

Imperialism and the New Industrial Society

The 1890s marked a watershed for Japan. The mood and the concerns of the nation underwent dramatic change. During the generation after 1868, Japan had been preoccupied with domestic reforms, intent on reordering its society and government. By 1890, however, the new political order was established and a new sense of discipline and purpose was evident in the nation's life.

Most important in bringing about the transformation of mood and concerns was the Japanese entrance into international affairs in an unprecedented way. Since the Restoration the prevailing policy had been to concentrate the energy and resources of the nation on domestic reforms and to avoid involvement in overseas entanglements. The primary goal of foreign policy had been to achieve a successful revision of the unequal treaties to escape from semicolonial status, and that goal required concentration on domestic reforms. The policy bore fruit when, in mid-1894, the Western powers agreed to sign treaties providing for the end of extraterritoriality. Little more than two weeks after revision of the unequal treaties was achieved, Japan declared war on China and embarked upon its first great foreign adventure in three centuries.

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895 was of immense importance in the history of international relations because it revealed the full extent of China's weakness and set off an intense competition among the imperial powers for control of the resources and markets of East Asia. Japan was inevitably swept into this maelstrom and obliged to subordinate all its other concerns to the protection and extension of its interests. During the period from 1895 to 1915, which we shall concentrate on in this chapter, Japan emerged as one of the world's great powers, and the rise of its imperialism influenced nearly every aspect of the new industrial society that was taking shape in this period.

Japanese Imperialism

The circumstances and motivations of Japanese imperialism during its first phase from 1894 to 1914 have been the subject of historic controversy. There is no simple explanation. Many factors were responsible for the strong imperialist drive that emerged in Japan at the turn of the century.

One important factor was the nationalist desire for equality with the Western powers. Together with constitutional government, industrialization, and a modern military, a colonial empire was a mark of status in the civilized world. The Meiji ambition to make Japan "a first-class country" (*ittō-koku*) helped to inspire expansionism. Thus it is not altogether surprising to find that even "liberals" such as Fukuzawa who greatly admired Western standards of civilization (*bunmei*) had no qualms about supporting imperialism. In an unguarded moment he exclaimed in 1882, "We are Japanese and we shall someday raise the national power of Japan so that not only shall we control the natives of China and India as the English do today, but we shall also possess in our hands the power to rebuke the English and to rule Asia ourselves."¹ In its more benevolent form, this nationalist drive was justified as fulfilling Japan's mission to be the leader of Asia. The journalist Tokutomi Sohō declared in 1895 that Japan's destiny was to "extend the blessings of political organization throughout the rest of East Asia and the South Pacific, just as the Romans had once done for Europe and the Mediterranean."²

Another factor was the economic motivation of maintaining access to the raw materials and markets of East Asia, which might be denied Japan if neighboring countries fell under the domination of one or another of the Western powers. A fundamental objective of the oligarchs was to build a modern economy as the basis of national power, and this meant establishing a strong export market for the products of its light industry. Asia and the Pacific, which lacked indigenous modern industry, were seen as the most promising market for Japanese textiles, cement, canned goods, and other products. As Peter Duus writes, "the Meiji leaders feared that unless Japan was more active abroad economically as well as politically, opportunities for trade and investment available to Japan in the region would slip into the hands of competitors. It was important that Japanese rather than Russians or Frenchmen build railroads in Korea, that Japanese as well as Englishmen established cotton mills in Shanghai, that Japanese rather than Americans control the textiles market in Manchuria, or that Japanese rather than Chinese carry foreign goods to Taiwan."³ There can be no question that imperialism at the turn of the century was motivated by the drive to acquire economic advantages and interests in the region.

The most important factor in the imperialist drive, however, was strategic. The prevailing political instability of East Asia outside of Japan created both problems and opportunities. In Korea and China old impotent governments were being undermined by revolutionary movements at the end of the nineteenth century. The impending collapse of these weak governments caused consternation in Japan because they might be replaced by Western control with consequent jeopardy to Japan's security. Japan's more rapid development together with the institutional backwardness of other countries in East Asia created a situation in which Japan could almost inevitably expect to dominate its neighbors. As a consequence, to the extent that one can separate strategic and economic objectives, it was the need for security that was the primary motive for imperialist expansion. In fact, as Mark Peattie writes,

No colonial empire of modern times was as clearly shaped by strategic considerations. . . . Many of the overseas possessions of Western Europe had been acquired in response to the activities of traders, adventurers, missionaries, or soldiers acting far beyond the limits of European interest or authority. In contrast, Japan's colonial territories (with the possible exception of Taiwan) were, in each instance, obtained as the result of a deliberate decision by responsible authorities in the central government to use force in securing territory that would contribute to Japan's immediate strategic interests.⁴

The empire grew by a kind of inexorable strategic logic that was implied by Yamagata who, addressing the Diet as prime minister at its opening session in 1890, explained his security strategy: "The independence and security of the nation depend first upon the protection of the line of sovereignty (*shukensen*) and then the line of advantage (*riekisen*). . . . If we wish to maintain the nation's independence among the powers of the world at the present time, it is not enough to guard only the line of sovereignty; we must also defend the line of advantage . . . and within the limits of the nation's resources gradually strive for that position."⁵ In other words, Japan's security depended not only on protecting the actual territorial limits of the nation but also on establishing Japan's dominant influence in areas beyond. In 1890 Yamagata had Korea in mind as the neighboring area that fell within the "line of advantage." Subsequently, when Japanese control of Korea was achieved, the line of advantage extended into southern Manchuria where, to ensure the security of Korea, Japan must also establish its dominant influence. Such strategic thinking was not unique to Japanese leadership but it was unusually influential, partly because

the Japanese Empire, unlike the far-flung European and American empires, was in close proximity to the home islands.

It should not surprise us that Yamagata thought in such strategic terms. He was a military man from his young days, becoming known as "the father of the modern Japanese army" for his attention to its development. He commanded forces that suppressed the Satsuma Rebellion, but it was his appointment later in life, after he had already been prime minister, to command the First Army at the outset of the Sino-Japanese War in 1894 that he recalled as "the happiest moment of my life." As a young man his ambition had been to become a master



Yamagata Aritomo. Bettmann Archive

spearsman. Late in life he still practiced on a great fig tree outside his bedroom. The tree eventually died from his thrusts.⁶

In the final analysis, strategic concerns and security objectives motivated the Meiji leaders in their creation of the Japanese Empire. Economic interests, while important, were secondary to the political objectives of expansion.

By the end of the 1880s, as the Meiji political order was nearing completion, Japan's leaders were giving serious attention to the play of forces in the international environment. Yamagata and the heads of the military services had come to the conclusion that East Asia was likely to be the scene of fierce competition among the imperial nations. The vacuum of power on the continent invited it. Russia's decision to build the Trans-Siberian Railway confirmed their fears, for the new line would likely require a warm water terminus in Korea or South Manchuria. It became a cardinal principle of Japanese foreign policy that the security of the Japanese islands depended on preventing Korea from falling under the control of a third country. As the Prussian advisor to the Meiji army put it, the Korean peninsula was "a dagger thrust at the heart of Japan."⁷ The General Staff, moreover, concluded that the "independence" of Korea could only be secured by control of neighboring Port Arthur and the Liaotung Peninsula. With those strategic objectives in mind, the government steadily built up the nation's military and naval power.

By 1894 intrigue and chaotic politics in Korea had created tense relations between China and Japan, each seeking to assert influence over the course of Korean politics. The Japanese foreign minister at this time wrote in a personal memoir, "I sensed that the wisest course to follow now was to precipitate a clash between ourselves and the Chinese" for whom he had only contempt. China was a "bigoted and ignorant colossus of conservatism" whose people "have never known how to observe the good faith that is indispensable in diplomacy," and it was mired in "centuries old stupor" while the "imbecile Korean government . . . simply did not know how to comport itself during times of war or peace as an independent state" and showed "the deeply suspicious animosity and unscrupulous recourse to treachery which are characteristic of the Korean people."⁸

War broke out on August 1 and the superior planning and readiness of the Japanese military were quickly apparent. The war lasted only eight months. The uninterrupted successes of the Japanese army, the total destruction of the Chinese fleet, and the surrender of Weihaiwei persuaded China of the futility of further struggle. The Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed April 17, 1895, ceded the Pescadores, Formosa, and the Liaotung Peninsula to Japan, recognized Korean independence, and obliged China to pay a large indemnity, to open additional ports, and to negotiate a commercial treaty.

It was an immensely popular war and greatly stimulated growth of the nationalist sentiment that the government had been seeking to promote through many of its new institutions. Victory brought the pride that had been wanting during the preceding decades of cultural borrowing from the West. As Tokutomi Sohō wrote in the midst of the war: "Now we are no longer ashamed to stand before the world as Japanese. . . . Before, we did not know ourselves, and the world did not yet know us. But now that we have tested our strength, we know ourselves and we are known by the world. Moreover, we *know* we are known by the world!"⁹ Fukuzawa Yukichi expressed a common sentiment when he pointed out that triumph in the war had been a vindication of the Meiji reforms. "One can scarcely enumerate," he wrote in 1895, "all of our civilized undertakings since the Restoration—the abolition of feudalism, the lowering of class barriers, revision of our laws, reform of the military, promotion of education, railroads, electricity, postal service, printing, and on and on. Yet among all these enterprises, the one thing none of us western scholars ever expected thirty or forty years ago was the establishment of Japan's imperial prestige in a great war. . . . When I think of our marvelous fortune I feel as though in a dream and can only weep tears of joy."¹⁰

This new self-confidence, however, was almost at once deflated. On April 23, 1895, Germany, Russia, and France demanded that the Japanese government renounce possession of the Liaotung Peninsula "in the interests of the peace in the Far East." The incident was profoundly humiliating. The German minister to Tokyo read the demands of the three powers to Hayashi Tadasu, the Japanese vice-minister of foreign affairs, in a garbled and blunt text written in Japanese. Hayashi could scarcely understand the German's confusing pronunciation, but one phrase came through clearly: "Japan cannot defeat the united strength of Russia, France, and Germany."

Too weak to oppose the three powers, Japan was compelled to retrocede the Peninsula. This event, known as the Triple Intervention, made a profound impression upon the nation, underlining its diplomatic isolation and increasing its sense of insecurity. Tokutomi Sohō, who became Japan's leading nationalist editor, was traveling about southern Manchuria, savoring Japan's new territory, when he heard that it had to be given up. "Vexed beyond tears" and disdaining to remain on the lost territory, he returned at once to Japan. But before embarking from Port Arthur, he scooped a handful of earth into a handkerchief, and he returned to Japan with this "souvenir of what has been, for a time, Japanese territory." For years he kept it on his desk in his newspaper office as a reminder to himself of the importance of national power.¹¹

The government set to work with a vengeance to expand military preparedness. Government leaders resolved that the nation should

bear whatever burden was required to redress this bitter outcome. Hayashi, who had experienced firsthand the humiliation of the Triple Intervention, wrote with bitter determination in June 1895 what Japan's strategy must be:

We must continue to study and make use of Western methods; for among civilized nations applied science constitutes the most important part of their military preparations. If new warships are considered necessary we must, at any cost, build them; if the organization of our army is inadequate we must start rectifying it from now; if need be, our entire military system must be changed.

We must build shipyards for the repair of our vessels. We must build steelworks to provide us with guns and munitions. Our railway network must be enlarged to enable us to carry out a speedy mobilization of our troops. Our merchant fleet must be expanded to enable us to transport our armies overseas. . . . At present Japan must keep calm and sit tight, so as to lull suspicions nurtured against her; during this time the foundations of her national power must be consolidated; and we must watch and wait for the opportunity in the Orient that will surely come one day. When this day arrives Japan will decide her own fate; and she will be able not only to put into their place the powers who seek to meddle in her affairs; she will even be able, should this be necessary, to meddle in their affairs.¹²

With fierce determination the nation set about preparing for conflict with Russia, whose interests lay athwart Japanese ambitions on the continent.

Taxes were progressively raised as military expenditures more than tripled in the decade from 1893 to 1903. Yamagata wrote to a friend in 1895 that the situation in East Asia would grow worse and that Japan must be prepared for war in ten years with the Russians, who soon seized the southern part of the Liaotung Peninsula for themselves. Both the army and navy undertook long-term programs to build up their strength.

Meanwhile, to allow time for military preparation, Japanese diplomacy sought and achieved a *modus vivendi* with Russia. The agreement reached between the two countries in effect accepted a balance of their respective interests in Manchuria and Korea. Japan's economic interests on the Korean peninsula were growing rapidly at the turn of the century. It was trading cotton products in return for foodstuffs and, above all, promoting an ambitious program of railway construction.

But the most impressive achievement of Japanese diplomacy was the signing on July 30, 1902, of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. For Japan the alliance not only overcame its previous diplomatic isolation, but



Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō, naval hero of the Russo-Japanese War. *National Archives*

also provided the first military pact on equal terms between a Western and a non-Western nation, thereby representing a great symbol of Japan's newfound respect among the imperial powers. The treaty, which promised British assistance if Japan became embroiled in conflict with more than one power, strengthened Japan's hand in its rivalry with Russia.

When renewed negotiations between the two countries over their interests in Korea and Manchuria broke down in February 1904, Japan

went to war, beginning with a surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. The Japanese army, in a succession of battles in Manchuria, defeated but could not wholly dispatch the Russians. To crush the Russian armies would have required more resources than the Japanese possessed. Both the oligarchy and the army General Staff were therefore prepared to negotiate an end to the war. The Tsar, however, hoped to turn the tide by sending the Baltic fleet around the world to overwhelm the Japanese navy. The Battle of the Japan Sea in May 1905, in which Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō's forces routed the Russian fleet, drew world attention. President Theodore Roosevelt wrote to a Japanese friend of Tōgō's triumph:

This is the greatest phenomenon the world has ever seen. Even the Battle of Trafalgar could not match this. I could not believe it myself, when the first report reached me. As the second and third reports came, however, I grew so excited that I myself became almost like a Japanese, and I could not attend to official duties. I spent the whole day talking with visitors about the Battle of the Japan Sea, for I believed that this naval battle decided the fate of the Japanese Empire.¹³

Roosevelt was subsequently persuaded by the Japanese to mediate between the two belligerents.

The war required an unprecedented mobilization of the nation's resources. The government mobilized one-fifth of the male working population for some form of war service and sent 1 million men to the front. Casualties mounted to more than 100,000 and the financial cost was immense. Its cost was ten times that of the Sino-Japanese War and stretched the economy to the limit. To sustain so heroic an effort, the war was justified as a great popular undertaking. Nothing in the nation's history had so heightened political awareness as this war. When the peace treaty was signed at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1905, riots in many Japanese cities expressed the disappointment of the Japanese populace at the terms of the treaty and revealed their heightened political consciousness. Though the people had been led to expect much more from the treaty negotiations, Japan nonetheless emerged from the war with acquisition of the southern half of Sakhalin, the recognition of its paramount interests in Korea, the lease of the Liaotung Peninsula, and railway rights in southern Manchuria.

Historians usually describe the Russo-Japanese War as an event that brought Japan great power status and won her worldwide acclaim. It is true that the war does represent a landmark in modern world history: throughout Asia, leaders of subjected peoples drew inspiration from the Japanese example, believing that they too could import Western science and industry, rid themselves of white control, preserve their national character, and themselves oversee the process



of industrialization. Jawaharlal Nehru, for example, recorded in his autobiography that the Japanese victory was a memorable event in his early life; he described it as "a great pick-me-up for Asia," which kindled his nationalism and his determination to "fight for India."¹⁴ Similarly, Sun Yat-sen, recalling the profound impression made on Chinese revolutionaries, said that "we regarded that Russian defeat by Japan as the defeat of the West by the East."¹⁵

The attraction that many Asian leaders felt to Japan, however, did not survive the decade following the Russo-Japanese War. During this period Japan made very clear its expansionist intentions. Following the Portsmouth Treaty, Japan established a protectorate over Korea, and Itō Hirobumi was sent to Seoul to serve as resident-general. He hoped to carry out a benevolent modernization of Korea, which would gain the support of the Korean people as well as serve Japan's national purposes, but he underrated a nascent Korean nationalism. From the beginning of the protectorate, Korean resentment and resistance presented problems. Ultimately Itō himself paid with his life, assassinated by a Korean patriot in the railway station at Harbin in 1909, and the following year Tokyo annexed Korea into the Japanese Empire.

What is striking about this period is that, in spite of the fact that Japan seemed to have fulfilled the Meiji dream by revising the unequal treaties, joining the ranks of the great powers, and acquiring impressive overseas possessions, it was nonetheless beset by a keen sense of insecurity and vulnerability, a sense of the fragility of its position. The resources of the nation had been stretched taut during the war with Russia, and now there could be no relaxation even though hostilities had ended. The strategic requirements of Japan's empire were quite formidable. It included both insular possessions, which required a strengthened fleet, and continental territory, which required a strengthened army. From 1905 to 1914 soaring government expenditures brought about extensive foreign borrowing, international payments problems, and a mounting tax burden on the citizenry. The political leadership faced an acute economic crisis.

The fearful demands that industrialization and imperialism were placing on Japanese society created a pervasive sense of uneasiness. The Meiji novelist Natsume Sōseki, despairing of the pace at which his country was driving itself, prophesied "nervous collapse" and admonished his countrymen not to be deluded into thinking of Japan as capable of competition on an equal footing with the great powers.

The famous poem, "Do Not Offer Your Life," which Yosano Akiko addressed to her brother who was drafted in 1904 at the height of the conflict bespoke a longing for a return to the private concerns of the family and home:

Dearest brother,
 I weep for you.
 Do not offer your life.
 Did your mother and father,
 Whose love for you, last born,
 Surpassed all others,
 Teach you to wield the sword?
 To kill?
 Did they rear you these twenty-four years,
 Saying:
 'Kill and die'?

You,
 Who shall inherit the name of our father—
 A master proud of his ancient name
 In the commerce of this town of Sakai—
 Do not offer your life.
 Whether Port Arthur falls or not
 Is no matter.
 Do you not know
 That this is nothing
 To the house of a merchant?
 Nothing?

Do not offer your life.
 The Emperor himself does not go
 To battle.
 The Imperial Heart is deep;
 How could he ever wish
 That men shed their blood,
 That men die like beasts,
 That man's glory be in death?

Dearest brother,
 Do not offer your life
 In battle.
 Mother, whom father left behind
 This past autumn,
 Suffered when
 In the midst of her grief
 Her son was called away.
 Even under this Imperial reign,
 When it is heard
 That the home is safe and secure,
 Mother's hair has grown whiter.

Do you forget
 Your forlorn young wife
 Weeping,
 Hidden in the shadows of the shop curtains?
 Or do you think of her?
 Consider a young woman's heart when
 After less than ten months
 Her husband is taken away!
 Alas, who else
 Than you alone
 Is she to rely on
 In this world?
 Do not offer your life!¹⁶

The Christian novelist Tokutomi Roka (whose brother Tokutomi Sohō was a leading proponent of imperialism) was oppressed by a foreboding of disaster. He urged his country in 1906 to turn away from reliance on military power: "Awake, Japan, our beloved fatherland! Open your eyes and see your true self! Japan, repent!"¹⁷ Other writers favored a shift to a less assertive international position, a "little Japanism," that would abstain from continental expansion and imbroglios with the powers and would lay stress instead on improving living standards at home by developing industry and trade.

But their voices were a minority opinion. The majority strongly favored improvement of Japan's continental position. Japanese imperialism was driven by continuing preoccupation with strategic advantage and a peculiar combination of nationalist pride and insecurity. In a 1907 document enunciating "the aims of imperial national defense," the military listed Japan's hypothetical enemies as Russia, the United States, Germany, and France in that order and recommended arms expansion to greater than twice the level achieved at the end of the Russo-Japanese War. There was to be no respite, no turning back.

The bureaucracy was already hard at work organizing material and spiritual support for the mounting costs of government, trying to evoke the effort and self-sacrifice required for industry, empire, and status as a world leader. Bureaucrats in their public appearances explained that the burden the people must bear would not be lighter even though the war with Russia was over. A civil servant in Yamaguchi prefecture, for example, gave a speech several times in 1906 to local officials. Japan, he said, as a result of victory in the war, had joined the ranks of the world's first-class nations and had to expand its military and diplomatic establishments abroad as befitted its new status. It needed to invest great sums in industrial growth and education so that its people might develop the resources required to support the Japanese Empire. The people had an obligation to contribute to the

achievement of Japan's destiny by paying higher taxes. Although the military war was over, Japan was now engaged in economic warfare, which in some ways would be more trying than actual combat. He spoke of the coming "peaceful war" in which every country would be Japan's enemy. If Japan's strength was to increase, the country must inevitably come into economic conflict with other countries. National unity would be imperative. Young men, old men, children, even women, he concluded, would be in the battles and must obey orders as in any war.¹⁸

This pursuit of empire and of status as a great power colored all other aspects of Japan's national development. Most particularly, it affected the way in which the new industrial society took shape. A successful imperialist policy required a unified nation at home, with every part of society subordinated to the whole, with the state taking precedence over the individual citizen and over social groups. Leaders in business and government recognized that the new society as it came into being would disturb vested interests, create psychological strain, and cause social dislocation. If the drive for industry and empire was to be sustained, national loyalties would have to be continuously reinforced and every effort made to overcome the forces of disintegration.

The Problems of Industrial Society Come to Japan

Because of the timing of its industrialization, Japan experienced the social problems attendant upon that process in a much different context than did the "early developing" industrial nations of the West. As a "late developer," Japan had the opportunity to profit from observing the problems that the first industrializers had encountered and to try to avoid them. Marx wrote in the preface to *Das Kapital* that "the industrially more developed country presents to the less developed country a picture of the latter's future." What Marx, however, did not acknowledge was the possibility that the less-developed country could, through the use of political initiatives, change the course of its industrialization and thereby avoid or mitigate the kinds of problems that the pioneers had experienced. Veblen wrote in 1915 that Japan had a special "opportunity," by which he meant that by industrializing while feudal values were still strong Japan could avoid much of the social cost that had plagued other nations. Personal ties, vertical relations of loyalty and obedience, would permit a much smoother industrialization than if economic individualism took hold.

The Japanese leaders themselves, years before Veblen's essay, had shown that they were aware of the opportunity they had to benefit from the Western example, to try to plan a calmer and less searing transition.

We find among Japanese bureaucrats and intellectuals a striking sensitivity to the lessons of Western history. We should learn, said one prominent official in 1896, from the "sad and pitiful" history of British industrialization. And, he added "it is the advantage of the backward country that it can reflect on the history of the advanced countries and avoid their mistakes."¹⁹ The economist Kawakami Hajime urged in 1905 that Japan maintain a balance between its agrarian society and the new manufacturing sector, arguing that Japan could not survive the destruction of its agriculture:

Unfortunately, as the pioneer of the industrial revolution, England overlooked this great truth and that was probably inevitable in the trend of the time. But fortunately we have the history of England's failure and there is no need to repeat that history. Are there not opportunities for countries that lag behind in their culture? . . . The history of the failures of the advanced countries is the best textbook for the follower countries. I hope that our statesmen and intellectuals learn something from this textbook.²⁰

For statesmen it was Japan's international position that gave urgency to averting the class antagonisms to which industrial civilization in the West had given rise. This was uppermost in the mind of one of the leading oligarchs, Ōkuma Shigenobu, when he wrote in 1910 that Japan was in an extremely advantageous position to secure the cooperation of capital and labor: "By studying the mistaken system that has brought Europe such bitter experience in the last several decades, businessmen, politicians, and officials in Japan can diminish these abuses." Relying on the force of laws and family customs, they would "prevent a fearful clash" and plan "the conciliation of capitalists and laborers."²¹

Thus, as Japan was making the transition to industrial society, its leaders were already thinking of the social problems likely to accompany the process. Their concern was made keener by the fact that European socialism was making its influence felt on radical intellectuals in Japan by the turn of the century. Following the Sino-Japanese War, a small but dedicated group of intellectuals and skilled workers tried to organize craft unions. The government, however, responded by passing the Peace Preservation Law of 1900, whose Article 17 outlawed strikes and other primary activities of labor unions.

As a result of the hostility of government, labor leaders after 1900 increasingly turned to politics. They became convinced that the regime would have to be changed, either peacefully or by force. In 1901 they organized the Social Democratic Party, which, although it did not have a long history—the Home Ministry closed it down hours after it was established—did attract attention to the new socialist movement and elicit the concern of government leaders. Denied the opportunity

to organize effective trade unions or a political party, the young socialists turned to methods of "education." In 1903 they established a newspaper, the *Heimin Shimbun*, which took strong and provocative positions against militarism, capitalism, and imperialism. In its pages was published the first complete translation of the *Communist Manifesto*. The newspaper opposed the war with Russia and for its pains was eventually forced out of business, while its editors were continually subject to police pressure. Frustrated in all their efforts, some of the socialists turned to anarchism and terror. Ultimately a number of them were implicated in a plot to assassinate the Meiji Emperor, and the government took the opportunity to move with severity to stamp out the anarchist movement. In the notorious High Treason Case of 1911, twelve radicals were hanged, three days after sentence had been passed.

As concern with social problems took root in Japanese intellectual and bureaucratic consciousness, the almost naive faith in the perfectibility of human society, which had characterized the early Meiji years, began to fade. Industrialization and imperialism put fearful demands upon society, and confidence in the future gave way to ambivalence. Every plus had its minus. The new technology was creative but also destructive; it offered new opportunities and prospects but at a high cost in human suffering and dislocation. As a result of the growing concern over the social problems that industrialization was likely to create, Japanese business and government leaders took the initiative in trying to prevent class hostilities, especially the alienation of the working class.

Origins of Japanese Labor-Management Relations

Studies of the Japanese factory system have called attention to several peculiar characteristics of industrial relations in present-day Japan, which have gained widespread attention owing to Japan's rapid economic growth. Many of these characteristics took shape during the period we are discussing, when the new industrial society was forming. It has been pointed out, first of all, that the large Japanese firm today has a low labor turnover—most employees enter a firm at the beginning of their working life and remain there until retirement. There is an understanding that the worker will not leave that company for industrial employment elsewhere, and, at the same time, the company will not discharge him, barring the most extreme circumstances. A second notable characteristic is the strong tendency of workers to identify with the fortunes of the company for which they work, to feel a deep sense of loyalty, and to organize unions according to their place of employment rather than by craft among many companies. Enterprise-

based unions, indeed, are quite common. Third, wages are determined more by seniority than by function or ability. In contrast to, say, an American firm—where wages are often related to the individual's contribution to efficient and maximal production—in the Japanese factory, economic rewards are most often determined by age and length of service. This characteristic naturally reinforces the low rate of labor turnover because a worker is clearly penalized for changing jobs and conversely is strongly rewarded for stability. Fourth, Japanese firms provide notably high levels of welfare services for their employees. These include better sick pay provisions, retirement pensions, and a variety of other benefits, including housing, education loans for workers' children, medical services, transport subsidies, and a variety of organized sports and social facilities.

These distinctive practices of Japanese labor relations were the result of a long evolutionary process beginning at the turn of the century—as Andrew Gordon writes, "a dialectic process involving the interaction of workers, managers, and bureaucrats, all taking initiatives at some point and responding to events at others."²² Some aspects of modern labor relations were influenced by the past. For example, the common Japanese practice of organizing unions at the place of employment rather than by craft had its "roots in the past. With no tradition of effective guild networks as a model they organized by workshop and factory with hardly a second thought."²³

Japanese cultural values stressing loyalty and the extension of quasi-kinship relations to groups beyond the family also played a part in the evolution of the system. Managers and bureaucrats often invoked "Japan's beautiful customs" of obedience, loyalty, and harmony to conciliate labor. Workers, however, responded that management must demonstrate the benevolence expected of superiors in hierarchical relations. Japanese workers were not as docile and diligent as is sometimes thought. They were not passive bystanders as the employment system emerged. Rather they demanded better treatment, respect, and improved status. They were motivated less by new, Western concepts of workers' "rights" or class struggle than by a desire to be treated with benevolence by their employers in a way that would justify worker loyalty. Workers believed that the employment relationship was similar to relationships between lord and vassal, master and servant, parent and child, requiring benevolence on one side and loyalty and obedience on the other. Independent of a modern labor union movement, which was still only in its infancy in the first decades of the century, industrial workers were coming together, forming workshop struggle groups, and negotiating with management. They appealed to a status ideology common in Tokugawa peasant uprisings. Thomas Smith sees worker protests as "deeply rooted in the history of the struggles of villages and towns for hierarchical

justice from regional lords during the Tokugawa period." The measures adopted—welfare services, greater security of employment, bonuses, and other aspects of the Japanese employment system—were "largely those that workers had for years been demanding as improvements of status and 'treatment.' They were adopted by management piecemeal, reluctantly, with a considerable time lag."²⁴

Managers responded to these demands because of several immediate factors. One was the continuing problem that employers had of preventing labor turnover—retaining skilled workers once they had been trained at a time when the supply was limited. Because of the newness of the skills involved, the enterprises devoted great attention to the training of their workers. Once trained, such workers were at a premium, and great attention had to be given to preventing their leaving for other work. At the turn of the century, when the shortage of skilled labor was severe, the turnover rates ran between 50 percent and 100 percent per year. Workers would simply abandon one employer for another, seeking higher wages, better working conditions, and a different experience. As a result, to encourage long terms of service the new industrial employers began to extend to skilled male workers a variety of incentives, such as retirement and sick leave benefits and regular salary increases heavily based on seniority.

Another factor encouraging development of the Japanese employment system was the growing awareness of the problems that industrialization had engendered in Western society. Labor strife, class divisions, worker alienation, social unrest, and the growth of radical ideologies were seen in Japan as inevitable products of industrialization unless leadership took steps to prevent them. The fact that labor organizations, strikes, and socialist groups were beginning to appear in Japan at the turn of the century reinforced this pattern of thought.

Because of the problem of labor turnover and because of the keen sensitivity to the Western experience with the social problems of industrialization, the larger firms, like Mitsubishi and Mitsui, took the lead in improving working conditions—such schemes as sick pay and retirement benefits, the establishment of the principle of "lifelong employment," salary increases according to seniority, and the development of profit-sharing bonus schemes—as a way to enhance the loyalty of employees. Large textile firms, with their reliance on the labor of young peasant girls, began to emphasize "familylike relationships" and the establishment of welfare programs. For example, Mutō Sanji, president of the Kanebo Cotton Textile Company in the early twentieth century, was a leader in developing a managerial ideology that emphasized paternal concern for employees and tried thereby to win their loyalty and affection. His welfare measures, Dore writes, included

a crèche [nursery] for working mothers, a workshop environment improvement fund with a claim to a percentage share of profits, much improved bathing and recreational facilities in the dormitories, an improved company housing scheme for married employees, subsidized consumer co-operatives for those living in company houses, a suggestions scheme, a complaint box grievance procedure . . . , a company news sheet . . . , a kindergarten to absorb the noisy children of night workers . . . and sick pay, pension and welfare fund . . . covering, for example, funeral expenses for members of the workers' family, paid by equal contributions from the worker and the firm.²⁵

The government also became involved in measures that contributed to the development of the Japanese employment system. Leaders in the bureaucracy early in this century paid special attention to the practices instituted in Western countries to deal with the problems of industrial labor, and consequently they played an influential role in establishing welfare programs in Japan in hopes of forestalling labor unrest. As a result of government pressure, the first factory act was passed in 1911. It provided minimum standards for employment in manufacturing establishments with fifteen or more workers. The impetus for this early legislation, it is important to note, came not from the laboring class or from pressure groups, but rather from bureaucrats in the Home Ministry, who had paid special attention to the development of factory legislation in Europe. The bureaucrat most responsible for this law boasted that it had been passed not as a result of an angry labor movement but out of a benevolent concern of the state to maintain in the course of industrialization Japan's "beautiful customs" of harmony among all its citizens:

In the future, our capitalists . . . will be steeped in the generous spirit of kindness and benevolence, guided by thoughts of fairness and strength. The factory will become one big family: the factory chief as the eldest brother and the foreman as the next oldest. The factory owner himself will act as parent. Strikes will become unthinkable, and we can look forward to the increased productivity of capital—the basis for advances in the nation's wealth and power.²⁶

More important, the government also played an active role in trying to accommodate such differences as did arise between labor and management. In 1919, following an alarming number of strikes and much civil disorder, the government established the Conciliation Society, which promoted workers' councils and consultative committees as a means of co-opting the union movement and of channeling worker grievances. But perhaps the most important contribution of

government was its propagation of the collectivist ethic throughout the nation. This ethic stressed vertical relations of loyalty and obedience, with a spirit of cooperation and self-sacrifice in all social groups. It generally set forth the concept of the "family nation," depicting Japan as distinct from the Western countries, where social unrest and class hostilities were described as endemic. In sum, as Dean Kinzley writes, the government in its approach to the problems of industrial relations was once again relying heavily on the "invention of a tradition."²⁷

The Role of Women in Industrialization

In addition to this pattern of labor-management relations that began to take shape in the new heavy industrial sector, Japanese industrialization had other distinctive features. It is important to emphasize that, in contrast with Europe, the leading sector of modern industry in Japan was not heavy industry but textiles. The fact that light industry played the leading role until the 1930s demonstrates the importance of Tokugawa economic growth as a precondition to modern success. "The growth of the modern textile industry was made possible by the specific skills, attitudes, roles, capital accumulations, and commercial practices brought into being mainly during the period of 'premodern growth.' Without these preconditions, the stimulus of foreign technology and foreign markets would not have resulted in the rapid expansion of the textile industry under private auspices after 1880."²⁸

The textile industry successfully assimilated modern techniques and then dominated the manufacturing sector until the 1930s. "It was also," as Gary Saxonhouse observes, "the harbinger of what has now become a familiar Japanese developmental pattern: import substitution followed by worldwide export success." In 1890 Japan was still a net importer of cotton yarn but by the 1920s Japan dominated the world market for cotton textiles. By 1937, 37 percent of all cotton fabrics in international trade were made in Japan.²⁹

Not only the dominance of light industry in Japan's early industrialization needs to be underlined here, but also the support that this offers for the school of interpretation that stresses the contribution "from below"; that is, the role of private capital and entrepreneurship. Saxonhouse stresses the great technological sophistication achieved in the textile industry that contained "many relatively small-scale mills which were, for the most part, fostered neither by the great *zaibatsu* nor by the Japanese government."

The most distinctive feature of Japan's early industrialization was the critical role played by women in the labor force. In the decades leading up to World War I, 60 percent of the industrial labor force and more than 80 percent of the workers in the textile industry were

female. Moreover, they were typically young, unmarried women from impoverished farm families who stayed at work about two years. They formed, writes Gail Lee Bernstein, "the backbone of Japan's Industrial Revolution."³⁰ Until recently, economic historians, frequently extolling the "amazing success" of Japanese industrialization, have paid scant attention to the experience of women factory workers that Sharon Sievers contends "matched, if it did not surpass, the worst conditions of both Europe and the United States."³¹

The work of women as reelers in cotton- and silk-producing regions of the Tokugawa Period was common and their treatment was relatively benign. Frequently this work entailed short-term migration, living away from home to reel and earn money to supplement the family income. Returning, they would teach reeling techniques to other women. The work was hard but not despised and the supervision was fairly compassionate.

By the 1880s, with the introduction of mechanization and the need to compete in the international marketplace, longer hours and harsher working conditions spread through the textile industry. The filatures were located in rural areas where the wage structure was low, the raw materials were nearby, and experienced female reelers were available. Girls were recruited from the poorest farm families, those in most need of supplemental income, and the starting age was as young as ten. They worked every day from twelve to fifteen hours in oppressive and unhealthful conditions. Many contracted tuberculosis and pleurisy. They lived in prisonlike dormitories, as many as fifty to a room, sharing bedding, with the doors kept locked after working hours, ostensibly to protect them but actually to try to limit the high runaway rate. Nearly half the girls ran away in the first months, and only one in ten stayed for three years. Company songs taught them that they were reeling for the nation, that employers were their second parents. But they had their own songs:

Factory work is prison work,
All it lacks are iron chains.

More than a caged bird, more than a prison,
Dormitory life is hateful.³²

Manipulative recruiters designed a wage-payment system that made the cost of quitting enormously high. Contracts were signed with the girls' parents who received an advance that had to be repaid in full if the contract were not fulfilled. Girls were thus caught between obligations to family and the severity of supervisors overseeing their work.

As Bernstein points out, the textile industry was intimately linked with the industrial revolution, women's work, and agriculture. Women's earnings helped pay rents to the landlords who in turn

invested in the textile mills. As the industry developed, Japan succeeded in capturing substantial shares of the international market. By 1909, for example, Japan had become the world's chief exporter of raw silk; and by the 1920s, 90 percent of the raw silk exported from Japan was sold in the United States.

Agrarian Society

Agriculture played a critical part in making possible the emergence of an industrial society in Japan. By producing export products and substitutes for imports, it helped provide the foreign exchange that was necessary to buy machinery and raw materials from abroad. The growing productivity of agriculture in the Meiji Period likewise provided a needed supply of staples to feed, relatively inexpensively, the growing population in the cities. Moreover, agriculture contributed through the land tax a substantial part of the government income that built the infrastructure for industrialization and also a portion of the capital that developed industries. Because of the agricultural expansion, the transition to industrial society took place without a drastic lowering of the living standards in the countryside, which, had it occurred, would doubtless have been a threat to political stability.

Nonetheless, by the turn of the century the burden that agrarian society was bearing in the process of industrialization was becoming apparent and causing increasing concern in the Japanese bureaucracy. We discussed earlier how the *gōnō* had acquired increasing amounts of land in the villages during the later years of the Tokugawa Period. The Meiji Restoration led to the confirmation of the landlords' position by giving to them title deeds to the property they had acquired. At the beginning of the Meiji Period approximately 30 percent of the cultivated land was tenanted. The increase in tenancy was aggravated by the land tax reforms of the 1870s, which, by requiring peasants to pay a fixed annual tax in money, worked hardship for the poor landowners, who frequently lost their lands by foreclosure. This was particularly true in the period of the Matsukata deflation (1881–1885). As Crawcour writes, "between 1884 and 1886, in the aftermath of the Matsukata deflation, foreclosures—many for the nonpayment of taxes—transferred almost one-eighth of the country's cultivated land into the hands of creditors. By the end of the century, landlords, who had not been a particularly influential group at the beginning of the Meiji era, annually collected rents equivalent to almost a quarter of Japan's rice crop."³³ Tenant-farmed land increased not only through foreclosures, but also because landlords developed new lands that were cultivated by tenant farmers. The tenancy rate soared and by the turn of the century nearly 45 percent of cultivated land was tenanted.

Leaders of the bureaucracy sensed growing unrest in the villages as the gap between classes grew. Moreover, the increasing tax burden on the citizenry made the government particularly sensitive to the problem of villages. It must be remembered that at the turn of the century 80 percent of the population still lived in communities whose population was less than 10,000. The government was, therefore, keenly concerned with preserving the cohesiveness of local society.

Indeed, without the material and spiritual support of towns and villages, the mounting cost of government could not have been borne. Requirements of armament, new colonial possessions, and industrial expansion caused central government expenditures to triple in the decade prior to the Russo-Japanese War, reaching 289 million yen in 1903; they more than doubled in the course of the war, and then remained at just less than 600 million yen down to 1913, by which time nearly half of the national budget was devoted to the army and navy, military pensions, and war debt service. Because the cost of the Russo-Japanese War was more than six times the ordinary revenues for 1903, extensive recourse was had to borrowing—particularly abroad. Taxes were raised, and lower- and middle-income classes bore an increasing share of the burden. There was some increase in the land tax, but the sharpest rise was in various excise taxes on such consumer commodities as textiles, kerosene, sugar, and salt. Indirect taxes rose from 96 million yen in 1903 to 152 million yen in 1905 and to 231 million yen in 1908. Responsibility for public works and education was increasingly delegated to local government, causing local taxes to grow alarmingly and bringing their total to more than 40 percent of national tax revenue after the turn of the century.

To strengthen the cohesiveness of local society and thereby provide a stronger basis for Japanese imperialism and industrialization, the central government in the decade following the Russo-Japanese War went to great lengths to shore up the administrative towns and villages that had been created through mergers ordered by the Town and Village Code of 1888. The government sought to strengthen them by encouraging the development of plans for improvement of landlord-tenant relations, by developing new crops and industries, and by reclaiming land. In addition, the effort was being made to revitalize local Shintō shrines and to focus their ceremonies on national loyalties revolving about the imperial throne. Campaigns to reward "model villages" and "model headmen" were sponsored, and, most important of all, the government sought to organize local groups nationally. Youth groups, for example, which had been organized within individual villages during the Tokugawa Period, were now organized into a nationwide hierarchy (with a membership of 3 million by 1913), and great emphasis was placed at all levels of the organization upon national loyalties and devotion to the imperial cause. Local military



Japanese schoolboys in 1905 study language textbooks. Library of Congress

associations were formed in nearly every village and again were organized into a hierarchy under the supervision of the army. They were instrumental in building respect for the army and its values. These associations, established in virtually every local community, numbered in excess of 11,000 in 1910. Likewise of great importance was a campaign by the central government to encourage the formation of agricultural cooperatives. A law regulating the conditions under which farmers could form credit, consumer, marketing, and producers' cooperatives was enacted in 1900. By 1913 the government reported the existence of more than 10,000 cooperatives with a membership in excess of 1,160,000.

In this way, the central government reached down into local village society, to mobilize loyalties and to extend them to the national level. Of great importance, of course, in this effort was the rapid growth of school attendance. By 1900, 95 percent of the children of compulsory school age were attending primary schools. Here they were subject, as we have seen, to increasingly intense indoctrination in the new national ideology.

The emerging industrial society was thus shaped in nearly every way by political and military ambitions that Japan's leaders formulated for the nation. Landlord-tenant relations, moral instruction in the schools, allocation of economic resources, employer-employee relations—everything was to be subordinated to national greatness, to

Japan's status as a first-rate power. The twentieth century, as the popular journalist Kayahara Kazan wrote during the Russo-Japanese War, "is not a time for individual heroes to vie with one another for fame. It is the time for national expansion and growth. This nationalism which has turned imperialism is now playing an unprecedented role in the drama of world history. Japan stands in the middle of this whirlwind, this ocean current of imperialism." Individual Japanese must devote themselves to the tasks of the nation, for Japan, he continued, "is destined to create an East Asian economic empire." This was "the ideal of a great people."³⁴

Notes

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8. See Mutsu Munemitsu, *Kenkenroku: A Diplomatic Record of the Sino-Japanese War, 1894–95*, ed. and trans. Gordon Mark Berger (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1982), passim.
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10

Crisis of Political Community

The Meiji Period, one of the most remarkable epochs of modern world history, came to a close in 1912 with the death of the Emperor whose reign had witnessed Japan's emergence as the leading power in Asia. His passing was mourned by literati as well as by the masses, in a striking display of emotion that showed how deeply the new nationalism had touched the Japanese people. "A dense mass of humanity again thronged the great open spaces outside the Palace walls last night," wrote the correspondent for the *London Times*, "continually moving up to the Emperor's gate, there to kneel in prayer a few minutes and then pass on once more. The crowd was drawn from all classes, and all preserved the highest degree of orderliness and silence save for the crunching of the gravel under wooden sandals and the low continuous murmur of prayers. . . . One who looked over the sea of bowed heads outside the Palace wall could not desire better proof of the vitality of that worship of the Ruler. . . ."1 Feelings were further heightened on the day of the funeral, September 13, when General Nogi Maresuke, the military hero of the Russo-Japanese War, and his wife committed ritual suicide in the manner of the classic samurai who loyally followed his lord even in death. The most significant novelists of the time, Natsume Sōseki and Mori Ōgai, found that the emotional experience of these events changed the course of their writing. They were drawn away from preoccupation with the Western world back to their own cultural traditions for the thematic material in their subsequent novels.

The new Emperor Yoshihito, who gave the name Taishō to the years of his reign (1912–1926), was a weak and uncertain figure. It was a poorly kept secret that the Taishō Emperor's illnesses frequently involved mental aberrations. On one occasion while reading a ceremonial message to the Diet he rolled up the scroll and began peering, as through a telescope, at the startled legislators. Such behavior seems not to have diminished reverence for the imperial institution, yet it was perhaps symbolic of the nation's passage into a time of trouble.