

BOOK REVIEW

México y Japón en el Siglo XIX: La política exterior de México y la consolidación de la soberanía japonesa, introducción, selección y notas de Ma. Elena Ota Mishima, Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores, Tlatelolco, México, D. F., 1976, 149 pp.

The book under review is a selection of the documents related to the first Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Amity between Mexico and Japan housed in the Archivo Histórico Genaro Estrada of the Foreign Relations Ministry of Mexico. This collection of documents is preceded by an introduction by Prof. María Elena Ota Mishima of the Colegio de México, where she is engaged in teaching the Japanese language and Japanese-Mexican relations. In the introduction, Mrs. Ota gives a very clear and short outline of the circumstances leading to the signing of the treaty and also explains its significance in the international context of that time. She first describes the initial contacts between Mexico and Japan. As is well known, the first contacts between these countries go back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when "galleons" passed through Japan on their voyages between Manila and Acapulco. A further concrete step was taken by the "daimyo" of Sendai, Date Masamune, who sent a special mission to Mexico, known as the Hasekura Mission. One of the purposes of this first diplomatic mission was to open the harbors of Sendai to Mexican ships. Of course, at that time Mexico was under Spanish rule and therefore any official relations between Japan and Mexico were supposed to be approved by the king of Spain. But this mission failed to sign any formal treaty, which was due also to a change in policy by the shogunate. Until January 27, 1614, Shogun Tokugawa Iyeyasu protected both the trade with the Western countries and the spread of the Catholic faith. However, due to reasons that are still very much under discussion today, on January 27, he banned the Catholic faith and began a persecution that led later to the edicts of 1633, 1635, and 1639. This move cut Japan from international trade, and only Dutch and Chinese sailors were allowed to land at Dejima in Nagasaki.

When, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan was forced to open up her ports to American ships (as well to English and French ships), those nations wanted to obtain from Japan conditions which were similar to those extracted from the Chinese. For this reason Japan was obliged in the first treaties signed with the Western powers to renounce to her rights of determining the custom tariffs for imports from the West. Also, foreigners living in Japan were exempt from Japanese laws, with special tribunals being set up for them. Only the United States, in the treaty of 1878 with Japan, recognized the Japanese right to determine its custom tariffs but with the provision that the other nations which had signed treaties with Japan agreed to it. At that time, Japan was engaged in a very difficult diplomatic task of revising the treaties with the European powers and the United States. For the Japanese, the treaties signed after the opening of their land to the West were humiliating because the conditions imposed by them clearly put Japan on an unequal level. The efforts of both foreign ministers Inoue and Ōkuma during those years were oriented toward getting the treaties renewed without the extraterritoriality clause, which exempted

foreigners from Japanese laws, and without the other clause which stipulated that Japan could not freely establish custom tariffs in her own ports.

In order to achieve this purpose, the Japanese at first chose to deal with the treaty nations as a bloc by inviting them all to a conference in Tokyo on May 1, 1886. But this conference failed when it became clear that Britain did not want any revisions. The new Japanese cabinet decided to deal with each of the countries through bilateral negotiations in the hopes of getting a more favorable treatment from them. This is why the Japanese government changed its attitude towards the proposal which had been put forth by Mexico somewhat earlier in 1883 for discussing the possibilities of negotiating a treaty for the benefit of both countries. In January 1888, the minister of Belgium in Tokyo informed the Mexican government that Japan was willing to enter into discussions concerning a treaty.

After some delay, the minister of Mexico in Washington, Matías Romero, and his counterpart from Japan, Mr. Mutsu, finally got together in that city to discuss the contents of the treaty, which they signed on November 30, 1888. On June 6, 1889, Mexico and Japan finally exchanged the ratification documents.

In Japan the treaty was considered as a major diplomatic victory for the government because Mexico renounced the extraterritoriality privileges which were enjoyed by all the other Western nations until then. With this new treaty as a model, the Japanese hoped to have the Western powers restore these same rights to Japan. Mexico, for its part, obtained through this treaty the privilege of being the first Western country to have received the right of having Mexicans being able to visit and live anywhere in Japan, provided they obeyed Japanese laws. The treaty included a secret article by which Japan could suspend this privilege in the event that the Western powers objected to it. Japan never used the so-called secret article, and this is why Mexico led the way in helping Japan to obtain equal rights with the powers of Europe and the United States.

Mrs. Ota gives a much more detailed history of the discussions between Mexico and Japan and justly appreciates the importance of this treaty for both Japan and Mexico. She remarks how, at that time, the "Chronicle" of San Francisco hailed the treaty as a natural recognition of Japanese sovereignty. She also points out that this was the first diplomatic treaty for Mexico with an Asian nation. She also affirms the fact that this treaty was used by the Japanese government to denounce the existing treaties with Britain, France, Germany, and the other Western nations. She does not utilize documents to prove this, however, and I therefore think that it would be very interesting to follow up what happened in the later discussions between Japan and the Western powers in order to determine the importance of this treaty in the diplomatic history of Japan. Another scholar Mrs. Iyo Kunimoto concludes her analysis of this treaty by saying: "It is, however, an overstatement to say that the conclusion of a treaty with Mexico had set Japan's treaty revision struggle in a new light, for even before the conclusion of the treaty with Mexico, some hope existed to improve the situation as exemplified by the relatively friendly attitude taken by the United States and Germany."¹

In terms of Japan's relations with Latin America in general, the Japan-Mexico treaty was the second such treaty negotiated in the Western hemisphere. Peru had established diplomatic relations and had signed a Treaty of Commerce on August 21, 1873, in Japan. However, there is a striking difference between these two treaties.

¹ I. Kunimoto, *Japan and Mexico, 1888-1917* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1975), p. 46.

The one with Peru was signed as a direct consequence of the famous incident of the ship, *María Luz*. This ship, while anchored in Yokohama, was found to be carrying Chinese coolies who were to serve as slaves for the building of the railroads in Peru. The Japanese government, which took the role of defender of the human rights of the Chinese coolies, did not force those who had escaped from the ship at Yokohama to return to their boat. That action enraged the Peruvians, which sent Captain García as an envoy to get an apology from Japan. But what they got was the first Treaty of Commerce between Japan and a Latin American nation.

On the contrary, the Mexico-Japan treaty was born from Mexico's interest in opening up a road to Asia because the Mexican peso was the exchange unit in the Far East and because the new railroads, built by the Porfirio Díaz government in Mexico, provided a way across the continent from the Pacific to the Atlantic in those days when the Panama Canal did not exist yet. The geographical location of Mexico made that country the natural road for commerce between Japan and Europe and the West Coast of the United States.

It is a pity that very little research has been done on the treaty of 1888 between Mexico and Japan. All the literature until recent times was included in studies about Japanese-American relations. In this regard, it is particularly important that Mrs. Ota collected all the documents which are located in the Mexican Archives of the Foreign Ministry. It would also be very interesting to collect all the documents on the Japanese side buried in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Gaimushō). Some research of this sort has been done by Mrs. Kunimoto in her doctoral dissertation for the University of Texas at Austin, entitled "Japan and Mexico, 1888-1917."

It would be very interesting to note how Japan and Mexico were, at the time, both struggling for complete independence and sovereignty. In Japan's early contacts with the Western powers she had to bow to unequal conditions, both politically and trade-wise. When Mexico approached the Japanese, the Latin American country was just recovering from the last attempt of the European powers to interfere in Mexico. From 1862 to 1867 France forced upon the Mexicans Archduke Maximilian of Austria as a puppet king of Napoleon III. After a prolonged battle with the French and their supporters, the national forces defeated Maximilian, who was killed on June 19, 1867. The French intervention helped consolidate the national conscience which would later be developed and used to support the long reign of the Porfirio Díaz era (1876-1911). Both nations, Japan and Mexico, were emerging as modern states and their governments were struggling to create a sense of national unity. Japan asserted herself as a united nation against the Western powers only after overcoming the internal struggles among the different *han* ("feuds"). Porfirio Díaz, either by himself or through his puppet president, Manuel Gonzalez, maintained strict control over the "caudillo" leaders who marred the first days of the republic. Thereafter, Mexico, for the first time, was able to confront the other nations of the world in order to establish herself as an independent nation. This is why Mexico was eager to sign the treaty with Japan.

From the standpoint of the analysis of international relations, it would be very useful to study how two small nations were trying to use a treaty like this for the purpose of diplomatically defeating the big powers of the last century. From this point of view, the research done by Mrs. Ota is a great contribution for Spanish-speaking academicians. They have in their hands a very valuable tool which, as I suggested before, should be compared with the documents in the Archives of the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

As far as selection of the documents is concerned, it is a pity that Mrs. Ota does not give a detailed explanation of the criteria she used in footnoting. We only find at the end of each document a footnote like the following: AREM III/352 (72:52)/1, 7-18-18, Primera parte, f.86-86 v (pag 75). I suppose this is the code used for the documents at the Archives of the Mexican Foreign Ministry, but there is no explanation of its meaning. This lack of systematic citation diminishes the value of the documents as a tool for those who are not familiar with the system.

There are also some documents which are either in French or English with an attached translation into Spanish in small print. There is no explanation as to whether the translation is to be found in the same documents or has been done by Mrs. Ota herself. If they are contained in the documents themselves, it is valuable in enabling one to study the nuances involved in each of the languages.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage the editor of these documents to continue the work started in such a way that we might have in the future a complete history of the diplomatic relations between Japan and Mexico based on the study of these documents.

(Gustavo Andrade)