



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 26, 2012

100 Years After the Cherry Blossoms Bloomed

One hundred years ago last week, on March 23, 1912, Japan gave America a gift that keeps on giving: more than 3,000 cherry trees, whose blossoming beauty is celebrated each year. Japan desired friendship with America and our Founding Fathers urged us to reciprocate with all nations that desired amiable relations with our republic.



The natural foundations for this friendship were clear. Although the modern history of Japan is largely overshadowed by the Second World War, a conflict in which the beastliness of the Japanese can scarcely be overstated, a truer history of Japan speaks of a nation that fought almost no wars at all and which tried very hard to fit into the costume of civilized society.

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, Russian POWs were not abused and tortured. President Theodore Roosevelt used his good offices to end that war by mutual agreement. During the First World War, when our nation was an ally of Japan, the Japanese treated their German POWs with decency and respect. There was nothing in the history of Japan that logically led to the Bataan Death March — neither instinctive sadism nor loathing of America.

When Japan was rocked by the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, the damage to its cities was comparable to the firestorms that our B-29s inflicted on Japanese cities with conventional incendiary bombs and then with two fission bombs. This natural disaster traumatized the Japanese people, but this anguish did not affect the warm feelings that the Japanese had for America.

The international relief efforts were led by the United States. President Coolidge told the American people: “An overwhelming disaster has overtaken the people of the friendly nation of Japan. The cities of Tokyo and Yokohama, and surrounding villages, have been largely if not completely destroyed by earthquake, fire and flood, with an appalling loss of life and destitution and distress, requiring measures of urgent relief.”

Coolidge was the titular head of the American Red Cross, and this private charity — along with many other private charities — greatly alleviated the suffering and increased the goodwill that Japanese felt towards Americans. Even neighboring nations, such as China, spoke glowingly of the charity of Americans in this time of great suffering in Japan. The U.S. Navy also sailed from other ports almost at once with emergency supplies of food and clothing for the Japanese.

Yet 18 years after the great humanitarian rescue of the Japanese people, their military would attack our naval forces at Pearl Harbor and would afterward treat Americans (as well as Europeans in Asia and any Asians who fell within the limits of Japanese conquest) with incredible viciousness. What happened?



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Conventional history insists that the seeds of angry militarism and the lust for empire had always guided the Japanese and as the industry and technology of Japan grew so did its hunger for political control of vital natural resources such as oil, iron, rubber, and cotton as well as its sense of right to empire. Nothing could have prevented Japan from rising into a monstrous realm that terrorized the world until its martial spirit was permanently crushed.

What really happened was that the United States had begun to treat Japan with antipathy and this over time was reciprocated. The London Naval Reduction Agreement of 1930, for example, insisted that Japan be allowed to build a navy of only 60 percent of the size of the British and American fleets (the same percentage allotted to France). This offended Japanese pride. Japan had been an ally of Britain and if Japan had fought on the other side in 1914, the Central Powers would have won the First World War. Japan also was an industrialized and crowded archipelago nation off the coast of a continent, just like Britain, and it was the existence of the British Empire that was offered to justify its larger fleet.

The treaty provided no check on rearmaments. Weimar Germany did all it could to cheat on the Versailles Treaty and Japan quietly broke the London Naval Reduction Agreement. All these attempts to limit the armaments of these powerful nations did was anger their people.

The Japanese viewed with horror the rise of Bolshevism. For a society built upon proper social behavior and reverence for the past such as Japan's, the crude and brutal regime run by the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, by its embrace of the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx and the forced subjugation of all the nations of the world under the "dictatorship of the proletariat" presented a grave moral danger.

When the United States recognized the Soviet Union in 1933 and the influence of American communists in our government grew, our attitude towards Japan changed. The machinations of covert Marxists in America led us to create enemies in Nationalist China and in Imperial Japan. While Japan and China may have had intractable problems, one thing is clear: Soviet agents in America worked hard to make sure that we reached no understanding with Japan.

John Toland, in his history of the Pacific War, *The Rising Sun*, notes that when we sent a demand to Japan to withdraw from conquered territory as a condition of normal relations with the United States, our communiqué incorrectly used the Japanese term for "China" that included Manchuria, while our government's intention was to request only the withdrawal from the rest of China. When Toland in the 1960s mentioned this to a man who had been a cabinet minister at that critical time, the Japanese man was flabbergasted: We would never, he told Toland, attack America if we had not been asked to surrender Manchuria.

Such a revelation gives us cause to speculate about how different the history of Asia would have been if Japan had accepted a more palatable demand made by the United States.

Withdrawal of the Japanese in 1941 from the bulk of China would have saved the Chinese people from the horrors of Japanese occupation. Furthermore, it would have allowed the Kuomintang to stabilize its rule and create a strong Chinese state that likely would have resisted the post-war takeover by the Communist Mao Tse-tung; it would have prevented us from fighting a long, bloody war with Japan; and, of course, it would have spared the Japanese people all the ravages of war, area bombing, starvation blockades, and humiliation.



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