Manshū jihen kara Nicchū sensō e* [*From the Manchurian Incident to the Sino-Japanese War*] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 2007), 162–69.

why the rejection of the racial equality clause at the Versailles Conference in 1919 and the Japanese Immigration Act of 1924 had not led to a similar shift.

Though Ward concedes that "two important parts of the story" that are "mostly exogenous to status dynamics" are "the economic crisis linked to the Great Depression" and the Manchurian invasion of 1931,[28] the application of the status immobility theory logically falls back on a rising power's perception of racial status immobility. Thus, Ward's theory says little as to why the two most unequivocal moments of Japan's racial status immobility, the Versailles Conference of 1919 and the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, did not provoke Japan's radical revisionism, or Japan's pursuit of status through assertion, but instead Japan's consistent restraint at the naval conferences from 1921–1922 to 1930.

Whereas Ward's status immobility theory is less attentive to the trade-off between material interests and status, Mukherjee's institutional status theory sheds light on the conditions under which a rising power chooses to "sacrifice their material interests for the sake of membership of the great-power club." The institutional status theory posits that "a rising power with an institution that is relatively open and procedurally fair will be more likely cooperate to earn symbolic equality with the great powers." By contrast, "a relatively closed and procedurally unfair institution will cause the rising power to challenge the institution as a way of asserting its claim to status."[29]

Likewise, the institutional status theory presents an array of status-seeking behaviors that a rising power may adopt within the existing international system without necessarily going down the path toward radical revisionism. Between cooperation and challenging, Mukherjee explains, a rising power can "seek to expand the set of criteria for institutional leadership" or "reframe the rules to put itself on a more equal footing with the great powers" if "an institution is relatively closed but procedurally fair" or "open but procedurally biased," respectively. However, while the institutional status theory argues that Japan's policy repetitively changed with the varying degrees in the 1920s in response to the influence of the navy's hardliners and the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, its status-driven restraint continued from 1921 to 1930.[30] For example, the institutional openness and procedural fairness of the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927 and London Naval Conference of 1930 were not so divergent from those of the Washington Conference of 1921–1922. The Japanese navy's investment in "qualitative improvements" and "areas not

28 Ibid., p. 121.
29 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*, p. 6.
30 Ibid., pp. 19, 145–47.

covered by the treaty" in its endeavors to offset the quantitative inferiority was a reasonable asymmetric strategy and not a sudden response to the lower institutional openness from 1922 onward.[31] Contrary to the expectation of the institutional status theory, Prime Minister Shidehara Kijuro played down the immigration crisis of 1924 and suggested that the Japanese ambassador in the United States "refrain from making a reply to the note of the Secretary of the State."[32]

In brief, Japan's status-motivated restraint persisted even after its disillusion at the Versailles Conference and the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 insofar as the political resonance of restraint among elites and the public endured until the early 1930s. According to Mukherjee, Japan's status policy altered twice from 1922 onward and 1924–1930 due to the low openness and high fairness and the low openness and low fairness, respectively.[33] However, this is inconsistent with the empirical fact that Japan was committed willingly to the naval arms limitation at the Geneva Disarmament Conference in 1927 and the London Naval Conference in 1930. The Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927 broke up primarily due to the Anglo-American disagreement.[34]

In fact, as early as the 1920s, Japan's two foreign policy ideas defined the national security and sovereignty of the nation differently. Alongside Japan's interest-based motivation for restraint, the dominant proponents of Japan's orthodox policy legitimized the sacrifice of military capabilities and the idea that "we [Japan] must … turn the conference to our advantage to improve our Empire's *international position*."[35] In contrast, those advocating the alternative idea of status-driven assertion framed equal sovereignty as Japan's right to possess an equal ratio of military capabilities relative to other great powers. In this view, Sadao Asada observes, a sacrifice of military capabilities was not only "the most serious threat" to "Japan's security" but also a source of "unbearable humiliation," or damage to Japan's national honor.[36]

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31 Ibid., pp. 170–74.

32 Quoted in Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, pp. 291–92.

33 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*, p. 146.

34 Phillips Payson O'Brien, *British and American Naval Power: Politics and Policy, 1900–1936* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 191–94.

35 Sadao Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918–1922: The Washington System and the Origins of Japanese-American Rapprochement," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 2 (April 2006): 215.

36 Sadao Asada, "From Washington to London: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the Politics of Naval Limitation, 1921–30," in *The Washington Conference, 1921–22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability, and the Road to the Pearl Harbor*, Erik Goldstein and John Maurer (eds.) (Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1994), 153.

TABLE 2 Japan's Two Foreign Policy Ideas in the Interwar Period

foreign policy ideas	status-driven restraint	status-driven assertion
sovereignty	not as equal as the ratio of military capabilities	right to possess military capabilities of equal ratio
the sacrifice of military capabilities	acceptable for greater non-military interest and great power status	unacceptable humiliation and damage to security interest and status
The primary means to pursue Japan's status	standing alongside more civilized Western powers and asserting Japan's rights and interest towards less civilized powers	maximization of observable military capabilities and spheres of influence
financial stability and national defense	financial stability is a part of national defense as it enables a long-term growth	military buildup at the expense of financial stability directly contributes to national defense

Whereas a rising power's typical foreign policy idea aligns well with status-driven assertion, Japan's orthodox foreign policy idea was status-driven restraint. As presented in the Table 2, the Japanese notion of civilizational hierarchy and its racial uneasiness as the first non-white great power helped shape this orthodox policy idea that brought about a strong elite consensus on the trade-off between greater status and less military capabilities. For instance, Fukuzawa Yukichi, whose discourse on civilization had a profound impact on Japan's modernization as well as imperialism, classified Turkey, China, and Japan as "semi-developed countries," which were below "the most highly civilized" nations of Europe and the United States and above "primitive lands" including Africa and Australia.[37]

Perceiving Japan as a semi-developed nation, Japan's foreign policy idea of status-driven restraint legitimized the material sacrifice of military capabilities

37 Fukuzawa, *An Outline of a Theory of Civilization*, pp. 13–15.

to participate in the more civilized club, the Washington naval system, but at the same time motivated assertive behaviors relative to what it saw as less civilized nations than itself, such as China and Korea. Under Japan's orthodox idea, sovereignty was not necessarily identical to the relative naval ratio. For instance, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo remarked that "security is not the exclusive preserve of soldiers" and that munitions were useless "unless one can exploit industrial power, encourage trade, and really maximize the national strength."[38]

As the author has noted, Japan's orthodox foreign policy idea essentially underlined escaping from the semi-developed states in Asia and joining the "most civilized" nations, such as European countries and the United States. For the sake of Japan's elevated position in the civilizational hierarchy, the orthodox idea prioritized a limited armament that entailed a sacrifice of military capabilities, as well as financial stability. These leaders were wary of Japan's non-white status and the racial hierarchy and made efforts to minimize its detrimental effects, as shown in Japan's racial equality proposal at the Versailles Conference. Their priority, however, was enhancing Japan's international status rather than combating the racial hierarchy itself.

As Shimazu observes, "the proposal had almost entirely to do with Japan's insecurity vis-à-vis Britain and the U.S., and not so much with the lesser powers," given its racialized attitude towards Chinese and Koreans.[39] Likewise, Japan's orthodox policy idea motivated its leaders to move beyond its racial humiliation in relation to the white powers, insofar as they could improve the nation's civilizational standing and also be able to be not so conciliatory towards less civilized states in Asia. Nonetheless, the defeat of the racial equality proposal at the Versailles Conference was deeply mortifying.[40] Makino Nobuaki, one of the Japanese delegates, cautiously expressed their wariness regarding Japan's non-white status:

> There exist the wrongs of racial discrimination which was, and is the subject of deep resentment of the part of a large portion of the human race. *The feeling of slighted* has long been a standing grievance with *certain peoples* …. If this reasonable and just claim is now denied, it will … have the significance of a reflection on *their quality and status* … [and] such a contingency must be borne in mind, for pride is one of the most forceful

38 Quoted in Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, pp. 289–90.
39 Shimazu, *Japan, Race, and Equality*, pp. 113–15.
40 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, pp. 5–6.

> and sometimes uncontrollable causes of human action .... I, for one, entertain *much anxiety* about the possible future outcome of this question
>
> emphasis added.[41]

The League of Nations Commission's rejection of the racial equality proposal gave rise to Japan's fear of isolation or being perceived as an inferior great power in the international hierarchy of status.

Even so, because the orthodox foreign policy idea revolved around the civilizational hierarchy, which might not be precisely the same as the racial hierarchy, and the elite consensus on the pursuit of status was still robust, Japan continued to prefer that observers rank it with the Western powers when the U.S. invitation to attend the Washington Conference arrived on 11 July 1921. Japan's policy memorandum on the fundamental policy toward the Washington Conference evinced the rationale for elevating the Japanese Empire's international position. To illustrate, the Japanese delegates aimed to "wipe out the stigma of a militaristic and aggressive nation and salvage it from diplomatic isolation" and "did their best to convince the Tokyo government to accommodate compromise solutions" for the sake of a successful conference.[42] On the other hand, the alternative idea of status-driven assertion already emerged in the opposition within Japan's navy. The hardliners in this branch of the military, as expected, opposed the sacrifice that amounted to the naval ratio of ten percent.[43]

Japan based its adherence to the principle of a seventy percent ratio as Japan's minimum defense in comparison with the United States on the premise that the enemy armada would require a margin of at least fifty percent superiority over the defending fleet.[44] The special committee on arms limitation submitted a resolution in late June 1921, which suggested that Japan "absolutely requires a naval ratio of 70% or above vis-à-vis the American Navy." Hence, the sacrifice of military capabilities certainly would undermine Japan's national defense, security, and honor from the perspective of hardliners like Vice Admiral Kato Kanji. The seventy percent implied Japan's maximum concession. He deemed the American proposal as an "outrageous" demand to

41 Quoted in Morinosuke Kajima, *The Diplomacy of Japan* [*Nippon Gaiko Shi*], *1894–1922*, Vol. III: *First World War, Paris Peace Conference, Washington Conference* (Tokyo: Kajima Institute of International Peace, 1980), 411–13.

42 Quoted in Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918–1922," p. 215.

43 Ibid., pp. 223–24.

44 Sadao Asada, "The Revolt against the Washington Treaty: The Imperial Japanese Navy and Naval Limitation, 1921–1927," *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 3 (Summer 1993), 87.

restrain the Japanese navy from ascending and to "deprive the Imperial Navy of its supremacy in East Asia."[45]

Still, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo subordinated military-strategic needs to the orthodox idea of status-based restraint.[46] Status-driven restraint guided the strategic priority of the Japanese elites who were determined to concede the proposed naval ratio. Most notably, Kato Tomosaburo spelled out the difference between his orthodox policy idea compared with the alternative policy idea. He admitted that Kato Kanji's position "is quite proper if viewed only from the standpoint of naval defense." But, he added, "it is of utmost importance for the security of our nation to take a larger view of the matter and insofar as possible to take the initiative to improve the Empire's international position and promote cooperation with the U.S. and Britain."[47]

As navy minister, Admiral Kato Tomosaburo was "a figure of towering prestige and unquestioned leadership" within and outside the Japanese navy and capable of defying "any challenge from his subordinates," including the hardliners of the "command group" in the Navy General Staff, or "the fleet faction," that Kato Kanji represented. Kato Tomosaburo symbolized "the administrative group" in the Navy Ministry, or "the treaty faction," as well as the orthodox idea of status-driven restraint consistent with his "navy orthodoxy." The Japanese cabinet appointed Kato Tomosaburo as the head of the Japanese delegation to the Washington Naval Conference to rein the hardliner's opposition.[48] Afterwards, Kato Tomosaboru became the prime minister from 1922 to 1923 until he died in office, whereas Kato Kanji continued to be hostile to the orthodox idea of status-driven restraint.

At the time of the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–1922, the opposition of hardliners, Asada reports, was a minority view and "did not in the slightest affect" Kato Tomosaburo's "command of the situation." Kato Tomosaburo had secured approval of his position "from top naval leaders, especially Fleet Admiral Togo [Heihachiro]." Once Kato garnered the approval of the naval leaders in Tokyo, the principal delegates reached a provisional agreement on the naval treaty on 15 December 1921. By February 1922, moderate civilian leaders prevailed and Japan signed the Five-Power Naval Treaty on 6 February. The Japanese delegates were content with "the unexpectedly sympathetic

45 Quoted in Asada, "From Washington to London," p. 148.

46 Asada, "The Revolt against the Washington Treaty," p. 87.

47 Quoted in Sadao Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor: The Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2006), 84.

48 Sadao Asada, "The Japanese Navy and the United States," in *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931–1941*, Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto (eds.) (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1973), 226–29.

attitude of American delegates."[49] Moreover, they appreciated "American efforts not to hurt our feelings or honor." The reports of the delegates stated that the "American attitude toward Japan is surprisingly friendly compared with the Japanese-American confrontation at the Paris Peace Conference." The Japanese thought that Secretary of State Charles Evans "Hughes has respected Japan's position as much as possible."[50] Like Kato Tomosaburo, Foreign Minister Shidehara had based his approach on the orthodox policy idea and assumed a broader view of security that embraced the sacrifice of military capabilities in exchange for Japan's higher status and non-military elements of national power since 1924.[51]

Shidehara and Tanaka Giichi, the two foreign ministers from 1924 to 1931, still operated within the orthodox idea and carried on Japan's status-driven restraint when coping with the Western great powers in connection with the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927, the Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact of 1928, and the London Naval Conference of 1930. The Japanese elites' decisions after 1924 adhered to the orthodox policy in spite of the unfortunate U.S. passage of the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924. The orthodox idea did not fall apart and the elite consensus on Japan's status-driven restraint lived on despite the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, as well as the financial crises during the 1920s that gave rise to political-economic discontent among the public to some extent.[52]

Shidehara, "an internationalist who advocated cooperative diplomacy with the U.S. and the UK," Ryuji Hattori explains, previously served as the vice-minister for foreign affairs and Japan's ambassador to the United States before assuming office as foreign minister from 1924 to 1927 and 1929 to 1931.[53] As the head of the Seiyukai cabinet in April 1927, General Tanaka Giichi took office as both prime minister and foreign minister until 1929. While Tanaka showed a stronger resolve to dispatch troops to deal with the ongoing conflict with China than Shidehara did, he inherited and largely retained the orthodox idea of status-driven restraint in Japan's dealings with the United States.[54]

Between December 1923 and July 1924, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 dominated "discussions of international politics in Japan" and "a public

49 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, pp. 88, 90–91.
50 Quoted in Asada, "Between the Old Diplomacy and the New, 1918–1922," p. 228.
51 Akira Iriye, *Japan and the Wider World: From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London and New York: Longman, 1997), 54.
52 Jerome B. Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973).
53 Hattori, *Japan at War and Peace*, p. 3.
54 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, pp. 152–54.

protest erupted nationwide" after the final approval of the bill during the period between the introduction of the immigration bill and passage of the law.[55] However, the public protest "gradually disappeared to be superseded by a less emotional, more realistic elite response, articulated for the most part by Japanese diplomats and government bureaucrats," as Lee Arne Makela depicts. The Japanese participation in the subsequent international conferences well prove Makela's point.[56]

In addition, Shidehara sought to manage the crisis related to the Immigration Act of 1924 and was reluctant to issue a protest to the United States formally. Shidehara explained that "whatever form of protest is carried out, it will ultimately not succeed in changing the mind of the U.S. government." It was no wonder that he would cease to continue Japan's protests over the immigration issue once he took office as foreign minister. Considering the upcoming presidential election in the United States, Shidehara posited that "pressing Japan's case further would only uselessly inflame the sentiments of the citizens of the two nations" and "complicate further the situation without serving any useful purpose."[57]

Therefore, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 did not undermine fundamentally the existing elite consensus on status-based restraint. Mukherjee similarly admits that "Japanese elites, initially outraged, tried to discourage public protest in an effort to repair diplomatic relations with Washington." However, he also argues that "the 1924 immigration law dealt a severe blow to Japan's major-power identity" and adduces the remarks of a scholar, a journalist, an American adviser to Japan's foreign ministry, the public, newspapers, and a Diet member. These demonstrated the heightened political agitations at the domestic level after 1924, but did not translate into Japan's foreign policy decisions.[58]

The orthodox policy idea subsumed both financial stability and the acceptable trade-off between higher standing and reduced military capabilities as an important part of Japan's national defense. The former component in part displayed Japan's interest-based motivation for restraint, but Japan's adherence to the gold standard simultaneously symbolized its great power status. For the elite supporters of status-based restraint, financial retrenchment went hand in

55 Lee Arne Makela, "Japanese Attitudes Towards The United States Immigration Act of 1924," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1973, Palo Alto, CA, p. vi.

56 Ibid., p. vii. See also, Masayo Umezawa Duus and Peter Duus, *The Japanese Conspiracy: The Oahu Sugar Strike of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 309–12.

57 Quoted in Hattori, *Japan at War and Peace*, p. 122; Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, p. 291.

58 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*, pp. 178–82.

hand with military restraint for Japan's greater status. These elites put financial retrenchment into action as a part of the orthodox policy idea in the 1920s. The Washington Five-Power Treaty allowed Japan to curtail its naval budget in 1923 and to remain solvent.[59]

Kato Tomosaburo enunciated that "we cannot find any country apart from the United States which can supply us with a loan … [and] while Japan was experiencing the greatest financial difficulties in completing her own 8-8 program, she could not cope with further American naval expansion" in December 1921.[60] Kato's remark reveals the establishment's awareness of Japan's financial relative weakness and instability and how the orthodox idea of military restraint was intertwined closely with the political case for financial austerity. The comprehensive definition of Japan's national interest in the orthodox idea placed its international status and financial stability over military expansion and increased government spending.

While the Japanese elites who held a strong belief in the orthodox policy idea had interest-based motivations to be keen on Japan's balance of payments and financial soundness, given financial crises of different scales Japan had undergone in the 1920s, their consistent pursuit of the gold standard was more of ideational or symbolic nature. For example, the year of 1920 started with a stock-market panic in March, bank failures followed in 1922, and the Kanto earthquake in September 1923 triggered a financial crisis. Another financial panic arose again from February to March in 1927. Through it all, the orthodox idea of restraint and financial stability held sway and total government expenditures, Jerome B. Cohen reports, "showed virtually no change," leading the percentage of armament to total expenditures to fall from 47.8 percent in 1920 to 28.4 percent in 1930.[61]

Though the Seiyukai party, whose political base was in "rural and agricultural districts," relatively preferred "a policy of government spending on public works" and the Keiseikai party, whose traditional power base was in financial sectors, favored "reduced government spending and balanced budgets," Jonathan Kirshner notes that both parties converged on "a return to the gold standard in principle." Despite such differences between the two parties, Kirshner adds, they "agreed on much, including the overall goal of restoring the gold standard." On balance, the 1920s witnessed the political victory of the financial sector at the expense of military and agricultural sectors in line with the orthodox idea. Hamaguchi Osachi rose to prominence

59 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 100.
60 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, p. 290.
61 Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction*, p. 4.

in 1920 by critiquing government spending and inflation and then as finance minister from 1924 to 1926, Kirshner explains, carried out "a retrenchment and readjustment of government finance." Once he became prime minister in 1929, the Hamaguchi cabinet maintained the same policy idea and sought to restore the gold standard, subsequently lifting the gold embargo the next year.[62]

Likewise, the impact of the Immigration Act of 1924 on the orthodox idea of status-driven restraint and financial stability was bounded, even though it certainly outraged the advocates of status-driven assertion and the Japanese public. Concerning the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927 and the London Naval Conference of 1930, the continuity of Japan's status-driven restraint and the elite consensus on the trade-off were more unequivocal. As the foregoing section shows, the supporters of status-driven assertion within the Japanese navy that Kato Kanji represented did not endorse the Washington Five-Power Treaty from 1921 to 1922. The Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 might have reinforced their conviction that the Washington naval system, Mukherjee writes, "was also unfair in the way it privileged smaller white European nations and clubbed Japan with the rest of Asia that Japan sought to leave behind."[63]

However, this was still a minority view inside the Japanese navy. Let alone Japan's position at the Geneva Disarmament Conference of 1927, "the majority opinion" of the Japanese navy viewed the Washington naval system as having benefited Japan according to the navy's research committee report on arms limitation of September 1928.[64] Notably, even before the passage of the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924, the supporters of status-driven assertion had a notion of inevitable war with the United States, partly due to intractable economic problems and racial prejudice. By February 1923, the revised Imperial National Defense Policy removed the elder Kato's principle of avoidance of war with the United States and partly embraced this more aggressive presupposition.[65]

This policy stipulated that "in addition, anti-Japanese agitation in California, spreading to other states, is growing in strength," Asada writes. "The Californian exclusion of the Japanese is becoming more deep-rooted … [and] the longstanding embroilment, rooted in economic problems and racial prejudices, is extremely difficult to solve, and the conflict of interests and estrangement of emotion will become increasingly serious in the future."[66] Hence, while the presence of racial bias and prejudice in the United States that California legislation in 1913 and 1920 confirmed was already indisputable by

62 Kirshner, *Appeasing Bankers*, pp. 62, 64, 66–67.
63 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*, p. 180.
64 Ibid., p. 183.
65 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 101.
66 Ibid., p. 102.

the early 1920s,[67] the reactions to the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 diverged between the advocates of status-driven restraint and those favoring status-driven assertion. The majority of elites that championed the orthodox foreign policy idea conceived Japan as having a higher status. For the other group of elites supporting assertion, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 was another confirmation that U.S. racial bias was so entrenched that Japan should not accept a further sacrifice of military capabilities.

For instance, Navy Vice Minister Osumi Mineo, an ally of Kato Kanji, insisted that a ratio below seventy percent concerning auxiliary vessels would be unacceptable for Japan during preparatory discussions for the Geneva Disarmament Conference in late March 1927. Meanwhile, Vice Chief of the Naval General Staff Nomura Kichisaburo took the orthodox view, arguing that a sixty percent ratio should be acceptable. The pre-existing elite consensus remained intact. Prior to attending Geneva Disarmament Conference in February 1927, the Wakatsuki cabinet was eager to extend its cooperative relations with the United States and secure Japan's international position. Japan's chief delegates, Asada reports, considered the seventy percent ratio as "a mere criterion for negotiations," and not as a "strict mathematical figure absolutely required for national defense."[68] In particular, they delivered a clear warning to the other naval officers sympathetic to the alternative idea of status-based assertion:

> We have to consider what is the best thing to do from the viewpoint of our actual present *national power*, from the viewpoint of the national interest and the people's welfare, from the viewpoint of the armament necessary for our future expansion, and from the viewpoint of *continuing to be ranked among the nations* supporting peace. Bluffing is inadvisable … [because] our economic strength, our industrial power, *our sense of honour*, our international morality will be increasingly understood and respected by the world. Gradually, the nation's power will become strong …. In other words, *we must refrain from acting like automatons and trying to increase our naval strength by means of one or two international conferences*
>
> emphasis added.[69]

67 Nish, *Japanese Foreign Policy, 1869–1942*, pp. 131–32.

68 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 113–14.

69 Quoted in Tatsuo Kobayashi, "The London Naval Treaty, 1930," in *Japan Erupts: The London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928–1932*, James William Morley (ed.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 14.

Japan's chief delegates based their argument on the idea of status-driven restraint that defined continuing to be ranked among the nations as the higher priority of Japan's foreign policy.

By contrast, the proponents of status-driven assertion pushed back against the orthodox idea and took the lower naval ratio as a manifestation of Japan's inferior status. When Navy Vice Minister Osumi denounced any compromise with the seventy percent ratio, Saito Makoto, a member of Japan's delegation to the Geneva Disarmament Conference, further "scolded" these hardliners and reminded them of "broad views on national defense" that should involve "winning greater respect and understanding from the rest of the world." He also was aware of a chance that Japan's demand for parity "would arouse antipathy."[70] Saito spoke of Prime Minister Wakatsuki Reijiro, who appointed him one of the chief delegates. He countered the voice of the alternative idea of status-driven assertion, settling the argumentation among the naval members of the Japanese delegation. In a similar vein, the Japanese naval advisors in Geneva reminded Navy Vice Minister Osumi that Vice Chief of the Naval General Staff Nomura had agreed "not to base the ratio question on a strictly strategic [operational] viewpoint but on broader considerations for Japan's international position."[71]

This alternative policy idea of status-driven assertion reemerged at a moment just prior to the London Naval Conference of 1930. From the standpoint of the alternative policy idea, Japan was entitled to naval parity, which Japan eventually demanded by 1934, and a seventy percent ratio was a significant concession in itself. For Kato Kanji, the sovereign right of Japan was identical to the right to have equal naval capabilities, and "the real issue at stake" in regard to its relative naval ratio was not merely a matter of naval power, but Japan's national prestige. He additionally attributed the Immigration Act of 1924 to Japan's orthodox idea and timid diplomacy.[72] Granted, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 had exacerbated Kato's negative view of the Washington system.[73]

Nonetheless, Prime Minister Hamaguchi's remark before the London Naval Conference of 1930 evinced the persistence of the orthodox policy idea. As he elaborated,

> there are both broad and narrow views on national defense. The narrow view is merely concerned with the size of armaments, whereas the broad

70 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 115–16.
71 Ibid., pp. 114–16, 119.
72 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, pp. 130–31.
73 Mukherjee, *Ascending Order*, p. 185.

> view takes into consideration not only armaments but also friendly international relations and the enhancement of national resources.[74]

The Hamaguchi cabinet's foremost tasks consisted of financial retrenchment and promotion of Japan's international standing. To this end, Hamaguchi appointed Wakatsuki Reijiro, former finance minister and prime minister, as the head of the Japanese delegation to the London Naval Conference.[75] Japan signed the final outcome of the London Naval Conference in April 1930.

The initial public reception of the London Naval Treaty, Jack Snyder reports, was "overwhelmingly favorable." The Japanese press issued positive commentary and on 19 June 1930 a crowd of people at the Tokyo Station unprecedentedly welcomed the returning negotiators as heroes with loud shouts of "Banzai [hooray]."[76] Snyder further explains that the media downplayed the internal opposition within the navy as "special pleading," and warned the populace not to allow "the navy's abuse of its monopoly of technical knowledge in arguing against the agreement" to sway them. The orthodox foreign policy idea persevered and parliamentary democracy functioned at least through the elections of 1928 and 1930.[77] But the social foundations in which the orthodox foreign policy and the elite consensus were grounded were undermined greatly soon after 1930. By the time repercussions of the Great Depression struck Japanese society with the Showa Depression of 1930–1931, Charles A. Kupchan explains, the majority of the public had become profoundly disillusioned with the orthodox policy and "parliamentary government," if not "the whole tenor of Taisho Japan's bourgeois, democratic society." Whereas other historical events of the 1920s had led the public to cast doubt on the existing policy, but not abandon it, a devastated public after 1930–1931 began to discredit and challenge the existing domestic political order and the ruling elite's foreign policy idea as a whole.[78]

The public directed its explosion of discontent, Kupchan observes, against "those who upheld … the existing order," or the elite establishment that had rationalized financial stability and status-driven military restraint. The advocates of assertion in the military found the right moment to capitalize on "the wave of popular discontent that emerged during the depression" and went

74 Quoted in Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 131.
75 Ibid., pp. 131–32.
76 Ibid., pp. 153–154.
77 Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 139–40.
78 Charles A. Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 316–17, 320–21.

the extra mile to lobby and mobilize the public to tilt the domestic political environment in favor of their alternative idea.[79] Those who spearheaded the alternative foreign policy idea within Japan's navy, Snyder writes, "mounted an overwhelming counterattack through the press, through public speeches around the country, and through popular navy leagues and ultranationalist societies."[80] By 1932, a set of orthodox policy ideas had fallen apart, and the elite consensus on the trade-off between status and military interest was untenable. Public attitudes and Japan's domestic political environment had undergone fundamental changes in a way that legitimized the alternative policy idea of status-driven assertion.

The majority of the public and the elite advocates of status-driven assertion "soured on" the orthodox policy idea. Furthermore, the Japanese people "were ripe for a change" in both Japan's foreign policy and the domestic political order. It was not a coincidence that political crises markedly escalated at this point into a series of assassinations of those who established the orthodox policy idea. In 1932, members of *Ketsumeidan*, a secret ultranationalist society, murdered Inoue Junnosuke, the former finance minister during 1923–1924 and 1929–1931, the former governor of the Bank of Japan during 1919–1923 and 1927–1928, and a relative of the president of Mitsubishi and the director of the Mitsui Bank.[81] Some suggest that the Great Depression further radicalized the Japanese army, but not the Japanese navy. But as the foregoing analysis has shown, the proponents of status-driven assertion within the navy existed as early as 1920 and by the early 1930s their increased influence became unruly.

In other words, failed social expectations that resulted from the consequences of the Great Depression reinforced the advocates of the alternative policy idea, namely status-driven assertion, in both the army and the navy. The 15 May incident of 1932 epitomized this shift. After two failed assassination attempts against Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi in February and March 1932, army and navy militants finally murdered him on 15 May 1932.[82] While the reactionary young officers in the navy assassinated Prime Minister Inukai, S. C. M. Paine contends, for the sake of "an undefined Showa restoration" and the navy purged the officers,[83] the cadets in the army, *Ketsumeidan,* and the public backed them. The light sentences the young officers received, as well as broad public

79 Ibid., pp. 315–16.
80 Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, p. 140.
81 S. C. M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire: Grand Strategy from the Meiji Restoration to the Pacific War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
82 Ibid., p. 116.
83 Ibid., p. 99.

support for them, indicated a critical shift in the domestic political setting of Japan. The public evidently judged them to be "heroes."[84]

The 15 May incident of 1932 had a tremendous impact on the balance of power between the Navy Ministry and the Navy General Staff. Specifically, Asada explains, it provided Vice Chief of the Navy General Staff Takahashi Sankichi, a confidant of Kato Kanji, "with additional leverage" to "expand the authority of the Navy General Staff" compared with the Navy Ministry within the navy, as Takahashi dramatized "the necessity of placating the young malcontents."[85] Unsurprisingly, the advocates of assertion within the navy pressed now Navy Minister Osumi to force out moderate senior officers from 1933 to 1934.[86] Osumi explicitly claimed in an interview with the correspondent of the United Press in Tokyo as early as 1933 that "we are not satisfied with the present arrangement and we will demand the change of ratios at the next conference."[87] With the completion of this "Osumi Purge," there were no other constraints that could block the Japanese navy from abandoning the idea of restraint and choosing the path of status-driven assertion.[88] From 1933 to 1936, Osumi had the solid backing of the naval elites as well as favorable public opinion.

As Asada comments, "public opinion in 1934 was different from that at the time of the London Conference" and "above all, the memory of the 15 May 1932 Assassination immobilized" the conventional elite consensus of civilian leaders.[89] Only after the disintegration of the orthodox policy idea and the breakdown of the elite consensus behind it did the negative interpretation of the inferior naval ratio officially resurface. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Joseph C. Grew reported the possibility that Japan's demand for parity.[90] By 1934, Matsudaira Tsuneo, then Japan's ambassador to Britain, proposed an agreement to Secretary of State Cordell Hull that "the U.S. and Japan mutually recognize the Eastern Pacific and the Western Pacific for the U.S. and Japan respectively," which was clearly a non-starter for the United States.[91]

Japan "openly demanded naval parity, a common upper limit, with the U.S. and Britain" at the upcoming second London Naval Conference from 1935 to

84 Kupchan, *The Vulnerability of Empire*, pp. 319–21; Snyder, *Myths of Empire*, p. 141.

85 Asada, "The Japanese Navy and the United States," p. 231.

86 Asada, "The Revolt against the Washington Treaty," p. 94.

87 "Interview Given by the Japanese Minister of Marine (Osumi [Mineo]) to the Correspondent of the United Press in Tokyo," enclosure to "The Ambassador in Japan ([Joseph C.] Grew) to the Secretary of State," 15 September 1933, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [hereafter *FRUS*], *Japan: 1931–1941* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1943), 1: 251–53.

88 Asada, "From Washington to London," p. 183.

89 Asada, *From Mahan to Pearl Harbor*, p. 197.

90 "The Ambassador in Japan (Grew) to the Secretary of State," 15 September 1933, *FRUS*, *Japan: 1931–1941*, vol. 1, pp. 249–51.

91 Cordell Hull, *Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 281.

1936.[92] On 24 October, Matsudaira averred, "any treaty agreement not to build beyond a certain level within the maximum would constitute, in essence, a disguised continuance of the ratio system and *would be interpreted as a perpetuation of naval inferiority by the Japanese people* [emphasis added]."[93] The same Matsutaira of the London Naval Conference of 1930 now spoke in the language of status-driven assertion. The domestic political landscape was shaken up and compelled Japan to adhere to this idea. At last, Japan in 1935 abrogated the Washington Five-Power Treaty, retracting its engagement as well from the second London Naval Conference in 1936.

Undoubtedly, the Japanese Exclusion Act of 1924 enraged the proponents of the alternative idea of status-driven assertion within the navy and caused a massive upheaval among the Japanese public nationwide. Nevertheless, the fact was that every step Japan had taken within the boundary of the orthodox foreign policy of financial retrenchment and status-driven restraint was a source of outrage for the supporters of the alternative idea of status-driven assertion from 1921 to 1930, including Japan's initial participation in the Washington naval system. Until the Showa Depression of 1930–1931 took hold, the defenders of the orthodox policy were capable of legitimizing the agreed-upon naval ratio as a badge of its great power status and attempted to steadily raise its relative naval ratio from sixty percent of the Washington Five-Power Treaty in 1921 to 69 percent of the Reed-Matsudaira agreement in 1930.

This Japanese case study of the interwar period is a reminder that the relationship between clear indices of racial hierarchy at the international level, or racialized moments, and a non-white rising power's foreign policy is not inevitably linear. Rising powers are more likely to filter external indications of racial status immobility and institutional closedness or unfairness through its lens of its dominant foreign policy idea at a given moment. Japan's orthodox foreign policy idea prioritized status-based restraint and focused more on Japan's civilizational standing relative to the Western great powers and the rest of the Asian states than on racial status itself. Until undesirable political-economic consequences of a critical event overturn the social foundations of the pre-existing policy idea and elite consensus, a rising power's orthodox policy idea may not shift swiftly despite some racialized moments.

In other words, the effect of international racial hierarchy on a rising power's pursuit of status is neither always necessarily linear nor ineluctably conflictual. Though the moments of outright racial humiliation and the sense

92 Ibid., pp. 444–49.

93 "The Chairman of the American Delegation ([Norman H.] Davis) to the Secretary of State," 24 October 1934, *FRUS*, *Japan: 1931–1941*, vol. 1, pp. 254–55.

of racial status ceiling certainly could provoke a rising power into seeking a radically revisionist policy, the effect of racial hierarchy is bound to filter through the dominant foreign policy idea of the time. The effect would be moderate if the orthodox foreign policy idea is amenable to elite consensus on the trade-off between military capabilities and great power status. However, if historical events that deal a major blow to social expectations upend the social foundations of the preexisting foreign policy idea and elite consensus, the alternative foreign policy idea will gain more traction. A more nuanced understanding of the effect of international racial hierarchy on a rising power's pursuit of status will help to better grapple with the status policy of another non-white great power of our time, specifically the People's Republic of China in the 21st Century.

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