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Japan's foreign policy: from imperial power to regional leader?



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Resumen

El presente ensayo busca explorar la política exterior japonesa y sus transformaciones a lo largo del tiempo. Se hace hincapié en dos momentos históricos: la aparición de Japón como potencia imperial, que comienza con la Restauración Meiji, y el Japón contemporáneo. La elección de estas dos instancias es un intento de definir un arco de desarrollo en la historia japonesa, con el fin de comprender el papel de Japón en Asia y cómo ha sido tanto determinado, como determinante de la dinámica internacional. Al presentar la información en orden cronológico, el ensayo intenta establecer una conexión entre el pasado y el presente, y pregunta si se puede deducir un “estilo de influencia japonés” de ambos períodos. El ensayo encuentra que el lugar de Japón en la región ha cambiado de uno más firme y líder, aunque más violento, a uno caracterizado por el equilibrio indirecto del poder. Al tratar con contextos radicalmente diferentes, el ensayo encuentra que las estrategias de influencia de Japón ya sean históricas o contemporáneas, han tenido efectos similares en términos del desarrollo de otros países. En este sentido, al mostrar una imagen amplia y breve del pasado y el presente de Japón que está atravesada por un solo tema, el ensayo contribuye a la comprensión de la posición actual de Japón, sus raíces históricas y los factores comunes que podrían continuar en el futuro.

Abstract

The present essay seeks to explore Japanese foreign policy and its transformations throughout time. Particular emphasis is placed on two historical moments: the emergence of Japan as an imperial power, beginning with the Meiji Restoration, and contemporary Japan. The choice of these two instanc-

es is an attempt to define an arc of development in Japanese history, in order to understand Japan's role in Asia and how it has both determined and been determined by international dynamics. By presenting information in chronological order, the essay tries to establish a connection between past and present, and asks whether a "Japanese style of influence" can be deduced from both periods. The essay finds that Japan's place in the region has changed from a more assertive and leading one, albeit more violent, to one characterized by the indirect balancing of power. While dealing with radically different contexts, the essay finds that Japan's influence strategies, whether historical or contemporary, have had similar intended effects in terms of the development of other countries. In this sense, by showing a broad and brief picture of Japan's past and present that is traversed by a single theme, the essay contributes to the understanding of Japan's current position, its historical roots, and the common factors that might continue in the future.

Keywords

Japan, Imperialism, Foreign policy, Asia, History, Development

Palabras clave

Japón, Imperialismo, Política exterior, Asia, Historia, Desarrollo

Introduction

The present essay seeks to explore the transformations of Japanese foreign policy and its strategic positions vis-à-vis its sphere of influence at different moments in time. Particular emphasis will be placed on two nodes of Japanese history which, because of the apparent radical distance separating them in terms of political tone and motivations, should be considered together in order to understand the changes in Japan's relations toward neighboring and extra-regional states. The two critical moments mentioned are the emergence of Japan as a global power with imperial ambitions (beginning with the Meiji Restoration), and contemporary Japan and its role in current regional dynamics (references to post-WWII conditions will have to be made in order to trace the origins of Japan's current opportunities and challenges, and in order to place it in the context of a historical process of inter-state relations that are both determined by and determinant in Japan's political decisions).

To what extent does the contemporary economic, military and political environment of the region and of other strategic areas in the world steer Japan into specific positions with a limited number of available choices? To what extent is this range of choices a reflection of Japan's previous actions and the roles it has played in world politics? How can the two historical nodes explored here conceal, despite their differences, the outline of a common style for what could be called a "Japanese model of influence"? These are some of the guiding questions the present essay intends to examine.

The present work is structured chronologically. It considers first the consolidation of feudal Japan and its subsequent emergence as an imperial power, including the justifications and motivations for its imperialist ambitions. Then, having established an historical context that will serve both as a point of reference for understanding Japan's current regional position, and as the first moment in a particular stage of modernization and outstanding economic growth, the essay will make references to contemporary Japan to show how its transformation arc has (and still does) make it unique in terms of regional dynamics.

It should be noted that for space purposes, the period chosen for the starting point of this work corresponds to the end of the Tokugawa period and the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. In this sense, while the essay makes brief allusions to the Tokugawa period to elucidate on the magnitude of changes that Japan experienced, no attempt is made to go deeper into Japanese history, for which the curious reader wanting to have a broader view of the intricacies of the Tokugawa system will have to resort to additional material.

Japan as an emerging non-western imperial power

The end of the Tokugawa period and the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1868 was characterized by major changes in Japanese society and the political system (Duque, Eusse, Hoyos, & Roldán, 2008). From internal instability and the demands made by the merchant class for the opening up of trade, to the Industrial Revolution and the effects it had on Western expansionist movements, the responses of the Japanese ruling classes to this confluence of significant internal and external variables set the country on a path that favored both its economic and military capabilities, and its imperialist mindset.

The mid to late-nineteenth century saw the global spread of Western values, institutions and products, as improvements in efficiency brought about by the technological innovations of the Industrial Revolution allowed for an unprecedented increase in productivity and manufactured goods in need of new markets. If Western economies were to grow successfully, less developed and more distant countries in Africa and Asia would need to be integrated within the emerging chain of international trade. These markets would both satisfy the high production capacity of industrialised economies, and serve as adequate sources for the raw materials needed in their production cycles (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Additionally, the assumption that these less-developed countries did not have the required institutions to promote growth in the capitalist system made it easy for the European and North-American powers to coercively implement their designs under the pretext of “civilizing missions”—something which Japan would later imitate when the time for its own imperialist pretensions came (Beasley, 1987).

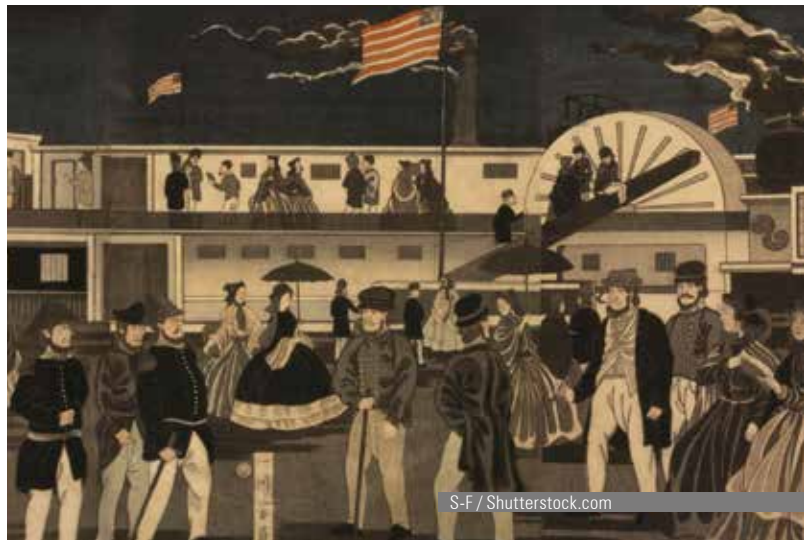
Thus, Western states began to exert their power directly—resorting repeatedly to the use of force—on Asian countries such as India and China, which were not only large and profitable markets, but also abundant in materials. However, unlike some of its neighbors, Japan came under Western influence through slightly different means, which gave it a broader scope of manoeuvre, albeit not immediately. By the period in question, Japan was a country with a political system of feudal characteristics and non-existent industry, causing it to quickly fall under unofficial imperial Western influence (Beasley, 1987). The reason for the “unofficial” nature of this imperialist relationship was the West’s reluctance to establish direct colonial rule, which in countries such as British-ruled India had proved to be extremely onerous (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Hence, while countries like the United States preferred to avoid direct confrontation, they were readily prepared to deploy the necessary military assets at their disposal to make a show of force, deter any possible outbursts of resistance and secure the asymmetric trading conditions that benefited their economies (Beasley, 1987).

A pertinent example would be the events of 1853, when US naval officer Matthew C. Perry sailed to the coast of Japan to demand the end of the long-lasting seclusion policy that had closed the insular country to external trade and influence for more than two centuries. The original purpose of this policy, first envisioned in the Tokugawa period, was to contain the spread of Christianity and the potentially damaging effects it could have on Japanese

culture, limiting Japanese contacts with the outside world to China and the Netherlands. A year later, officer Perry returned to the island with his fleet, and unwilling to accept a negative response, secured the Kanagawa Treaty establishing trade relations between Japan and the United States (Duque, et al., 2008).

Soon after, other European countries followed (Britain in 1854 and Russia in 1855) and secured trade relations with Japan, giving rise to what was called the Treaty Port System. This system can be described as the unequal set of international legal provisions imposed by Western powers in order to open Asian markets to their trade. The use of force or “gunboat diplomacy”, though not always useful for the costs it implied and the risk of political instability—which might endanger trading opportunities—was an available and necessary tool in order to coerce Asian countries into complying and maintaining that set of unfair conditions. In Japan, the conditions introduced by the treaties were met with strong opposition across society and led to several confrontations between nationalists and foreigners. Because of this, following new attacks on foreigners, a joint foreign expedition (counting the British among its members) opened fire against Shimonoseki in 1864. Demonstrations of force like this one had two main consequences: “one result was to convince many Japanese activists that Western military strength was irresistible. Another was to open the way to a reaffirmation of foreign rights” (Beasley, 1987: 24).

Despite recognising the irrefutable military superiority of Western countries, it is important to highlight that these repeated outbursts of violence enabled the Japanese government to secure significant treaty amendments. For instance, an 1866 agreement allowed Japanese merchants not only to trade directly with foreign merchants at local and international ports, but also to travel abroad for trade and study purposes (Beasley, 1987). This newly broadened access to Western culture and institutions became critical in the sequence of events that followed, and is in fact an important point to consider when trying to understand the Meiji government’s response to Western influence, and the role it would begin devising for itself in international politics.



It is also important to underline the degree of influence that the Treaty Port System had on internal politics. Indeed, it should be noted that the perception of unfairness that these treaties prompted within Japanese society played a

significant part in the collapse of the Tokugawa political system and the restoration of imperial power:

“Ideologically, the [Meiji] restoration was propelled neither by an upsurge of spontaneous loyalty to the imperial house, nor by a sudden revulsion of feeling against the shogunate as an institution. Its main impetus before 1868 was nationalist xenophobia, felt first by young samurai and spreading to politically minded landlord-entrepreneurs in the villages. This “revere the emperor, expel the barbarian” movement had been triggered by the unequal treaties, and the *bakufu*¹ came under increasingly severe attack for being unable to stand up to the foreigners” (Caiger & Mason, 1992: 217).

Considering the last two points made above—the general and xenophobic discontent with the Treaty Port System and the recognition that Western military and technological capabilities surpassed those of the Japanese —, the Meiji rulers had to carefully develop a pragmatic foreign policy that would lay down the revision of international treaties as one of its main goals (Caiger & Mason, 1992). This needed to be done without losing sight of the deep and long-lasting repercussions that international diplomacy would have on the internal economic and social structures of the country. Japan, much like China, had the same type of trade relationship with the West in terms of its production output—mainly primary products. However, whereas China remained in the same position of development until the 20th century, there was a general consensus among the Japanese ruling elite that something had to be done (Beasley, 1987). To this point, Caiger & Mason explain that despite the temptation to unilaterally denounce the agreements and go against the wrath of the West, “the Meiji government stuck to its original aim of properly negotiated revision [...], which showed its seriousness in abandoning the seclusion policy, and its commitment of Japan to open diplomacy and an appropriate place in the existing Power system” (1992: 220).

Japan’s commitment to ascertain “its place in the international Power system” constituted a paradoxical dilemma: fueled unequivocally by national pride and an uncomfortable sense of inferiority in relation to its Western counterparts, Japan was determined to adopt elements of the institutions, values and technologies that made European and North American countries such superior adversaries. Much of the Meiji reforms of the time and the desire to imitate Western power would, then, be balanced against a public discourse that justified the acceptance of a foreign system—which in and of itself threatened the conservation of Japanese traditions—with popular and irrefutable principles like national greatness and prosperity.

In time, even some of the most conservative factions of society would come to agree with the Meiji rulers’ stance toward foreigners, for their opening to the outside world was also a two-way channel that Japan could use to its advantage in order to understand and adopt the aspects that had made its foes so mighty and rendered it so defenseless. While in the late 18th century Japanese scholars had been interested in Western culture and civilization through the few writings they could acquire, the immersion of Japan within global dynamics in the 19th century allowed them to not only have more access to information, but to shift their attention to the study of Western military knowledge (Beasley, 1987). Additionally, the Japanese knew that to focus solely on military power was neither enough, nor did military might emerge from nowhere. Officials, even during the Tokugawa period, understood that adherence to the Western model implied

1 *Bakufu* or Shogunate: followers or representatives of the ruling military groups that characterized the Tokugawa period (Duque, et al., 2008).

more than the simple acquisition of weapons. Hotta Masayoshi, the Head of the Tokugawa Council declared the following:

“military power always springs from national wealth and wealth is principally to be found in trade and commerce. This being so, Japan’s aim must be to conclude friendly alliances, to send ships to foreign countries everywhere and conduct trade, to copy the foreigners where they are at their best and so repair our own shortcomings to foster our national strength and complete our armaments” (Beasley, 1987: 28).

A number of others concurred, including the famous writer Fukuzawa Yūkichi, who in the name of national security, prosperity and defense against “rapacious” foreigners, advocated for the adoption of some of their institutions and values in addition to their machines and technologies (Beasley, 1987); “western strength was not a simple matter of technology and trade. Behind technology stood science; behind trade, industry; behind them both, particular kinds of law and institutions and philosophy” (Beasley, 1987: 30). This view of the West and the role it had to play in Fukuzawa’s vision for a civilized and modern Japan would lead him to elevate Japan’s destiny over that of its regional neighbors, and in so doing, begin the construction of a national identity based on a right and responsibility to expand, but also to lead:

“We cannot wait for our neighbor countries to become so civilized that all may combine together to make Asia progress. We must rather break out of formation and behave in the same way as the civilized countries of the West are doing” (Beasley, 1987: 31).

Other influential people of the time such as Yoshida Shoin and Tokutomi Soho added to Fukuzawa’s call for national integration and prosperity by enlarging the concept of security itself; for them, security would come to include all public matters related to the country’s reputation (Beasley, 1987). Consequently, economic expansion through coercive means as in the case of Korea (Caiger & Mason, 1992), military aggressions against states threatening national interests² and the diffusion and protection of Japanese values in the face of Western influence were all justified by its role as the sole regional power (Beasley, 1987).

As mentioned previously however, Japanese traditions and values represented a source of concern for some of Japan’s main national figures, as they were not yet convinced that the adherence to Western institutions would not erode the country’s internal cohesion—especially old values stemming from Shinto, Buddhism and Confucian traditions—, making Japan more susceptible to outside control. But the Meiji government, in a clear demonstration of its pragmatism, put forth a set of economic and foreign policy reforms that both ensured the completion of Japanese modernization—and appeased national concerns with regard to cultural contamination. This was done while also making sure to play by the same rules as its Western counterparts in terms of trade relations and gunboat diplomacy, such as in Korea in the 1890’s, to ensure its place in the power system. Meanwhile, cultural anxieties were managed through the continuation of a rhetoric imbued with national pride that painted Japan’s expansion as an almost inevitable consequence of its destiny, and as the fulfilment of its responsibility as the regional safekeeper of Asian values against the West (Beasley, 1987).

2 The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-5 and the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, leading to the subsequent annexation of Taiwan and Korea to Japan, would come to symbolize, especially with regard to the latter, Japan’s gradual rise to world power and its capacity to contest Western influence (Caiger & Mason, 1992; Beasley, 1987; Duque, et al., 2008)



As a result, Japan had acquired, or was in the process of acquiring, all the necessary ideological and material tools for the realization of its imperialist desires in Asia, grounded in the pretext of a civilizing mission, much like the West had done in previous years. “[...] the Meiji reformers in Japan created a stabilizing, though flawed, fusion of tradition (the emperor and Shinto), and modernity. They quickly put in place a modern nation-state that could cultivate nationalism, pursue industrialization, and resist foreign takeover (Buzan & Koyama, 2018: 192).

Because a detailed explanation of the economic reforms of the Meiji Restoration goes beyond the scope of this work, the main focus of which is Japanese foreign policy and the interplay between national and international elements, the essay will not linger on this issue. However, two last points of particular importance need to be made in order to understand Japan’s developmental history and some of the reasons for its influence and effectiveness.

First, it needs to be said that Japan’s modernization process was not solely the direct consequence of Western influence. For more than two centuries, Tokugawa rule had fostered the development of an economic system of capitalist characteristics that prepared the social base—through culturally embedding essential values of entrepreneurship—for the catalyzing effects that the Meiji reforms would insert in the national reality (Beasley, 1987). Both a highly centralized and capable bureaucracy that guided public matters, and a society that had been establishing proto-capitalist practices like commerce among towns, business relations, credit, literacy and an increase in the manufacturing of handicrafts, helped cement the bases for eventual modernization, even if the Meiji reforms would only speed up that process (Caiger & Mason, 1992).

In the end, the Meiji reforms would protect national production from cheaper outside products; by diversifying local sectors, (the Treaty Port System did not allow for the implementation of tariffs) (Caiger & Mason, 1992) and at the same time introducing a higher degree of sophistication to the modernization process that Japan had already begun by adopting Western techniques. This contests generally held assumptions regarding the Western/Non-western duality that place the origins of modernity incontrovertibly in Europe (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Japan’s precedent as the first successful country in its region to reach modernization and industrialization, and the first to come shoulder to shoulder with other world powers, would then solidify its place in regional politics and serve as an exemplary model for the rest.

Finally, while industrialization in Japan did not occur at a pace that would allow it to equate its economy with that of other European states, the manner in which Japan exercised its imperial practices in Korea, Taiwan and Manchuria—which

by 1910 had been annexed to its territory—, resembled previously mentioned methods used by European empires. At the same time, Japan's modernization had important and specific consequences particular to the region. Under the rhetoric of the civilizing mission, Japan "became a direct agent of modernization in Northeast Asia" (Buzan & Koyama, 2018: 195), both through imposition on its colonies and through inspiration in places like China, Hong Kong and Singapore.

It has been stated by various authors that unlike other imperialist powers, Japan heavily invested in the reformation of local agricultural sectors, the implementation of its own Meiji model and the reshaping of social and economic institutions favoring industry and insertion into world trade. In the colonies of Korea and Manchuria, Japan established chemical industries, steel and for a time even automobile production (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Thus, the degree of penetration, control and guidance of their policies, and the complementary assimilation of these industries into Japan's own economic system, helped lay the foundations for a process that would culminate in growth rates³

It must be noted that while Japan played a considerable role in the eventual development and economic prosperity of its colonies and neighbors, it did so at the expense of their cultural self-determination and dignity (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Moreover, the atrocities and brutal violence used by the Japanese armed forces⁴, yet not entirely recognized by Japan, have been a source of intraregional conflict that impede future coordination efforts or thwart Japan's leadership role.

Contemporary Japan

Despite the violence perpetrated on its colonies and the aggressions carried out against the West during the first half of the 20th century, the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the subsequent capitulation of Japan had two main consequences: (i) they placed Japan within a narrative of victimization that muddied its responsibility as a victimizer and prevented the acceptance of responsibility for crimes committed against its neighbors (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). (ii) for much of the second half of the 20th century, Japan became an introspective country preoccupied with its own economic and social reconstruction after the war, and unwilling to claim any sort of leadership role in regional political or security (Hughes, 2017).

In fact, while its direct confrontations with European countries during WWII had put a definite end to their presence in the region, post-war Japan became the backbone of U.S. power in East Asia (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Having been occupied (1945-52) by American forces led by General Douglas MacArthur, Japan was subject to a number of economic and political reforms, one of which was the inclusion of Article 9 in the Constitution. Article 9 precluded Japan from having armed forces and from resorting to war as a legitimate right, establishing a relationship of subordination and dependence on the U.S. for security matters— which in fact had established military bases on Japanese soil during its occupation (Duque, et al., 2008).

3 "[...] the Asian Tigers tripled their GDP per capita in a little over two decades—by 1988, they accounted for 8.1% of world trade, almost double the share held by the whole of Latin America. In South Korea, exports increased at an average rate of 8% per year between 1962 and 1989" (Buzan & Koyama, 2018: 204).

4 During the conflict with China between 1937 and 1945, Japan killed between 14 and 20 million Chinese. It has also been accused of conducting medical experiments with prisoners of war, civilian massacres and the forced prostitution of women for Japanese servicemen (Buzan & Koyama, 2018).

Even so, during the American Occupation the U.S. government pressured Japan to develop its military capabilities, and has done so ever since, prompting internal debates and reinterpretations of Article 9 as to the basic military conditions needed for self-defense, the international role that Japan should play in security global missions like those of the UN, and the spending it directs toward its military self-defense enhancements. Although the JSDF army is theoretically not offensive in nature, it is larger than that of the UK or France (Kingston, 2011). It should be noted that these pressures for remilitarization are playing against a background of general support within Japanese society for Article 9, and an equally general aversion to any possibility of Japan resurging as a military power (Kingston, 2011).

Notwithstanding Japan's subdued international role in the years following the end of WWII, the economic recovery that the country experienced during the 1970s and 1980s (Duque, et al., 2008), gave a new impetus to the idea that the former imperialist power was at the epicenter of economic regional development and wealth (Buzan & Koyama, 2018). Indeed, Japan's resurgence and the paths that its former colonies took during this time inspired scholars to propose theories like the *Flying Geese Paradigm*, a conceptual framework that aims to explain how the performance of a leading country and its model influences the development of other countries in its sphere of influence, through the transfer of technology, the transfer of production activities and through the creation of complementary trade chains (Kasahara, 2013).



When the end of the century came, Japanese leaders started to realize that the impressive economic performance that had characterized it for much of recent history could not continue to depend solely on national policies if it was to be maintained. Simultaneously, while the Japanese private sector was demanding a higher degree of liberalization for the economy, China was emerging as the new regional major player with increasingly assertive interests and military expenditure (Hughes, 2017). North Korea would years later become a security threat included in the "Axis of Evil" of U.S. president Bush, while in the West, European countries were formalizing their monetary and political union. This confluence of factors started steering Japan in a direction that called for a more assertive role from Tokyo both economically and politically. The country needed to diversify its diplomatic actions and partners if it was to lessen the risk that its overdependence on China and the U.S. implied (Hughes, 2017).

Thus, after frustrating results in the regional economic cooperation sphere, Japan started to exert a more direct role toward its neighbors and other countries, embarking on a route of bilateral free trade agreements (Hughes, 2017). Both Article 9 and historical tensions with its most immediate neighbors, Korea and China, prevent it from executing explicit and robust security policies

on which “normal” states could normally rely to defend their interests; they also prevent it from advancing efforts in regional economic cooperation where it might serve as one of the leading voices. Therefore, Japan has had to devise ways in which it can influence regional and extra-regional dynamics without necessarily being directly under the spotlight.

Wallace (2018) proposes a strategy that Japanese officials are currently implementing in order to reduce overdependence on the U.S. and China. It consists of the articulation of economic and security programs conceived within a “soft infrastructure strategy”. Comprised of a “soft security infrastructure” and a “horizontal economic corridors strategy”, these policies range from the assistance and training of coastguards, the transfer of military technology, the implementation of ‘overseas development assistance’ programs regarding border and maritime surveillance, and the sharing of knowledge concerning cybersecurity, international law and disaster mitigation, to the negotiation of Economic Partnership Agreements with many of its regional neighbors. As a matter of fact, nine of the fifteen EPAs that Japan has signed are with Southeast Asian countries (Wallace, 2018). Indeed, Wallace’s essay focuses on Japan’s shift of attention to other parts of Asia and Africa as a way to balance China’s military and economic influence in the region.

His main premise is that even if Japan is not yet investing much of its resources in the development of “hard”/offensive security infrastructure, without which it lacks the deterrence capabilities to directly hamper Chinese advances; or even if direct economic returns from trade are minor compared to those coming from China and the U.S, its main goal is to help create a network of more developed and capable states that together can balance Chinese influence and hinder its coercive tactics by displacing the center of gravity.

In this sense, Japan’s objective is to procure aid, Foreign Direct Investment, and infrastructure, and also to establish trade relations through which less developed economies can integrate into the production cycle of Japanese companies and “initiate export-focused industrial upgrading rather than attempting to completely recreate an industrial base of unrealistic scale” (Wallace, 2018: 897). The development of infrastructure that connects subregions (physical projects such as roads, bridges and railroads, but also harmonized customs systems, logistics and communications), and that creates industrial networks makes it harder for outside influence to pressure individual and isolated states. As Wallace (2018: 902) states, “affecting how others relate to China is a more achievable goal than trying to block or ‘contain’ Chinese economic gains”.

Conclusions

As this essay has shown, Japanese history and Japan’s immersion in global dynamics has had profound effects on the configuration of its internal structure and its relations to other states. Being forced to enter into an unequal trading system and having to forgo part of its sovereignty, the rulers of the Meiji period resorted to xenophobic discourses of national pride and prosperity to advance modernization. This combination of nationalist rhetoric, effective policies that fostered industrialization, and a neighborhood of weaker states, together with the Western model of imperialism, led Japan to reaffirm its imperialist ambitions under the justification of the civilizing mission and the protection of Asian values. While it did comply with part of that “mission” as an agent of modernization in other countries, it did so at a great human cost.

Today, after the radical shift in foreign policy that Japan experienced after WWII, its economic model, supported by its resurgence and the performance of its former colonies, has proved to be essential to the development history of the region as a whole. Moreover, even though intraregional conflict and the provisions of Article 9 prevent it from gaining leadership status for cooperation or region-building efforts, the bilateral and diverse relationships that Tokyo has established with countries outside of Northeast Asia make it a key player in the region, ready to use its new-found alliances to secure its interests in a context where its two main trading and political partners (China and the U.S.) are becoming increasingly unpredictable.

Finally, it should be noted that while Japan's role in the region does not place it directly at the epicenter of political, economic or security dynamics, the strategies it is implementing to move the board in its favor and promote stability (through Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Official Development Aid (ODAs), draw a peculiar line of likeness to its imperial past, at least in terms of the effects its influence had, and intends to have, on foreign development. One that complements its own industrial networks, but also one that stands on its own and has the necessary foundations to foster growth and modernization.

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