SOLUTION IN ASIA

By Owen Lattimore

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The Desert Road to Turkestan

High Tartary

Manchuria, Cradle of Conflict

The Mongols of Manchuria

Inner Asian Frontiers of China

Mongol Journeys

America and Asia

The Making of Modern China
(*with Eleanor Lattimore*)

Solution in Asia

TO

ELEANOR

FOREWORD

THIS book took shape out of two lectures on "Japan and the Causes of War in Asia" and "Japan and the Future of America" at Omaha, Nebraska, in March 1944, constituting the Fourth Annual Baxter Memorial Lectures sponsored by the University of Omaha. Other ideas developed in the book come from a lecture on "The Cause of Freedom in Asia" given under the Mayling Soong Foundation at Wellesley College in April 1944. The lectures were given prior to the Bretton Woods conference on financial and monetary questions and the Dumbarton Oaks conference on a future world organization; the results of these two conferences have enabled me to deal much more positively with certain questions of the future. I have also been able to make allowance for the important military events in the Pacific and China during the summer and fall of 1944, and the rapidly changing political situation in China.

I wish especially to acknowledge the care and patience with which my father, David Lattimore, and my wife, to whom this book is dedicated, have read the manuscript and helped in its revision.

OWEN LATTIMORE

Ruxton, Maryland

CONTENTS

SOLUTION IN ASIA

CHAPTER I

THE IMPORTANCE OF ASIA IN WAR AND POLITICS

IN FIGHTING this war we have come to a watershed dividing two periods of history. The landscape leading up to it is more or less familiar, and accordingly we often speak of World War II, comparing this war with World War I. The landscape on the far side is felt to be unknown and this accounts for an intense and often doubting interest in the future.

It is the importance of Asia which makes this war a watershed. Asia was for several centuries an area in which political history and the economic fate of hundreds of millions of people were determined by things that happened somewhere outside of Asia. We have now crossed over into a period in which things happening in Asia, opinions formed in Asia, and decisions made in Asia, will largely determine the course of events everywhere in the world.

Our ability to see beyond the watershed to reconnoiter the future depends largely on whether we have enough knowledge of Asia and enough con-

fidence in our knowledge to use it as a surveyor uses his instruments. If we feel that the data of Asia are more or less comparable to the data of horse racing, we shall waste our opportunity at the end of this war by playing hunches in politics and treating our own future as one big gamble.

Americans in pre-Pearl Harbor Asia lived in a world of privilege; either colonial privilege or the special advantages conferred by treaty in China. The American businessman in Asia rarely had to get out and hustle. He held key positions and could afford to wait until the business was brought to him. In politics, the Asiatic was always the petitioner; and a life which demands no keener political perception than is needed to accept some petitions, reject others, and forward still others to higher quarters, does not strenuously develop the brains of the professional diplomat.

Even in Japan, the foreigner was lulled by a sense of superiority and advantage. The Japanese, not strong enough to challenge openly the world order in which they held a second-rate position, necessarily worked for long years in secret to prepare their "New Order in East Asia" before they tried to set it up by force. Although in the period between 1931 and Pearl Harbor the secrecy had worn diaphanously thin, the Japanese were saved by the fact that the majority of the experts had by then, through patient adherence to habitual thinking, developed a portentous technique for seeing through

brick walls and no aptitude for seeing through glass.[1]

American lack of facility in Asiatic languages is a good gauge of the shallowness of American expert knowledge of Asia. Or, to put it the other way around, the premium on the knowledge of English

[1] On October 20, 1941, less than two months before Pearl Harbor, our ambassador in Tokyo set down his thoughts about the replacement of Prince Konoye, the slow-motion imperialist, by General Tojo, the hair-trigger militarist. Because the American press and radio were "almost universally interpreting the present government as a preliminary move leading to an attack on Russia or to some other positive action which will inevitably bring about hostilities between Japan and the United States," our ambassador thought it well to "set forth certain factors, some based on fact and others on valid assumption," which would "indicate that the opinion which appears to have been accepted by the American public . . . may not be an accurate appraisal. . . ." These included: —

1. "We think that a reasonable motive for the resignation . . . was Prince Konoye's belief that the conversations with the United States would make more rapid progress if our Government were dealing with a Prime Minister whose power was based on a commanding position in and on support of the Army. . . ."
2. ". . . indications of a willingness on the part of the Tojo Government to proceed with the conversations . . . would imply that it is premature to stigmatize the Tojo Government as a military dictatorship committed to the furtherance of policies which might be expected to bring about armed con-

and other European languages by Asiatics is a good index of the status of privilege which Americans enjoyed. The young American businessman did not need to learn more than the smattering of Chinese, Japanese, Malay, or pidgin English which made it easier to give orders to servants. His promotion did not depend on learning a language well enough to get inside the actual working processes of Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, or Indian business. It was taken for granted that the local, "native" businessman would prepare and ripen each deal until it was ready to be plucked by the foreigner. He would then bring it to the foreigner and discuss the final details in English.

In diplomacy, it was the rare exception to carry on a conversation in an Asiatic language. A certain number of young diplomats and army, navy, and marine officers were expected to learn an Asiatic language; but few of them used it habitually for social purposes. Even the routine work of reading and excerpting local newspapers was most commonly done by "native" clerks. It was altogether exceptional to find a newspaperman who could

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flict with the United States." – *Ten Years in Japan*, by Joseph C. Grew. Simon & Schuster, pp. 459–460.

No comment is needed, except to point out that it would take about two months to prepare and launch such an enterprise as the attack on Pearl Harbor.

conduct an interview in an Asiatic language, or read a local newspaper, or who made it a habit to travel widely in the interior of Japan or China or India. Most missionaries were occupied in interpreting only specific aspects of the West to the East. When they interpreted the East to the West it was natural for them to stress those aspects which indicated the need of more money for missionary work. Many of the most influential books on the politics and even the history of Asia were written by men who could not read source materials in the language of the people whose affairs they authoritatively discussed.

It was a common experience to hear a lecture or read an article, by an "expert," describing China as a chaos of militarists, opium, squeeze, concubines, Communists, and malevolent encroachment on foreign interests. Perhaps a week later there would be offered a lecture or article describing the Chinese as a democratic people, guided by a devoted band of wise political leaders who were preparing, among other things, an unlimited field for American enterprise and profit. The American who can recall such an experience may well reflect on it. How far did he feel, at the time, that he had reliable criteria for judging the relative expertness of experts who contradicted each other?

At the time of the Chinese Revolution of 1911 the majority of the American experts (and of course the Europeans, too) were strongly of the opinion that a republican form of government was abso-

lutely unsuitable for the Chinese. An emperor was the only thing the Chinese could understand. They were not interested in self-government. All they wanted was stable government, of a paternalistic kind – law, order, and reasonable taxes. The war lord Yuan Shih-kai was described as a strong man of the kind that China needed and the Chinese could understand. Sun Yat-sen was described either as an amiable but unpractical idealist, or as a mischievous visionary. Before the establishment of the Nationalist Government in 1928 the Nationalists or Kuomintang were described as an unmanageable horde, deeply tinged with Bolshevism, who would plunder foreign business and create nothing of their own. After the Kuomintang had broken with the Communists and come to terms with foreign business, the Communists were described as a bloodthirsty rabble who on the one hand were entirely incited by the Russians and on the other hand had neither roots nor place in Chinese life and could be exterminated almost overnight if the Chinese Government were given the necessary munitions and planes. This overnight extermination went on for ten years, until 1937. In that same year, when the Japanese, after years of aggression, made their "final" attack on China, the overwhelming majority of the experts was positive that the Japanese would get everything they wanted within three months.

This is a very much condensed record, but one

thing at least seems to be clear. America's "expert opinion" is so incompetent that usually when the majority of the experts agree, they are wrong. In the face of such a record, do Americans feel that when the majority of the experts on China suddenly begin to say the same thing very emphatically, it will be safe to believe them? The record of our experts on Japan, which will be considered in a later chapter, is even worse.

To make the experts the scapegoats for our own ignorance and confusion is, of course, no solution. The fact is that only a public which holds the experts to account can enforce the kind of competition in which good experts show up and bad experts are shown up. Discussion groups like to be told things, but rarely set their own brains to work to form an independent opinion. Yet it is a simple thing to compile the record of what an expert has said or written, and equally simple to compile the record of the editorial policy and judgment of a newspaper, showing the proportion of attention it gives to European and Asiatic problems, its score in correct and mistaken analyses, and the relation between its foreign and domestic policies. The records of Senators, Congressmen, and the State Department can be compiled in the same way. If experts had to address audiences which did this kind of homework, we should soon have better experts.

A skeptical and critical introduction of this kind is necessary as an attempt to clear the ground. In

this book no pretense will be made that there are inner mysteries in Asia which have to be accepted on faith. The general assumption will be that Asiatic problems can be understood by anyone who can understand any other kind of problem. There will be emphasis on facts which others have not emphasized, but the facts will be easily verifiable. Opinions will be stated which differ from the opinions of others, but the reasons for the opinions will be plain, and they will be given in a form which is an appeal to reason, not to faith.

Unfortunately, we Americans have several handicaps in tackling the problems that we are going to have to tackle. One big handicap is our habit of thinking in terms of Europe. When we direct our political thought toward Africa or Asia, we are still in the habit of routing it via Europe. The Neutrality Act is a good example. Passed in 1939, it was drafted by Europe-minded men who assumed that the kind of war it would need legal restraint to keep us out of would be a European war and no other. It is a typical inconsistency that at the same time that this kind of thinking was prevalent, it was also widely assumed that the natural course of events would probably lead to a war in which Germany would attack Russia from one side and Japan from the other. In other words, Japan, on the Asiatic side, was taken as a secondary factor; Germany, on the European side, as the primary factor. It was such thinking that led to what Wal-