

EX-PREMIER AND FOREIGN MINISTER KŌKI HIROTA'S  
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Before and After the Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War.

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I. The Japanese Atmosphere and Ex-Premier Kōki Hirota.

**Novel Biography, "Setting Sun burning".**

A bit reactionary atmosphere has risen in Japan these days, so that under such circumstances novel biography of late premier Kōki Hirota, "Setting Sun burning" written by novelist Saburo Shiroyama has appeared and got popularity and TV picked up this one and broadcasted it, which so much influenced the popularity of the novel, encouraging its sale more. The novel treats Kōki Hirota so manly a personality that he did his death by hanging as a war criminal of the Second World War by the hand of the Allied and Associated Powers without doing any bit of defending himself or standing on a witness-box for asserting himself in the Allied Far Eastern Military Court held from 15 December 1946 to 12 November 1948.

In Japan tragic personality is so popular historically and in this case popularity is in the point of tragedy not so concerning the character of tragedy, that is, whether the tragedy has the meaning of justice or not is not so concerning among the Japanese people. In Japan most popular theater drama is "Story of 47 Loyalists' Revenge" (Syllabary

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Model of Loyalists Stock). The Japanese people generation by generation admired so much this story that 47 loyalists revenged their lord who was made to commit suicide by Harakiri by the order of Bakufu because he injured his senior lord in the Palace, by killing his opposite. All Japanese people sympathized with the fate of 47 loyalists who were also made to commit suicide by Harakiri after their revenge and of their lord, being hatred of Bakufu and their lord's opposite. In this case the Japanese people completely forgot the fact that their lord broke the Bakufu's regulation and began to attack the opposite from himself, injuring the opposite with his short sword. It was the fact that 47 loyalists and their lord opposed the prestige and power of Bakufu that the Japanese people continued to admire and love this story for over 270 years, ignoring the fact of their breaking the law.

There is another example that the Japanese people's sentimental partiality. There is a maxim "Hōgan Favouritism" which means that the Japanese people favour Kuro-Hōgan Yoshitsune Minamoto who defeated the Heikes in Danno Ura in Shimonoseki to ruin them and then became suppressed by his brother (different mother)'s Kamakura Bakufu to death in the last. Yoshitsune's life was full of tragedy under brilliant war career, which influenced the mind of all the Japanese people to love him. In this case also the fact that Yoshitsune killed and executed all the Heikes including girls, ladies and children even though the Heikes saved his and his brothers' lives in infancy when his father's Genjis were defeated by the Heikes and his father was not directly killed by the hand of the Heikes but one of his vassalage, was forgot completely.

In these both cases of 47 loyalists and Yoshitsune the same point of similarity is that they were all suppressed by the authority of the time

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having tragical death. In this point Kōki Hirota has very similarity to them because he was killed by hanging by the hand of the Allied and Associated Powers, the very authority of today. "Setting Sun burning", intended to stress this point of Hirota's tragedy, which appealed so strong to the mind of the Japanese and is about to make a War hero of Japan in K. Hirota. So it is necessary, it is thought, to define the real character of the Hirota's diplomacy toward China and the world to examine whether his tragedy deserves a rational one or not different from his both former examples of model tragedies of Japan type.

### II. Hirota's Diplomacy.

#### **The Military and K. Hirota.**

K. Hirota served from 14 September 1933 to 9 March 1936 as Foreign Minister under premiers Makoto Saito and Keisuke Okada, then he became Premier and served until 1 February 1937 and again served from 4 June 1937 to 26 May 1938 as Foreign Minister under Premier Fumimaro Konoe, so that he served, it means, as an important politician sitting in the Japanese political center in several years in this period. This period was a very violent one for Japan to decide its way towards future and its fate. Immediately before he became Premier, the February 26th Affair took place in which Finance Minister Korekiyo Takahashi, Inspector General Jyōtaro Watanabe and Former Premier Makoto Saito were killed and Grand Chamberlain Kantarō Suzuki was seriously wounded by the hand of the revolutionary rising troops of the Tokyo First Division. In this period Soviet Russia in the way to the completion of its second five years plan, strengthening the military power to be possible to practice two front wars extending

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one to Japan, so that Kantō-gun army planned to march on toward Vladivostock and the Siberian Railway on the Lake Bikal but the Navy kept the plan to go toward South, keeping the north front in defence. Japanese military was so active in North China in encouragement of separation movement, establishing Hopei Autonomous Government on 25 November 1935 and also in Inner Mongolia to be independent. This plan was to dream to make intimate unity between Japan, Manchukuo and China, centering on North to cope with the U. S. A. in the prediction of Americo-Japanese war expected 30 years later. Inside China Mao Tse-tung's red army, being defeated by Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army on Ching Kang Shan, just reached Yen'an in November 1935<sup>②</sup>. At any rate the World was under serious tension. Under such circumstances of the world the February 26th Affair took place in Japan and groping for its secured expansion way, it was 7 July 1937 under K. Hirota, Foreign Minister and F. Konoe, Premier that Japan began the Sino-Japanese War.

K. Hirota was never opposed to the military though its power was already too strong to cope with it in any problem. When he began to form his cabinet on 9 March 1936 the military intervened in it and rejected expected ministers, Hiroshi Shimomura, Tadashi Ohara and Shigeru Yoshida (later premier) to be in his cabinet under the reason of their being too liberal and K. Hirota easily obeyed the 'order' to oust them out of his cabinet. As a result his cabinet was formed.

The more serious collaboration by K. Hirota to the military was the revival of the system that "Actual Service Generals only deserves Military Ministers" which had been abolished in March 1913 under G. Yamamoto Cabinet after violent attack by the political parties on the Cabinet on the problem.<sup>④</sup> This system was the strong hand of the

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military to control cabinets or political parties because if the military was not content with any new cabinet it was possible for it to overthrow it by not sending military ministers into the one the military disliked as long as the military ministers were confined to generals in actual service. Historically reviewing, it was true that no one except generals in actual service had not occupied the posts of the military ministers after this abolishment but the meaning of this revival at that time was very serious. Sure enough next to K. Hirota cabinet the Emperor's momentous order to form cabinet was given Kazushige Ugaki but it became impossible to do so for him because the Army rejected him by refusing sending war minister into his cabinet under the protection of this military minister actual service system. General K. Ugaki was most senior of the Army but he performed the reduction of the army divisions by 4 ones <sup>⑤</sup> in his time of War Minister from January 1924. It was the reason why the Army rejected him at the time of his forming cabinet. It was K. Hirota who opened the way for the military to kill cabinet even by rejecting Imperial Prerogative.

### **K. Hirota's Policy toward China.**

As Foreign Minister K. Hirota declared his three principles toward China on 4 October 1935, in which there were the following items: (1) To make China collaborate with the Empire, letting it abolish anti-Japan activity and get out of reliance on Americo-Europe. (2) To make China recognize Manchukuo de jure in the end but de facto in the present at least, making north China collaborate with it in economic and cultural fields. (3) To make China collaborate with various Japanese institutions in adjacent area to Outer Mongolia to prevent Red threatening from coming in. <sup>⑥</sup> This principles were declared as the

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answer to the Chinese similar proposal that; (1) Both China and Japan respect mutually each other's independence in international law, (2) Both countries maintain true friendship, (3) Any affair to happen between both countries must be solved by diplomatic means, dated 26 February 1935 but presented to K. Hirota on 7 September. As shown in them the spirit of the Hirota's three principles are far from that of the Chinese proposal. The former dropped mutual respect and equal mutual assistance and collaboration. It is very clear that Hirota's intention was to complete the establishment of Manchukuo and to make China collaborate in the Japanese expansion policy in Manchukuo and its adjacent areas of China at least though not intended to make invasion into north China directly those days. The problem was his actuality in Manchukuo policy though in the time any person could not stand anywhere except in Prison in Japan as long as he was opposed to the existence of Manchukuo.

As Foreign Minister K. Hirota started the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 with other members of F. Konoe Cabinet. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident occurred on 7 July 1937 and under the storm of war-spreading-assertion or war-stopping-assertion inside Japan F. Konoe Cabinet once decided to dispatch 3 divisions to North China to solve the problem but it was made null and void but again the dispatch was decided inside the Army and the Cabinet recognized it on 27 July. On 30 July, however, the Emperor asked F. Konoe to solve the problem by diplomatic negotiation by saying how about diplomatic negotiation to solve the problem about that time, so that F. Konoe prepared the proposal that the abolishment of Japanese restrictions on North China including the Taku Cease Fire Agreement, the withdrawal of increased Japanese Armies, the dissolution of North China Autonomous Govern-

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ments, and the Chinese recognition of Manchukuo were written in but the plan became null because of the happening of Ooyama Incident in which Japanese Naval Captain Ooyama and a sailor were killed by Chinese soldiers in the Shanghai road on 9 August. Then the Emperor said "It can not be helped any more. The Naval General Staff think so also. It is very difficult to save the situation by diplomatic means." The Cabinet decided the dispatch of 2 divisions to China from Japan on 13 August and Naval Minister intended to publish the governmental declaration to the Incidental War but K. Hirota did not consent to it but on 15 August the government declared its purpose to form the Eastern Asian Block to be led by Japan and on 17 the Cabinet decided to give up the war-stopping-attitude and to do necessary preparations for establishment of war-time conditions. As shown above the F. Konoe<sup>⑧</sup> Cabinet, lacking its own idea and judgement of the situation running to war, just followed the various opinions and decisions especially military and the Emperor's and K. Hirota was the Foreign Minister in it.

As Foreign Minister K. Hirota was responsible for the cutting off of the peace drive done by German Ambassador to China O. Trautmann. When the Japanese dispatched army approached to Nanking in early November 1937 the peace move took place between China (Chiang Kai-sek) and Japan. It was important for Japan, of course because to drive to Nanking meant giving up short time solution of the North China Incident. The peace move was done by O. Trautmann through German Ambassador to Japan Dirksen. Relying upon Trautmann's mediation Japan sent its peace plan to Chiang Kai-sek on 2 November, which was based on the Konoe's one above mentioned, that is; (1) The recognition of Manchukuo de jure, (2) The dissolution of the

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Japanese military restrictions on North China (Sino-Japanese military agreements), (3) The conclusion of Anti-Comintern Pact between China and Japan. But after the Japanese dispatched army occupied Nanking on 13 December and the peace drive was taken up by the Japanese cabinet publicly lots of severe conditions on peace were added by war-spreading-parties in the military and others, so as the result the Japanese peace demands were changed to very imperative ones, i. e. such as (4) Assured staying of the Japanese soldiers in north, central China and Inner Mongolia, (5) The establishment of new north China government, (6) The establishment of Anti-Comintern autonomous government in Inner Mongolia, (7) To practice Anti-Comintern movement, (8) Reparation for Japanese military and war cost. As the result of this severe adding the Drive was to be led to the failure naturally but in the process the General Staff adamantly stuck at the peace drive, asserting to continue it waiting for Chiang's answer which was slow after being shown the Japanese added proposal from the end of December to next January 14, when Chiang's answer came and it was the one to want to know much about the content, so that the Konoe cabinet decided to cut off the negotiation on that day but on 15 Vice Chief of the General Staff Shun Tada, demanding the continuation of the negotiation, waged a wordy battle with K. Hirota who asserted the cutting off the negotiation having no hope in the future of the negotiation, and on 16 the Japanese government conveyed its intention of cutting off the negotiation to O. Trautmann through Dirksen. So in this case K. Hirota appeared as one of the war-spreading-party. Moreover, according to Kazuo Horiba who wrote a book about the North China Incident, he was very doubtful if K. Hirota perverted the Japanese peace conditions into much more difficult ones impossible for

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Chiang Kai-sek to accept when the Japanese Foreign Ministry sent them to Chinese side because K. Horiba found later so-called K. Hirota's four peace conditions including the item about establishing wide non-militarized area in China and the item of reparation which, according to K. Horiba, would necessarily be led to the breaking of the negotiation and because such two very invasion items occupied the half of the four items.<sup>⑨</sup> It may not be made sure whether K. Hirota sent only his four items to Chinese side instead of the Konoe's peace conditions or not but it is sure that K. Horiba accused K. Hirota violently in his book of his treacherous diplomacy and as a warmonger.

Hardly had the Konoe Cabinet decided to cut off the Trautmann peace negotiation when he made a governmental declaration toward China, in which he said that the Japanese Government would not have nothing to do with the Kuomintang government any more on 16 January 1938, i.e. "Our Imperial Government has waited for until today in order to give the Chinese Kuomintang Government the chance of reconsideration —the Kuomintang Government, however, plans to resist wantonly, understanding no true intention of ours and does not sympathize with the people in extreme distress inside and takes no attention of peace all over Eastern Asia outside, so that Our Imperial Government would have nothing to do with the Kuomintang Government any longer, expecting the establishment and development of new government possible enough to be in concert with Our Imperial Empire—."<sup>⑩</sup> This declaration decided the course of the war in the long term one and it can not be measured how seriously it damaged the Japanese international trust, influencing on its fate badly. As Foreign Minister K. Hirota can not evade the responsibility for issuing the declaration.

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**K. Hirota's Diplomacy to Anti-Comintern Pact**

As Premier K. Hirota concluded the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany on 25 November 1936, which extended to include Italy in it on 6 November 1937. This Pact sought for the establishment of the line of preventing Red influences from spreading all over the world but in fact to strengthen both countries' collaboration in coping with Soviet Union, which declared in the secret Protocol added to the main as such: §1. If one of the contracting parties was given unprovoked attack by Soviet Union the other would never lighten Soviet's burden in regard to its position. §2. The contracting parties would never conclude any convention with Soviet Union.<sup>(11)</sup> Such an attitude to show how their rejecting Red influences to the capitalist world was common to Germany and Japan which were going to lead the countries to dictatorship and Anti-Comintern Pact was the effective propaganda for the purpose. This Pact was the base on which Germany, Italy and Japan's collaboration would be led to the conclusion of the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis of 27 September 1940. This Pact was negotiated by the Japanese military attaché in Germany Colonel (later Lieutenant General) Hiroshi Ōshima first from 1935 but later it was continued by Japanese Ambassador to Germany Kintomo Mushakōji including H. Ōshima from 8 May 1936, so that it can be said, it was made under the cooperation between Foreign Ministry and the Military. In the explanation of it to the Privy Council K. Hirota said that Soviet threatening by military in Eastern Asia and Comintern's disturbing policy there would be the direct danger to Japanese national defence and that the third countries would be invited to join in the Pact.<sup>(12)</sup> K. Hirota, however, failed to get Britain and Holland to join the Pact except Italy.

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III. The Conclusion.

Besides the above mentioned the matters concerning K. Hirota in his age of actuality in Japan politics were the buying by Japan of Siberian (Chinese Eastern) Railway on 21 January 1935 and the cruel Nanking Massacre took place during the Japanese occupation of Nanking. These mentioned above, however, are adequate enough to explain what K. Hirota's figure as Minister was. His real figure as politician was the one very obedient to the tide of the time, i. e. the influences of the military at that time. He worked for or made exertions to attain the purpose set by the military in short term or in long term, which was very clearly seen in the process especially of the starting of the Sino-Japanese War from 1937. His real figure was far from the description in the novel "Setting Sun burning" or that of the advertisement letters of the book such as "Dramatic life of ex-premier and foreign minister Kōki Hirota's who did nothing to defend himself when he was charged with war responsibility despite his resisting the rising military and his selecting the way to avoid the outbreak of the war in extreme exertions."<sup>13</sup> It must be said that the case of K. Hirota's to be national hero is quite similar to the cases of 47 loyalists and Yoshitsune Minamoto, i. e. the real figure is very far from the false one which is getting popularity. If K. Hirota's case is similar to the former two cases his popularity would be much more enhanced together with the novel having been given a literature prize and a publishing prize. In his case it, however, may be adequate for popularity that he was killed in the Far Eastern Military Court without defending himself a bit.

A more word in the end, it is that the fact K. Hirota obeyed and

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followed the military and its policy is quite different from the problem of whether his death in the Military Court was justified or not though his popularity is on this point, i. e. he was killed by the very authority of the time resisting against it as much as possible in the means of silent rebellion which is only one example of expression of strength shown to the huge powerful authority of the time among other war criminals and the defeated Japanese soldiers, so that no concerning the true mind of Hirota's to death and however feeble his resistance might be, the more feeble it was the more popularity his resistance would get among the Japanese people of today and may be, those of the future.

Notes.

- ① Tsukasa Kawano, ed.: 2. 26 Jiken (February 26th Affair), Nipponshuhō' 1957, p. 16. Shuji Aritake: Saito Makoto (one of biographies of premiers through three generations), Tokyo, 1958, pp. 258—61.
- ② Chiang Kai-sek: Mō Takutō no Haisō (The rout of Mao Tse-tung, Chiang Kai-sek's secret memoir, vol. 10), Sankei Shinbun, 1976, pp. 178—182.
- ③ Toshikane Ōkubo, ed.: Seijishi (Political History, one of the Series of Systematic Japan History), Yamakawa Shuppan, 1967, p. 451.
- ④ Tansho Yamazaki: Naikakuseido no Kenkyu (Study of Cabinet Institutions), Tokyo, 1942, pp. 256—63.
- ⑤ Yoshio Matsushita: Nippon Gunbatsu no Kōbō (The Rise and Fall of Japanese Military Cliques, vol. 3), Jinbutsuōrai-Sha, 1967, pp. 28—33.
- ⑥ Japan Foreign Ministry, ed.: Nippon Gaiko Nenpyo narabini Shuyo Bunsho (Japan Diplomatic Chronology and Documents), vol. 2, Hara Shobo, 1966, pp. 303—4.
- ⑦ Japan Institution of International Politics, ed.: Taiheiyōsensō eno Michi (The Road led to the Pacific War, vol. 3, Sino-Japanese War,

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vol. 1), Asahi Shinbun, 1959, p. 129.

- ⑧ Gendaishi Shiryo, vol. 9, Nichūsenso, vol. 2 (Contemporary Historical Documents, vol. 9, Sino-Japanese War, vol. 2), Misuzu Shobo, 1964, p. 34. Taiheiyosenso eno Michi vol. 4, pp. 3—23.
- ⑨ Kazuo Horiba: Shinajihen Sensōshidōshi (The History of War Planning in the Sino-Japanese War.), Jijitsūshin, 1962, pp. 112—21.
- ⑩ *ibid.*, p. 131.
- ⑪ Nippon Gaiko Nenpyo narabini Shuyo Bunsho, *op. cit.*, pp. 352—54.
- ⑫ Taiheiyosenso eno Michi, vol. 5., p. 36.
- ⑬ A Newspaper Advertisement (Asahi Shinbun).

