

The Pro-American Intellectuals and the Pacific War: Focusing on Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih

MUTO Shutaro

Abstract

The process culminating in the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States in 1941 necessitates a consideration of the roles played by pro-American intellectuals in both Japan and China. Notably, Asakawa Kan'ichi (1873–1948) of Japan and Hu Shih (1891–1962) of China exhibited particularly significant activities and pronouncements. This paper investigates the actions undertaken by Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih concerning the Japan-U.S. conflict, with a specific focus on the intellectual exchange and personal relationship that existed between them.

Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih were prominent pro-American intellectuals, representing Japan and China, respectively. Both individuals shared a common background, having studied classical Chinese literature in their youth and pursued history as their major at American universities. While initially driven by an ascetic inclination to abstain from political engagement, both ultimately took action during their respective national crises: they advocated for domestic introspection and simultaneously presented international arguments to justify their nation's stance.

Both figures recognized that the decisive factor determining the outcome of the Second Sino-Japanese War resided in the actions of the United States. Ironically, they found themselves in opposing positions, each maneuvering to secure an advantage for their respective nation concerning President Franklin Roosevelt's policy.

Furthermore, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih consistently promoted the principles of democracy within their own countries. The intellectual exchange between these two individuals constitutes a crucial chapter in the history of Sino-Japanese relations. This study aims to elucidate the nature of this relationship, which has previously received minimal scholarly attention.

Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih

The roles played by pro-American intellectuals in both Japan and China warrant close examination when analyzing the processes that culminated in the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. Notably, significant contributions were made by Asakawa Kan'ichi (1873–1948) of Japan and Hu Shih (1891–1962) of China.

Asakawa Kan'ichi, the first Japanese professor appointed to Yale University, was a legal historian whose career focused on the comparative analysis of Japanese and European feudal systems. His 1929 publication *The Documents of Iriki*, which compiled historical materials from the Iriki-in families in the Satsuma domain, received high commendation from the distinguished French historian Marc Bloch. Bloch, whose foundational work *La Société féodale (Feudal Society)* would be published a decade subsequent to Asakawa's work, lauded Asakawa's compilation as an indispensable resource for Western scholars engaged in the study of Japanese feudalism. This scholarly exchange was further evidenced in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1931), for which Asakawa, at Bloch's invitation, co-authored the entry on feudalism. It is widely recognized

that Bloch's comprehension of Japan, as reflected in the bibliography of *Feudal Society*, was substantially informed by Asakawa's research.¹

Hu Shih, a philosopher who studied under John Dewey at Columbia University, emerged as a central figure in China's New Culture Movement while serving as a professor at Peking University. His essay, "Proposals for Literary Reform," published in the journal *Xin Qingnian* (*New Youth*) in January 1917, is widely recognized as a pivotal catalyst for the advent of a new literature composed in the vernacular Chinese language (*bai hua*). Hu Shih's intellectual contributions also extended to the field of philosophy, notably with his 1919 publication *An Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. 1. In this influential treatise, he applied a positivist framework to the study of ancient Chinese thought.

Furthermore, Hu Shih's scholarly rigor is manifested in his systematic efforts to unearth and catalogue various historical texts, including those pertaining to Confucianism, classical literature, and Zen Buddhism. His 1930 compilation *The Collected Works of Shenhui* resulted from his discovery and subsequent organization of Dunhuang manuscripts located in collections in Britain and France. The meticulousness of this endeavor was formally commended by the Buddhist scholar Suzuki Daisetz, who observed that the work was "organized with an extremely meticulous critical eye."²

As this overview illustrates, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih achieved foundational academic results within their respective disciplinary domains. Notwithstanding their personal reservations regarding political engagement as scholars, they responded to national crises by advocating for the interests of their nations on the international stage. Concurrently, they provided incisive critiques of the challenges confronting their own countries. The reevaluation of their contributions and statements has constituted a key scholarly trend in both Japan and China since the 1980s, a period also characterized by the systematic organization and archival processing of their personal papers and published works.

In the summer of 1917, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih traversed the Pacific aboard the same steamship from Vancouver, Canada, as they returned to their respective home countries. While this shared voyage has been anecdotally documented in biographical accounts of Hu Shih,³ a cross-examination of their personal and professional correspondence substantiates that they established a scholarly rapport during this journey and maintained communication thereafter.

Furthermore, a discernible influence on Asakawa Kan'ichi's historical methodology can be traced to Hu Shih's advocacy for "systematizing the national past" (*zhengli guogu*, 整理国故) and his emphasis on conceptual precision. Other interconnections between them also existed within their respective social and academic networks. Ironically, these two individuals, whose initial encounter was a matter of coincidence, found themselves positioned on opposing sides during the diplomatic and political processes preceding the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941.

The intellectual exchange between pro-American circles in Japan and China during the first half of the twentieth century constitutes a crucial area of inquiry, with the relationship between Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih representing a particularly salient case study. To elucidate this relationship, this paper will commence by examining the circumstances surrounding their initial encounter.

¹ Horigome Yozō, "A Preliminary Essay toward a Reassessment of Feudalism: A Reconsideration of Modernization Theory" (封建制再評価への試論 近代化論の再検討), *Tenbō*, no. 87 (March 1966): 30.

² Suzuki Daisetz, "Mr. Hu Shih" (胡適先生), *Bungeishunjū*, vol. 26, no. 7 (July 1948): 33.

³ Zhu Hong, *Hu Shih: A Great Biography* (胡適大伝), vol. 1, Hefei: Anhui People's Publishing House, 2001, pp. 189–191; Zheng Yanguo, *The Square and Round of Translation* (翻譯方圓), Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 2009, pp. 233–234.

Expectations and anxieties regarding Japan-China relations

In November 1904, during the ongoing Russo-Japanese War and the siege of Port Arthur, Asakawa Kan'ichi published *The Russo-Japanese Conflict* in the United States. Following his graduation at the top of his class from Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō (now Waseda University), Asakawa had completed his doctoral studies at Yale University in June 1902 with his dissertation *The Early Institutional Life of Japan* and subsequently commenced his career as a history lecturer at Dartmouth College. The objective of *The Russo-Japanese Conflict* was to explicate the historical antecedents of the conflict and to assert that, in contrast to Russia, Japan was not seeking a monopoly of interests in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula but was rather upholding the principle of equal opportunity for all nations.

According to Asakawa Kan'ichi, the resolution of conflicts between the great powers in Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula necessitated adherence to two key principles: regional integration and equal opportunity.⁴ He contended that Russia had violated these principles, in stark contrast to Japan's efforts to uphold them. Asakawa characterized the Russo-Japanese War as a clash between the "new civilization" of Japan and the "old civilization" of Russia. *The Russo-Japanese Conflict*, which advocated for the justness of Japan's stance, received a positive reception, including a review published in *The New York Times*. During the period of the war, Asakawa has delivered over forty lectures across various regions to disseminate his perspectives.⁵

At the onset of the Russo-Japanese War in February 1904, the adolescent Hu Shih, accompanied by his elder brother-in-law Hu Zhenzhi, relocated from Jixi in Anhui Province to Shanghai. He matriculated at Meixi Academy, which represented an early instance of modern primary schooling in China. For a writing assignment concerning "The Reasons for Japan's Strength," Hu Shih, whose knowledge regarding Japan was highly circumscribed, utilized such sources as Luo Pu's translation of a special issue of the Japanese journal *Taiyō (Sun)* titled *Thirty-Year History of the Meiji Restoration* (1902), and the *Ren-Yin New Citizen's Miscellany Compilation* (1902).⁶ Following the development of a sense of solidarity with Japan based on contemporary news accounts of the conflict, Hu Shih withdrew from the academy in an act of protest against the injustice surrounding the death of a Chinese carpenter at the hands of a Russian sailor.

Hu Shih subsequently transferred to Chengzhong Academy. In the summer of 1906, he again transferred to the newly established Zhongguo Gongxue Academy in Shanghai, an institution founded by Chinese students who had repatriated from Japan. Their return was a direct consequence of the "Regulations Regarding Public and Private Schools for Admitting Qing Students" issued by Japan's Ministry of Education in November 1905. These regulations, colloquially termed the "Regulations for Regulating Qing Students," stipulated new provisions concerning the accommodation and admission qualifications of Chinese students. In response to this policy, a substantial number of Chinese students protested and returned to their home country, which subsequently led some of them to establish the Zhongguo Gongxue Academy with the explicit objective of independently cultivating new talent.

Subsequent to the Russo-Japanese War, Asakawa Kan'ichi reached the conviction that Japan's foreign policy was in direct conflict with the principles he had articulated in *The Russo-*

⁴ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Russo-Japanese Conflict: Its Causes and Issues*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1904, pp. 305–310.

⁵ Yamauchi Haruko, *A Study of Kan'ichi Asakawa: The Formation and Practice of His Scholarship* (朝河貫一論 その学問形成と実践), Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 2010, pp. 197–203.

⁶ Hu Shih, "My Autobiography at Forty" (四十自述). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih* (胡適全集), vol. 18, pp. 54–56. The original source of *Thirty-Year History of the Meiji Restoration* is a special issue of *Taiyō* (published in May 1898) commemorating the 30th anniversary of the transfer of the capital to Tokyo. This translated work exerted ideological influence not only in China but also in Korea and Vietnam.

Japanese Conflict. Following his repatriation to the United States after an approximately eighteen-month temporary sojourn in Japan and the commencement of his new role as a lecturer at Yale University, Asakawa corresponded with Ōkuma Shigenobu, the founder of Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō in May 1908, conveying a significant deterioration in American perceptions of Japan. He described a pervasive sentiment that “Japan is oppressing Korea and, replacing Russia in Manchuria, is trending toward undermining China’s sovereignty and the rights and interests of other nations.”⁷ He underscored the gravity of the situation by warning that “a crisis is at hand that necessitates profound national reflection.”

To amplify his message, Asakawa Kan'ichi published his Japanese-language work *The Crisis of Japan* in June 1909, a volume in which he condemned the Japanese government for abandoning its core principles, violating Korean independence, and pursuing aggressive Manchurian interests at the expense of China. He asserted that “the majority of our nation’s future destiny will be determined by our relationship with China, which is posited to be the greatest problem in the future of the East, and with the United States, which is anticipated to be the most powerful nation in the world.”⁸ Ultimately, he called for a fundamental reorientation of Japan’s policies vis-à-vis China and the United States.

Hu Shih expressed his concern regarding Japan’s expanding ambitions in October 1908, articulating in the “Current Affairs” section of the Shanghai journal *Jingye Xunbao* that “since Japan’s victory over Russia, the region of South Manchuria has become their possession.”⁹ It is noteworthy that while Hu Shih was enrolled at Chengzhong Academy, a Chinese translation of Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* was published. The translator of this influential work, entitled *Tianyan Lun*, was Yan Fu, who subsequently became the inaugural president of Peking University.

The publication of *Tianyan Lun* exerted a profound ideological impact on Chinese society, which was then reeling from the defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War. This work, which introduced the tenets of Social Darwinism, significantly influenced Hu Shih. The central concept of “survival of the fittest” resonated so strongly with him that he adopted it for his own name.¹⁰ For Hu Shih, who perceived the international environment through the lens of might makes right, Japan’s ascendancy must have been construed as an existential threat to China.¹¹

On August 16, 1910, Hu Shih embarked on a vessel from Shanghai to the United States, having successfully qualified for the U.S. government-sponsored Boxer Indemnity Scholarship. During a stopover in Yokohama on August 29, he observed a public celebration marking the annexation of Korea, which transpired on the same day.¹² This event included a “Lantern Parade Celebrating the Annexation of Korea” that drew 5,000 participants. The newspaper *Yokohama Bōeki Shinpō* described it as “a magnificent spectacle throughout the streets, surpassing a victory

⁷ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa* (朝河貫一書簡集), Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 1990, pp. 174–175.

⁸ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Crisis for Japan* (日本之禍機), Tokyo: Jitsugyō no Nihon Sha, 1909, pp. 257–258.

⁹ Hu Shih, “Current News” (時聞). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, p. 90.

¹⁰ Hu Songping, *First Draft of the Long Chronological Biography of Mr. Hu Shizhi* (胡適之先生年譜長編初稿), vol. 1, Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1990, p. 60.

¹¹ Hu Shih, “An Attempt to Explain the Meaning of ‘Competition of Things, Selection by Heaven, Survival of the Fittest’” (物競天拙適者生存試申其義). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, p. 2.

¹² Hu Songping, *Records of Mr. Hu Shizhi’s Conversations in His Later Years* (胡適之先生晚年談話錄), Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 1984, p. 180.

celebration, with the brilliant light making it as bright as day.”¹³ Following his arrival in the United States, Hu Shih received correspondence from his brother-in-law Hu Jue, who informed him of Japan’s expanding control over the Three Northeastern Provinces (Manchuria). This intelligence evoked considerable distress in Hu Shih.¹⁴

The overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, initiated by the Wuchang Uprising in October 1911, culminated in the establishment of the Republic of China. Hu Shih, who was then a student in the United States, experienced considerable frustration at his inability to participate in this pivotal historical event.¹⁵ During World War I, while a significant number of his Chinese peers were incensed by Japan’s Twenty-One Demands and advocated for immediate military intervention, Hu Shih adopted a more measured approach. He contended that students should prioritize their academic pursuits as preparation for China’s future. Influenced by his engagement with Christianity, Hu Shih promoted a policy of “non-contention”. He maintained a degree of optimism, expressing hope that Japan’s occupation of the German-leased territory of Jiaozhou Bay would be temporary and that the territory would be restored to Chinese sovereignty. Although this expectation was ultimately unfulfilled, Hu Shih fundamentally maintained his non-contention stance, while simultaneously arriving at a key realization: “the grave threat to China is Japan.”¹⁶

The occupation of Jiaozhou Bay elicited concern from Asakawa Kan’ichi regarding the deterioration of American public opinion toward Japan, prompting him to address a letter to Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu.¹⁷ In this correspondence, Asakawa emphasized the necessity of publicly announcing a date for the restitution of the territory to China. He further cautioned Ōkuma that Japan’s inept handling of the Twenty-One Demands presented to the Yuan Shikai government was a primary source of American distrust. He specifically drew attention to the unpublished fifth group of demands, which sought to establish Japanese military advisors within the Chinese central government, thereby challenging the nation’s fundamental sovereignty. Asakawa asserted that “cooperation between Japan and the United States regarding China is of paramount importance for the future progress of the world” and that such cooperation was contingent upon Japan’s restitution of Jiaozhou Bay. His counsel, however, was disregarded. This outcome led Asakawa to articulate his profound disappointment, observing, “Viewing Count Ōkuma in charge, he does not appear to be a statesman of significant caliber after all.”¹⁸

The preceding discussion establishes that both Asakawa Kan’ichi and Hu Shih devoted considerable intellectual energy to the future of their respective nations and the complexities of Japan-China relations during the period spanning the Russo-Japanese War to World War I. In June 1917, their trajectories converged on a return voyage from the United States. Asakawa was en route to Japan to conduct research that would subsequently form the basis for his work on *The Documents of Iriki*, while Hu Shih was returning to commence his new appointment at Peking University.

¹³ Jiang Yongzhen estimates that Hu Shih arrived in Yokohama on August 22, 1910, not the 29th, citing the date the Japan-Korea Annexation Treaty was signed (Jiang Yongzhen, *Who Else but Me: Hu Shih [Part 1]: From Unpolished Jade to Perfect Disk 1891–1917* (舍我其誰：胡適【第一部】璞玉成璧 1891–1917), Taipei: Lianjing Publishing Co., 2011, p. 197). However, the treaty was promulgated one week after its signing, on the 29th. Given that celebratory events were held on the 29th, Hu Shih’s recollection should be regarded as correct.

¹⁴ Luo Zhitian, *An Attempt to Re-Create Civilization: A Biography of Hu Shih* (再造文明的嘗試 胡適傳), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006, pp. 88–89.

¹⁵ Hu Shih, “To Hu Shaoting” (致胡紹庭). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 23, p. 38.

¹⁶ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary” (留學日記). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 26.

¹⁷ Asakawa Kan’ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan’ichi Asakawa*, pp. 220–230.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

According to Hu Shih's diary, on June 17, as his train traveled from Chicago to Vancouver, he transferred to a first-class car in St. Paul and encountered Asakawa.¹⁹ Asakawa's own diary corroborates this meeting, noting his departure from New Haven and including the entry: "S. Hu is on the train."²⁰ The two individuals arrived in Vancouver on June 20 and, the following day, they boarded the RMS *Empress of Japan*, a regular passenger liner operating on the North Pacific route.

While aboard the RMS *Empress of Japan*, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih met and engaged in daily conversations in the ship's smoking room, notwithstanding their differential accommodations—Asakawa in a first-class cabin and Hu Shih in a second-class cabin. During one of these discussions, Asakawa disclosed to Hu Shih his plan to produce a five-volume series of classic Chinese and Japanese works for the Everyman's Library published by J.M. Dent & Sons.²¹

Asakawa Kan'ichi solicited Hu Shih's counsel regarding the editorial approach for the two volumes dedicated to Chinese works. Hu Shih proposed a two-part schema: one volume would feature Confucian classics, including the *Book of Odes*, the *Four Books*, and the *Classic of Filial Piety*; the other would contain selections from non-Confucian classics, such as *Laozi*, along with excerpts from *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, *Mozi*, and *Han Feizi*. Asakawa was duly impressed with this proposal and extended an invitation to Hu Shih to assume the role of editor and translator for the two Chinese volumes. Hu Shih readily accepted the offer, perceiving it as an excellent educational endeavor.

Although Hu Shih was dissatisfied with the proposed allocation of volumes—three dedicated to Japan and two to China—Asakawa's offer remained compelling. While aboard the vessel, Hu Shih articulated his perspective on the project in a letter to his friend E.C. Williams:

Most interesting man I have met here is a Prof. K. Asakawa, a Japanese who has for many years been Professor of Institutional History of Japan at Yale University. He is in the first-class cabin, but we met every day in the smoking room which occupies the highest storey of the ship and which commands the best view of the ocean. We had met before in the train between St. Paul and Vancouver. He is a good scholar of the research type and had done some very scholarly research in his own line.

One interesting outcome of our talks may interest you to hear. He had been approached by the publisher of the "Everyman's Library" to select and edit several volumes of Japanese material for inclusion in that Library. In reply he persuaded him to enlarge the scope to include some volumes of Chinese classical literature as well as Japanese. The negotiation is now almost completed, and it was decided upon to devote 2 volumes to Chinese material. Prof. Asakawa asked my opinion about the selection and distribution of the material for these volumes. I told him what I thought ought to be included therein and the method of selection. He was so much satisfied with my suggestions that he immediately asked me to undertake the translating and editing of these volumes. I accepted the offer without hesitation because I know the value of the "Everyman's Library" and I believe I can do a service both to China and to the English-speaking world in this undertaking. It is not a very good proposition financially. But I do not mind that very much.²²

Hu Shih's enthusiasm for Asakawa's proposal can be inferred from this correspondence.

¹⁹ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 567.

²⁰ *Asakawa Kan'ichi papers*, Series 2, Box 5, Folder 51, p. 50019, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

²¹ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 577–578.

²² Hu Shih, "To E. C. Williams." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 40, pp. 195–196.

Evidence of their discussions concerning the Everyman's Library project is additionally documented in a letter from Asakawa to the businessman Shirai Shintarō:

I was commissioned by Dent & Co. in London to produce five volumes within three years: one volume consisting of abridged translations of the fundamental classics of Confucianism and another of non-Confucian works from China, and three volumes consisting of carefully selected texts that are representative of the development and transformation of Japanese religion and thought (Shinto, Confucianism, and Buddhism), translated and annotated as I had done previously. Of these, the section on China has been entrusted to Prof. Hu Shih of Peking University, while the section on Japan will be carried out under my own responsibility.²³

On July 5, the *Empress of Japan* docked at Yokohama Port, where Hu Shih learned of the Zhang Xun Restoration, an event that had occurred only four days prior on July 1. This political upheaval in China, in which Zhang Xun attempted to reinstate Puyi, the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, constituted a source of deep concern for Hu Shih.²⁴ After parting ways with Asakawa in Yokohama, Hu Shih remained aboard the vessel, which continued its voyage through Kobe and Nagasaki before ultimately arriving in Shanghai on the 10th.

Following their voyage, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih maintained correspondence to finalize the practical details of the Everyman's Library publication. Their discussions addressed various pragmatic matters, including volume length, associated costs, and the specific policies for editing and translation. In late 1917, at his mother's insistence, Hu Shih married his fiancée Jiang Dongxiu, to whom he had been betrothed prior to his departure for the United States. Upon receiving news of the marriage, Asakawa promptly dispatched his congratulations. In March 1918, Hu Shih composed the following letter to his mother:

Yesterday, a Japanese friend sent me two books as a congratulatory gift for my recent marriage. This friend, now a professor at Yale University in the United States, is a well-known scholar. Last year, when I returned to China, I first met him on the train, and later we traveled by ship together, engaging in frequent and delightful conversations. We found each other very congenial, and thus became friends. Upon hearing about my marriage, he sent these two books to extend his congratulations. Naturally, I was very pleased.²⁵

The reference to a Japanese friend teaching at Yale University within the letter can be confidently identified as Asakawa Kan'ichi. Although the specific titles of the two books he sent are not explicitly stated, it is highly probable that they were his two major works: *The Early Institutional Life of Japan* and *The Russo-Japanese Conflict*.

The Everyman's Library project ultimately failed to reach publication. In September 1934, Hu Shih appended an annotation to his diary stating, "This matter ultimately did not come to fruition. I feel deeply ashamed toward Professor Asakawa."²⁶ While the precise reason for the project's non-realization remains unclear, this annotation suggests that the responsibility may have been attributed to Hu Shih. It is plausible that upon his return to China, his expanding influence and demanding schedule precluded him from dedicating the requisite time to the translation work. Notwithstanding the project's outcome, the two scholars, who initially met by chance, developed a significant scholarly rapport.

²³ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 254.

²⁴ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 581.

²⁵ Hu Shih, "To Mother" (致母親). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 23, p. 163.

²⁶ Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, p. 578.

Scientific methodology and feudalism

In an article entitled “The Mission of Sinology Researchers,” the Oriental history scholar Kuwabara Jitsuzō proposed the following methodological approach: “Overall, the corpus of Chinese classics is currently in a disorganized state. Prior to their utilization, we must first organize them thoroughly using a scientific methodology, and subsequently, we must research the organized materials using a scientific methodology.”²⁷ Kuwabara posed the question of why Western researchers, despite their circumscribed proficiency in reading Chinese documents, were able to produce notable research. He attributed their success to their rigorous application of “scientific methodology.”

For instance, they could estimate the length of a *li* (Chinese mile) during the Han Dynasty to be approximately 400 meters by comparing historical descriptions with the actual distances between verified locations. However, Kuwabara Jitsuzō contended that such analysis necessitated, as a prerequisite, historical criticism and the “systematic organization” (*seiri*, 整理) of these materials into a unified classification and order. Originally intended for Japanese scholars, this article was subsequently translated and published in the Chinese journal *Xin Qingnian*, Vol. 3, No. 3, in May 1917.

The third volume, third issue of *Xin Qingnian* contained Hu Shih’s essay “On a Historical View of Literature” as well as his letter to Chen Duxiu detailing the responses to his earlier “Tentative Plan for Literary Reform.” While returning by vessel from Yokohama, Hu Shih procured and perused this issue, which also featured Kuwabara Jitsuzō’s article “The Mission of Sinology Researchers.”

In his diary, Hu Shih recorded his positive impressions of Kuwabara Jitsuzō’s essay, observing that “it advocates for the adoption of scientific methodology in the study of Sinology, which constitutes an extremely sound opinion.” He specifically lauded the estimation of a *li* as 400 meters, designating it “a great invention of historical research.”²⁸ Regarding Kuwabara’s contention that Chinese classics were disorganized and thus unsuitable for utilization, Hu Shih’s diary noted, “*zhengli* (整理) is equivalent to the English term ‘systematize.’” This entry suggests that the Japanese term *seiri* (整理) was unfamiliar to Hu Shih at the time.

In December 1919, Hu Shih published an essay entitled “The Meaning of the New Tide of Thought” in *Xin Qingnian*. In this work, he contended that the fundamental significance of China’s “New Tide of Thought” was a “critical attitude.” Hu Shih equated this critical stance with the concept of the “transvaluation of all values,” a term derived from the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche.²⁹ He asserted that this same critical approach should be applied to China’s traditional academic and intellectual traditions.

According to Hu Shih, attitudes toward traditional academic thought can be categorized into three types: (1) opposition to blind obedience, (2) opposition to harmony, and (3) advocacy for “systematizing the national past” (*zhengli guogu*, 整理国故). In this context, the term “*zhengli guogu*” refers to the systematic, logical organization and rigorous, evidential research of Chinese classics, executed through the application of “scientific methodology” as advocated by Kuwabara Jitsuzō. This concept likely originated from Hu Shih’s diverse intellectual background, which encompassed Qing Dynasty evidential scholarship and Western philosophical traditions.³⁰ The

²⁷ Kuwabara Jitsuzō, “The Mission of Sinology Researchers” (支那学研究者の任務), *Taiyō*, vol. 23, no. 3 (March 1917): 100.

²⁸ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary”. In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 581–582.

²⁹ Hu Shih, “The Meaning of the New Tide of Thought” (新思潮的意義). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 1, pp. 691–700.

³⁰ Grieder, Jerome B, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1937*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 103–111.

influence of Kuwabara is particularly notable, given Hu Shih's explicit adoption of the term "zhengli" (*seiri*).³¹

In the development of Hu Shih's intellectual framework, the concept of "systematizing the national past" served as a pivotal keyword. It is posited that Asakawa Kan'ichi also provided important insights into the formation of this idea. While on his return voyage home, Hu Shih perused Asakawa's paper. He recorded the following in his diary:

I recently read Mr. Asakawa Kan'ichi's paper "The Origin of the Feudal Land Tenure in Japan," which contains many thought-provoking facts worth noting.

Note: The term "fengjian zhidu" (封建制度) is a translation of the Western term "feudalism," though it is not entirely accurate. This system differs from what is historically referred to as "fengjian" (封建) in China. Due to the lack of a more appropriate term, it is temporarily used here. I once asked Mr. Asakawa what term Japanese scholars use. He mentioned that, in addition to "fengjian zhidu," some use "chigyō seido" (知行制度). The term "chigyō" appears in official documents of the time, particularly in the contracts signed by tenants who pledged allegiance to landlords, though it does not really constitute a proper term. Today, it occurred to me that terms such as "fenju zhidu" (division-based system, 分据制度) or "geju zhidu" (fragmentation system, 割据制度) might be more appropriate than "fengjian zhidu."³²

The paper "The Origin of the Feudal Land Tenure in Japan" (1914), which was published in *The American Historical Review*, was likely provided by Asakawa to Hu Shih during their return voyage. In this work, Asakawa identified historical parallels between Western and Japanese feudalism and analyzed the developmental process of feudal land ownership in Japan. A review of Hu Shih's earlier corpus confirms his lack of prior engagement with the feudal system; it was Asakawa's work that appears to have catalyzed his initial interest in the subject.

In February 1920, a letter from Hu Shih to Liao Zhongkai, the founder of the journal *Jianshe* (*Construction*), was published in that periodical. The correspondence challenged the historical authenticity of the well-field system (*jingtian zhidu*, 井田制度), a land-holding arrangement believed to have been operational during China's Zhou Dynasty. This system, conceptually structured on the Chinese character for "well" (*jing*, 井), divided a one-square-li plot into nine sections. The central plot was designated as "public land," while the surrounding eight plots were distributed to eight families as "private land." The eight families were obligated to cooperatively cultivate the public land and render its harvest to the state as a form of taxation. The system was historically idealized by figures such as Mencius as a model of equitable land distribution.

In response to Hu Hanmin's paper asserting the historical reality of the well-field system, Hu Shih contested this claim. He referenced Asakawa Kan'ichi's research to advance the following argument:

The ancient feudal system was by no means as simplistic as described in texts such as the *Mencius*, the *Rites of Zhou*, or the Royal Regulations. In antiquity, tribes evolved into numerous small states, with countless semi-civilized ethnic groups both within and beyond their borders. The royal house was merely the strongest among these states, enabling it to hold a nominal, religious, and political leader. In any case, it is impossible that a neatly partitioned "tofu block"-

³¹ Sang Bing, *Guoxue and Hanxue: Records of Academic Exchange between China and the World in Modern Times* (国学与汉学 近代中外学界交往录), Hangzhou: Zhejiang People's Publishing House, 1999, p. 182.

³² Hu Shih, "Study Abroad Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 582–583.

like feudal system existed over those millennia. To study China's feudal era, we should draw comparisons with European medieval feudalism and Japan's early modern feudal system (封建制度). We must break away from the "tofu block" concept of feudalism and instead adopt a scientific approach, complemented by historical imagination, to rediscover what the so-called feudal system of ancient times truly entailed (Japanese scholars such as Asakawa Kan'ichi have conducted highly scientific research on Japan's feudal system).³³

Hu Shih's critique of the well-field system was premised upon a fundamental point: the absence of historical evidence to substantiate the existence of a land tenure system partitioned into plots resembling a *doufugan* (a firm, rectangular type of tofu utilized in Chinese cuisine). He maintained that such a system would have been politically unfeasible for its historical period, asserting that the well-field system, as idealized by figures such as Mencius, should be regarded as a utopian construct. Furthermore, Hu Shih proposed that the term for the feudal system, "*fengjian zhidu*" (封建制度), was susceptible to misinterpretation and that the alternative nomenclature "*geju zhidu*" (割据制度) would be more accurate. Hu Shih's views, articulated in this correspondence, can be interpreted as a concrete application of the ideas he began to formulate after perusing Asakawa Kan'ichi's paper, as documented in his diary.

In January 1923, the Institute of National Studies (*Guoxuemen*) at Peking University inaugurated its journal *Guoxue Jikan*. As chairman of the editorial board, Hu Shih published his "Declaration on the Launch of *Guoxue Jikan*" in the inaugural issue, in which he provided his working definition of "national studies" (*guoxue*, 国学). According to Hu Shih, "*guoxue*" was an abbreviation for "*guogu xue*" (国故学), with "*guogu*" being defined as "all past culture and history in China."³⁴

As key tenets for future engagement with "national studies," Hu Shih listed the following three recommendations:

- (1) Broaden the scope of national studies research through a historical lens.
- (2) Categorize the materials for national studies research through systematic organization.
- (3) Supplement the organization and interpretation of national studies materials through comparative research.³⁵

Regarding the third recommendation, Hu Shih utilized the example of "*fengjian zhidu*" (封建制度), stating, "We have long been misled by the square-shaped enfeoffment theory, which has subsequently impeded a clear conceptual understanding. Now, if we compare it with the feudal systems of medieval Europe and Japan, we can readily comprehend it." Here, too, he employed the example of "*fengjian zhidu*" to advocate for the efficacy of comparative research in the process of "systematizing the national past."

This analysis suggests that Hu Shih's engagement with feudalism, which is manifested in his theories on "systematizing the national past" and "national studies," was substantially influenced by his intellectual interactions with Asakawa Kan'ichi.

Prior to this, Chen Duxiu had already advanced an argument in the journal *Xin Qingnian*

³³ Hu Shih, "A Critique of the Well-Field System" (井田弁). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 1, p. 392.

³⁴ Hu Shih, "Declaration on the Launch of *Guoxue Jikan*" (『国学季刊』 發刊宣言). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 2, p. 7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

that attributed various societal pathologies in China to the persistence of a feudal system.³⁶ This broader conceptualization of feudalism gained widespread intellectual acceptance in the 1920s, influenced by Marxist thought, including the theses of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and the Comintern. Within this intellectual milieu, two major scholarly controversies emerged within the Chinese academic community. The first, the so-called “Debate on the Nature of Chinese Society,” unfolded from the late 1920s to the early 1930s and focused on whether Chinese society should be characterized as “feudal” or “semi-feudal,” a determination that had direct ramifications for revolutionary strategy. The second, the “Debate on Chinese Social History,” revolved around the interpretation and application of the concept of feudalism, and further encompassed discussions concerning the existence of the Asiatic Mode of Production and the institution of slavery in Chinese history.

Although Hu Shih was not directly engaged in these debates, he functioned as a vigorous critic of the ambiguous application of the concept of “feudalism.” His essay “Where We Are Headed,” published in the journal *Xinyue* (*New Moon*) in December 1930, serves as a primary illustrative example. This piece was composed subsequent to Hu Shih’s proposal that his colleagues at the journal each contribute an article on the thematic inquiry of “how we should solve China’s problems.” He authored this essay in response to the counter-suggestion that they should first clarify their fundamental attitudes on the matter.³⁷

In this essay, Hu Shih identified five primary impediments China was obligated to surmount: poverty, disease, ignorance, corruption, and disorder. He defined the ultimate objective as the establishment of a “peaceful, prosperous, civilized, modern, and unified nation.”³⁸ Hu Shih rejected the necessity of a violent revolution to achieve these objectives, advocating instead for gradual change. He contended that those who resorted to violent revolution were merely utilizing abstract slogans such as “the target of the Chinese revolution is the feudal class” or “the target of the Chinese revolution is feudal forces.” Hu Shih asserted that neither a feudal class nor feudal forces were extant in contemporary China. Consequently, he maintained that, to address the core systemic problems, one must directly confront empirical reality rather than be misled by vacuous slogans.

As a successor to the journal *Xinyue*, *Duli Pinglun* (*Independent Review*) was established in May 1932. A scholarly debate concerning the form of government in China was conducted within its pages. Hu Shih, the editor-in-chief of this journal, countered the historian Jiang Tingfu, who supported the establishment of an “autocratic” government, citing the Tudor Dynasty in England, the Bourbon Dynasty in France, and the Romanov Dynasty in Russia as necessary precursors to “revolution.” Hu Shih asserted that Jiang was conflating political unification with autocracy.³⁹

Hu Shih asserted that autocracy was not only an unnecessary prerequisite for nation-building but was fundamentally incompatible with China’s unique historical trajectory. He highlighted a key structural divergence between European and Chinese history: while former feudal classes in Europe evolved to lead a new bourgeois society, China’s feudal period had concluded more than two millennia prior. Specifically, with the establishment of the civil service examination

³⁶ Feng Tianyu, *A Study of “Fengjian” (Feudalism)*, Revised Edition (『封建』考論 修訂版), Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2010, pp. 192–215.

³⁷ Zhang Qing, *The “Hu Shih School of Scholars” and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (“胡適派学人群”与現代中国自由主義), Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2004, pp. 160–162.

³⁸ Hu Shih, “Which Road Should We Take” (我們走那條路). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 4, pp. 455–470.

³⁹ Hu Shih, “Nation-Building and Despotism” (建国与專制). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 671–677; Hu Shih, “Revisiting Nation-Building and Despotism” (再論建国与專制). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 680–686; Jiang Tingfu, “Revolution and Despotism” (革命与專制), *Duli Pinglun*, no. 80 (December 1933): 2–5.

system, a fixed ruling class ceased to be extant. Consequently, it was infeasible for an “autocratic” monarch to constitute the core of a new government. Owing to these historical distinctions, Hu Shih contended that democracy, rather than autocracy, constituted the appropriate trajectory for China.

The path to war between Japan and the United States

During his student tenure in the United States, Hu Shih articulated distrust of Japan's diplomatic posture, particularly its presentation of the Twenty-One Demands to China. Concurrently, his diary reveals a critical perspective on his own nation, observing: “Our nation's scholars frequently express disdain for Japan, neglecting to explore its civilization and, furthermore, failing to seek avenues for fostering sincere communication between the two nations. This constitutes a grave error.”⁴⁰ This position, which advocated for learning from Japan, represented a consistent thread in Hu Shih's thought and can also be confirmed after his return to China.

In May 1921, during a visit to Beijing, Uchigasaki Sakusaburō, a Japanese scholar of English literature, proposed a concept of “Sino-Japanese mutual assistance.” In response, Hu Shih argued that anti-Japanese sentiment in China originated from the fact that only a select minority of the numerous Chinese individuals who had pursued studies in Japan, such as Zhou Zuoren, possessed a genuine comprehension of Japanese culture.⁴¹

Furthermore, following his approximately ten-month trip from July 1926, which included sojourns in the Soviet Union, Europe, and the United States, Hu Shih concluded that Japan had presented the most favorable impression.⁴² He observed that the Japanese populace, in contrast to their Chinese counterparts, worked diligently to construct a material foundation that emulated Western society. He likened the relationship between China and Japan to the fable of the tortoise and the hare, contending that the Chinese people must relinquish their self-conceit and pursue steady, sustained progress.

Reflecting his intellectual posture and internationalist perspective on “non-contention” dating from his tenure in the United States, Hu Shih initially advocated for a peaceful resolution with Japan during the 1931 Manchurian Incident, thereby seeking to avert military conflict. He established organizations such as the “Self-Conscious National Salvation Society” to promote this objective.⁴³ This stance, however, should not be interpreted as one of unqualified acquiescence to Japanese aggression. His involvement in the Institute of Pacific Relations (IPR) offers a counterexample, illustrating the complexity that characterized his diplomatic position.

The IPR was a non-governmental organization formally established in July 1925 in the wake of an international conference convened in Honolulu, Hawaii. Initiated by the Young Men's Christian Association, it is regarded as a precursor to contemporary non-governmental organizations. Its formation was particularly opportune, coinciding with escalating tensions in the Pacific region, as evidenced by the U.S. enactment of the Japanese Exclusion Act in July 1924.

The IPR established its mission to foster scholarly research and inquiry into issues concerning the Pacific region. It convened international conferences on an approximately biennial schedule. Following previous meetings in Honolulu and Kyoto, the fourth conference was scheduled to be

⁴⁰ Hu Shih, “Study Abroad Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 28, pp. 26–27.

⁴¹ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 29, p. 238.

⁴² Ren Qian, “Impressions of Mr. Hu Shizhi on His Return from His Travels” (胡適之先生漫遊回來的感想), *Shenghuo Zhoukan*, vol. 3, no. 14 (February 1928): 155.

⁴³ Chou Min-Chih, *Hu Shih and Intellectual Choice in Modern China*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984, pp. 101–103.

held in Hangzhou, a decision made at the recommendation of the Chinese branch.⁴⁴

In July 1931, in preparation for the fourth international conference of the IPR, Hu Shih assumed the chairmanship, succeeding Yu Rizhang, who had resigned due to illness.⁴⁵ Following the Manchurian Incident, Hu Shih and his colleagues initially proposed the postponement of the conference, operating under the belief that a shared forum for a proper discussion of Sino-Japanese relations had been compromised. However, they soon re-evaluated their position, viewing the conference as a crucial opportunity to present “China’s case” to the international community.⁴⁶ They subsequently relocated the venue from Hangzhou to Shanghai and proceeded with the conference as originally scheduled.

The conference was formally convened from October 21 to November 2, 1931, with delegates in attendance from Japan, China, the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Observers from the Dutch East Indies, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the League of Nations were additionally present.⁴⁷ Although the “Manchurian Problem” was not formally inscribed on the agenda, it swiftly became the central focus of deliberation.⁴⁸ Chinese representatives denounced the actions of the Japanese military as illegitimate, while the Japanese delegation rejected these assertions.

One of the scholars engaged in the research and activities of the Japan IPR from its inception in 1925 was Takagi Yasaka, a professor at the Imperial University of Tokyo. In December 1931, shortly after the Shanghai conference, Takagi, a specialist in American studies, expressed profound concern about the future following the Manchurian Incident in a letter addressed to his friend Asakawa Kan’ichi.⁴⁹ In the correspondence, he also conveyed his steadfast resolve in the face of this “serious trial,” stating: “It’s time for us to shed the overly grand facade of a victorious, first-class nation. My sincere hope is to truly re-evaluate ourselves and rebuild the lives of our people from the ground up.”

In September of the following year, Takagi Yasaka published a paper entitled “Reflections on the Manchurian Problem and the History of American Expansion” in the journal *Kaizō* (*Reconstruction*).⁵⁰ In this work, he contended that Japan, in instigating the Manchurian Incident, was motivated by beliefs analogous to America’s “Manifest Destiny” during its period of westward expansion. He further criticized politicians and commentators who, by disregarding the principles of post-World War I internationalism, advocated for an “Asian Monroe Doctrine.”

In February of the same year, Asakawa Kan’ichi also corresponded with Ōkubo Toshitake, a member of the House of Peers, to condemn Japan’s military activities in the Manchurian Incident

⁴⁴ Zhang Jing, *A Study of the China Institute of Pacific Relations* (中国太平洋国際学会研究), Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012, pp. 62–64.

⁴⁵ Ouyang Junxi, “Hu Shih and the Institute of Pacific Relations: Also on the Dilemma of Modern Chinese Liberalism” (胡適与太平洋国際学会 兼論現代中国自由主義的兩難处境), *Anhui Shixue*, 2006, no. 1 (January 2006): 93.

⁴⁶ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, pp. 145–146.

⁴⁷ Green, Elizabeth, “Conference trends in China: a general indication of round table discussion,” *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1932): 1.

⁴⁸ Katagiri Nobuo, *A Study of the Institute of Pacific Relations: Focusing on the Activities of the Japanese IPR during the Interwar Period* (太平洋問題調査会の研究 戦間期日本IPRの活動を中心として), Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2003, pp. 206–221.

⁴⁹ *Collection of Asakawa Kan’ichi’s Correspondence Materials* (朝河貫一書簡資料集), Archival Call Number B95–2, Manuscripts and Archives, Fukushima Prefectural Library.

⁵⁰ Takagi Yasaka, “The Manchurian Problem and a Review of the History of American Expansion: A Liberal Viewpoint on Independent Diplomacy” (満洲問題と米国膨張史の回顧 自主外交に対する自由主義的見解), *Kaizō*, vol. 14, no. 9 (September 1932): 87–93.

and the First Shanghai Incident.⁵¹ He asserted that these actions constituted a grave error that severely damaged America's perception of Japan and violated the Covenant of the League of Nations. Having cultivated a deepened scholarly rapport since their initial meeting in 1919, both Asakawa and Takagi shared a pervasive sense of crisis regarding Japan's increasing international isolation in the wake of the Manchurian Incident and were actively issuing warnings concerning the situation.

The Fifth International Conference of the IPR was convened in Banff, Canada, from August 14 to 28, 1933. Prior to the conference, Hu Shih undertook a stopover in Japan in June, where he met with delegates of the Japanese IPR.⁵² On that occasion, Takagi Yasaka was among the individuals who escorted Hu Shih from Yokohama Port to Tokyo.

Prior to departing Shanghai, Hu Shih had been informed by the journalist Matsumoto Shigeharu, a close acquaintance of Takagi Yasaka, that Takagi was advocating for a four-nation Pacific conference (Japan, China, the U.S., and the U.K.) to resolve the Sino-Japanese issue. In alignment with Takagi's proposal, Hu Shih argued at the conference for the imperative of directly addressing the problem. He proposed two viable approaches: (1) the formation of a special conference with a select few members from the Japanese and Chinese IPR, or (2) the establishment by the IPR of a "Special Committee on Sino-Japanese Problems" comprising impartial scholars from various countries.

During his sojourn in Japan, Hu Shih countered the assertion made by Satō Yasunosuke, a former army major general and member of the House of Representatives, who had stated that the status of Manchukuo was immutable. Hu Shih contended that the issue ought to be approached not from the perspective of any particular nation, but from the standpoint of membership within the IPR. That evening, Takagi Yasaka paid a visit to Hu Shih at his lodgings and lauded his remarks as highly significant, commending him specifically for having accurately identified the flaws in the Japanese side's posture.

During the series of events surrounding the establishment of Manchukuo on March 1, 1932, Hu Shih persisted in seeking a rapprochement with Japan. For instance, he acclaimed the report published that October by the Lytton Commission—a fact-finding mission dispatched by the League of Nations—as a "fair judgment."⁵³ Hu Shih adopted a position of accepting the establishment of an autonomous government in Manchuria, a stance that encountered vigorous opposition within China.

Furthermore, despite vigorous calls for full-scale military engagement, Hu Shih expressed support for the Tanggu Truce, signed between China and Japan in May 1933, asserting that it constituted a necessary measure to preserve the North China region.⁵⁴ He advocated for a long-term strategic policy of "pro-Japanese for function, and self-strengthening for substance" for the subsequent two to three decades, contending that China ought to cultivate its national strength through strategic patience and self-restraint. A shift in this conciliatory approach began to become apparent around the time of his intellectual exchange with Murobuse Kōshin, the chief editor of the magazine *Nihon Hyōron (Japan Review)*.⁵⁵

In October 1935, at the request of Murobuse Kōshin, Hu Shih authored an article entitled

⁵¹ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, pp. 446–459.

⁵² Hu Shih, "Diary." In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, pp. 209–217.

⁵³ Hu Shih, "A Report Representing World Public Opinion" (一個代表世界公論的報告). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 502–510.

⁵⁴ Hu Shih, "The Importance of Preserving North China" (保全華北的重要). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 21, pp. 628–634.

⁵⁵ Hu Shih et al, *Selected Correspondence of Hu Shih* (胡適來往書信選), vol. 2, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, p. 575.

“A Respectful Message to the Japanese People.”⁵⁶ In this piece, he contended that, rather than focusing on an unsubstantiated “Sino-Japanese friendship,” the fundamental issue was dismantling the prevailing “Sino-Japanese animosity.” He warned that the collective animosity of 400 million Chinese citizens had reached a critical threshold, with the potential to erupt into widespread rebellion imminently.

Hu Shih urged Japan, drawing upon its legacy from the Meiji Restoration, not to allow its accumulated glory to be vitiated in a manner analogous to the reversal of Germany’s international standing following World War I. The article was subsequently translated and published in the November 1935 issue of the *Nihon Hyōron*, although sections containing criticisms of the Japanese military were intentionally subjected to censorship.

In response, Murobuse Kōshin acknowledged Hu Shih’s preceding arguments but countered with a critical inquiry: “Have the political leaders of your nation undertaken efforts to placate and convince the populace for the sake of a genuine rapprochement with Japan?”⁵⁷ In his rejoinder, Hu Shih clarified that his criticism was not directed indiscriminately at the Japanese people. He provided a personal example to illustrate his distinction, stating, “For instance, while I may resent certain Japanese militarists, I can simultaneously hold deep respect and affection for my friend Professor Takagi Yasaka.”⁵⁸

Hu Shih’s subsequent meeting with Takagi Yasaka transpired in July 1936, during a stopover in Japan on his route to the Sixth International Conference of the IPR. When Takagi engaged in a conversation with Hu Shih over a meal with delegates of the Japanese IPR, he reportedly felt profound regret at their parting.

The Sixth International Conference of the IPR was convened from August 15 to 29, 1936, at a hotel situated in Yosemite National Park (U.S.). In a significant departure from his preceding appearances, Hu Shih delivered a speech that directly criticized Japan for impeding China’s initiatives toward self-reliance. This precipitated a heated verbal exchange with the Japanese delegation, including former Foreign Minister Yoshizawa Kenkichi, who rebutted Hu Shih’s assertions.⁵⁹

Concurrently, Takagi Yasaka, who was absent from the conference, articulated his distress concerning the situation in a letter addressed to Asakawa Kan’ichi. He discussed Japan’s intensifying inclination toward fascism and revealed his personal intellectual struggle, stating: “Is it not because there are no strong people who can bravely say ‘no’ anywhere? Why can we not find such people in our country? These kinds of questions go through my mind day and night as a student of history.”⁶⁰

On September 8, 1937, Hu Shih, having been appointed by Chiang Kai-shek as an unofficial diplomatic envoy to the United States, issued a statement to Gao Zongjia as he departed Nanjing. Reflecting upon the initial attempts at a peaceful resolution, he remarked, “Our efforts in early August to pursue the ‘greatest endeavor for peace before the outbreak of war’ were indeed worthwhile. However, we must acknowledge that the past month of fighting has proven that our concerns at the time were perhaps excessive.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ Hu Shih, “A Respectful Message to the Japanese People” (敬告日本国民). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 22, pp. 380–385.

⁵⁷ Murobuse Kōshin, “A Letter in Reply to Hu Shizhi” (胡適之に答ふる書), *Nihon Hyōron*, vol. 10, no. 12 (December 1935): 236.

⁵⁸ Hu Shih, “Letter” (書信). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 24, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Hu Songping, *First Draft of the Long Chronological Biography of Mr. Hu Shizhi*, vol. 4, p. 245.

⁶⁰ *Collection of Asakawa Kan’ichi’s Correspondence Materials*, Archival Call Number B95–3, Manuscripts and Archives, Fukushima Prefectural Library.

⁶¹ Hu Shih, “Diary.” In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 32, p. 668.

Hu Shih's conviction in China's capacity for military resistance was bolstered by the military engagements of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident and the Second Shanghai Incident. During his initial stopover in San Francisco on September 29, he delivered a speech entitled "Can China Win?" at the Commonwealth Club. In his address, he delineated the requisite conditions that determine the outcome of a war.⁶² Regarding one of these conditions—cooperation from overseas—he subtly appealed for material and diplomatic assistance to China. While respecting the neutral stance of the United States, he contended that neutrality alone was insufficient for the preservation of peace.

On October 1, Hu Shih delivered a similar address on CBS Radio. On October 20, he and Ambassador Wang Zhengting held their inaugural meeting with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a fellow alumnus of Columbia University. During his nine-month sojourn, Hu Shih continued to travel extensively across the United States, presenting nearly 100 public addresses.⁶³

While Hu Shih was delivering his public addresses, Asakawa Kan'ichi corresponded with his acquaintances in Japan, warning them of the accelerating deterioration of public opinion toward Japan in the United States. In a letter dated March 6, 1938, addressed to his former junior high school classmate and current Waseda University professor Nakagiri Kakutarō, Asakawa observed that while Japan appeared to appreciate America's neutral stance, "public opinion in the U.S., from top to bottom, has taken a completely anti-Japanese stance."⁶⁴ He further noted that the Japanese military's explanations regarding the reported atrocities in Nanjing were losing credibility among the international community.

Perceiving a significant discrepancy between the official narrative articulated in Japan and the information reported by foreign media concerning Sino-Japanese relations, Asakawa Kan'ichi transmitted newspaper clippings from sources such as *The New York Times* to his colleagues and acquaintances. Through this extant network, he sought to raise awareness among leading political and journalistic figures, including Hatoyama Ichirō, Saitō Takao, and Ogata Taketora, regarding the divergent international perceptions of the conflict.⁶⁵

On September 17, 1938, Hu Shih was formally appointed by Chiang Kai-shek as Ambassador to the United States, succeeding Wang Zhengting. The September 20th edition of *The New York Times* featured an article on Hu Shih under the headline "A Welcome Ambassador," which characterized him as an indispensable figure for cultivating mutual understanding between China and the United States. The article expressed the anticipation that he would substantially reinforce the bonds of sympathy connecting the two nations. Given his regular perusal of *The New York Times*, it is highly probable that Asakawa Kan'ichi was cognizant of this article.

Upon his formal appointment as ambassador, Hu Shih continued his public relations campaign through speeches and publications, framing the Second Sino-Japanese War as a conflict between "autocracy" and "democracy." He contended that Japan, owing to its prolonged "feudal" era, retained pronounced militaristic elements, a situation he posited as analogous to Germany. Conversely, he argued that China had successfully abrogated feudalism more than two millennia prior and had cultivated a form of democracy more consonant with Western ideals.

According to Hu Shih, Japan's rapid Westernization was merely a superficial process, whereas China's constituted a more deliberate and fundamental trajectory. In this manner, Hu Shih

⁶² Hu Shih, "Can China Win?" In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 37, pp. 403–417.

⁶³ Hu Huijun, *Hu Shih During the Sino-Japanese War: The Evolution of His War View and His Lecture Activities in the United States* (抗日戰爭時期的胡適 其戰爭觀的變化及在美國的演講活動), Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press, 2013, p. 82.

⁶⁴ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 512.

⁶⁵ Abe Yoshio, *The Last "Japanese": The Life of Asakawa Kan'ichi* (最後の「日本人」朝河貫一の生涯), Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1983, pp. 167–173.

underscored China's perceived superiority by highlighting the contrast in their respective "feudal" histories.⁶⁶ His argument represents a reinterpretation of Japan's once-lauded historical past as an impediment to its modernization.⁶⁷

The outcome of the Second Sino-Japanese War was contingent upon the diplomatic and military posture of the United States. In an effort to persuade the U.S. to formally enter the conflict against Japan, Hu Shih engaged in an active lobbying campaign. It has been contended that Hu Shih played a significant role in the breakdown of U.S.-Japan diplomatic negotiations, as China's sustained opposition to a settlement ultimately contributed to the failure of these deliberations.⁶⁸

In contrast to Hu Shih's lobbying efforts to persuade the United States to enter the conflict, Asakawa Kan'ichi sought to avert a full-scale war by orchestrating a high-level diplomatic appeal. His proposed initiative involved having President Franklin D. Roosevelt dispatch a personal letter to the Japanese emperor, advocating for peace and bilateral amity. Asakawa's concept was communicated to U.S. officials through the intermediary Langdon Warner, which resulted in the dispatch of the presidential letter on December 6.

However, that same evening, President Roosevelt privately articulated his reservations to Hu Shih, stating that the letter might prove to be ineffectual. As Roosevelt had indeed predicted, the epistle was delivered to the Emperor only moments prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor, ultimately demonstrating its insufficiency in averting the outbreak of hostilities between the United States and Japan.

Expectations of, and disappointment over, democratization

Upon receiving news of Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945, Hu Shih dispatched a telegram to Wang Shijie on August 24 with a message intended for Mao Zedong.⁶⁹ In the telegram, Hu Shih proposed that, in light of the prevailing domestic and international circumstances, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party ought to abandon the utilization of military force and prepare to constitute the second-largest political party in China.

Citing the example of the British Labour Party, Hu Shih noted that the party, notwithstanding its limited initial vote count, had evolved into a major political force with 12 million votes through peaceful and patient development. He contended that if the Chinese Communist Party were to adopt a similar strategy of incremental growth, its future potential would be boundless. The telegram containing this counsel was subsequently transmitted from Wang Shijie, who was present at the Chongqing negotiations, to Mao Zedong.

In June 1946, Hu Shih's aspirations for a peaceful outcome were fundamentally undermined with the resumption of the Chinese Civil War between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. Returning from the United States around the same time, Hu Shih assumed the presidency of Peking University in September and commenced the undertaking of institutional reconstruction.

On August 1, 1947, Hu Shih delivered an address on the Kuomintang Central Radio Station in Peking, in which he discussed the ideal set of values shared by a global culture. He identified three key components of this ideal: (1) scientific achievements, (2) a "socialized" economic

⁶⁶ Ouyang Zhesheng, *Exploring Hu Shih's Spiritual World* (探尋胡適的精神世界), Beijing: Peking University Press, 2012, pp. 257–258.

⁶⁷ Ogata Yasushi, "The Destiny of Philosophy: Hu Shih and Dewey" (哲学の運命 胡適とデューイ), *Chūgoku*, no. 19 (June 2004): 264–266.

⁶⁸ Hyer, Paul, "Hu Shih: the Diplomacy of Gentle Persuasion," In Richard Dean Burns and Edward M. Bennett ed., *Diplomats in Crisis: United States-Chinese-Japanese relations, 1919–1941*, Santa Barbara: ABC-Clio, 1974, pp. 153–170.

⁶⁹ Hu Shih et al, *Selected Correspondence of Hu Shih*, vol. 2, pp. 26–27.

system, and (3) a democratic political system. He substantiated the third component, a democratic political system, with the following rationale:

In my view as a student of history, the trajectory of world culture has been on a clear path toward democracy and freedom for the past three to four hundred years. The recent three-decade surge of collective authoritarianism, which opposes freedom and democracy, is merely a minor setback or a small counter-current. We shouldn't let this thirty-year reversal erase the grand, three-hundred-year-long trend toward democracy and freedom.⁷⁰

Hu Shih consistently emphasized the significance of “democracy,” which he posited as the optimal choice for China in preference to “autocracy.” He contended that this political framework was deeply embedded in China's historical trajectory.

Similarly, as Japan intensified its national control in the period preceding the conflict with the United States, Asakawa Kan'ichi consistently underscored the historical significance of “democracy” in his correspondence with his academic and political acquaintances. His repeated emphasis on this concept stood in stark opposition to the prevailing nationalistic and authoritarian currents in Japan:

A liberal political system is the highest and most naturally rational form of government humanity has achieved to date, but it is also the most difficult. It carries the greatest risk of internal failure, as the sense of individual responsibility, which is the foundational basis of this system, is the most prone to slackening. For this reason, it is a form of government that requires constant self-reflection and self-exertion more than any other. ... Authoritarian states like Germany, Italy, and Japan have fallen into a defeatism that sees only the flaws of democracy, and have taken a shortcut focused solely on efficiency. This is not only a deviant path straying from the course of great history, but also a cowardly act of weak will, succumbing to difficulties.⁷¹

Asakawa Kan'ichi anticipated that Japan's national crisis would compel its populace to recognize their errors. As he defined the concept, “democracy was the most difficult form of government, one that made constant self-reflection, reform, and unceasing trials or experiments its lifeblood.”⁷² Ultimately, Asakawa's aspirations were not realized, and Japan irrevocably committed to the Pacific War. Although he constituted a notable exception who retained his academic freedom in the United States even after the war, he was nonetheless pervaded by a profound sense of sorrow and disillusionment.

In the People's Republic of China, established by the victorious Communist Party, the concept of “democracy” advocated by Hu Shih was superseded by a conceptually similar yet fundamentally distinct notion: Mao Zedong's “New Democracy.” Furthermore, a large-scale campaign dedicated to the critique of Hu Shih's thought was launched in the 1950s, thereby effectively repudiating the very actions that had invoked the discourse of “democracy.” Concurrently, in Taiwan, Chiang Kai-shek maintained a martial law regime that functioned, in essence, as an autocracy.

In 1917, Asakawa Kan'ichi and Hu Shih—both scholars educated in the United States—encountered one another fortuitously while transiting by vessel to their respective home countries. Both were specialists in historical studies, and both shared the conviction that

⁷⁰ Hu Shih, “The Current Trend of World Culture” (眼前世界文化的趨向). In *The Complete Works of Hu Shih*, vol. 22, p. 693.

⁷¹ Asakawa Kan'ichi, *The Collected Letters of Kan'ichi Asakawa*, p. 553.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 553.

democracy constituted a universal human institution with profound historical antecedents. This fortuitous meeting marked the commencement of a sustained intellectual rapport.

In moments of national crisis, both individuals found themselves compelled to transcend the confines of purely academic engagement. They not only articulated candid critiques of domestic affairs but also assumed roles on the international stage in defense of their nations' interests. Yet, as global tensions escalated toward open conflict between Japan and the United States, historical circumstance positioned them on opposing sides.

Ultimately, these pro-American intellectuals became, in an ironic sense, casualties of their respective nations' historical trajectories. Asakawa Kan'ichi's admonitions against Japan's increasingly militaristic course were systematically disregarded as the country descended into conflict, leaving him in profound despair throughout the duration of the war. Hu Shih's aspirations for a peaceful and democratic China, meanwhile, were thwarted by the resumption of the Chinese Civil War and the ascendancy of the Communist Party, whose articulation of "New Democracy" diverged fundamentally from his personal vision.