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Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Japan and Philippine Commonwealth Politics

Grant K. Goodman

As the determination of the Americans to leave the Philippines became evident, Japan sought to expand its economic role in the Islands. Astute and intensive diplomatic efforts by the Japanese in the Commonwealth era clearly reflected their intent ultimately to try to displace American influence. In particular, contacts with and support for leading Filipino political figures were an important avenue to advance Japan's interests in the Islands.

KEYWORDS: *hegemony, coexistence, naturalization, oligarchy, neutralization*

Fifty years ago, in his careful and extensive analysis of the success of Japan's invasion of the Philippines, Louis Morton (1953, 118) wrote:

Interrogation of Japanese officers after the war and a study of Japanese and American records fail to support the belief that a Japanese fifth column existed in the Philippines. There is not a shred of evidence to indicate that any organized effort was made by the Japanese to utilize the sympathies of the Japanese population in the Islands or of Filipino collaborators. To have done so would have involved knowledge by a Japanese organization in the Philippines of the 14th Army's detailed plans well in advance of the attack, communications with the airfields in Formosa, and an elaborate organization to receive information from agents and relay it on to Japanese headquarters in Formosa. Such an organization did not exist. If an effort to assist the attacking Japanese was made, it must have been sporadic and on an individual basis.

While this appraisal is not incorrect, it does not take into account the extent to which the Japanese, both from their astute consular personnel and from the extensive prewar Japanese community in the Islands, did have detailed knowledge of the existing situation in 1941 in the Philippines. In addition, as I hope to show in the paragraphs that follow, based on extensive research in the archives of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, once the Philippine Commonwealth was inaugurated in 1935, the amount and nature of the interaction between the Japanese and influential Filipinos increased greatly. Clearly, the Japanese looked forward to much broader commercial and investment opportunities in a soon-to-be free Philippines. Moreover, with the scheduled end of American colonial rule at hand, the Japanese also anticipated a much greater role in Philippine life generally and specifically, too, a key role in Philippine politics.

While none of these activities could be called a "fifth column," and none of them was designed to presage or to facilitate a military invasion, nevertheless, it seems clear that the Japanese were determined to play a very active role in an independent Philippines. At the same time it also appears evident that leading Filipinos were not only responsive to Japanese overtures but were, in effect, recognizing that in the near future the Japanese probably would be more important to them than the Americans. Perhaps the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 and the consequent inauguration of the Commonwealth in 1935 had a psychological impact on Philippine-American relations greater than either Filipinos or Americans realized at that time.

The Commonwealth of the Philippines (1935–1946) was to be a ten-year transition period from colony to independent republic. During those ten years the Philippines was to be fully responsible for its own internal governance while foreign affairs and defense were to continue to remain the responsibility of the colonial power, the United States. Japan, during the permissive colonialism of the United States, had developed significant economic and commercial interests in the Philippines prior to the Commonwealth era. The Japanese had invested significantly in the cultivation of abaca for Manila hemp and in the fishing industry. Japanese immigrants had spread throughout the Islands and were most active in the retail trade, in hotels, in restaurants, in

barber and beauty shops, and even in houses of prostitution. Clearly, as independence approached, the Japanese diplomatic representatives in the Philippines saw it as their primary obligation to protect Japanese nationals and to enhance Japanese commercial activities.

A few months before the Commonwealth was launched *The Tribune* (11 August 1935), a leading Manila newspaper, published an interview with the distinguished Tokyo correspondent of the *New York Times*. When asked what "Japan was thinking or saying" about the Philippines, Hugh Byas replied laconically, "Very little" (*ibid.*). "The Sakdalista uprising provided a laboratory test of one of the favorite American illusions: that Japan is watching the Philippines as a cat watches a caged canary," said Byas (*ibid.*). According to Byas, the revolt was a "one-day sensation" in the Japanese press (*ibid.*). Byas further said that Japanese disinterest in the Philippines was not new and that he, in fact, had a file on Japan for the preceding twenty years but had never needed a separate folder for the Philippines. He explained the indifference of the Japanese toward the Philippines by the fact that, in his view, practically ever since modern Japan had really known the Islands, the Philippines had been under American rule. Thus, he contended, the Philippines had been in the same category as California, i.e. seizure would mean war with the United States, a war in which "Japan would risk so much and gain so little" (*ibid.*).

However, Byas did state that there was in Japan "public indifference and secret naval interest" (*ibid.*) in the Islands. Japan, he continued, would only fight the United States for "hegemony in East Asia." In that case he contended, the importance of the Philippines to Japan would be "as hostages which their fleet would seize if war broke out" (*ibid.*). The conquest of the Philippines, then, could not decide the outcome of such a war; rather, the war would decide their fate.

In short, Byas concluded the interview by arguing that Japan needed markets not territory. Moreover, he added, the relatively small Philippine market was not worth the expense of governing the Islands. China and Manchuria, he said, were far more tempting targets of opportunity, to say nothing of how important they were in terms of defense against Soviet Russia.

Efforts to Protect Japanese Interests

Interestingly, not long before the Byas interview was published, and certainly unknown to Byas or to either Americans or Filipinos, a secret report entitled "Achievements of Japanese Immigrants Who Have Contributed to the Commercial Development of the Philippines" was submitted to the Japanese Foreign Ministry (JMFA 1935). This document set out the proposition that the new semi-independent Philippine Commonwealth regime would be most troubled by economic problems. Accordingly, the report claimed that one key to solving those economic difficulties was the development of the island of Mindanao. Quoting sources which said that "at the present rate of progress" it would take 300 or even 500 years to develop Mindanao, the report also ridiculed an apparent Filipino slogan which said "We will develop Mindanao with our own hands" (*ibid.*).

The crux of this report was the following:

We believe that it must be the great policy of our empire which is the leading power in the Far East to enlighten our benighted southern neighbor and friend the Philippines. Therefore, our government together with giving the greatest importance to our Philippine policy at this time should deepen interest in Philippine-Japanese friendship among influential organizations of private citizens and others involved in foreign relations. Moreover, for the sake of peace in the Far East and in order to build cooperation and coexistence, just as in days gone by the difficulties of building the Benguet road were overcome by Japanese hands, so should the development of Mindanao be in Japanese hands. (*Ibid.*)

Again, it needs to be stressed that these concepts on the part of the Japanese never implied conquest of the Philippines. However, they certainly did imply much more involvement in the Philippines than before 1935.

By 1936 confidential dispatches from Manila Consul General Uchiyama Kiyoshi began to pinpoint his efforts to exercise political leverage. For example, in May Uchiyama reported in code a conversation he had with U.S. High Commissioner Frank Murphy. According to

Uchiyama, Murphy, in effect, made light of the dispute over Japanese land holdings for abaca plantations in Davao. Murphy told Uchiyama that this problem never should have generated a controversy in the first place (JMFA 1936a).¹ Murphy said that he himself would respect the rights which the Japanese believed they had. Murphy even went so far as to say that, after fulfillment of the contract period, the Japanese leases should be renewed (*ibid.*). Murphy added that, while he did not want to interfere in Philippine internal matters, since this was a matter of U.S.-Japan friendship, he would convey the views of Uchiyama to Commonwealth Pres. Manuel L. Quezon the next time he had a chat with him (*ibid.*). Uchiyama also urged Murphy, who was about to travel back to the USA, to stop in Japan and meet the prime minister and the foreign minister in order to comprehend Japan's position so that Murphy will be in a better position to "resolve misunderstandings" about Japan's role in the "Philippine problem" (*ibid.*).

In the same dispatch Uchiyama warned the Foreign Ministry that matters unfavorable to the Japanese were likely to be raised in the Philippine Assembly. Nevertheless, Uchiyama hoped that "as before, Japanese in the Philippines will continue their peaceful pursuits and livelihoods unimpeded" (*ibid.*). Moreover, Uchiyama wrote that, when anti-Japanese proposals emerged in either the Philippine press or in the Philippine legislature, the Japanese should not become "unnecessarily excited" (*ibid.*). His solution to such possibilities was to deal with them in the context of Japanese-American relations and hope for mitigation accordingly.

Japanese Activism in Philippine Commonwealth Politics

On 11 September 1936 the Manila City Council passed a law requiring that 80 percent of employees in the city's hotels and eating and drinking establishments had to be Philippine or American citizens. Vice Consul Kihara Jitaro immediately paid a call on the mayor since such legislation would have a direct effect on the Japanese. The mayor told Kihara confidentially that, while it was painful for him to oppose the city council, for the good of "neighborly relations," he intended to veto the bill (JMFA 1936d).

Simultaneously, Kihara was busily working the halls of the Assembly to discern the fate of certain bills in which the Japanese had an interest. He reported that a bill to abolish port calls by foreign ships at "unopened ports" was being sent to committee for further consideration. A more worrisome bill was a proposed alien registration law in reference to which Kihara wrote: "We are continuing our efforts to the best of our ability both overt and covert to deal with all legislation affecting our interests" (JMFA 1936b).

A subsequent dispatch detailed the maneuvers of Kihara in the matter of foreign ships calling at "unopened ports." Kihara's principal contact was Assemblyman Tomas Oppus, member of the Committee on Navigation. Together they managed to have the bill returned to committee and to reopen public hearings. Because of the "scheming of Filipino shipping interests," Kihara predicted that there would be "quite a hassle" (JMFA 1936c). Concurrently Kihara was in close contact with the Superintendent of Customs Aldanese who advised Kihara that, while there was strong support for the bill in the Assembly, he himself had already gone on record against it. Both Oppus and Aldanese suggested that a compromise such as one which would permit ships of over 500 tons to come in to port to take on cargo might be possible. Encouraged by this potential solution, Kihara, in turn, urged the Foreign Ministry to accept this sort of compromise in the interest of long term good relations with the Philippines (*ibid.*).

On 18 September 1936 Consul Uchiyama reported to Tokyo in detail on Vice Consul Kihara's most recent interactions. On the night of the 16th Commonwealth Pres. Manuel L. Quezon held a cabinet meeting to discuss the legislative situation in the Assembly. Secretary of Finance Antonio de las Alas gave Kihara the details of that meeting. The first matter discussed was a bill to expand and contract customs tariffs up to 200 percent and down to 50 percent. The president expressed his support for this legislation as a significant gesture to the U.S.-Philippine Trade Conference which would be faced with just such concerns. Next, a proposed naturalization law on the model of then existing American naturalization legislation was deemed unfair to Orientals, and it was decided to revise the law to treat Asians and Caucasians alike (JMFA 1936e).

Thirdly, the Quezon administration decided not to support separate tariffs for beer and fish in light of the pending bill to expand and contract tariffs broadly. Similarly, the administration intended to oppose retail trade limitations, alien registration, and any limit on foreign ships calling at unopened ports. All of these decisions were in line with Japanese interests. Moreover, Superintendent Aldanese told Kihara that passage of the flexible tariff law would practically guarantee that no other tariff bills would pass. Aldanese also thought that, even if the compromise tonnage for foreign ships at unopened ports bill succeeded, the president would veto it. Assemblyman Pedro Sabido reported further to Kihara that the pro alien registration forces in the Assembly were unexpectedly strong but were mainly directing their concerns at the Chinese. Sabido advised confidentially that, if it were impossible to stop an alien registration bill, the Japanese could probably register free of charge (JMFA 1936f).

By 10 October 1936, Kihara seemed extremely pleased by the apparent results of his efforts at the Assembly. Alien control legislation had been stymied for the current session by the work of the chairman of the Committee on Labor and Immigration. However, Manuel Roxas told Kihara that, since many administration generated bills had not been passed in the current session, there was the possibility of a special session being called the next week. Unfortunately, Roxas said that he could not guarantee that the alien control bill might not reemerge in the special session. And Kihara reported: "So we are uneasy as before, and we must keep very close surveillance on our contacts in the Assembly" (*ibid.*). Uchiyama also noted that in the first regular session of the Philippine Commonwealth Assembly the only "real blow" to Japan was the beer tariff bill (Goodman 1970). All the rest, he said, had failed (JMFA 1936f).

Despite this positive evaluation of the Assembly's actions or inactions, Uchiyama and Kihara warned the Foreign Ministry that "the contents of these bills may be said to reflect the feelings of the people here" (JMFA 1936g). They pointed out further that the proposed alien control bill had the "plotlike character of racial subjugation" (*ibid.*). Moreover, they warned that in the future such attitudes would be exacerbated by what was seen by some as "the Japanese threat" (*ibid.*).

While contending that the number of assemblymen who were truly anti-Japanese was small, they recognized that anti-Japanese voices were being heard. "We can not disregard public opinion and must exert our efforts in behalf of enlightening the public more and more" (*ibid.*).

In late November 1936, a new problem seemed to loom for the Japanese. The Immigration Bureau was to be moved from under Customs control to the Department of Labor. Whereas the Japanese had maintained close personal relations with Superintendent of Customs Aldanese, Uchiyama noted that the Department of Labor had been supporting the alien control legislation. Further, it seemed that the then current Inspector General of Labor, Jose Figueras, was to become the head of the Immigration Bureau. Uchiyama described Figueras as "not a very good character" (JMFA 1936h). In particular, Uchiyama felt that the Labor Department was ill-disposed toward the entry of foreigners into the Philippines and he felt anxiety lest the intent of "such evil practices was for the purpose of trying to secure bribes. This point is very secret" (*ibid.*).

That Uchiyama was, in fact, not loath to utilize monetary encouragement was evident in his dealings with Quintin Paredes in 1937. According to what Paredes told the Japanese consul general, the coalescence of the Quezon political faction with the faction of Vice President Sergio Osmeña had occurred without the knowledge or participation of Paredes who was in the United States as resident commissioner. Paredes expressed his personal disappointment to Uchiyama and, while Quezon wanted Paredes to continue at least temporarily as resident commissioner, Paredes said that friends of his were planning to open a law office in his name in mid-October (JMFA 1937a).

Paredes, feeling like an onlooker in a moment of political change, told Kihara that, when he left the post of resident commissioner, he had already secretly arranged a remuneration of P3,000 from the National Bank to open his law office (*ibid.*). Uchiyama wrote the Foreign Ministry that "when one considers Paredes's political future, it is necessary to attract him to our side" (*ibid.*). Accordingly, under the pretext of celebrating the opening of his law office, the Japanese Consulate General gave Paredes P3,000 "under the table" (*ibid.*).²

Meanwhile, President Quezon had been abroad on a lengthy trip to Europe and the United States, where he had met privately with Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt. Consul General Uchiyama seemed to sense “a great change” in the president. Uchiyama wrote to the Foreign Office that Quezon “has been attacking capitalistic monopolies and emphasizing the necessity of protecting the public.” What particularly concerned Uchiyama was that, with the Philippine Assembly scheduled to go into session on 16 October 1937, Quezon was said to intend to have legislation affecting foreign relations “presented in the utmost secrecy and passed as quickly as possible.” Of course, this was troubling to Uchiyama but perhaps even more distressing was the rumor that Quezon, with his “new” commitment to public welfare, would introduce a whole panoply of legislation analogous to the American New Deal: eight-hour day, collective bargaining, workmen’s compensation, unemployment compensation, and the like. Uchiyama wrote, “Thus, when one views the President’s socialistic attitude, there are many proposals which have a close relationship with our interests” (JMFA 1937b).

Nevertheless, the joint efforts of Uchiyama and Kihara to prevent the Assembly from enacting anti-Japanese legislation were persistent, generally successful and ongoing. However, as Japanese aggression against China intensified from 1937 on, anti-Japanese sentiments in the Philippines heightened. Yet some members of the Filipino oligarchic elite saw things differently. To them, not only was it to the presumed advantage of the Philippines to see the Japanese military focus its efforts on the mainland of Asia, thus seemingly securing the Philippines from Japanese attack, but it also, perhaps perversely, encouraged them to seek closer ties with Japan as the American presence in the Islands rapidly waned.

In the spring of 1938 Consul General Uchiyama reported that he had held a private meeting in Baguio with Supreme Court Justice Jose P. Laurel. “We are relying on Laurel for his help and his guidance of the cabinet in avoiding anti-Japanese legislation,” Uchiyama wrote to Tokyo (JMFA 1938a). In the same dispatch Uchiyama reported that President Quezon had held a cabinet meeting on the 19th in Baguio and “naturally sought Laurel’s views” (*ibid.*).

By the summer of 1938 then Acting Consul General Kihara noted that "from 1936 to this year by our behind the scenes maneuvers we have prevented the passage of laws detrimental to us" (JMFA 1938b). Nevertheless, since the great majority of the assemblymen intended to seek reelection, he feared that they might try to pass again the current session's unfinished legislation. "Though we cannot relax, close contact with [Manuel] Roxas, who has retired from the Assembly, is very necessary. . . . It is necessary to maintain contact with Oppus, Quimpo and Paredes who has resigned as Resident Commissioner and is again coming to Manila" (*ibid.*).

After the second election for members of the Assembly was held in 1938, Kihara, whom the *Philippines Free Press* (19 October 1940) described as "popular, congenial and convivial," sent his assessment of the election results to the Foreign Ministry (JMFA 1938c).

Our side lost four supporters in the recent election: Quimpo lost in Davao; Aquino, Roxas and Osias retired from the Assembly. Newly elected were Isidro Vamenta [Misamis Oriental] and Quintin Paredes [Abra]. Reelected were Sabido Oppus, Buencamino, Magalona, Villanueva and Veyra whom we can continue to use. Sotto [who defeated Quimpo in Davao] understands us rather well, and, since he is powerless as the only member of the Labor Party, though we can use him in the Davao question, results will be minimal. His value will go up if he aligns himself with the government bloc or joins the government party recognizing the powerlessness of a one man party.

Kihara also noted that Pio Calica, who was the leader of the first student observation party to Japan, ran as a candidate of the Young Philippines Party and lost. In addition, one anti-Japanese assemblyman, La Flores from Cebu, also lost, receiving only four votes! (*ibid.*). Yulo, thought Kihara, would probably be reelected speaker and, as a member of the pro-American faction, could not be "used" by the Japanese (*ibid.*).

Kihara later reported to the Foreign Ministry that his great favorite, Paredes, had been elected floor leader of the Second Assembly (JMFA 1939a). Indeed, the prospects for any legislation which might negatively

affect the Japanese diminished considerably in the 1939–1940 Assembly session. Kihara's sense of Philippine politics seemed finely honed, and his personal contacts, at times enhanced by certain kindnesses, consistently worked to Japan's advantage. Of course, his machinations were implicitly reinforced both by Japan's aggressive expansionist activities on the Asian mainland as well as by the clear intent of the United States to withdraw from the Islands.

In September of 1939 Kihara wrote to Tokyo about a private conversation he had enjoyed with President Quezon. In talking about his anticipated reelection, Quezon said that after that he would not have to worry any more about the views of the Americans and that he would like to spend about a year resting in Japan. Moreover, Quezon also said that, though in the past in the Philippines in agriculture and other enterprises, American methods had been adopted, these were not appropriate for the Philippines. Accordingly, the president hoped that in the future Japan would invite Filipino technical experts to study and do research in Taiwan and in Japan (JMFA 1939b).

In June of 1940 in the Japanese journal *Hirippin Jôhô* or Philippine Report (1940, 53–54) George Hisashi Enosawa, a long time Japanese resident of Manila, wrote that in the past the major obstacle to improved Japan-Philippines relations had been the so-called Tanaka Memorial. However, wrote Enosawa, in February when a member of the Diet asked Foreign Minister Arita Hachiro whether Japan would sign a nonaggression pact with the Dutch East Indies and with the Philippines which would guarantee Philippine neutrality, Arita replied that, if the other party desired such an agreement, Japan was willing. From that time the situation of Japan-Philippines relations, he said, had truly improved (*ibid.*). Indeed, Carlos P. Romulo of the *Philippines Herald* newspaper telephoned Enosawa and said he wanted to have an important talk with him as soon as possible. Romulo told Enosawa that Arita's comment was very important to the Philippines (*ibid.*). In his excitement Romulo asked Enosawa to accompany him to the Japanese Consulate and to ask Consul General Yoshida Tanichiro to transmit six questions to the Foreign Ministry (*ibid.*). About February 22 the answers came from Tokyo, and they appeared on the front page of the *Herald* as a major scoop (*ibid.*). According to Enosawa,

Romulo trusted this reply because "it was not spontaneous, and it reflected Japan's real intention" (ibid.). Enosawa added that the Japanese should remember that, after 350 years of Western occupation, the Filipinos' European- and American-like reactions must always be kept in mind (ibid.).

In the fall of 1940 Consul General Yoshida was ordered home and on arriving in Kobe told reporters:

In general there is a strong pro-Japanese sentiment in the Philippines. President Quezon is very popular among the Filipinos, and he understands well the Japanese position. But there are those who do not yet fully understand Japan's policies in the South Seas region. (*Hiripin Jôhó* 28 September 1940, 94)

Japanese-American Tensions in the Philippines

Since the Philippine Commonwealth was to remain under United States sovereignty until full independence in 1946, American authorities in the Philippines were not insensitive to the increased activities of the Japanese. Intelligence reports were sent regularly to the War Department Bureau of Insular Affairs in Washington, D.C., although it is difficult to know what response these observations elicited. For example, in a "confidential" dispatch entitled "Monthly Report of Subversive Activities for February 1940" there was an item concerning the Anti-Communist League of the Philippines. It read: "Reliable source reports that the Anti-Communist League of the Philippines headed by Pio Duran, Attorney Vicente Correa and Sixto V. Jimenez is a pro-Japanese society with headquarters at 471 Calle Dasmariñas, Manila" (BIA 1940a). It was further noted that members of the Anti-Communist League were required to subscribe to the *New Orient Magazine* and the *Far Eastern Bulletin*, the aim of both publications being to propagate Japanese activities in the Islands (ibid.).

Another Bureau of Insular Affairs report noted the establishment of "a large Japanese publishing concern" in Davao, the Davao Nichi-Nichi Shimbun-sha Inc. with capital subscribed and paid of US\$55,000 (BIA 1940b). Further intelligence data included the fact that on 7 July 1940,

the *Sunday Informer*, the only local Sunday evening paper printed in English, appeared on the newsstands in Manila. Statements of its ownership identified organizations and individuals who were leaders in the Japanese community. The paper was printed by People's Press (OMHM), and the real editor was J. M. Intengan, city editor of the *Herald*, who had recently returned from a trip to Japan (*ibid.*). The aforementioned *Far Eastern Bulletin* had failed, and the *Sunday Informer* was its replacement. Interestingly, too, much of the *Informer's* news was prototalitarian and supplied by Domei, the official Japanese news agency (*ibid.*). The same document suggested that Hisashi Enosowa was en route to the Philippines carrying P150,000 to be used to influence the local press (*ibid.*).

Japanese efforts to influence Filipino politicians and, in particular, President Quezon were surely known to the Americans. Indeed, an intelligence report of August 1940 reported that Tsugikazu Morokuma, a prominent businessman in Davao, "wrote to Manuel L. Quezon requesting Japanese participation in a fishing venture to be launched locally" (BIA 1940c). Morokuma suggested to Quezon that the local sponsor accept Japanese "guidance" through the Nippon Marine Products Co. whose President was Yoshisuke Aikawa, a brother-in-law of Fusanosuke Kuhara, head of the Seiyukai Political Party in Japan, who was said to be a great admirer of Quezon (*ibid.*).

These sorts of activities raised some hackles in the Office of the American High Commissioner Francis B. Sayre. The High Commissioner expressed his concerns in a letter to Secretary of State Cordell Hull (BIA 1940d).

I had found it necessary to inform the Japanese Consul General at Manila that certain of his activities—such as his efforts to influence the course of immigration legislation then before the National Assembly—would not be tolerated and that he would have to discontinue them.

Although I strongly suspect that the Japanese Consul General continues improperly to approach officials of the Commonwealth Government for the purpose of influencing them favorably toward Japanese desires, it is difficult to obtain substantial evidence thereof. For example, Army Intelligence received a report on July 24 that

the Japanese Consul General had recently urged President Quezon to cause the name of Pio Duran to be placed on the ticket of the Nationalista (Government) Party for the election next December of an assemblyman from Albay. Pio Duran is a Filipino lawyer who is well known as ardently pro Japanese. My conversations with Mr. Quezon, however, have not substantiated the information received by Army Intelligence. Mr. Quezon told me that he had not seen the Japanese Consul General for a number of weeks. President Quezon also promised me to refer the Japanese Consul General to me whenever he approached him on official matters.

Two or three times, recently, in connection with Japanese visits to Manila, the Japanese Consul General has given the appearance of failing to observe the proprieties in respect of this office and at the same time of attempting to ingratiate himself with the Commonwealth authorities. Two such instances were brought informally to the attention of the Japanese Consulate General.

The very next month High Commissioner Sayre wrote another letter to the Secretary of State on the same matter (BIA 1940e). Consul General Yoshida had called to say goodbye, but at the same time he raised with Mr. Sayre the contents of a letter of 22 July 1937 from the then administrative assistant to the American high commissioner. This letter had explained in detail the procedures for foreign consular officers in dealing with officials of the Commonwealth government. One paragraph had said: "Foreign consular officers stationed in the Philippines may appropriately address and appeal to the local authorities, throughout the extent of their consular districts, for the purpose of protecting the rights and interests of their nationals" (*ibid.*). Accordingly, Yoshida claimed that this provision allowed him to do exactly what Sayre had criticized. Sayre countered by reference to another paragraph in the same letter: "Subjects of political character and questions relating to exequators, visits of foreign war vessels and airplanes, and other formal matters should be dealt with as usual through diplomatic channels, i.e. through the Embassy or Legation in Washington of the country concerned." Sayre told Secretary Hull that Consul General Yoshida wanted a clarification of these paragraphs and that Sayre believed "there is merit in his suggestion" (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

Obviously from the evidence in this piece the Japanese had not shown any hesitation to involve themselves directly in Commonwealth politics or to make direct approaches to President Quezon. While the Americans seemed to know that such activities were taking place, their response was, not surprisingly, low key. This was because their real authority had been severely diminished both by the establishment of a semifree Philippine government being nurtured hopefully toward a full-fledged democracy and by the real force in Asia of an increasingly militarily powerful Japan.

In this situation, as suggested above, the potential “winners” seemed to be the Filipinos who were, until the outbreak of the Pacific War, having the best of both worlds, so to speak. The Commonwealth was truly the forerunner to full independence, and, while American pressure continued to be useful despite its clearly weakened condition, the Japanese presence loomed larger and more important than ever before. To the great credit of President Quezon he managed to convince both the Americans and the Japanese that he was their friend and their respective best bet for their future interests in the Philippines. Clearly, too, capable and aggressive Japanese diplomats, often reinforced with appropriate financial resources, played a key role in furthering Japan’s national interest in a soon to be free Philippines.

Notes

1. For a detailed history of the Davao “problem” in Japan-Philippine relations, see Goodman 1967.

2. “Our intention was that the 3,000 pesos should come from the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, but this consulate has had to bear the onus of 1,000 pesos on its own.”

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