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THE
PROBLEM OF ASIA

A LECTURE DELIVERED

BY

G. D. WESSELITSKY

BEFORE THE CENTRAL ASIAN SOCIETY OF
LONDON,

JUNE 1st, 1904,

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

SIR DONALD MACKENZIE - WALLACE,
K.C.I.E.,

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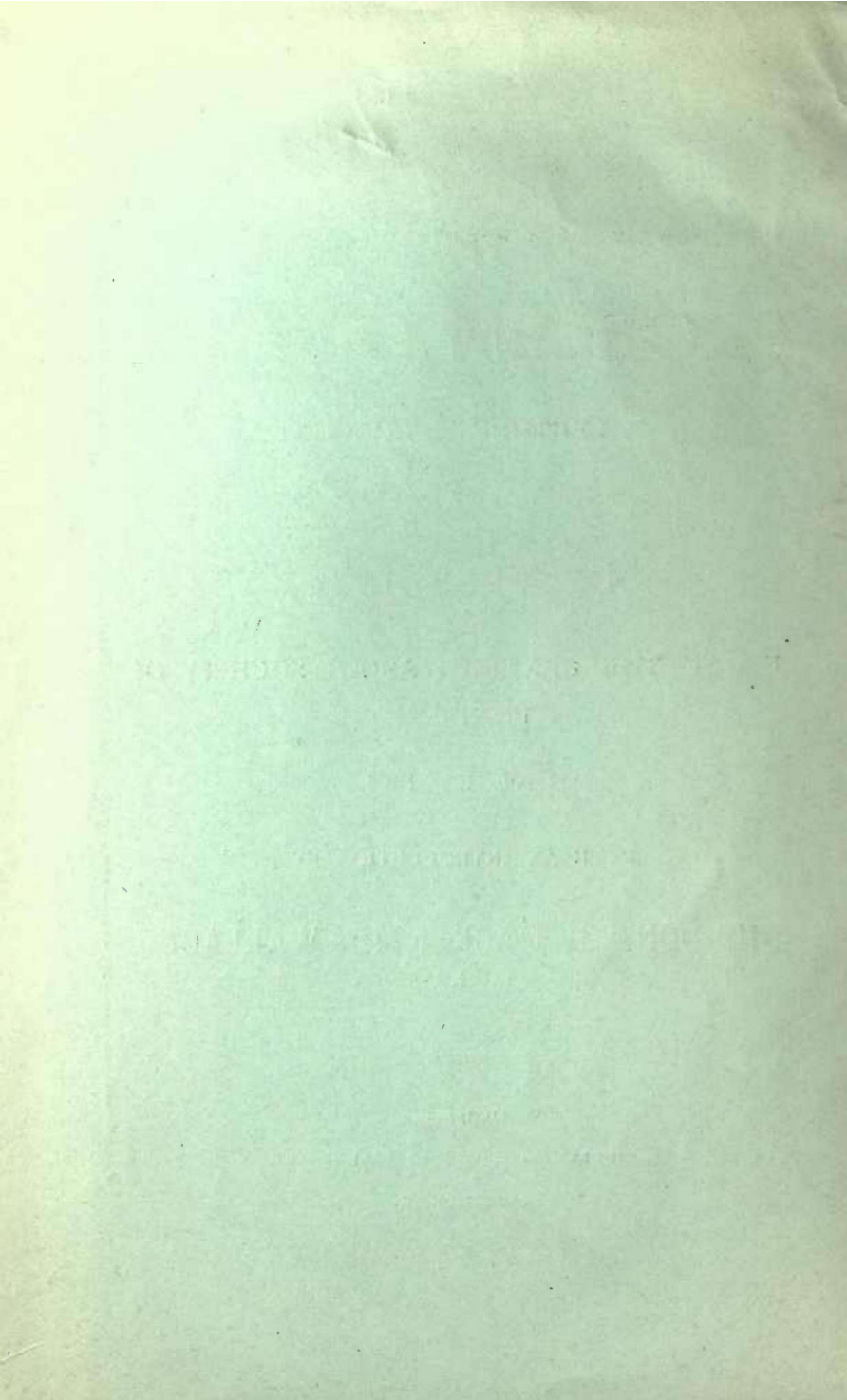
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INTRODUCTION.

I have been requested by M. de Wesselitsky, whom I have long known as the able and universally respected correspondent of the *Novoe Vremya* in London, to write a few lines of introduction to a lecture which he delivered lately on "The Problem of Asia"; and I gladly comply with his request, because I believe his views are deserving of careful attention. They may be accepted or rejected, but they should not be overlooked. We are at present entering on a new phase of what the Germans call *Weltpolitik*, and it is certain that in the political combinations of the near future Japan will be an important factor. Is that young vigorous State to be cordially received into the great family of the civilised nations, or is it to be regarded as a dangerous enemy of the family, so far as the Far East is concerned? When we have dismissed as a harmless bogey the Yellow Peril in its original shape, we have still to examine it in other forms. Granted that there is no danger of Mongol Hordes overrunning and conquering Europe, is it not possible that a yellow race, by adopting the products of European civilisation, may oppose successfully the aggressive tendencies of the European nations in the Far East? In that case what attitude should these nations adopt? Should they combine to maintain by force of arms what they consider their civilising mission? Or should they limit their pretensions in such a way as to leave room for the civilising activity of a young Oriental nationality which may some day raise the cry of "Asia for the Asiatics!". The former course was adopted by Russia, France and Germany, when they compelled Japan to relinquish the conquests which she had made in Manchuria during her war with China, and when the present war is terminated the question will again come up for decision.

We naturally feel inclined to turn away from the thorny problems which we would gladly bequeath to future generations intact, but unfortunately we are very near to the parting of the ways. As to which way we should choose I refrain from expressing any opinion. All I wish

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to say is that common prudence suggests our looking a little ahead and considering the burning question in the Far East in its broader aspects. The war which is at present raging is not a mere struggle between two rival Powers for a bit of territory coveted by both. It is the beginning of a much greater struggle in which all nations having Eastern possessions and Eastern ambitions will be compelled, sooner or later, however reluctantly, to take part. Anything which prevents us from shutting our eyes to disagreeable realities is to be welcomed, and it is for this reason that I venture, without endorsing all M. de Wesselitsky's views, to recommend them to the attention of the British public. On one point, at least, I cordially agree with him, that the preponderating feature of the situation in Asia is the rivalry of England and Russia, and that the interests of Europe and of Asia alike demand that this friction should cease.

DONALD MACKENZIE WALLACE.

23rd July, 1904.

THE PROBLEM OF ASIA.

An address delivered by Mr. Gabriel de Wesselitsky
before the Central Asian Society of London, June 1st,
1904. Rt. Hon. Sir Alfred Lyall, G.C.I.E., in the chair.

I AM fully conscious of the great honour of addressing you on so momentous an issue, but not less conscious of the manifold difficulties of the task, and of the inadequacy of my power to fulfil it. I would never have dreamed of attempting it if, in listening a month ago to our Chairman's lucid paper on the situation in Central and Eastern Asia, I had not felt that a suggestion of a friendly understanding with Russia from the English side ought to be followed by a response from our own; and on receiving Sir Alfred's kind request to address you here, in spite of professional work taxing my energies to the utmost, I did not hesitate to accept it. I would have preferred to listen, with you, to a more competent advocate than myself; but unfortunately there was no one else available who, while pursuing an independent career, had made politics his life-study. I must caution you, however, against attaching to my words more importance than they deserve. They are only a free expression of my own views, for which no one else is responsible. They are, naturally, identical with those contained in the London telegrams and letters to the *Novoe Vremya* of St. Petersburg, yet they in no way engage that journal. For in one respect at least there is more freedom in a Russian newspaper than in any other. No strict unity of opinion is insisted upon, and permanent contributors have a wide latitude. Provided that they are all inspired by the same considerations of national interest, they may differ as to the means of attaining it.

Sir Alfred Lyall sees the predominating feature of the situation in Asia in the rivalry of England and Russia ; and he believes that the interests of Europe and Asia alike demand that this friction should cease. Our Chairman expects from the present war a turning-point in Asiatic politics affecting, not merely Russia, but all Europe and particularly England. I am happy to be able to endorse those views, only I consider this war but one link in a chain of developments of which it is the most striking, yet not the most unexpected, nor even the most important.

Two other white nations—the United States and Germany—have become Asiatic powers, and represent incalculable elements in the situation. But the changes introduced by European nations are overshadowed by the changes in the Asiatics themselves ; the awakening of the peoples of Asia. It is impossible to speak of it without mentioning Japan. I am in no danger of forgetting that I am addressing her allies. Even if it were not so, Japan would still have a claim on my courteous consideration. National policy as well as national pride, forbid me to disparage an adversary. But it is no disparagement of the Japanese to disagree with their over-zealous friends who pretend that they are not Asiatics at all, but a race apart, a remnant of the population of a sunken continent. Race, language, culture and traditions make them Asiatics ; and it would rob Japan of her strongest claim to the world's respect if she were dissociated from Asia. Those who say that the Japanese cannot be Asiatics because they are active, progressive and efficient, ignore the fact that all those qualities have belonged to other Asiatic peoples for thousands of years. The deciphering of cuneiform inscriptions has revealed a condition of things in the past which, judged by the same standard, ought to be declared quite un-Asiatic. We must not forget also that the progress of the Arab culture revived the Byzantine learning in the tenth century, and that the Arabic university of Cordova became a model for that of Paris. Our contempt for Asiatics is based only on our acquaintance with the Mongol and Turanian tribes which established themselves on the ruins of ancient and highly civilised empires and have stereotyped the decadence which they produced.

Japan's insular position permitted her to escape that latest and most baneful conquest ; and the long preserva-

tion of her feudal regime provided her with excellent material for national expansion. The Samurai, who had, during the internal wars and rivalries of the Daimios, developed great military, diplomatic and political talents, are applying them now to the service of national greatness, with the same passionate loyalty which they used to display while serving their feudal lords. The proficiency of the Japanese in naval and military matters has been much exalted; but little justice has been rendered to some of their other achievements. Since the days of the Baghdad Caliphate, when the Arabs were the only great travellers and explorers, no Asiatics had visited foreign lands for the purpose of study. For the last thirty years the Japanese have not only travelled widely and observed with keenness, but have applied what they learned and perfected it still further. Hand in hand with their studies went the propagation of sympathies for their own nation, and her aims, which, in two great white countries, at least, achieved singular success. Unnoticed by Europeans, but even more important in their consequences, were their travels and sojourns on the continent of Asia, whose peoples began in their turn to visit Japan and to study there. Thus personal intercourse, together with the prominent political *rôle* of Japan, have done more than centuries of European trade and conquest to shake off the lethargy into which the peoples of Asia were sunk.

Speaking of the relations of the Japanese with other Asiatics, I must expect to be accused of trying to conjure up the bogie of the Yellow Peril. It has been lately the daily task of Japanese statesmen and of their white sympathisers to ridicule and to discredit in advance any reference to such dangers. I will endorse their denial of a specifically Yellow movement. "Yellow" and "Mongol" are not the watchwords which rally Asiatic now. And I do not believe in the existence, for a well-organised and self-conscious nation, of any terror-striking peril; except only that of closing her eyes on the realities good or bad, of her inner and outward situation. As for the Japanese propaganda amongst white as well as coloured nations, I consider it to be the work of ardent patriots, and I do not see in it anything which they had reason to deny or be ashamed of. Nay, I admire the ingenuity of their means, and their self-sacrificing devotion to their cause.

I hear from English sources—all the information contained in this address is derived from such—that it is

customary in Japan for young men of rank and fortune to undertake the hard and servile work of coolies in order better to serve their country. Taking advantage of the similarity of features, common to all peoples of the Mongol stock, they go to Canton, grow pigtailed there, learn the local dialect and customs; then on to Peking, where they figure as Chinamen from the South. These Crypto-Japanese join the staff of Chinese newspapers, and enter the secret societies which are daily growing in importance, and direct their policy to serve their own objects. They support the overt propaganda of Japanese ideas which is permeating China; and these combined influences have brought that vast empire under the moral sway of Japan. Indeed she might now precipitate China into a war pregnant for the latter with the gravest dangers; and is prevented from so doing only by consideration of the inconveniences which would arise therefrom for herself.

Europeans are aware of this influence over China, but believe it to be limited to China alone. That is a great mistake. Since the war of 1895, Japan is the refuge of malcontents from all parts of Asia and the focus of their activity. The Filipinos' revolt against Spain has been fostered by Japanese pensions to Aguinaldo and other chiefs, and, but for the Spanish-American War, the Philippines might now have Asiatic masters. Refugees from those islands, as well as from the Hawaiian group, are receiving allowances from Japan, and the same practice has been long in force regarding the Malays. Many of the latter have been adopted by the Japanese, and with the help of their new relatives have returned to their own country and attained a prominent position there. Thus a refugee from Natuna, a group of islands near the West coast of Borneo, who had become a Japanese, succeeded in making himself the Sultan of one-half of that Archipelago. Whether rumours of an alliance between this Chief and Japan be true or not, their intimate relations are beyond all doubt. Two Japanese cruisers, now used as training ships, the *Kongo* and *Hiwei*, are often seen in Natuna, from which they make frequent voyages to the Malacca and Sunda Straits. The inhabitants of the adjacent shores are won by presents and propaganda to the cause of Japan, whose influence extends to many of the semi-dependent Malay Sultanates, nominally under Dutch sovereignty.

Since 1895 Japan's influence is firmly established in Siam. Two Japanese magistrates act as legal advisers of

the King. Japanese officers are instructors in the army, most valuable concessions have been granted to Japanese; a high Japanese school and a branch of the Panasiatic Society have been created at Bangkok; and the intimacy between the two courts has been consummated by the visit of the Crown of Siam to Tokio in 1903.

The scientific curiosity of the Japanese was also attracted by French Indo-China. For a number of years it was visited by military and commercial missions from Japan, which examined roads and rivers, ports and markets, and these were discontinued only when they were discouraged by the French authorities. Yet a considerable residue was left behind by traders and commercial travellers, Buddhist priests or teachers, among whom French investigators have detected many reservists, non-commissioned officers and officers of the Japanese army. A young and eloquent French writer, Henri Moreau, has voiced the apprehensions felt in French colonial circles concerning Japan's views on that great French colony, the practical fulfilment of which is of course adjourned for the present.

The greatest historical and philosophical interest is presented by Japan's influence in British India. It did not originate in the Japanese propaganda. It is the work of the British Press, from which Indians learned the victories won from China by Japan, of whose existence they were hardly aware. But it was the praises by the English papers of her troops during the Boxer' troubles that endeared Japan to the heart of all Indians. At that epoch Anglo-Indian papers began sending correspondents to Tokio, and Indians became frequent visitors to Japan. Traders and ex-Samurai also went to India; and though they had not the same motives there, they used the same methods as in China. They frequently disguised themselves as Nepalese, whose Mongoloid type permits the Japanese to pass as such. The absence of any political object for this conduct points to a great force of habit, if not at an excess of zeal. It is interesting to note how much of their power religious differences have lost in Asia. If the Buddhists were the first sectaries in India whom the Japanese approached, they found through them access to Brahmins and even to Mussulmans. Japanese, pretending to be Nepalese, have been recognised by Englishmen,

who know both Japan and Nepal, at the Court of the Nizam of Hyderabad and at other Indian Mussulman Courts.

A sensation was produced in India last year by the arrival of a group of Japanese from Afghanistan. The alleged object of this journey thither was to visit the remains of an ancient Buddhist shrine at Bâmiân. In fact, they had passed several years at Cabul, and their chief was in high favour with the Amir. His name was Tâni, and he was a member of a princely family, related to the Mikado, and high priest of the Chief Buddhist temple at Tokio. It seems that these pilgrims were not exclusively occupied with the contemplation of the Bâmiân ruins, for soon after their arrival in Cabul, Afghans began to travel to Japan; and intimate relations were established between the two peoples. Only yesterday I had the information that the Amir recommended to the consideration of his Diwân the study of the Japanese constitution, in which he sees the cause of the firm cohesion of the Japanese State. He would like to see the Chiefs of the Afghan tribes renounce their privileges, as the Daimios did their power; and the tribes themselves contribute as substantially to the needs of the Afghan State as is the case with the provinces of Japan.

Other Japanese went to Persia and made valuable friendships there. It is reported that an informal Japanese mission is at present at Teheran, and a similar Persian mission at Tokio. Many have been the efforts of Japan to befriend Turkey, and several Japanese have even embraced Islam. The Sultan took their conversion so seriously to heart that he sent a steamer with two Pashas on an extraordinary mission to Japan, which was escorted back by two Japanese cruisers. Turco-Japanese relations might have acquired great importance if the Germans, who favoured them at first, had not become jealous of the Japanese, and succeeded in ousting them from Turkey. Last year Japanese were noticed in Syria, and were said to be active in all Arab Countries. A month ago two Japanese were reported to be travelling in Bulgaria and Macedonia, studying the Balkan question.

The current of political missionaries from Japan towards all parts of Asia called forth a counter-stream of adepts towards Japan, and Tokio has become the moral

capital of Asia, the Mecca of Panasiaticism. Mr. Stephen England, one of the *Daily Mail's* special correspondents in Tokio, himself an enthusiastic friend of Japan and writing in a decidedly pro-Japan organ, speaks of the statesmen and princes from all the countries of Asia who have been coming to Tokio from 1902 to 1904. He says that he could "give a long list of notable men representing all the East who have been conferring with the leaders of Japan." At the same time Japanese schools, colleges and universities were admitting hundreds of scholars from the mainland of Asia. At present at the Tokio university and some high schools alone there are 108 Indians, 32 Nepalese and 400 Chinese, besides several Siamese, Burmese, Afghans and Persians. Considering that the curriculum is couched in a language which cannot be of practical use to the students in their future careers, their presence there is a solid proof of their own and their parents' devotion to the ideal of Asiatic unity.

Besides a number of local associations there are two great political societies comprising all the zealous partizans of the movement. One of them is called *To-a-Dobunkai* (One Script Society), whose members include all who use the literary Chinese language, *i.e.*, the cultured Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Siamese, Burmese, Annamites, all belonging to the Mongolian race. The other society, *Dojin-Kai* (Philanthropic Society), is still more important, for it admits all Asiatics, and has particularly a very large proportion of upper-class Indian members. The meetings of this society, held at the Nobles' Club of Tokio, which receives illustrious strangers into its midst, were the occasion of speeches which even the *Japan Mail*, a semi-official Japanese organ in the English language, blamed as imprudent and alarming. I do not wish to dwell on that matter, and must refer those interested in it to the *Japan Mail* itself, to the *Yellow Whirlwind*, by Mr. S. England in the *Dail Mail*; and to Mr. F. J. Norman's letters in the *Spectator* of February and March last. A report reached me yesterday, which I mention in the hope of seeing it rectified, if untrue, by someone of those present here, namely, that a Maharaja whose part in the proceedings of the *Dojin Kai*, and in the Panasiatic movement in general, had attracted much attention, has been requested to return to his State, but preferred to remain in Japan.

You find the inspiration of Modern Japan, says Mr. S. England, in a nutshell, written in *The Ideals of the East*,

by Kakasu Okakura, the most renowned writer of the present generation in Japan. The following extract is the most characteristic: "Asia is one. The Himalayas divide, only to accentuate, two mighty civilisations, the Chinese with its communism of Confucius, and the Indian with its individualism of the Vedas. But not even the snowy barrier can interrupt for one moment that broad expanse of love for the ultimate and the universal which is the common thought and inheritance of every Asiatic race."

"If Asia be one, it is also true that the Asiatic races form a single mighty web. Arab chivalry, Persian poetry, Chinese ethics, and Indian thought, all speak of a single ancient Asiatic peace, in which there grew up a common life, bearing in different regions different characteristic blossoms, but nowhere capable of a hard-and-fast dividing line. Islam may be described as Confucianism on horseback, sword in hand; and Buddhism, that great ocean of idealism in which merge all the river systems of Eastern Asiatic thought, is coloured not only by the water of the Ganges, for the Tartaric nations have made their genius also its tributaries."

"It has been, however, the great privilege of Japan to realise this unity in complexity with a special clearness. The Indo-Tartaric blood of the race was in itself a heritage which qualified it to imbibe from the two sources, and so mirror the whole of Asiatic consciousness."

The Ideals of the East, written in the classical Japanese language, appeared first in the Japanese weekly *Nippon*, and afterwards, translated into English, in the monthly *The Far East*. According to Mr. Stephen England, the Emperor of Japan did an unprecedented thing when Okakura's work appeared. "He praised it, and made his praise known; therefore it is to be assumed that his ideals are those based upon the theory that Asia is one, and that Japan is the impregnable rock upon which its regeneration and salvation are to be based."

Against those facts we have the assurances of Japanese statesmen that Japan has cast in her lot with the white peoples, and adopted western conceptions of policy. Let us accept those assurances; and suppose Japan has adopted western ideals, and is acting upon them and has even succeeded in teaching them to China and other Asiatic peoples, what will be the consequences of it all? Will not

the Europeanised Asiatics demand the application of European principles to themselves? Will not China, for example, demand the abolition of the extra-territorial European settlements in China, as well as free emigration of Chinese to all countries under white rule? In the future it would be very difficult to stop the flow of emigration, first of Japanese, and then of Chinese, into such countries as Australia, South Africa and West Africa, where the white population is so small and is increasing so slowly.

Concerning Japan's external relations, especially with Australia, Sir Tollemache Sinclair (formerly M.P. for Caithness), in a letter to the *Westminster Gazette* (reproduced in his very valuable pamphlet *Russia and Japan*), speaks as follows:—"It was clear to the Government of Queensland, from 1890 to 1898, that Japan had set her eyes on the tropical part of Australia, and indeed she had largely populated the Northern Territory of South Australia and the Pearl Shell Fisheries of Thursday Island. She had also a number of labourers working in the Queensland sugar plantations. So serious at last did this invasion become, that the Government was compelled to negotiate with Japan to restrict this influx; and only after endless trouble could they succeed in getting a promise that the numbers would not be increased. During these negotiations our Government sent one of their best soldiers to visit Japan, and after a considerable stay there and a thorough inspection of their military system he made a report, of which a copy was given to the War Office in London, in which it was stated that the tropical portion of Australia was considered by Japan as her natural heritage, and that in every school the soldiers, from their earliest enlistment, were educated to view this position as their inevitable possession, and that all were taught the necessary military methods to acquire it, if ever an occasion arose. The correspondence between Japan and Queensland on these subjects can be seen in the Blue Books."

Leaving, however, to the author the responsibility for the details of his statement, based as it appears on official correspondence, I shall only remark that it cannot be denied that Australia greatly attracts Eastern Asiatics, and that she will be the first white country to feel the pressure of their immigration. Such is the point of view of the Australians themselves, and it explains their attitude concerning the present war, widely different from that of

the British public. It is not less certain that, whatever is granted to Japan will necessarily be granted to China later on, as well as to the Indian subjects of the British Empire. It is, indeed, one of the greatest triumphs of European civilisation to have taught Asiatics their geographical and historical unity. Would that they were able to reward the service by teaching Europe the same lesson!

I am not going to preach any coalition of Europeans against Asiatics, of white races against coloured. The latter have not always been treated well by the former; they are naturally anxious to secure better treatment and more equal rights. But the white nations also have their rights and interests to maintain, and they ought to unite in mutual defence of them. The first step towards that union should be a friendly understanding between Great Britain and Russia, as suggested by the Chairman.

The chief difficulty in the way of a realisation of that object is not so much the existence of positively divergent interests—which are few and capable of arrangement—as traditional and mutual distrust. There is, however, a double ground for hoping that that obstacle may be overcome. First, the example of an understanding between Austria and Russia, who had been for a century and a quarter in a direct antagonism on the Balkan question, considered by each of them vital for herself, yet seven years ago they came to an agreement regarding that very question, and established a co-operation which, through most critical contingencies, preserved peace in the near East and obtained the approval and adhesion of the other great Powers. And secondly, the happily intermediate position of France which, owing to her alliance with Russia and her understanding with England, wishes nothing better than to bring England and Russia nearer together and to unite them in the defence with her of European interests in Asia.

It is not for me to enter into the details of an eventual agreement. We Russians are now occupied in settling another question. But we always gladly welcome every sincere offer of a friendly understanding, and I am happy to have been able to respond to the offer made by our much-respected Chairman.

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