Russo-Japanese Negotiations and the Japanese Annexation of Korea

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The Russo-Japanese negotiations after the conclusion of the war between the two belligerents affected Japan’s annexation of Korea. Soon after the Portsmouth Peace Conference, Japan forced the Korean emperor to sign the Treaty of Protection in 1905, putting his empire and its diplomacy under Japanese control. Before the final settlement of the 1907 Russo-Japanese Convention, Japan seized virtually complete control over Korea’s internal affairs. As the Japanese Premier Katsura Tarō said, Japan’s annexation of Korea in 1910 was carried out “immediately after finishing business with Russia (with the 1910 Russo-Japanese Convention).” Russo-Japanese negotiations shifted the Japanese policy toward Korea from “protection” to “annexation.” The Russo-Japanese Conventions both in 1907 and in 1910, which were done after the Portsmouth Treaty, became a final safety lock to Japan’s annexation.

It was not until the conventions with Russia and the adjustment of interests among the imperial powers that Japan had a free hand in controlling Korea. The powers would not allow Japan to proceed with annexation, which was regarded as beyond Japan’s prudent diplomatic boundaries. This was the reason why Japan needed the second convention with Russia in 1910 to certify again the approval from Russia, even though they had already given tacit consent to Japan’s annexation of Korea in the 1907 convention.

The Russo-Japanese Conventions and the following annexation of Korea symbolized the re-formation of the international balance of power after the Russo-Japanese War. The Russo-Japanese Convention weakened the anti-Russian character of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance; at the same time, the convention also threatened the existence of the Anglo-Japanese
Alliance itself. The 1910 convention frustrated the Open Door principle in Manchuria and made it impossible for the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to stand against the United States. The renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the conclusion of the Anglo-American Unlimited Arbitration Treaty in 1911 are the proofs of reorganization in international relations. It can be said that the Russo-Japanese Convention escalated conflicts between the United States and Japan, mainly in East Asia and the Pacific throughout the Twentieth Century.

As international relations became complicated regarding the interests in East Asia, some puzzling problems remain in the study of the Russo-Japanese negotiations in relation to Japan’s annexation of Korea. In what way did the Russo-Japanese Convention have an impact upon transforming Korea’s situation from protectorate into colony? What influence did the Anglo-Japanese alliance have upon the Russo-Japanese Conventions? How did the powers’ interests over Manchuria affect Japan’s annexation of Korea?

This chapter strongly emphasizes the second Russo-Japanese Convention and its surrounding international relations from 1905 to 1910. Russo-Japanese Conventions will be evaluated in relation to the East Asian Policies of Britain and America. The second convention made Japan employ firm and high-handed diplomacy and also was a clue to the entangled international environment whirling around the Korean Peninsula during its annexation by Japan.

The Russo-Japanese Convention was an inevitable diplomatic product to supplement the Portsmouth Peace Treaty. The convention was a natural consequence of the Portsmouth Treaty, which uncertified certain concrete notions about the Chinese Empire, Manchuria, and Korea. At the Portsmouth preliminary consultation, Witte, the Russian plenipotentiary, insisted that the measures of guidance and control which Japan considered necessary to enforce upon Korea should not bring any prejudices to the sovereign rights of the Emperor of Korea, but Japan objected to including this in the original text of the Peace Treaty. However, in the end, the Japanese plenipotentiaries accepted Russia’s demand and declared that it would be appropriate that those measures to change the status quo by Japan should be taken in accordance with the Korean government. Japan accepted the fact that they would need the consent of Russia, one of the powers concerned in the Korean problem, in the case of annexing Korea.

After the Portsmouth Peace Treaty, the biggest problem for Japan was to avoid repeating the disgrace of the Triple Intervention in 1895. Hayashi Tadasu, the Japanese Foreign Minister, had a series of collaboration plans with the European Powers to evade any kind of intervention or opposition from them. According to his plans, Japan needed to make the most of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and then to persuade the other powers – the United States, Russia, and France – to support Japan.

The Franco-Japanese Convention, which was concluded before the Russo-Japanese Convention, was a kind of lever to turn Russia towards Japan. As a matter of fact, the two conventions made it possible for Japan