Argentine Warships in Russo-Japanese War
Chenhui Wang 1,a

1 College of Liberal Arts, Shanghai University, Shanghai 200444, China;

a 429474603@qq.com

Abstract. On December 30, 1903, before the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan reached an agreement with the Argentina, and Japan purchased two Argentine warships. The two warships were purchased by Argentina and built by Italy, and the two warships were originally named Moreno and Rivadavia, which were later renamed Nisshin and Kasuga by Japan. Shortly after the Russo-Japanese War broke out in February 1904, the two ships arrived in Japan and immediately took part in the Russo-Japanese War. At the end of the 19th century, Argentina and Chile engaged in a decades-long naval arms race as the two countries were pitted against each other over a dispute over territory in their south territory. The rivalry eased with an agreement between Argentina and Chile to accept British arbitration, then Argentina wanted to transfer two warships. Japan took note of Argentina's willingness to sell the warships in time, and with the help of British, the transfer of the warships was achieved through active diplomatic contacts.

Keywords: Argentina-Chile Navy Arms Race; Russo-Japanese War; British.

1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, Argentina and Chile were engaged in protracted naval arms race due to their border conflict, and the two countries ordered large numbers of new warships from European countries. Argentina ordered two cruisers from Italy's Giovani Ansaldo & C., in 1901. Argentina sought to sell the two unfinished cruisers after a detente between Argentina and Chile in 1902, when the two countries signed the Pacts of May, an armaments limitation brokered by Britain, just before the Russo-Japanese War, when both Japan and Russia were looking to buy warships to bolster their navies. Argentina initially intended to sell the warships to Russia, but the Russian offer did not meet Argentina's expectations, and the Japanese side very quickly contacted the Argentine side and reached an agreement on the transfer of the warships at the end of 1903. At the end of February 1904, the two ships arrived in Japan under British escort, and then took part in the Russo-Japanese War as the main battleships. This article will review the historical background of the arms race between Argentina and Chile, the process of Japan's purchase of Argentine warships, and analyze the role of the United Kingdom in this process.

2. Argentine-Chile Naval Arms Race

In the early 19th century, Argentina and Chile had independence from the Spanish colonies. At that time, Argentina and Chile did not have a clear national border. After independence, both countries claimed to inherit the border of the Spanish colonial era and have full sovereignty over Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. The two countries did not exercise effective rule in the region, and Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego were mostly uninhabited except for some indigenous people. [1] Argentinian and Chilean claims to the territory of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego cause tensions between the two countries. With the expansion of the two countries to the south area, the tension between the two countries continued to grow. [2]

In 1879, Chile fought a war with Bolivia and Peru, known as the Nitrate War. In order to win the war, Chile expanded its navy and ordered warships from European countries. [3,4] With these warships, Chile won the War, and the Chilean Navy was even stronger than the United States Navy after the American Civil War, and became the naval power in the entire American continent. The victory of Chile made Argentina deeply worried, and Argentina also began to order some warships from European countries around 1880 to build a modern navy, and Argentina and Chile gradually
began a navy arms race against each other. In 1880, Argentina ordered the iron armored battleship Admiral Brown (ARA Almirante Brown) from the United Kingdom as a naval capital ship. Before that, the Argentine Navy only had some small ships. From the purchase of Admiral Brown, the Argentine Navy began the process of naval modernization. In 1885, Argentina ordered the armored cruiser ARA Patagonia from Austria-Hungary. [5]

The victory of the Nitrate War led Chile to wish to expand its navy, and while the Nitrate War was still in progress, Chile ordered the defense cruiser Chilean Esmeralda from the United Kingdom to expand its naval capabilities. In 1887, the Chilean government ordered the Capitan Prat, a modern ironclad battleship, from France. And two defense cruisers, the Presidente Errazuriz and the Presidente Pinto, from the British government. In the View of Argentina, the expansion of the Chilean navy break the balance of naval power in Latin America, Chile had already built up an experienced and well-equipped navy during the Pacific War in South America. The expansion of the Chilean navy caused concern in Argentina, in 1888, Argentina purchased two defense cruisers from Britain, the ARA Libertad and the ARA Independencia. The defense cruiser ARA Veitcinco de Mayo was purchased from the British in 1890 and the defense cruiser ARA Nueve de Julio was purchased from the British in 1891. [5]

On January 16, 1891, the Chilean Civil War broke out. The civil war lasted nearly nine months, pitting the navy on the side of Congress against the army on the side of President Jose Manuel Balmaseda. The civil war ended with the defeat of the Chilean Army and the suicide of President Balmaseda, with the victory of the Congress and the Chilean Navy. [1] After the end of the Chilean Civil War, the prestige of the Chilean Navy was greatly strengthened, and with the arrival of Chilean Admiral Jorge Montt as President of Chile, the Chilean Navy began a new expansion program. In 1892, Chile purchased the defense cruiser Blanco Encalada from the British. In 1895, Chile purchased the armored cruiser Esmeralada 1896 and the defense cruiser Ministro Zenteno from the British and ordered four torpedo boats. In response, Argentina bought the defense cruiser ARA Buenos Aires from Britain in 1894 and the armored cruiser ARA Garibaldi from Italy in 1895. [5]

In 1896, Chile ordered an armored cruiser, the O'Higgins, as well as six torpedo boats, and at about the same time Argentina ordered an armored cruiser, the ARA San Martin. During this period, the Argentinean naval arms race with Chile was heating up, and the Argentines, in pursuit of an advantage over the Chilean navy, in 1897-1898, two armored cruisers were ordered from Italy, the ARA Pueyredon and the ARA General Belgrano. The naval arms race between the two countries reached its peak in 1901, When Argentina ordered two of the most advanced Giuseppe Garibaldi-class cruisers in the world, the Rivadavia and the Mariano Moreno, Chile also bought two advanced iron-clad cruisers, the Constitucion and the Libertad, and a defense cruiser, the Chacabuco, from Britain. [5]

After nearly two decades of arms race, the Argentinian and Chilean navies reached an astonishing size. By some estimates, prior to the signing of the May Treaty in 1902, the Argentine and Chilean navies had a combined displacement of 200,000 tons, and each had built a strong modern navy. The combined tonnage of the Argentine Navy and the Chilean Navy reached a surprising seventh place in the ranking of the navies of the countries at that time, if the per capita tonnage of this data is even more exaggerated, the Chilean Navy ranked first in the world with 33 kg per capita, and the Argentine Navy ranked third in the world with 22 kg per capita. [6]

By the beginning of 1902, the size of the Argentine and Chilean navies far exceeded what was reasonable for either country. First of all, all the warships of the two countries were purchased from European countries, and the maintenance and repair costs of the later warships were extremely high, so the two navies could not afford the maintenance costs of the warships, and European countries rarely provided technical support, which resulted in the failure of the two navies to maintain the warships in good running condition. Secondly, such a huge scale of navies is out of proportion to the population size and economic size of the two countries, which has caused serious burdens to the economies of the two countries. Finally, both countries lack sufficient human resources to operate
these ships, and in the course of the arms race between the two navies, there have been cases of crew operational errors leading to accidents on both sides. [6]

The arms race and near war between Argentina and Chile caused great concern to Britain. Britain had broader political and economic interests in Latin America. The British government was very worried that the outbreak of war between Argentina and Chile would affect Britain's import of raw materials and export of commodities to this region. And such a large expansion of the navies of the two countries also caused the British government to worry about the ability of the two countries to repay the loans. For these reasons, Britain became involved in the arms race between Argentina and Chile, and under British mediation, Argentina and Chile began talks to resolve the strained relations between the two countries. On May 28, 1902, Argentina and Chile signed the Pacts of May. The two countries agreed to limit their naval armament and invited the British Crown to arbitrate the border dispute between the two countries. [7] According to the Treaty, Argentina and Chile would cease the naval arms race, reduce the size of their navies, purchase no new warships, and release warships under construction for sale on the international market. Following the signing of the Treaty, the Argentine government decided to sell the two cruisers, Rivadavia and Moreno, which it had ordered from Italy in 1901. And the Chilean government decided to selling the cruisers Constitucion and Libertad, which had been ordered from Britain in 1901. News of the Argentina and Chile sale warships immediately caught the attention of the nations of the world still engaged in a naval arms race. Japan and Russia, both expanding their navies in preparation for the coming war, were interested in buying the ships that Argentina and Chile had put up for sale.

3. The process of Japan's purchase of Argentine warships

At the beginning of 1903, Argentina and Chile, according to the May Treaty signed in 1902, decided to sell the warships that had been purchased but not yet built, so that two battleships of Argentina and two battleships of Chile were put on the international market. The first to be sold were the two Chilean warships. Antony Gibb & Sons, a British trading company, represented Chile in the sale of two of its warships. Subsequently, Britain purchased two Chilean warships. [7]

After the successful resale of the Chilean warships, Gibbs & Sons began selling the Argentine warships and began to approach the interested countries. At about the same time, Russia and Japan approached both Gibbs & Sons and Argentina about the purchase of the ships. Initially, Argentina wanted to sell the ships to Russia, but the negotiations failed because Argentina demanded too much and the Russian side hoped that the installment purchase plan would not be accepted by Argentina. After Japan quickly contacted Argentina, Japan agreed to Argentina's offer and was willing to pay in cash immediately. Under the operation of Gibbs's father subsidiary, on December 30, Japan and Argentina signed the contract for the transfer of warships, Japan bought two Argentine warships at the price of 1.53 million pounds. After acquiring the two warships, Japan renamed the Ricadavia as Kasuga and the Moreno as Nisshin. The two completed warships were delivered to Japan in Genoa, Italy, on January 7, 1903. On 9 January 1904, the two warships left the Port of Genoa, Italy. On 16 January, the two ships arrived in the Suez Canal under British naval escort, and on 2 February, the two ships arrived in Singapore. [7]

On 8 February 1904, the Russo-Japanese War officially broke out when the Japanese Navy attacked the Russian Pacific Fleet stationed at Port Lushun at night. The two ships were still on their way to Japan when the Russo-Japanese War broke out. On February 16, the two ships arrived in Yokosuka, Japan. On 4 April, Kasuga and Nisshin were integrated into the Third Fleet of the Japanese Combined Fleet. Afterwards, Kasuga and Nisshin served as the main battleships in the Russo-Japanese War.
4. Summary

The atmosphere of the large-scale arms race between European countries in the late 19th century and early 20th century influenced other countries and regions around the world, and Japan's purchase of Argentine warships can be regarded as a typical case of arms race. In the late 19th century, Argentina and Chile launched the arms race for 20 years because of the territorial and border disputes between the two countries, and both sides spent huge sums to buy a large number of warships from European countries, which brought heavy economic burden to both sides. Although Argentina and Chile were on the brink of war for a time, they finally reconciled with each other through British mediation. In 1902, Argentina and Chile reached the Treaty of May on the limitation of armaments, which decided to release warships purchased by both countries but not yet built to the international market. During the whole process of the sale of warships, the British government deeply influenced the process of the sale of warships. Although the British government scrupulously maintained neutrality before the Russo-Japanese War and avoided getting involved in the disputes between the two countries, the British government's actions in the whole process of warship sale and transfer indirectly helped Japan, which enhanced its naval strength before the war.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Britain was at the peak of its power, with colonies all over the world and significant influence in important parts of the world. South American countries Argentina and Chile are both important importers of primary products to Britain. If a war breaks out between the two countries, it will affect Britain's trade in this region. In consideration of its own interests, Britain decided to intervene in the arms race between Argentina and Chile. In the process of Japan's purchase of Argentine warships, Britain indirectly supported Japan in the process to help its Allies and limit Russia, so that the two Argentine warships finally arrived in Japan safely. Britain's support was a key factor in Japan's purchase of the Argentine warships, and the Japanese navy was further enhanced by the acquisition of the two warships, which provided a guarantee for its victory in the Russo-Japanese War.

References