



Building the Nation-State

The task of building a modern nation-state engaged the Meiji leaders for the entire period of their hold on government, from 1868 through the turn of the century. The feudal organization of the country into more than 200 semiautonomous fiefs had to be replaced by a new political structure that would centralize government and provide a unifying national spirit to galvanize the energies of the Japanese people for the tasks of building an industrial society.

Ordinarily, description of the process of nation building tends to concentrate on the formation of constitutional government, but in actuality the task was larger than simply establishing the Meiji Constitution. The fundamental task of the Meiji leaders was to mobilize the masses and integrate them into a new political system that would capture their loyalties and win their hearts. It involved a variety of techniques for mass mobilization and, above all, it required an effective ideology. Japanese scholars often refer to this process as the building of the emperor system.

Initial Problems

In contrast to the historic development of constitutional government in many Western nations, the Japanese experience was not one of a rising bourgeoisie bent upon achieving political rights. Rather, constitutional government was instituted "from above," the creation of a politically astute elite that had as its goal national power and equality with Western nations.

Within the loose alliance of oligarchs who controlled the regime in its early years, there was only limited consensus as to what kind of political structure should best be established in Japan. The oligarchy, which was composed chiefly of samurai from Satsuma and Chōshū (but included one or two from Tosa and Hizen, as well), had been

united by their leadership of the anti-Tokugawa campaign but had achieved no more than broad agreement on the shape that political reforms should take. It took two decades of trial and error and struggle among them before the details of the new system of government were worked out. One step upon which all could agree was the need for administrative unification of the country. There was a notable consensus that until feudal divisions were done away with, essential reforms of the military, of education, and of the economy would be impossible. Accordingly, the Meiji leaders, as we have seen, moved quickly to establish a highly centralized political structure. In 1869 the daimyo were induced to accept the title of imperial governor of the land they had held in fiefs. This was prelude to abolition of the domains and their reorganization as prefectures governed by appointees of the central government. The relative ease with which this centralization was achieved is comprehensible if we recall how weak most of the daimyo had become by late Tokugawa days, and how beset most domains were by fiscal troubles.

This unification, in turn, made possible the conscription law of 1873, which called for the replacement of the separate samurai armies of the many domains with a single national army based upon universal conscription. All able-bodied males, regardless of their social background, were liable for three years of active military service. The conscription law represented a decisive break with the past, which was required by the goal of building national strength.

Many of the oligarchs had come to the view that a hereditary elite was no longer consonant with national unity and efficiency of government. Itagaki Taisuke from Tosa, himself from a well-to-do middle samurai family, pointed out in 1871 how essential to national strength was the mobilization of the loyalties of all the people: "In order to make it possible for our country to confront the world and succeed in the task of achieving national prosperity, the whole of the people must be made to cherish sentiments of patriotism, and institutions must be established under which people are all treated as equals." To bring the ablest men into government, he said, it was necessary to do away with the old class divisions. "We should seek above all to spread widely among the people the responsibility for the civil and military functions hitherto performed by the samurai . . . so that each may develop his own knowledge and abilities . . . and have the chance to fulfill his natural aspirations."¹ Itagaki was not only summarizing the arguments developed during the Tokugawa Period for the promotion of talent, he was as well laying down one of the basic propositions of modern leadership.

After centuries of existence as a hereditary elite, the samurai had by 1876 lost all their exclusive privileges: superior education, possession of bureaucratic office, stipends, and sword bearing. The new gov-

ernment could not afford to continue supporting a hereditary elite, and it needed to cast a wider net for talent in administration. Inevitably, as the new government pressed ahead with its reforms, it engendered growing hostility among many groups of the dispossessed. The administrative unification of the country and the reforms that the government had carried out to put it on a solid basis were severely tested by several major samurai uprisings that occurred in the mid-1870s. Significantly, they all occurred in the southwest where the new Meiji leadership had emerged. The reason for this was that the uprisings were led by disaffected oligarchs—members of the original Meiji government who had withdrawn from it because of disagreements over policy, particularly disagreement over the extent of political reforms.

The government survived those challenges to its authority. But the final and by far the greatest of the samurai uprisings, the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, required the full application of the new government's resources. The rebellion was led by Saigō Takamori, who left government service in 1873 over the Korean controversy. At issue in this controversy was whether to invade Korea, which had affronted Japanese sensibilities by rebuffing the overtures of the new Meiji government for diplomatic recognition. The controversy led to a fundamental division. A number of the oligarchs, including Saigō and Itagaki Taisuke, favored an invasion of Korea as a means of asserting Japan's national dignity and of giving vent to samurai frustration and energy. After protracted controversy their views were overridden by Okubo Toshimichi, Iwakura Tomomi, and others who had recently returned from Europe convinced of the primacy of domestic reforms. Okubo argued that war would divert resources badly needed to stimulate industry. He concluded that Japan must pursue a prudent foreign policy, seeking first to revise the unequal treaties, before undertaking bold overseas commitments. His arguments carried the day and set the basic course of government policy for the next two decades. Saigō therefore resigned from the government and returned to Satsuma in high dudgeon.

If opposition to the new government was to succeed it could have no more magnetic leadership than Saigō gave it. He was, in the words of Craig, "the most potent personality in Japanese history."² He combined a burly physique (his collar size was 19-1/2 inches), charisma, and personal dynamism with a devotion to classic samurai values of stern integrity and disdain for physical danger. Although Okubo, his boyhood comrade from Satsuma, adopted Western ways, Saigō still dressed in simple clothes. He supported the policy of *fukoku-kyōhei* as necessary to strengthen Japan, but he was "opposed to the excessively rapid changes in Japanese society and was particularly disturbed by the shabby treatment of the warrior class. Suspicious of the

new bureaucratic-capitalist structure and of the values it represented, he wanted power to remain in the hands of responsible, patriotic, benevolent warrior-administrators who would rule the country under the Emperor."³ When the Korean expedition was overruled, he retired to Satsuma, where inevitably he attracted thousands of followers. He became the leader of a company of 40,000 disaffected samurai who eventually rebelled in January 1877. By September the government's new national army, superior in numbers and weaponry, had quelled the uprising, and Saigō took his own life on the battlefield. In later years, Saigō was apotheosized as a great national hero, the epitome of the classic samurai who clung to his ideals with single-minded sincerity rather than make the compromises required for worldly success.

The Satsuma Rebellion was the last real challenge to the new Meiji order. There were other short-lived uprisings, such as the Chichibu Revolt in 1884 brought on by acute economic distress among medium and small farmers, but they lacked the means to mobilize effective opposition. The government's policies ensured that the propertied and educated had a substantial material stake in the emerging order. As Stephen Vlastos writes,

the wealthy farmers, landlords, entrepreneurs, and the commercial and educated classes benefited enormously from the progressive reforms of Meiji—especially reforms that brought citizen equality, meritocracy, protection of private property, and promotion of capitalist economic growth. . . . However, the classes marginalized by the Meiji reforms, groups that were losing social power as a result of modernization, faced an entirely different situation. The traditional warrior and small-scale subsistence farmer did not fit into the new order, and the government sacrificed their social needs quite ruthlessly to speed national integration and capital accumulation.⁴

The Movement for Constitutional Reform

Although such militant opposition was suppressed, the government still faced the challenge of other disaffected oligarchs, whose opposition took the form of the first political parties in Japan. Itagaki was the leader of the early party movement, known as the *Jiyū minken undō* (the People's Rights Movement), forming in 1874 the *Aikoku-kōtō* (the Public Party of Patriots). As we have seen, Itagaki had earlier argued that abolition of Tokugawa class restrictions was necessary in order to unify the people and to mobilize their energies for national goals. As a party leader, he now used very similar reasoning in arguing for creation of a national assembly, namely, that it would provide a means of marshaling the popular will in support of the policies of the state. He

and his associates, initially from Tosa, resented the tight grip on power that the Satsuma-Chōshū group was acquiring. The constitutional order must be established, he asserted, to ensure that the will of the people was expressed through a representative form of government. For the next decade, Itagaki and his party, which was subsequently reorganized as the *Jiyūtō* (Liberal Party), invoked Western liberal ideas to attack the oligarchy and to demand the formation of an elective national assembly.

There has been considerable debate among scholars regarding the importance of the People's Rights Movement. Was it strong enough to compel the Meiji oligarchs to loosen their grip on power, to share control of the government with the people, to institute parliamentary institutions, and to begin the road to democratic government in modern Japan? There is no question that the Meiji government was compelled to take into account the demands of the opposition groups. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to think that the Meiji leaders were opposed to constitutional government or that they were forced to establish it contrary to their disposition. In fact, their interest in establishing a constitution and a national assembly antedated the People's Rights Movement. From the time of the Restoration there had been among the leadership a keen interest in the idea of both a constitution and a national assembly. The Imperial Charter Oath, issued in April 1868, which set forth in broad strokes the outline that the Meiji leaders had for their future course, declared in its first article that "assemblies shall be widely convoked and all affairs of state shall be determined by public discussion." This article represented a general commitment to broaden the basis of government and to rectify the Tokugawa failure to consult widely about the formation of national policy. Precisely how this broader basis of government was to be achieved remained to be gradually hammered out through debate within the oligarchy.

Western political systems engaged the keen interest of the Meiji leaders and were carefully studied in the first years of the Meiji Period. Actually, the first students sent abroad by the bakufu in the 1860s, Nishi Amane and Tsuda Mamichi, had published their studies of the theories of parliamentary government, separation of powers, and the constitutionalism that prevailed in Western society. Likewise, Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Seiyō jijō* was influential in its explanation of the workings and theoretical basis of parliamentary politics in the West. Interest in Western constitutionalism was further heightened by the Iwakura Mission.

Constitutional government was regarded as an essential aspect of the treaty revision effort. Establishing a constitution would, it was thought, lend credence to the assertion that Japan was a civilized country with up-to-date political practices, perfectly capable of meeting the accepted standards of the nineteenth century. But more than

that, a constitution and a national assembly were seen as a way of mobilizing Japanese loyalties and evoking popular identification with the new government. In other words, the institutions would in themselves be a source of national strength; they would interpret issues to the people, serving to transmit the wishes and goals of the central government. Furthermore, the assembly would serve as a safety valve for social discontent, allowing the ventilation of grievances through the participation of popular representatives in the central government.

Japan's new leaders, committed to the immense task of building an industrial society in the course of their generation, had to find ways of overcoming the disruption of vested interest, the social dislocation, and the psychological strain that this task entailed. They found in Western society no dearth of examples of popular discontent and even rebellion that had obstructed the goals of political leadership. They were therefore intent upon finding ways of spurring on the populace, of achieving national unity, and of preventing harsh antagonisms that would make impossible—or at least much more difficult—the task of building an industrial society.

The "Opinion on Constitutional Government," which Yamagata Aritomo, one of the leading oligarchs, wrote in 1879, illustrates the reasons why they favored constitutional government and a national assembly. While regarding political parties and other forms of opposition to the government as wrong and immoral, Yamagata believed that, in order to overcome divisions within society, popular estrangement from government, and economic discontent, it was necessary that the governed have the right to participate in national administration. "If we gradually establish a popular assembly and firmly establish a constitution, the things I have enumerated above—popular enmity towards the government, failure to follow government orders, and suspicion of the government, these three evils—will be cured in the future."⁵ Yamagata, in other words, was setting forth what became the basic rationale among bureaucrats throughout the modern period for popular participation in government: the governed should be brought into the governing process not as a natural, innate right but rather as a means of achieving national unity.

Itō Hirobumi, who had emerged as one of the leading oligarchs by 1880, reflected a common view that ran through the thinking of most oligarchs about constitutional government when he wrote that "today conditions in Japan are closely related to the world situation. They are not merely the affairs of a nation or a province. The European concepts of revolution, which were carried out for the first time in France about 100 years ago, have gradually spread to the various nations. By combining and complementing each other, they have become a general trend. Sooner or later, every nation will undergo changes as a result."⁶ There was a sense of inevitability about the establishment of Western

forms of government. This feeling was a manifestation of the belief that Western civilization represented a universal path of progress. Just as those countries provided a pattern for economic and social development, so, it was thought, they provided a pattern for political development as well.

At issue among the oligarchs was the nature of the future constitutional setup and the speed with which it should be established. A critical turning point was reached in the so-called Crisis of 1881. The issue was raised by Ōkuma Shigenobu, an oligarch from Hizen, who favored the immediate establishment of a British-style system with a cabinet responsible to an elected legislature. Ōkuma's proposal was rejected, and in a power struggle with the Satsuma-Chōshū group, he and his following in the Ministry of Finance were forced from the government, but at the same time the remaining oligarchs came to a decision and publicly promised to promulgate a constitution and establish a national assembly by 1890.

Itō Hirobumi took charge of drafting the constitution. In 1882 he departed for Europe on an imperial mission to study the constitutional systems there and to collect material for the formulation of the Meiji



Itō Hirobumi with his family. Library of Congress

Constitution. Although he observed practices in several countries, he was most impressed by the Prussian Constitution and its operation because of the evident similarities between the Prussian experience and Japan's own. In point of fact, it had already been decided prior to Itō's mission that Japan should adopt a Prussian-style constitution. So for that reason Itō, according to plan, spent the greater part of his journey in Berlin, where he heard lectures by the legal scholar Rudolph von Gneist over a period of many months. From there he moved on to Vienna, where he sought the advice of Lorenz von Stein, who reinforced the conservative views regarding parliamentary government that he had received in Berlin. "By studying under two famous German teachers, Gneist and Stein," he wrote to a fellow oligarch in Japan, "I have been able to get a general understanding of the structure of the state. Later I shall discuss with you how we can achieve the great objective of establishing Imperial authority. Indeed the tendency in our country today is to erroneously believe in the works of British, French, and American liberals and radicals as if they were Golden Rules, and thereby lead virtually to the overthrow of the state. In having found principles and means of combatting this trend, I believe I have rendered an important service to my country, and I feel inwardly that I can die a happy man."⁷ The mission returned from Germany in late 1883, and thereafter Itō began work in earnest, drafting the constitution with the help of several advisors, including Hermann Roesler, a German legal consultant to the Japanese government.

The Meiji Constitution

The Meiji Constitution was promulgated on February 11, 1889. Although scholars since World War II have found fault with it and stressed its authoritarian aspects, the constitution nonetheless represented a great forward step for Japan in the establishment of representative institutions. It was greeted at the time with near unanimous acclaim.

The Emperor was the central symbol of the new political structure, and the constitution was presented to the nation as a "gift" from him to his people. The Emperor was to exercise all executive authority, the individual ministers being directly responsible to him, and he had supreme command of the army and navy. In addition, he had the right to suspend temporarily the Diet (the bicameral legislature), to dissolve its Lower House, and to issue ordinances when the Diet was not in session. Only he could initiate amendments to the constitution. The Emperor was "sacred and inviolable" as the descendant of a dynasty "which has reigned in an unbroken line of descent for ages past." Sovereignty, in short, resided in him.

Separate legislation provided that the Lower House of the legislature was to be elected by all males paying taxes of 15 yen or more (approximately 5 percent of the total male population). The Upper House, composed of members of the new peerage and imperial appointees, was to serve as a check on the Lower House. The constitution gave the Lower House the right to pass on all permanent laws and in addition the power of the purse strings; however, the government was given a loophole by which it could extricate itself from Lower House control over the budget. This loophole provided that were the budget for a particular year to go unapproved by the Lower House, then the budget of the previous year would automatically go into effect.

Basically, the constitution embodied the concept of popular political participation that had always been in the minds of the oligarchs: the national assembly as a means of achieving national unity. It was not a democratic concept, as was clearly indicated by the fact that the Emperor alone appointed ministers of the state, who were responsible to him and not to the legislature. The oligarchs spoke of the cabinet (which was not even mentioned in the constitution) as "transcendental," that is, as a body whose concerns and interests "transcended" the narrow, selfish political concerns of all groups in the state.

Establishment of a Modern Bureaucracy

"The key to understanding Japanese political life," an astute historian wrote in 1940, "is given to whoever appreciates fully the historical role and actual position of the bureaucracy."⁸ Accustomed to the primary importance of political parties in the Anglo-American tradition and the subordinate role of bureaucracies, most Western historians of modern Japan have focused their attention on the development of political parties under the Meiji Constitution. Only recently have we come to see that the role of the bureaucracy in the political system is one of the key themes of modern Japanese history. What are the origins of the modern bureaucracy?

For the first decades after the Restoration, positions in government were held by men chosen by the Meiji leaders and their subordinates. Most were former samurai. Because samurai had monopolized government positions in the Tokugawa Period, they were able to depend on influential friends in government. Their appointments were the result of favoritism and personal contacts, and there were no formal criteria for advancement in government service.

Once the Meiji political system was established, however, the oligarchs turned their attention to creation of a permanent civil service. Yamagata, in particular, was determined to insulate government office holders from party influence. He wanted bureaucrats to be an elite

corps of administrators, servants of the Emperor above and beyond politics. Knowing that party members would be seeking appointments to positions in government, Yamagata devised plans for a demanding civil service examination to be required of all officeholders below the rank of cabinet minister. An examination system for government office had existed in traditional China, but Japan had depended on hereditary rank as the determinant of government position in the Tokugawa Period. Between 1887 and 1899 a series of regulations created the modern civil service; and an examination system was introduced requiring extensive knowledge of jurisprudence and various types of law including constitutional, administrative, commercial, and civil. Years of university study would be required to pass the examination, training that party members would rarely possess. An 1899 ordinance instigated by Yamagata removed vice-ministers, bureau chiefs, and prefectural governors from political appointment. They had to come up through the ranks of the civil service. By 1900 free appointment of officials outside the civil service was limited to cabinet ministers, ambassadors, and confidential secretaries. Determined to limit the potential influence of the party men, Yamagata sought to ensure also that the parties would not intrude into the military bureaucracy. By ordinances issued in 1900 only generals and lieutenant-generals, admirals, and vice-admirals on active duty could serve as army or navy minister. By seeking to prevent civilian control of the military, these ordinances helped to strengthen the independence of the army and navy.

As a result of Yamagata's efforts, the bureaucracy grew into a powerful elite with fierce pride in its traditions of service to the emperor and the nation. The esprit de corps was strengthened by arduous training. The failure rate on the civil service examination was close to 90 percent. Those who succeeded justifiably felt a special sense of achievement and looked forward to working their way up the hierarchy, potentially to section chief (*kachō*), bureau chief (*buchō*), or vice-minister (*jikan*). At the highest levels, bureaucrats were overwhelmingly graduates of Tokyo Imperial University. At the end of the Meiji Period in 1912, all seven cabinet vice-ministers and twenty-eight of thirty-six bureau chiefs were Tokyo Imperial University graduates. Between 1900 and 1945, 115 of the 135 prefectural governors were graduates of Tokyo Imperial University; 10 were from Kyoto Imperial University.

We shall have many occasions to see how great was the influence of the bureaucracy in the political system as it developed in modern Japan. Suffice it to say, at this point, that 91 percent of all laws enacted by the Diet under the Meiji Constitution from 1890 to 1947 were written by bureaucrats.

From the 1890s on, the civil bureaucracy grew into a powerful and pervasive presence in Japanese life. From 29,000 in 1890 it grew to a

total of 1,300,000 employees by 1928, when it was four times the combined strength of the army and navy. Low-ranking bureaucrats had a profound influence on the life of ordinary Japanese. Robert Spaulding writes that

the police, for example, had operational responsibility for a bewildering variety of government programs and policies in addition to public safety, traffic control, and criminal investigation and apprehension. They enforced economic controls, discouraged unionism, inspected factories, censored publications, licensed commercial enterprises, arranged for public welfare aid, supervised druggists and public baths, controlled public gatherings, managed flood control and fire prevention, maintained surveillance of people suspected of dangerous thoughts, and did countless other things.⁹

The New Nationalism

For the quarter of a century preceding 1890 Japan had passed through a time of unprecedented ferment, a time of experimentation and groping, as it sought to reorient its institutions to the realities of the international order into which it was so suddenly thrust. Building an industrial society had required supplanting much of the old order with techniques and institutions borrowed from the West. As the bureaucracy and the military, as commerce, industry, and education fell under the sway of Western example, there developed among the educated segment of society an intense ambivalence about traditional Japanese and the new Western cultures.

Such ambivalence, we have come to recognize, has been a characteristic problem of intellectuals in most late-developing societies, which must of necessity borrow new technologies and institutions from the advanced industrial countries. Under such circumstances, intellectuals are often strongly attracted to the progressive, scientific, and liberal aspects of Western civilization and simultaneously alienated from institutions and values of their own culture that suddenly appear outmoded. Yet, at the same time, building an industrial society is motivated by strong nationalist sentiments and therefore requires a strong urge for pride in one's own civilization. Nationalist sentiments and cultural pride were all the more intense in the heyday of imperialism, and admiration for Western culture the more perplexing because it was Western nations that offered the challenge to national sovereignty.

Many Japanese intellectuals argued that government policy in establishing Western institutions had gone too far, that it was demeaning to adopt, wholesale, the values and practices of Western civilization. As the articulate editor of a leading newspaper, *Nihon*, put it:

If a nation wishes to stand among the great powers and preserve its national independence, it must strive always to foster nationalism. . . . Consider for a moment: if we were to sweep away thoughts of one's own country, its rights, glory and welfare—which are the products of nationalism—what grounds would be left for love of country? If a nation lacks patriotism how can it hope to exist? Patriotism has its origin in the distinction between “we” and “they” which grows out of nationalism, and nationalism is the basic element in preserving and developing a unique culture. If the culture of one country is so influenced by another that it completely loses its own unique character, that country will surely lose its independent footing.¹⁰

On the other hand, many in the intellectual elite saw the institutions of the West as representative of the road to national progress and regarded Western values and institutions as of universal applicability. They tended to view cultural nationalism as reactionary. Wrote one editor, “We study physics, psychology, economics, and the other sciences not because the West discovered them, but because they are the universal truth. We seek to establish constitutional government in our country not because it is a Western form of government, but because it conforms with man's own nature. We pursue the use of railways, steamships, and all other conveniences not because they are used in the West, but because they are useful to all people.”¹¹ The upshot of this “debate” in intellectual circles was a deep sense of uncertainty and restlessness. One young writer summed up the feeling when he said, “What is today's Japan? The old Japan has already collapsed, but the new Japan has not yet risen. What religion do we believe in? What moral and political principles do we favor? It is as if we were wandering in confusion through a deep fog, unable to find our way. Nothing is worse than doubt or blind acceptance.”¹²

Government leaders recognized the problem, but they looked at it in a different way. They were concerned not so much about cultural pride per se, but rather about problems of maintaining order and reestablishing stability and unity in political life. They needed to mobilize mass support for the goals they had set for the nation. To provide the ideological glue that would hold the new political structure together, the Meiji leaders set about building an imperial ideology that would at once legitimize their rule and function as a binding and integrative force, enabling the Japanese people to act in concert and to deal effectively with their domestic and international problems. Itō put it this way:

What is the cornerstone of our country? This is the problem we have to solve. If there is no cornerstone, politics will fall into the hands of the uncontrollable masses; and then the government will

become powerless. . . . In Japan [unlike Europe] religion does not play such an important role and cannot become the foundation of constitutional government. Though Buddhism once flourished and was the bond of union between all classes, high and low, today its influence has declined. Though Shintoism is based on the traditions of our ancestors, as a religion it is not powerful enough to become the center of the country. Thus in our country the one institution which can become the cornerstone of our constitution is the Imperial House. For this reason, the first principle of our constitution is the respect for the sovereign rights of the Emperor. . . . Because the Imperial sovereignty is the cornerstone of our constitution, our system is not based on the European ideas of separation of powers or on the principle enforced in some European countries of joint rule of the king and the people.¹³

To build support for the modern state they were creating, the Meiji leaders resorted to the traditional language of loyalty and obligation and drew on a mythical past to yield a distinctive national ideology. They needed to focus popular sentiment on the imperial institution. We may think that the Japanese people in all eras instinctively revered the Emperor as the primary symbol of their history. But this was not necessarily the case. A German doctor, Erwin Baelz, who came to Japan in 1876 to serve as the Emperor's physician, lamented the popular indifference. Baelz wrote in his diary on November 3, 1880, “The Emperor's birthday. It distresses me to see how little interest the populace take in their ruler. Only when the police insists on it are houses decorated with flags. In default of this house-owners do the minimum.” National veneration of the imperial institution had to be promoted. A new image of the emperor, it was felt, had to be created.

Leadership plays a critical role in the promotion and making of nationalism. Recently several scholars have drawn attention to what they call “the invention of tradition.” They distinguish between the persistence of practices from the past that may be called “customs” and the establishment of practices that claim to be remnants from the past but that are actually artificially created, conceived, and instigated by elites. The latter may be called “invented tradition.” The invention of tradition is a key element of modern nationalism and is not unique to Japan. To promote nationalism the elites manipulate and rework ideas, institutions, and cultural symbols from the past to forge a nationalist ideology that will serve present purposes yet still resonate with basic values and sentiments on which the social system rests. In the coming pages we shall see how Japanese leaders manipulated tradition to create a new national ideology. It took many forms, but they were all related: family state ideology, the institutionalization of State Shintō, the ideology of industrial harmony, and the ideal image of Japanese womanhood.

In 1890, just as the new legislature opened, the government issued a document of vital importance, the so-called Imperial Rescript on Education, which set forth the cardinal principles of this ideology. It exhorted the people to "be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious; as friends, true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation . . . always respect the constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth."

In those Confucian terms the leaders set forth the concept of the family state, of the Emperor as the father of the nation and the subjects as his children. The Rescript, which became a part of daily school ceremonies, thereby equated political obligations with filial piety and sought to imbue the Emperor and his government with the sanctity and legitimacy that would suppress political opposition and dissent. As one scholar observes, "the Emperor became a substitute for the charismatic leader so prominent in the modernization of most nonwestern societies of a later period, a substitute that was more permanent, more deeply rooted in the culture, and more invulnerable to attack."¹⁴

At the same time as it issued the Imperial Rescript on Education, the government began the conscious use of mass education to inculcate the new ideology. Textbooks, formerly only loosely controlled, became standardized and uniform—subject to the control of the increasingly powerful Ministry of Education. Schools, which in the early Meiji Period had done so much to introduce Western concepts, now became a prime force in building nationalism, which was essential if the modern state was to evoke the self-sacrifice of millions of Japanese. Passages such as the following, in a school textbook of 1910, became common: "It is only natural for children to love and respect their parents, and the great loyalty-filial piety principle springs from this natural feeling. . . . Our country is based on the family system. The whole country is one great family, and the Imperial House is the Head Family. It is with the feeling of filial love and respect for parents that we Japanese people express our reverence toward the Throne of unbroken imperial line."¹⁵

In addition to the new national conscript army and the increasingly tight control of educational policy, another agency of centralization was the organization of local government, established largely as the handiwork of Yamagata. The purpose of the Town and Village Code of 1888 was to amalgamate more than 76,000 Tokugawa hamlets into some 15,000 administrative towns and villages, thereby enabling the central government to extend its influence into local communities, which had heretofore possessed a considerable degree of autonomy. By shifting loyalties from the hamlet, traditionally the object of identification for its inhabitants, to the new administrative towns and villages, Yamagata expected that material and spiritual resources might be efficiently mobilized for national purposes.

The nationalist purposes of the Meiji state were further served by the reorganization and centralization of local religious practices. The government took important steps to establish what we call in retrospect State Shintō. We can find no better example of the government's manipulation of tradition to serve its own purposes. As Helen Hardacre writes, "Shintō, as adopted by the modern Japanese state, was largely an invented tradition."¹⁶ To strengthen the new administrative towns and villages as centers of national loyalty, the government in 1906 ordered the merger of all the Shintō shrines and establishing in their place one central shrine in each administrative village. Before the merger order, Japan had more than 190,000 shrines, the great mass of them small and devoted to the concerns of local inhabitants—healthy children, good crops, and prosperous communities. Communal spirits or deities (*kami*) were worshipped according to simple rituals to elicit their protective powers. These local observances were the product of popular practices since prehistoric times. At the national level since earliest times the Japanese imperial line had based its claims to sovereignty on Shintō myths that proclaimed the imperial family's descent from the sun goddess Amaterasu. The political authority of the imperial court was sanctioned by this indigenous religion. The Meiji government, therefore, could elaborate and reshape the deeply rooted traditions of the imperial cult in a modern setting. The central bureaucracy sought to remold local folk religion everywhere into a powerful source of nationalism. "The study of Shintō's relations with the state provides many examples of the invention of tradition to unite disparate elements into a modern nation."¹⁷ Shrine liturgy was standardized to stress devotion to the Emperor rather than local concerns. Shintō priests were placed under the disciplinary rules of regular civil government officials. In the years immediately following the shrine merger order, the number of local shrines throughout the nation dropped dramatically. At the same time, new ones were founded to serve nationalist ends. The best example is the Yasukuni Shrine established in Tokyo in the early Meiji Period, which commemorated all those who died on the loyalist side in the Meiji Restoration and in Japan's modern wars. "The significance of enshrining the soul of a human being in Yasukuni is that the rite of enshrining is an apotheosis symbolically changing the soul's status to that of a national deity."¹⁸ Hardacre adds that "Yasukuni shrine, of all the invented traditions of State Shintō, most profoundly colored the character of popular religious life."¹⁹

By the early years of the twentieth century, the government was thereby succeeding in politically mobilizing the leaders of local society. Village headmen, elementary school principals, Shintō priests, prominent landlords, and other local activists were imbued with the national ideology and charged with responsibility for achieving Japan's imperial destiny. They became interpreters of the national

mission to the masses. As such, they played a key role in the national community that the Meiji leadership was disciplining for the forced march to industry and empire.

Ideology soon took on a life of its own. One tendency in historical writing has been to see imperial ideology as nothing but a top-down process, as a creation instilled by Meiji leaders and bureaucrats in an obedient and deceived citizenry. For invented tradition to be successful, however, it must resonate with the values on which the social system rests. As Robert Smith writes, "outright falsification of the past will fail, but an adroit combination and reordering of some of its elements that remain faithful to existing predispositions will be of great benefit to those who wish to persuade the people of the legitimacy of their goals."²⁰ Clearly statesmen did take the lead in the process of inculcating the ideology. However, precisely because reverence for the Emperor, the values of the family, and suspicion of foreigners and their religion and intentions struck a strong and responsive chord, people outside the government became some of the most fervent purveyors of this nationalist ideology. As Carol Gluck writes, "the strongest views—the hard line—often came from outside the government, from the *minkan*, as it was called, from 'among the people.'"²¹ When the leading Japanese Christian of the day, Uchimura Kanzō, declined to bow before the Imperial Rescript on Education in a ceremony honoring its presentation, it was journalists, scholars, and townspeople who berated him. When a Presbyterian minister, Tamura Naoomi, criticized the indigenous family system, it was the media and fellow Japanese Christians who denounced him for a lack of patriotism. When a professor at Tokyo Imperial University, Kume Kunitake, wrote an objective historical essay describing Shintō as the "survival of a primitive form of worship," it was Shintōists and nativist scholars who hounded him out of his job. The pressure to conform to the national orthodoxy, Marius Jansen points out, came not so much from the government as from "forces within Japanese society. Colleagues, neighbors, publicists, relatives—these were the people who hounded the Kumes, the reformers, and the liberals."²²

In sum, just as important as government indoctrination in explaining the sway that nationalist ideology held was the remarkable receptivity to this effort by people outside the government. Self-appointed ideologues proclaimed national solidarity, harmony between ruler and people, loyalty, filial piety, and colonial expansion as inherent in the national character. They stressed that all spiritual authority resided in the Japanese state, and they denounced Christianity and Western liberalism as incompatible with the national polity. We can view the popular reception of a national ideology that reasserted familiar ideals as a reaction to the sense of uprootedness, emotional stress, and dislocation produced by rapid social change.

Notes

1. William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972), 384–385.
2. Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively, eds., *Personality in Japanese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 274.
3. Ivan Morris, *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), 248.
4. Marius B. Jansen, ed., *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 5 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. John Whitney Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 426–427.
5. Quoted in George M. Beckmann, *The Making of the Meiji Constitution* (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 1957), 130.
6. *Ibid.*, 132.
7. Quoted in Nobutake Ike, *The Beginnings of Political Democracy in Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1950), 175–176.
8. E. H. Norman, *Japan's Emergence as a Modern State* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), 206.
9. Robert M. Spaulding, Jr., "The Bureaucracy as a Political Force, 1920–45," in *Dilemmas of Growth in Prewar Japan*, ed. James William Morley (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 36–37.
10. Quoted in Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885–1895* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969), 75.
11. Quoted *ibid.*, 90.
12. Quoted *ibid.*, 7.
13. Quoted in Joseph Pittau, *Political Thought in Early Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 177–178.
14. Robert A. Scalapino, "Ideology and Modernization: The Japanese Case," in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), 103.
15. Quoted in Wilbur M. Fridell, "Government Ethics Textbooks in Late Meiji Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 29 (August 1970), 831.
16. Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.
17. *Ibid.*, 4.
18. *Ibid.*, 90.
19. *Ibid.*, 8.
20. See *Cultural and Social Dynamics*, vol. 3 of *The Political Economy of Japan*, ed. Shumpei Kumon and Henry Rosovsky (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 28.
21. Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 9–10.
22. Marius B. Jansen, ed., *Changing Japanese Attitudes toward Modernization* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 80–81.