

Japanese Pan-Asianism in the Philippines: The Hirippin Dai Ajia Kyōkai

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Since the 1930's saw the flowering in Japan of a wide variety of extremist nationalist organizations with Pan-Asian aspirations, it is not surprising that at least one of these groups should have been noticeably active in the Philippines. And because that society considered itself to be working for the betterment of Japanese-Philippine relations through closer cultural ties, it seems appropriate to consider its activities as still another phase of Japan's "cultural offensive" in the Islands. Moreover, its totally unofficial nature provides an interesting contrast with the semi-official and government sponsored Philippine Society of Japan, and in particular with its sister organ in Manila, the Philippine-Japan Society.

On July 8, 1934, the founding meeting of the Philippine Great Asia Society (Hirippin Dai Ajia Kyōkai) was held in Manila. The stated objectives of the Society were the propagation of "Great Asianism," the promotion of friendly relations among Asian nations, an investigation of the "situations" of Asian nations, and the holding of Pan-Asian conferences. The two principal figures in the establishment of this association were Imamura Chūsuke and Mochizuki Otogoro. Among the Filipinos who were active in the group were Jose P. Laurel and Pio Duran, whose names appeared as advisers to the organization, and Jose L. Baluyot, Gertrudo Kalam-bacal and Isidro Vamenta who served on its board of directors.

Imamura Chūsuke had come to the Philippines in February, 1934, calling himself a special correspondent of the *Nagoya Shimbun* and returned to Japan on July 12, 1934. Imamura's purposes were

to "observe conditions" and to propagandize for the Great Asia Society, which had been founded in Tokyo the preceding year.¹ During the five months he spent in the Philippines, Imamura made several trips to Iloilo, Cebu, Baguio, Davao, etc., lecturing on Great Asianism to the Japanese settlers in those locales and encouraging the formation of a branch of the Great Asia Society in the Islands. Imamura stated everywhere he visited that he was acting under the "secret orders of the authorities" with the understanding of the Japanese General Staff and that he had close personal ties with General Matsui Iwane, then head of the Taiwan Army and also one of the founders of the Great Asia Society.² Manila Consul General Kimura Atsushi, in his report to the Foreign Office on Imamura's activities, was highly skeptical and viewed the latter's attitude as "foolishly defiant" and described him as stirring up unrest in peaceful areas.³ However, most unpalatable to Kimura was Imamura's tendency to appeal to what the Consul General called disaffected and ambitious elements in the local Japanese community.

En route back to Japan Imamura Chūsuke himself was quoted in a police report as having said on shipboard:

I organized a branch of the Great Asia Society in the Philippines with about 1,000 persons from among the local Japanese community and from local Filipinos who had studied in Japan. I am on my way back to Japan to establish liaison between the Philippine branch and the Tokyo headquarters. The Society's principles are not political but rather seek to achieve an all-Asian cultural unity. I especially felt in the Philippines a fear of a Japanese invasion after independence. So I explained with all my heart that within Japan we are devoted to *kōdō* ["Imperial Way"] and that overseas we advocate "Great Asianism." Moreover, I said that Asianism does not encompass the invasion of other countries. But, as can be seen in the case of Manchukuo, Japan is interested in the peace of all of Asia. When I said this with all sincerity, they understood. I also explained this to former General Aguinaldo and expressed Japan's desire for economic cooperation, but Aguinaldo also asked whether or not political cooperation was not also possible.⁴

Mochizuki Otogoro, who became the president of the Philippine Great Asia Society, was a retailer who came to the Philippines in 1918 and had been vice-president of the Japanese Association of Manila. He was also head of the Japanese Fishermen's Association of Manila and owner of the BBC Bar frequented by American and

Filipino sailors and soldiers. However, Mochizuki, who had at one time been quite prosperous, had suffered a series of business setbacks and was not re-elected to his post in the Japanese Association when it was suspected by his fellow settlers that he was using his position to try to recoup his personal losses. Thus, according to Consul General Uchiyama Kiyoshi, Mochizuki was seeking to regain his lost prestige in the community through his association with the newly organized Philippine Great Asia Society. Uchiyama pointed out, however, that even though the membership of the Philippine Great Asia Society was drawn principally from the Japanese Association of Manila, the Japanese Chamber of Commerce, and the Japan Club, its members were either the elements whose reputation was not the best, or simple laborers such as fishermen, carpenters, or shopworkers who, when they were persuaded to join the new group, did so without any real understanding of its goals.⁵ Uchiyama's predecessor, Consul General Kimura, had earlier noted that the elite of the local Japanese commercial and banking firms who later supported the Philippine-Japan Society did not participate in the Philippine Great Asia Society. Nor in fact did Kimura himself, who reported that when he had refrained from giving the group any "positive assistance" he was attacked at its opening meeting.⁶

Perhaps the most revealing observation of Uchiyama was that most of the Japanese in the Philippines agreed with the principles of the Great Asia Society. However, what they found questionable was the public expounding of such ideas. In view of the political conditions in the Philippines with the advent of independence but the continued presence of the Americans, this seemed very ill-advised. Moreover, in the light of the feelings of many Filipinos about Japan, to try to propagate Great Asianism, Uchiyama felt, could only serve to arouse doubts and fears. In addition, Mochizuki's standing in the community was not sufficiently respected to attract the active cooperation of those Filipinos who already were members of the organization, and many others simply refused to join because of their negative feelings about him.

For the Japanese Consulate General and for the local representatives of leading Japanese business firms, therefore, the appearance of the Philippine Great Asia Society presented serious problems. It was feared that the vocal extremism of the Great Asianists

threatened the closer relations and the mutual friendship and trust between Japan and the Philippines which were being nurtured during the transitional decade provided for in the Tydings-McDuffie Act. Moreover, the cohesiveness of the Japanese community in the Philippines, which seemed essential to the protection of local Japanese interests and of the positions of persons of Japanese descent in Philippine society, was endangered by the emergence of this new splinter group. Finally, the activities of the Philippine Great Asia Society, with its close connections with General Matsui and the Taiwan Government General, provided another example of civilian-military encroachment in an area which seemed clearly within the purview of the Foreign Ministry.

The possibility of a rift in the Japanese community was strengthened by the rumor that Mochizuki was trying to use the Great Asia Society not only to advance his own cause, but to oppose the Japanese Association outright. According to Consul General Uchiyama, the Philippine Great Asia Society was said to be attempting to start a second Japanese-language newspaper.⁷ Uchiyama reported further that the proposed journal would compete with the *Shōkō Shimpō*, the organ of the Japanese Association, and Manila's only Japanese-language newspaper. One Isoumi Kunitoshi, who had earlier been fired from the staff of the *Shōkō Shimpō*, was identified as being especially active in seeking to raise funds to finance the new publication. Among the sources which had been approached by Isoumi in this regard were the Taiwan Great Asia Society (Taiwan Dai Ajia Kyōkai), the Southern Region Social Club (Nampō Konwakai), another extremist nationalist organization, and the Taiwan Government General itself, which in the past had given subsidies to favored Japanese schools, hospitals, etc. Isoumi was similarly supposed to be requesting support from such individuals as Lieutenant Colonel Tamura Hiroshi of the Taiwan Army Headquarters and Colonel Sakai Takeo, who was attached to the Taiwan Government General. Tamura's name was rather notorious in the Philippines since a circular letter bearing his signature and denouncing President Quezon had been given wide publicity in the Islands on the eve of the inauguration of the Commonwealth. Colonel Sakai had made an "observation trip" to the Philippines in 1936 and on that occasion had apparently had extensive contact with Isoumi.

However, Consul General Uchiyama wrote that, despite whatever success Isoumi might have in securing subsidization, the economic future of the planned newspaper would still be highly doubtful because of opposition to it by all of the important Japanese business firms and financial interests in the Philippines. Even more significant was Uchiyama's stated belief that if the Philippine Great Asia Society did publish its own newspaper, this would not only cause a cleavage in the Japanese community but would seriously hamper the maneuvers and tactics of the consulate itself.⁸

That the Taiwan Government General was in fact favorably disposed toward the Philippine Great Asia Society seems evident from a report of the Society's activities. This secret document which originated in the Police Bureau of the Taiwan Government General⁹ recounted a meeting of the Society's board of directors held at Mochizuki's home. There a joint Japanese-Philippine New Year's party was planned as well as a tour group to Japan under Society sponsorship. The same report noted that, although until the inauguration of the Commonwealth government the Society had kept its activities hidden, it had been constantly working behind the scenes for closer relations with Filipinos. Among its Filipino members singled out for special praise were the attorney Isidro Vamenta and the journalist Pedro Aunario. Vamenta, it was said, had made pro-Japanese speeches seeking to "enlighten" his Filipino countrymen about the land problem. Aunario, editor of the Spanish-language newspaper *La Vanguardia*, was commended for having "courageously and candidly" expounded the indivisibility of Japan and the Philippines and the need for a recognition of Japan's leadership in the Far East.¹⁰

In May of 1936, under the sponsorship of Mochizuki and Imamura Eikichi and with the support of Laurel and Duran, an "Asia Club" was founded at Arlegui and Quiapo Streets in Manila. Imamura, who had been a resident of the Philippines since 1917 and a leader of the Japanese community, had earlier been rejected by the Foreign Office as a self-proclaimed candidate for the leadership of a Japan-Philippines cultural association. The purpose of the club was to establish a center where mutual understanding and friendly relations could be promoted between Japanese settlers in the Islands and Filipinos. The building, which had formerly belonged to a private college, was remodeled to provide rooms for

billiards, cards, archery, and even Japanese sumo wrestling, and attractive young Filipinas were hired as waitresses. Written applications were required of prospective members, but those who were already members of the Philippine Great Asia Society were automatically members of the Asia Club.

In August of 1936 Professor Sato Tasuke of the Taihoku Higher Commercial School in Taihoku, Taiwan, came to Manila on an "observation trip" and during his visit lectured at several Philippine universities on Shinto and the "Japanese spirit." On August 10, Professor Sato and Mochizuki Otagoro paid a call on Consul General Uchiyama and brought with them introductions from General Matsui and one Sakamoto who was then head of the Foreign Affairs Section of the Taiwan Government General.¹¹ According to Mochizuki, the Philippine Great Asia Society henceforward would closely coordinate its activities with the Tokyo headquarters of the Great Asia Society, and was seeking the assistance of the Japanese Consulate General in extending and strengthening the "Asia for the Asians" movement in the Philippines.

Uchiyama presented to Sato and Mochizuki his views on whether or not such activities should be expanded at that time, and in so doing also seemed to be expressing the views of the Foreign Office on basic policy toward the Philippines. This latter interpretation of Uchiyama's statements is particularly important in the light of the credentials from both the Taiwan Great Asia Society and the Taiwan Government General which supported the positions of Sato and Mochizuki. Uchiyama began his analysis by noting that, while it may have seemed to some Japanese to have been a gradual process, the Philippines had already in 1936 become much like an independent country, and that there was little difference between the political status of the Commonwealth form of government and an American state. Moreover, according to Uchiyama, like American states, while the Philippines had internal freedom, its relations with the United States government and its relations with foreign governments remained under the control of Washington. One point of difference, however, between the Commonwealth of the Philippines and an American state was that during the transition period of ten years en route to complete freedom the Philippines had elected a president and a vice-president.

Nevertheless, said Uchiyama, while the rights of the Filipinos had greatly increased since the establishment of the Commonwealth, the status of the Philippines was still not the same as that of independent countries like China or Siam. Therefore, while the Filipinos were still under the American flag, outward manifestations by them of opposition to the white man's control and vigorous advocacy of an Asia for the Asians would be extremely ill-advised. Uchiyama argued that for a people who had to rely on America economically it would certainly be foolish to evidence this kind of an antagonistic attitude prior to the conclusion of a firm and viable Philippine-American economic agreement. Moreover, he contended that inasmuch as even a certain amount of anti-Japanese policy orientation on the part of the Commonwealth government was unavoidable under existing circumstances, noisy agitation about Great Asianism among people who were still under American control, especially during this crucial transition period, should be soft-pedaled. For example, he asked Sato and Mochizuki, if in Taiwan the Americans would go around preaching Pan-Americanism, what would be the reaction of the Taiwan Government General, to say nothing of the islanders?

Of course, said Uchiyama, he himself understood the necessity of working for close and friendly relations between Japan and the Philippines. However, the Japanese Consul General was fearful lest vigorous and active advocacy of Great Asianism either frighten the Americans into delaying the granting of Philippine independence (which Japan supported) or be misinterpreted by the Filipinos as nothing more than a deceptive device for advancing Japan's supposed political ambitions in the Islands. Uchiyama especially felt that the Japanese would be well advised to consider carefully and seriously the sensitivities and possible reactions of a people who had already spent over four centuries under colonial control. He also noted that even in the case of the Philippine-Japan Society which had just been established in Manila, though its aims were very similar to those of Great Asianism, he had urged that it would be much more profitable for Japan in the long run to exercise restraint in the activities of such an organization while the Philippines was still under the American flag.

Uchiyama maintained, too, that as far as the attainment of complete independence for the Philippines was concerned, a sound

economic policy was essential. Since Japan did not intend to take the place of the United States in the purchase of the Islands' two major natural products, sugar and coconut oil, he expressed the view that Japan was obliged to exercise restraint in Philippine affairs at least until after the United States-Philippine trade conference scheduled for 1937.¹² Further, it would be very difficult for the Japanese to try to provide even quasi-political direction for the Philippines at a time when exports from Japan to the Philippines far exceeded imports and while the Davao problem was simmering. Therefore, opined Uchiyama, to develop effective Japanese-Philippine economic relations was far more important than to emphasize emotional Great Asianism.

If Japan were "loudly and foolishly" to proclaim unwarranted concepts of intimate relations with the Philippines, it would only make it very difficult for the Filipinos to have confidence in the Japanese. This was especially important to consider, thought Uchiyama, at a time when there seemed to be emerging a desire in the Philippines to lessen dependence on the United States. He believed that this attitude might well reflect a tendency among Filipinos themselves to develop their own Asianism. At any rate, he went on, Japan must "wait for its chance." Great Asianism must be emphasized first in Sino-Japanese relations, he said, and the achievement of Sino-Japanese friendship must be a matter of prior consideration. Therefore, concluded Uchiyama, "For the time being, I find it difficult to assist in your intent to bring this movement in the Philippines out in the open."

Professor Sato replied to the Consul General that the Great Asianism he was expounding was not at all political but a purely cultural activity. However, Uchiyama told Sato that, semantics aside, Mochizuki had fallen out with the local Japanese Association and was intriguing to recoup his own power in the community by using the name of the Great Asia Society, and that he had been making trouble for some time by passing along to visiting journalists and others disruptive stories about the Japanese community in the Philippines. Thus, in discussing any augmentation of Great Asianist activities in the Islands this problem would have to be recognized. Uchiyama also reiterated that he wanted General Matsui and all other persons involved with the Great Asia Society to understand that they should refrain from carrying on "in the open" enterprises

which would be viewed with disfavor by the Americans, at least until the termination of the Philippine-American trade conference. Moreover, if the newly founded Philippine-Japan Society were not to be the focal organ for all maneuvers for Japanese-Philippine friendship, the Filipinos would surely become confused. Finally, the Consul General stated that if Great Asianism were to develop gradually in the future in the Philippines, there would have to be evidenced a plan and a purpose which would assure the Filipinos that so-called Great Asianism was something more than a euphemism for the ambition of Japan to conquer the peoples of Asia.

This lengthy dispatch from Consul General Uchiyama in Manila to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo is significant both in its specifics and in its implicit generalities. For in this microcosm of proposed means by which closer cultural ties between Japan and the Philippines could be developed one is exposed not only to the complexities of Japanese policy in the Philippines but to the broader predicaments of policy formulation which constantly complicated the operations of the Foreign Office throughout the 1930's. Basically, as was clear in the discussions between Uchiyama on the one hand and Mochizuki and particularly Sato on the other, both the Consul General and the representatives of the Great Asia Society desired the same end result, i.e., increased Japanese-Philippine friendship as an avenue to greater Japanese influence in the Philippines. The difference, however, between the cautious official approach and the unofficial aggressive activism advocated by the slightly disreputable Philippine Great Asia Society generally paralleled the dichotomous pattern of Japan's Asian policy during the 1930's. Moreover, the support afforded the Great Asian element by the Foreign Affairs Section of the Taiwan Government General as well as by the extremist military faction in the person of General Matsui made the task of the Foreign Office and its representative in Manila that much more difficult.

While Uchiyama's reasoning, as described above, perhaps seems convincing to the contemporary observer, the Consul General was attempting to explain the government's official position to representatives of an organization which not only was committed to a program of direct action, but which viewed the Foreign Office and its minions as little better than striped-pants mossbacks who had no understanding of Japan's "divine mission" in Asia. For its part,

the Foreign Office, while it disdained the overzealous activism and unsubtle propaganda indulged in by the proponents of Great Asianism, was never quite able to call a halt to their undertakings. The failure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to act decisively in this regard was due in part to its fear of offending a potentially powerful sector of Japanese society, but perhaps still more to the lingering thought that at some juncture it might wish to utilize for its own purposes either the projects or the personnel of such organizations.

The significance of this latter point is supported by both the guest list and the remarks of the featured speaker, Assemblyman Isidro Vamenta, at a testimonial dinner tendered to Mochizuki Otagoro in April, 1938, on the occasion of his departure for Japan, where he was scheduled to spend the next several years. The very impressive assemblage included Assemblymen Pedro Sabido, Tomas L. Cabili, Manuel Fortich, Emilio de la Paz, Juan S. Alano, Manuel A. Alzate, Francisco Lavidés, Maximino Noel, Maximo Kalaw, Hilario Abellana, Tomas Oppus, and Guillermo Z. Villaneuva.¹³ Other distinguished Filipinos present were Gulamu Rasul, Pedro C. Hernaez, Benito Soliven, Olegario B. Clarin, Antonio Villarama, Deogracias Puyat, Pedro Aunario, and Jose I. Baluyot.¹⁴ Vamenta, who was then president of a so-called Pan-Asiatic Association which was an offshoot of the Philippine Great Asia Society, expressed the hope that the Association would not be viewed with suspicion. He stated his belief that such an organization would bring about harmony, justice, and equity by uniting nations "of the same blood."¹⁵

Vamenta, who often took on the role of spokesman for the Japanese point of view, about a year later criticized those who spoke of potential designs by Japan on the Philippines. The Asian situation, he said, is so "confused" that Filipinos should exercise caution and should not do anything that might arouse "the antagonism of Japan."¹⁶ Vamenta supported this contention by pointing out that in view of the tightening restrictions on commerce with the United States, the Philippines should be considering drawing economically closer to Japan.¹⁷

Thus, despite the potentially disruptive nature of the activities of the Great Asianists in the Philippines, it seemed patently impossible to the Japanese consular staff either to disown them publicly

or to try openly to prevent the propagation of their brand of Pan-Asianism. Moreover, examples such as that of Vamenta assisted the representatives of the Foreign Office in rationalizing that Great Asianism was not really in conflict with the broadest principles of Japanese foreign policy. Paradoxically, however, it may be conjectured that the extreme caution with which the Great Asianists were handled only served to encourage them in their view that the Japanese civil government was indecisive and thus inadequate to the task of creating a "Great Asia." After July of 1937 much of the real diplomatic acumen which had characterized the tenures in Manila of Consuls General Kimura and Uchiyama was dissipated. And, as tact gave way to cant, the Great Asianist tail often seemed to be wagging the Foreign Office dog.

NOTES

1. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter referred to as JMFA), I.4.6.0.1-1, July 18, 1934.
2. *Ibid.* The validity of Imamura's contentions was supported by Tanaka Masaaki, former secretary of the Great Asia Society and former personal secretary to General Matsui. (Interview with Tanaka Masaaki, Jan. 18, 1965.)
3. *Ibid.*
4. JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, Nov. 12, 1934.
5. JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, Mar. 25, 1936.
6. JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, July 18, 1934.
7. JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, Mar. 25, 1936.
8. *Ibid.*
9. JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, Dec. 4, 1936. Secret.
10. *Ibid.*
11. The paragraphs that follow are all derived from JMFA I.4.6.0.1-1, Aug. 11, 1936. Very Secret.
12. This view was in sharp contrast to the more visionary statements of certain Japanese who in 1939 and 1940 were contending that the "yen bloc" could and would absorb Philippine sugar and coconut oil.
13. *Manila Tribune*, April 23, 1938.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Manila Tribune*, Mar. 3, 1939.
17. *Ibid.*