Introduction

Continuity of Diplomacy in the Democratisation Process

Harold Nicolson, a British diplomat who became a member of the House of Commons, argued in his classic work *Diplomacy*:

> The function of diplomacy is the management of the relations between independent States by processes of negotiation. The professional diplomatist is the servant of the sovereign authority in his own country. In democratic countries, that sovereign authority is represented, in the first place by a majority of the House of Commons, and in the second place by the Government or Cabinet to whom that majority accords executive powers.¹

Diplomacy is a form of foreign policy, and while foreign policy includes defence policy and the use of military force, diplomacy is negotiations between nations. A state’s diplomacy with foreign counterparts requires continuous policy and human interaction to ensure unwavering trust.

However, two factors threaten the consistency of diplomacy. First, diplomacy in a democracy is prone to inconsistency due to regime changes. Democracy in a modern state is an indirect one and takes the form of party politics. Opposition parties often criticise the ruling party’s diplomacy as soft and against the national interest and try to change the diplomacy when they come to power. Today, with the development of diverse media, the phenomenon of populism is common even in developed countries. It is not infrequent for politicians to manipulate the media to incite the masses or pander to public opinion and appeal to extreme foreign policies. Second, in countries in the process of democratisation, the military often comes to power and intervenes in foreign affairs. In countries on the verge of democratisation, such as modern Japan and contemporary South-East
Asia, coups d’état have often occurred, and the military has taken over the reins of power. Since the military, which has taken control of the country, also meddles in diplomacy, changes in civil–military relations have a significant impact on foreign policy.

Thus, the question of how to maintain the continuity of diplomacy while developing democracy without military intervention is an old and new issue. The challenge can be described as a dilemma between democracy and diplomatic coherence. This dilemma is not unique to the twenty-first century; it has been a constant challenge to the development of democracy. In non-Western countries, democratisation originated in the nineteenth century and has had many successes and failures. After the Russo-Japanese War, political parties began to take power in Japan, replacing the military-backed forces represented by Army General Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922). The president of the Rikken Seiyūkai, Hara Takashi (1856–1921), who became prime minister in 1918, formed the first full-fledged party cabinet by appointing all ministers from the party except for the ministers of war, navy and foreign affairs. In the late 1920s, party politics with the two major parties—the Rikken Seiyūkai and the Minseitō—reached its peak in Japan. However, party politics in prewar Japan did not last long, and the military dominated politics from the Manchurian Incident in 1931 until the defeat in the Pacific War in 1945. The rise of militarism in Japan in the 1930s and early 1940s led to the collapse of party politics, but democracy was restored in the late twentieth century.

Who Is Shidehara and Why Is He So Important?

The best embodiment of diplomacy in Japan’s emerging democracy—the development of parliamentary democracy and mass-based democracy—is Shidehara Kijūrō (1872–1951), who served as foreign minister from 1924 to 1927 and from 1929 to 1931, and was prime minister from 1945 to 1946. As a diplomat from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Shidehara had long grappled with the issue of how to ensure diplomatic coherence in modern Japan, which was becoming increasingly democratic. Although Shidehara succeeded to some extent in promoting diplomacy in cooperation with the US and the UK under party politics, the rise of the military after the Manchurian Incident forced him to retire for a period.
‘Manchuria’ is the former name for China’s north-eastern region, covering the three provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang, and part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. However, after the Pacific War, Shidehara became prime minister of the US-occupied Japan and attempted to restore cooperative diplomacy under party politics. Shidehara came to the conclusion that the way to achieve both democracy and diplomatic coherence was through nonpartisan diplomacy towards peace. This book examines the tension between diplomacy and democracy, focusing on Shidehara’s life and exploring modern Japan’s footsteps.

Shidehara was undoubtedly one of Japan’s most important diplomatic figures. Along with Mutsu Munemitsu (1844–1897) and Komura Jutarō (1855–1911), he is considered one of the representative foreign ministers of the nation’s modern era. Even in the twentieth century as a whole, only diplomatic figures like Yoshida Shigeru (1878–1967) or Shigemitsu Mamoru (1887–1957) made comparable contributions. Today, ‘Mutsu diplomacy’ has become a household term. Yet, it was Shidehara who was the first to have his name associated with a particular form of diplomacy—‘Shidehara diplomacy’. Such is the extent to which he drew both praise and censure.

Shidehara’s diplomatic career began in the era of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05). After an initial posting to Incheon, followed by Busan and London, Shidehara served as the vice-minister for foreign affairs and then as Japan’s ambassador to the United States. From 1924 to 1927, as well as from 1929 to 1931, Shidehara served as foreign minister, and his policies were commonly referred to as ‘Shidehara diplomacy’. Although he left office following the Manchurian Incident (1931), he served as prime minister during the US occupation of Japan, working to preserve the emperor system as well as helping draft the new constitution. Shidehara also appeared in court during the International Military Tribunal for the Far East or the Tokyo Trial. At the time of his death in 1951, he was serving as the speaker of the House of Representatives.

Shidehara was an internationalist who advocated cooperative diplomacy with the US and the UK. At the same time, he regarded the annexation of Korea in 1910 as a natural occurrence and was critical of China’s abolition of unequal treaties. In this sense, Shidehara’s diplomacy was a confluence of internationalism towards the West and imperialism towards Asia. Shidehara is attracting new attention today. The reason for this is the issue of whether Prime Minister Shidehara was the originator of
Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan, which stipulates the renunciation of war and the non-preservation of military power, as constitutional revision has become a real issue in Japan in recent years. Further, as speaker of the House of Representatives in his final years, Shidehara was more enthusiastic than Prime Minister Yoshida about maintaining the US military presence in Japan after independence. These facts indicate the necessity of following in Shidehara’s footsteps when considering contemporary international security.

**Literature Review**

A significant amount of research has focused on Shidehara’s time as foreign minister. I will examine this research in more detail in the following chapters. However, biographical research has lagged behind. Currently, the most reliable source is *Shidehara Kijūrō*, edited by the Shidehara Peace Foundation and published in 1955. It is a thorough work for its time and one that has retained its value as a historical resource. However, it does not utilise important documents, including the records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is also significantly limited by its laudatory approach.

Studies published in Japanese in recent years include the following: Taneine Syūji, *Shidehara Kijūrō* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2021); and Kumamoto Fumio, *Shidehara Kijūrō* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2021). Although these make use of Japanese historical sources, they are aimed at a general readership rather than an academic audience. Hence, until now, properly rigorous biographical research has not been conducted. Only one biography of Shidehara has ever been published in English: Klaus Schlichtmann, *Japan in the World: Shidehara Kijūrō, Pacifism, and the Abolition of War*, 2 vols (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009). However, it does not utilise important documents, including the original records of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Hence, until now, properly rigorous biographical research has not been conducted in English.

In addition to the records of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this study uses documents of the US (Record Group 59, 331, National Archives), the UK (FO 228, 371, 800, National Archives) and Taiwan (Record of the Foreign Ministry, 03.25.25.31.1). Besides the above-mentioned public documents, I also researched private papers.
Aims and Scope

This work is not intended to serve only as a biography in the narrow sense. Can Shidehara’s life and career be adequately traced without also depicting the historical trajectory of Japan in the twentieth century? Certainly, it must be noted that Shidehara died in 1951. Therefore, at the very least, he cannot be said to occupy a central position in twentieth-century history. In fact, the opposite could be argued: Shidehara is, in a way, a peripheral figure.

In support of the above claim, let us briefly consider the other leading figures in Japan’s modern diplomatic history. Beginning with Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830–1878), we would proceed to mention Itō Hirobumi (1841–1909), Yamagata Aritomo, Inoue Kaoru (1836–1915), Mutsu Munemitsu, Komura Jutarō, Hayashi Tadasu (1850–1913), Hara Takashi and Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929). Moving forward, we would have to mention Hirota Kōki (1878–1948), Tōgō Shigenori (1882–1950), Shigemitsu Mamoru, Yoshida Shigeru, Kishi Nobusuke (1896–1987), Satō Eisaku (1901–1975), Fukuda Takeo (1905–1995), Ōhira Masayoshi (1910–1980) and Nakasone Yasuhiro (1918–2019). When comparing Shidehara with such diplomatic figures, we might say that one of his characteristics was a certain kind of weakness. That is to say, by Shidehara’s time, a wide range of foreign affairs mechanisms were already in place, and Japan was increasingly receptive to democratic forms of governance. What this new era needed was talented officials; it was no longer the age of daring diplomatic officers.

For this reason, in this book I consider not only Shidehara’s policies and general outlook on foreign affairs but also his personal relationships. I speak of his connections with figures such as Komura Jutarō, Henry Willard Denison (1846–1914), James Bryce (1838–1922), Sir Edward Grey (1862–1933), Katō Takaaki (1860–1926), Debuchi Katsuji (1878–1947), Saburi Sadao (1879–1929), Yoshida Shigeru, William Richards Castle (1878–1963), Shigemitsu Mamoru, Joseph Grew (1880–1965), the Shōwa emperor, Douglas MacArthur (1880–1964) and Ashida Hitoshi (1887–1959). In the presence of such strong personalities as these, Shidehara could not help but be overshadowed.

Such is the fate of a person whose life and career coincided with such tumultuous historic events. Yet, I would like to suggest that Shidehara’s peripheral position in this period is itself symbolic of Japan’s own
trajectory. There are four reasons why Shidehara was a peripheral figure. First, although Shidehara was a vice-minister for foreign affairs during World War I, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ position had declined because the Japanese army had led the Siberian Intervention. Second, in 1927–28, against Shidehara’s policy, the Tanaka Giichi cabinet sent troops to the Shandong Peninsula, and the Japanese Kwantung Army assassinated Zhang Zuolin, a Mukden warlord. Third, in 1931, when Shidehara was a foreign minister, the Japanese army caused the Manchurian Incident, destroying Shidehara’s diplomatic solution. Fourth, although Shidehara was prime minister from 1945 to 1946, it was not Shidehara who led the Japanese constitution’s enactment, but the US occupation forces, who held absolute power. Therefore, while I make Shidehara the main focus of this book, I also provide a brief historical overview. More concretely, I divide the twentieth century into three periods, on which I overlay Shidehara’s own steps. These periods are the Meiji and Taishō eras, the prewar Shōwa era and the postwar era.

In the Meiji and Taishō eras, Japan won the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–05) and secured its position as a ‘Great Power’ through the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the Washington Naval Conference (1921–22). This is also the period that saw the establishment of party-based politics in Japan and the formation of the Katō Takaaki cabinet in 1924 (the thirteenth year of Taishō). The Katō cabinet was a cross-party cabinet consisting of members of the Kenseikai, the Rikken Seiyūkai and the Kakushin Club (‘Reformist Club’); it was also referred to as the ‘three-party coalition cabinet of constitutional protection’. It was as part of the Katō cabinet that Shidehara first served as foreign minister.

However, prewar Shōwa-era Japan stumbled as a result of the China policies adopted by the cabinet formed by Tanaka Giichi of the Seiyūkai. Following the Manchurian Incident and the May 15 Incident, party-based politics collapsed. Japan was now on a path to catastrophe. After his reappointment as foreign minister in the cabinet formed by Hamaguchi Osachi (1870–1931), Shidehara also served as foreign minister in Wakatsuki Reijirō’s (1866–1949) second cabinet. Subsequently, however, he became a forgotten figure. Shidehara’s residence in Sendagaya was damaged in the Pacific War, a conflict that would lead to the collapse of Japan’s entire empire.
Yet postwar Japan, undergoing a period of reform under the occupation of the Allied forces and a subsequent era of rapid economic growth, eventually grew into an economic power. Serving as prime minister during the occupation, Shidehara was directly involved in the reforms of the period, beginning with the establishment of the constitution. In fact, it was Shidehara who prepared the English version of the Shōwa emperor’s ‘Declaration of Humanity’. Shidehara also took to the witness stand at the Tokyo Trial and worked tirelessly to maintain the integrity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In his final years, as speaker of the House of Representatives, he endeavoured to find a way to achieve reconciliation with foreign countries through nonpartisan diplomacy.

If we were to briefly summarise these three periods, it might be said that Japan experienced a time of glory during the Meiji and Taishō eras, rising to the status of a first-class power; a time of breakdown in the prewar Shōwa era, beginning with the Tanaka cabinet; and an eventual recovery with the reconstruction of the postwar period. As it happened, only Shidehara served as a cabinet minister during all three of these periods. Long-serving figures such as Yamagata Aritomo and Hara Takashi did not live to see the Shōwa years, while conversely, others such as Yoshida Shigeru and Shigemitsu Mamoru remained peripheral to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until the end of the Taishō era. Put simply, when it comes to representing Japan internationally during these three periods, and while having a career that reflected and embodied the successive changes that took place in Japan, no one surpasses Shidehara.

If those long-running threads of Shidehara’s career that influenced foreign diplomacy could be thought of as the ‘warp’, then it is the cross-threads, the ‘weft’, that constitute the central focus of the present book. In short, a look at Shidehara’s career allows us to consider the age-old tension between foreign diplomacy and democracy. This work asks: how did Shidehara understand the relationship between foreign policy and party-based politics, and how did he act accordingly? During Shidehara’s time as a diplomat, party-based politics took shape and then collapsed. In this historical context, Shidehara attempted to preserve a certain consistency in foreign policy by separating domestic politics from diplomacy. In this sense, Shidehara is the clearest embodiment of orthodox Kasumigaseki-style (i.e. Japanese government bureaucracy-style) diplomacy.
However, once Shidehara was forced into opposition with the formation of the Tanaka cabinet, he became involved in the development of the Minseitō’s policies. Then, in the postwar period, political parties naturally started once more to shoulder diplomatic responsibilities. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs could no longer centrally manage foreign relations. These significant changes between the prewar and the postwar periods are also reflected in Shidehara’s words and actions. Moreover, starting in the postwar period, Shidehara devoted himself to the restoration of party-based politics. Thus I suggest that Shidehara’s arguments remain instructive for us even today, when looking at the relationship between diplomacy and democracy.

Structure and Arguments

This book consists of three main parts and an epilogue. The three sections correspond to the three periods outlined above: Part I covers the period of Meiji- and Taishō-era glory, Part II examines the breakdown of the prewar Shōwa period and Part III focuses on the postwar recovery.

Starting with Part I, Chapter 1 looks at Shidehara’s background. Here I will outline the stages of his early life, from his birth in the town of Kadoma, where he was raised in a privileged environment, until he joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Chapter 2 covers Shidehara’s early career as a member of the diplomatic service. I will trace Shidehara’s initial posting to the consulate of Incheon as a consular assistant following the end of the First Sino-Japanese War; his rise to the position of consul at Busan during the Russo-Japanese War; his role as vice-minister for foreign affairs during World War I; and, finally, his performance at the Washington Naval Conference as the ambassador plenipotentiary to the US.

Chapter 3 focuses on Shidehara’s first stint as foreign minister, from 1924 until 1927. As foreign minister, Shidehara played a crucial role in orienting Japan towards the US and handling a China that was moving towards reunification. This chapter concludes Part I and the Meiji and Taishō eras.
Proceeding to Part II, and Chapter 4, I turn to Shidehara’s status during his time in political opposition. He was ousted from office because his political stance differed from that of the Seiyūkai, which had secured executive power with the formation of the Tanaka Giichi cabinet. At this point, Shidehara aligned himself with Hamaguchi Osachi’s party, the Minseitō, and even debated Prime Minister Tanaka during Diet sessions.

Chapter 5 covers Shidehara’s second stint as foreign minister, from 1929 to 1931. While Shidehara’s diplomatic efforts resulted in success at the London Naval Treaty Conference in 1930, they were eventually undermined by the fallout from the Manchurian Incident.

Chapter 6 looks at the period from the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 to the outbreak of the Pacific War in 1941. This was a time when Shidehara was once more in political opposition. Nevertheless, as we shall see, he was able to make pertinent judgements on the unfolding global situation, and he called for a peace accord to bring an early end to the Pacific War. This chapter concludes Part II and the prewar Shōwa era.

Next, in Chapter 7 and the beginning of Part III, I discuss Shidehara’s actions during the initial period of the US military occupation of Japan. At this time, Shidehara became the prime minister. His time in office was brief, lasting only half a year. Nevertheless, as prime minister, Shidehara had an extremely important role, working, for example, to secure the survival of the emperor system and establish the new constitution.

In Chapter 8 I outline some of the important details of Shidehara’s career in the final years of his life. At this point, Shidehara was no longer prime minister, instead becoming a minister of state and cabinet minister without a portfolio in Yoshida Shigeru’s cabinet. He finally became speaker of the House of Representatives. As well as appearing in the Tokyo Trial in this period, Shidehara searched both for a nonpartisan approach to conducting diplomacy and a way to secure the integrity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In Chapter 9, I review some of the criticisms and discussions of Shidehara that took place after his death, and look at Japan’s path in the years following the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951. This chapter concludes Part III and my examination of the postwar era.
Finally, in the conclusion, I look back upon Shidehara’s legacy and the currents of Japan’s diplomatic history, while reflecting upon the nature of the relationship between diplomacy and democracy.

Thus, this book seeks to place the reader at the crossroads of Japanese diplomacy from the perspective of Shidehara, providing a view of his repeated attempts to negotiate the nature of the relationship between foreign affairs and party-based politics. What I aim to show is that, by looking at Shidehara’s life and career, we can learn much about Japan’s twentieth-century history, and about the interlinkage of democracy and diplomacy within that history.

Endnotes
