

Exploration of the Reasons for The Outbreak of The Sino-Japanese War from The Perspective of "Thucydides Trap"

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Abstract

In recent years, "Thucydides Trap" has been used by Graham Allison as an explanation of the US-China relationship, and it has even been regarded by some people as an iron law in international relations. In fact, it is still controversial whether this argument can explore the real law behind it. Based on the Sino-Japanese War in Allison's case study, this paper describes and analyzes the causes of the war through the lens of "Thucydides Trap," following Allison's idea of exploring the issue of a rising Japan and a defending China, respectively. The basic conclusion of this paper is that China's "ruling power syndrome" was not the cause of the war, and that the Sino-Japanese War is not an appropriate part of Allison's argument, and that the theory is not sufficiently well developed.

Keywords

"Thucydides Trap"; The Sino-Japanese War; Graham Allison.

1. "Thucydides Trap"

The term "Thucydides' Trap" has received widespread attention in recent years because it has been used as a metaphor for Sino-American relations by Graham Allison, a renowned contemporary American scholar in the field of international relations. The concept originates from the ancient Greek historian Thucydides' analysis of the reasons for the outbreak of war between Athens and Sparta in his book *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, in which he argued that what made the war "unavoidable" "was the growth of Athenian power and the consequent fear of Sparta"[1]. Thucydides not only recounts history, but also focuses on the surface of historical events to dig deeper into the causes of the war, and his ideas on the causes of the outbreak of war still have far-reaching influence and significance for future generations. The "Thucydides' Trap" proposed by Allison is an abstraction based on the narrative and analysis of this important assertion of Thucydides, which is defined as the serious structural pressure caused when a rising power threatens the dominant position of a ruling power[2]. This view suggests that when the rise of an emerging power challenges the position of a dominant power, the latter will feel threatened and fearful and take measures to contain and suppress the former, and the structural contradictions between the two will be more and more likely to lead to conflict and war. The "Thucydides Trap" is therefore one of the theories that explore how the transition of power between countries will lead to war.

As a matter of fact, Allison's "Thucydides Trap" is quite controversial in the academic world. Some scholars deny or even criticize the existence and legitimacy of the theory. He Yuanguo examines Allison's "Thucydides' Trap" from a classical perspective, arguing and pointing out that its concept lacks theoretical basis[3]. Other scholars believe that Allison has fundamentally

misinterpreted Thucydides' viewpoints, "firstly, because of his inability to grasp Thucydides' thought, and secondly, because of his insufficient understanding of the nature and lessons of the Peloponnesian War"[4]. On the contrary, "Thucydides' Trap" has been questioned and criticized, but also received a lot of praise, many scholars regarded it as an "iron law" in international relations, and believe that Allison has provided a profound understanding of today's international political affairs. In any case, if we want to effectively judge and evaluate the "Thucydides Trap", we can perhaps start from the theory itself, and discuss and analyze whether it can accurately explain the reasons for the occurrence of wars through relevant cases. Allison in the "Thucydides Trap case study" found that over the past 500 years there are 16 times similar to the Thucydides Trap case in the great powers in the struggle for hegemony, of which only four cases to achieve a peaceful transition, the rest of the outbreak of war, such as the United Kingdom and Germany in World War I, World War II, the United States and Japan, and so on, due to the change in national strength and triggered wars. Therefore, this paper will select the Sino-Japanese War case and analyze the reasons for the outbreak of this war from the perspective of "Thucydides Trap", hoping to gain a new understanding of "Thucydides Trap". According to the discussion of the "Thucydides Trap", Allison believes that the causes of war need to have two premises, one is the rise of emerging powers to break the original balance of power, and the second is that the established powers feel the challenge of the emerging powers and then fear, prompting them to take corresponding measures to curb the development of the later. In detail, it can be regarded as the "Rising Power Syndrome" and the "Ruling Power Syndrome" involved in the theory, "the former mainly refers to the increasing self-awareness of the rising powers, which requires them to increase their own interests as well as obtaining greater recognition and respect, while the latter basically means that the rising powers are more aware of their own interests, and are more likely to be recognized and respected. The former refers mainly to the growing self-awareness of the rising powers and their demand to increase their interests and gain greater recognition and respect, while the latter is basically the mirror image of the former, referring to the magnified sense of fear and insecurity of the established powers in the face of the threat of their "decline"[5]. Once the conditions of these two "syndromes" are met, it is easy to move towards competition and conflict. In addition, in his study of related issues, Allison focuses on the examination of the policy decision process, finding key decisions and decision makers, and analyzing the reasons why decision makers make decisions. Therefore, this paper will follow Allison's idea of exploring the problem, combined with the conditions of "Thucydides' Trap", to study and analyze the important events and decisions that led to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War.

2. Analysis of the Causes of The Outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War

The Sino-Japanese War, which broke out in 1894, was a war that Japan provoked in the process of its rise to power to China, which was a dominant power at that time, to reverse the pattern of East Asia, and it occupies an extremely important position in the modern history of China and Japan. The decline of the Qing dynasty and the rapid development of Japan constitute the two main elements of the Thucydides Trap, which focuses on the changes in the power contrast between the rising power and the ruling power to stimulate and change the interaction between the two, which in turn generates structural pressures that may ultimately lead to the occurrence of the war. The following will analyze the reasons for the Sino-Japanese War from the perspective of the "Thucydides Trap" on both sides.

2.1. Japan's "Rising Power Syndrome"

The rise of Japan can be traced back to the opening of its doors by the American "Black Ship" in 1853, after a long period of extreme isolation and backwardness, in which Japan, like other countries in its Asian neighborhood, relied mainly on the traditional tribute system of

dependence on China. Less than five years after the founding of the country, "the shogunate actively pursued reforms, the policy of opening up the country, in the modernization of education, military modernization, as well as the understanding of the world situation, grasp, etc. have achieved the achievements of the then China is incomparable, greatly shortened the distance with the European and American powers"[6]. After the overthrow of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the transfer of power to the hands of the Emperor and the establishment of a new government, the Meiji Restoration reform movement implemented by Emperor Meiji in 1868 ushered in an important turning point in the history of modern Japan. Through the Meiji Restoration, Japan actively introduced and learned advanced Western science and technology, and realized rapid development in politics, economy, military, social life, etc., and at the same time, it also made Japan embark on the road of modern capitalism from feudalism. The process of Japan's gradual westernization actually planted the gene of outward colonial expansion. Due to Japan's poor native conditions, small size, lack of resources, frequent disasters, coupled with the coexistence of foreign invasion from the West and the need for domestic development, Japan's unique sense of crisis and the sense of humiliation of the invasion of the island nation are intertwined, and therefore, in the early Meiji period, the emperor declared that he wanted to "vigorously build up the military, so that the country's prestige will be shining in the overseas countries, so that it can answer to the gods of the ancestors and the late emperor". After that, he also said that he wanted to "open up thousands of miles of waves" and "spread the country's prestige in all directions"[7], and formulated the "continental policy" of conquering Asia by force, which laid down the main theme of Japan's foreign expansion. This set the tone for Japan's foreign expansion.

From the geopolitical point of view, Japan's foreign expansion can choose a very limited path, and the need for Korea and the Ryukyus as a springboard, which has naturally become the primary solution to the problem. Historically, Korea was a vassal state of China, and Japan could not bypass dealing with China if it wanted Korea. 1874 invasion of Taiwan and 1879 annexation of the Ryukyus were Japan's test and provocation of the Qing dynasty and its efforts and attempts at expansion. 1884 Koshin coup d'état took place in Korea, and the two sides negotiated and signed the Treaty of Tianjin in the process, which enabled Japan to gain the same rights as China to deal with Korea, and also provided Japan with the right to negotiate with China before the First Sino-Japanese War. The Treaty of Tianjin was negotiated in the course of which Japan was granted the same rights as China to deal with Korea, and also laid the groundwork for Japan to send troops to Korea before the Sino-Japanese War. As the main participant in Japan's hegemony during the Meiji period, Ito Hirobumi had to persuade Li Hongzhang to sign a treaty with Japan, considering that Japan did not have the certainty of defeating China at that time. Several negotiations Ito Hirobumi to punish the murder compensation matters of particular concern, even if repeatedly rejected by the Chinese side also refused to give up the fight[8]. This is very likely to divert attention from the Chinese side to lower its proposed rights and interests related to the Korean war, at the same time, China's tough attitude to Japan's discontent, stimulating Japan's determination to vigorously expand the military preparations for the war, enhance the maritime power, for the future war to make good military preparations. In the 1890s, Prime Minister Aritomo Yamagata re-established Japan's foreign policy since the Meiji Restoration, that is, "The first is to guard the line of sovereignty, and the second is to protect the line of interest. The so-called sovereignty line is the border of the country. The so-called line of interest is the area closely related to the safety and security of the sovereignty line. If the sovereignty line and the line of interest are not protected, the country will not be a country." [9]This policy was in line with the policy set out in the previous period, in which mainland Japan was regarded as the line of sovereignty and China and Korea as the line of interest.

The Korean Donghak Uprising was the trigger for the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, for which both the Qing government and Japan sent troops into Korea to suppress the rebellion. At that time, Japan's purpose of sending troops was only to maintain the balance of power in Korea, "Although Ito Hirobumi confirmed the sending of troops, he still adopted the policy of avoiding conflict with the Qing army, advocating the maintenance of coordinated relations between Japan and China, and the reform of the internal affairs of Korea under the mutual consultation, so as to designate Korea as the common sphere of influence of the two countries"[10]. In addition, Ito Hirobumi also reached a consensus with the Chinese Minister in Japan that "both sides will withdraw their troops after the pacification of the Korean civil strife, and jointly consult on the reform of the internal affairs of Korea"[11]. However, unlike Ito Hirobumi, the warlords believed that Japan had sent troops to fight with China for hegemony in Korea, and the warlords, led by Rokuou Sokou, had prepared for war at the beginning of the dispatch of troops and incited hard-line sentiments in the country against China. Ito Hirobumi also changed his mind and decided to go to war with China because of the strong opposition to the withdrawal of troops and other voices against China and the promotion of the policy toward Korea. Capture and control of Korea has been Japan's expansion of the "mainland policy" since the important steps, but the Korean plot for decades has not yet made much progress, this time to seize the opportunity to send troops to Korea, if the follow-up action is only withdrawal of troops, I'm afraid that it is difficult to push forward the plan of outward expansion, it is more difficult to satisfy its expanding ambitions, it can be said that the Koshin coup d'état for Japan to get the "crowd's opinion" and other voices to confront China to promote the war against China. Koshin coup for Japan to get the qualification to enter Korea, and the uprising for its invasion of Korea to provide a pretext and timing, Japan knows that touching Korea is bound to anger China, but even so still ready to go to war is also reflected from the side of the implementation of the determination to expand, in dealing with the issue of North Korea in every step of the way to witness Japan in the continuous pursuit of greater interests, after years of preparations for the conditions of war, naturally, the action is inclined to fight a war of probability, but also in the case of Japan, the Japanese government is not willing to take action. After years of preparation, Japan had the conditions for a war and naturally favored a war that it was likely to win in terms of action.

2.2. China's "Non-Ruling Power Syndrome"

From the perspective of the "Thucydides Trap", the Qing dynasty in the relationship with Japan as a conservative country is not typical, it is not like the Spartan suppression of the rise of Athens as not allowed to repair the walls, and not like the first world war when the British wary of Germany as to maintain the "balance of power" in Europe, crazy arms race, especially its ruling class did not show due fear at the stage of the rise of Japan, on the contrary, its ruling class did not show due fear. The Qing dynasty did not seem to have a real sense of the "ruling power syndrome" in dealing with Japan, especially its ruling class in the stage of Japan's rise did not show due fear, but rather belittled Japan, blind arrogance, and failed to see the real situation clearly. Although the Qing dynasty in the experience of the Western powers violently opened the door to the semi-colonial vassals under their control, but the concept of heavenly kingdom is still deeply rooted, even as Li Hongzhang at the time of the more advanced people, in the face of Japan to carry out the Meiji Restoration is not only not to be vigilant, but also to threaten that "our country will never carry out this kind of change!"[12]. Coupled with the feudal decadence of the Qing government, the backwardness of the social system, the inability to cope with and solve the internal and external problems, even if it is the foreign affairs movement to try to realize the master of the barbarians to control the barbarians, to a certain extent, to promote the development of China's industrialization, so that the national strength has been enhanced, but compared to the Meiji Restoration of Japan, such a change exists in many weaknesses, lack of a new era of the need for the deeper underlying, by the limitations of

the community of internal factors, which can only become a superficial change. However, compared with the Meiji Restoration in Japan, such a reform had many weaknesses, lacked the deeper foundation needed for a new era, and was limited by many factors within the society. Moreover, the tolerant attitude of the Qing government towards Japan's behavior towards Taiwan and Korea in the 1970s and 1980s made it more and more unconcerned, and the sluggishness and contempt it showed towards them were the very reasons why Japan started the war against China later.

Li Hongzhang played a major role in relations with Japan as an important foreign minister of the Qing dynasty. For Japan after the Meiji Restoration, Li Hongzhang realized that the increasingly powerful neighboring countries may pose a threat to China, unlike the Thucydides-style interaction, he proposed to unite Japan for its assistance and prevention of aggression. "Japan is only three schedules away from Suzhou and Zhejiang, proficient in Chinese characters, its soldiers and armor than the East Island countries are poor and strong, can be united for foreign aid, do not make the West rely on foreign government." [13] In the case of several Western blatant invasion, Li Hongzhang such considerations are not unreasonable, he hoped that by drawing Japan together against the Western powers, which shows that the threat of the rise of Japan has not yet been enough attention. But since then Japan has repeatedly challenged the bottom line of the Chinese side, changed his original perception. However, although no longer believe that the United States is reliable, but also to beware of Japan, there are certain actions, but in dealing with Japan's provocations, especially in dealing with the Korean issue, Li Hongzhang still chose to repeatedly compromise, concessions. In the Japanese invasion of Taiwan, Li Hongzhang advocated "only since the camp training, strengthen my momentum, but not sudden action"; in forcing North Korea to sign an unequal treaty, but also suggested that "persuade them to tolerate the small wrath of for the peace of mind plan "; and then the Japanese annexation of the Ryukyus is more unsettled [14]. In fact, the Qing dynasty in these things on the upper hand, when Japan can still be defeated, but Li Hongzhang so compromise conservative thinking and weak practice but not calculating not, but also condone the Japanese ambition to inch forward, followed by the signing of the "Treaty of Tianjin" is the Japanese Sino-Japanese War logically sent troops into the country to find a basis.

Ultimately led to Li Hongzhang so the reason is ultimately still despise Japan, otherwise would not have been invited by the Korean government to send troops to assist in the suppression of the uprising, asserted that "firmly believe that Japan 'will not have other intentions', will not take the opportunity to cause trouble" [15]. Like Li Hongzhang such a complex situation in the world have a certain understanding of the person is still so, not to mention those general officials and even other important decision makers in the Qing court, they are more deeply rooted in the concept of Japan's "assorted small countries". Although the Japanese invasion of Taiwan after the impact of Li Hongzhang's initiative to develop a modern naval defense construction, the creation of a new type of navy, in a certain period of time to achieve considerable results, but due to the short-sightedness of the Qing government in 1888, "to the 'Ministry of the Treasury is empty, the sea border of nothing,' for the reason that no longer continue to introduce warships and other weapons and equipment" [16]. In the Japanese naval construction in full swing period, the Qing government has stopped this investment, and instead diverted the funds to repair the Summer Palace to Cixi birthday celebration, resulting in the stagnation of the construction of naval defense. The threat of Japan was not as important as celebrating the birthday of the person in power, reflecting the corruption and ignorance of the Qing government and its contempt for Japan.

Compared to the rise of Japan, the Qing dynasty more fear and sense of crisis from the Western powers than the powerful, and Japan's relationship, due to hundreds of years of unchanging status difference caused by the Qing dynasty's stubborn inertia of thinking, in general, the development of Japan with tolerance and contempt for the attitude, so it can be said that the

Qing dynasty is not the traditional sense of a ruling power, it is not "conservative country syndrome" is one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of war. Therefore, it can be said that the Qing Dynasty was not a conservative country in the traditional sense, and its non-"ruling power syndrome" was one of the factors contributing to the outbreak of war. Imagine, if the Qing dynasty is really like the history of the conservative state in general, the rise of Japan's enough vigilance, to take appropriate measures to contain, combat Japan, take out the determination to fight with Japan to pay attention to the development of their own, perhaps the war will happen earlier, but perhaps not the war will not happen, will not be the reason is that Japan has been in the strength of the Qing dynasty to choose to avoid the war, and then after that, if Japan is still peeping into the other side of the powerful strength, even when the conflict between the two sides. After that, if Japan still saw the strong strength of the other side, even when the two sides clashed, perhaps again choose to give up the war. But in any case, the fact is that the Sino-Japanese War happened even though the Qing Dynasty did not have the condition of "syndrome". Therefore, the Qing dynasty may only have the name of a conservative country because it had been a dominant power, and there was no substantial element between the Qing dynasty and the gradually powerful Japan to fulfill the two prerequisites of "Thucydides' Trap". In addition, in his book on the Sino-Japanese War, Allison also focuses on the rise of Japan, seemingly emphasizing only one side's role in the war's occurrence, which can hardly be said to be compatible with the "Thucydides Trap".

3. Summary

From the perspective of "Thucydides Trap", the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War came from the rise of Japan, on the one hand, since the Meiji Restoration, Japan's comprehensive national strength has been greatly enhanced, after embarking on the road of capitalism in an attempt to foreign expansion, and therefore demanded a change in the status quo of the region, through the Sino-Japanese War to expand the interests of the long-awaited plans to put into practice. The plan that had been planned for a long time was put into practice. On the other hand, it came from China's "non-ruling power syndrome". The Qing dynasty, with its weakened national strength, showed contempt and slowness in facing the challenges of Japan's rise, and made concessions time and again in dealing with Japan's covetousness and encroachment on neighboring countries, which encouraged Japan's ambitions to invade China. In conclusion, since the situation of China is not similar to that of the traditional conservative countries, it is not entirely appropriate to discuss the causes of the Sino-Japanese War through the "Thucydides Trap", and there may be room for further improvement of this theory.

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