

Abstract

A Japanophile's Approach to Aggression: William Castle and the Manchurian Crisis

Barney J. Rickman III
Valdosta State College

William R. Castle, Jr. occupied a strategic position within the American government during the Manchurian Crisis of 1931-1933. As Under Secretary of State, Castle restricted the American response to Japan's aggression in China's northeastern province. This paper explains how Castle shaped U.S. policy as well as the pro-Japanese ideology that motivated his actions.

By 1931, Castle had already formed a coherent ideology about American policy for East Asia. Castle's ideology was based on a strident anti-communism, a limited conception of East Asia's importance to the United States, a dismissal of China as a stable nation, and a deep respect for Japan. Castle identified the Soviet Union as the major threat to peace in East Asia. Because Castle believed that American economic and strategic interests in East Asia did not justify a major application of American power to block the Soviet menace, the United States, he argued, needed a partner in the Far East. If China lacked the cohesion to be that ally, then cooperation with Japan was, for Castle, the logical and preferable choice. Based on this set of assumptions, Castle

argued fervently that American policy in East Asia must be grounded on friendship with Japan. As a Japanophile, Castle worked incessantly during the Manchurian Crisis to dampen American-Japanese friction.

Castle's friendship with President Herbert Hoover enabled Castle to shape American foreign policy toward Japan in accordance with his pro-Japanese ideology. During the 1928 campaign, Hoover and Castle formed a close working relationship, and as president, Hoover continued to seek Castle's advice on foreign affairs. As Under Secretary of State, Castle often conflicted with Henry L. Stimson, Hoover's Secretary of State. During the Manchurian Crisis, Castle relied on his friendship with the President to circumvent Stimson's policy of threatening the Japanese. Castle blocked any consideration of economic sanctions against Japan, assured the Japanese publicly that the United States would not act to remove them from Manchuria, and maneuvered the appointment of another pro-Japanese American diplomat as the United States Ambassador to Japan. By March 1933, the non-coercive policy of Castle and Hoover had prevailed over the more provocative approach advocated by Stimson.