

RALEIGH LECTURE ON HISTORY

JAPAN AND THE WEST IN THE MID  
NINETEENTH CENTURY: NATIONALISM AND  
THE ORIGINS OF THE MODERN STATE

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WESTERN writing about modern Japan, if not very considerable, has at least shown a variety of approach. A hundred years ago, books about that country were commonly being given titles which emphasized the peculiarities of its exotic polity: *The Capital of the Tycoon*, by Sir Rutherford Alcock in 1863; *The Mikado's Empire*, by an American, W. E. Griffis, a little over a decade later. W. S. Gilbert, one might say, pursued a similar theme in a work which became a great deal more famous than either of these.

By the end of the century the emphasis was less on the exotic than on the new: *Fifty Years of New Japan*, for example; or, by way of nostalgia for something that seemed already to be disappearing, *In Lotus-land Japan*. There followed a period in which the West's concern was with Japan's territorial ambitions and the politics that lay behind them, with *Japan, the Hungry Guest* and *Government by Assassination*.

And now? Now we are in a different world again. *Japan's New Middle Class* is one recent title. *The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan* is another.

These rather random examples serve to illustrate not only the shifting preoccupations of Japan's Western visitors, but also one of the major themes of her modern history. Japan, in a little over a century, has undergone a remarkable transformation. In the 1860s her political institutions still had characteristics which can reasonably be described as feudal. To quote Alcock:

With the Japanese, we take a step backward some ten centuries, to live over again the Feudal days . . . Feudalism, so seemingly after time and out of place, is here, with sufficient identity and analogy in all its leading features to make the coincidence striking. . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Alcock, *The Capital of the Tycoon: a Narrative of a Three Years' Residence in Japan* (2 vols., London, 1863), I, pp. xix-xx.

Japan's economy at that time was still agrarian—as befitted a feudal state—for all that it embodied important elements of commercial growth. Her military power was such that her rulers despaired of defeating even Perry's single squadron of 'black ships'.

From this unpromising beginning was moulded, first, a centralized bureaucracy, acting in the emperor's name—what Japanese historians now call 'Meiji absolutism'—then an industrial complex capable of sustaining a substantial military force. This industrial complex—Japan's first 'economic miracle'—helped to build an empire. Equally impressive, it has survived the collapse of empire to become the basis of a way of life which seems every year to owe less and less to the pre-nineteenth-century past.

The process of modernization, of which all these changes were part, began quickly. As early as 1876 Griffis was able to say:

It is time that a writer treated Japan as something else than an Oriental puzzle, a nation of recluses, a land of fabulous wealth, of universal licentiousness or of Edenic purity. . . .<sup>1</sup>

For, he said, this was the 'first of Asiatic nations to enter modern life':

Her people walk our streets; her youth sits, peers and rivals of our students, in the class-room; her art adorns our houses . . .<sup>2</sup>

Other observers, both then and now, might have thought this encomium a little premature. But it was not entirely without substance. By 1876 the course of change, which was to make Griffis a true prophet, if not necessarily a good historian, had already been set.

It began, as is not uncommonly the case, with a political upheaval. This takes its English label, 'the Meiji Restoration', from the events of 3 January 1868, when troops from five of the great feudal princedoms seized the gates to the imperial palace in Kyōto. By so doing they made it possible for their allies within the Court to issue a decree 'restoring' to the emperor his traditional responsibility for administration, which for centuries had been entrusted to successive families of hereditary Shōgun. The hegemony of the last of these, the Tokugawa, thus came to an end. In their place new leaders came to power; and these,

<sup>1</sup> W. E. Griffis, *The Mikado's Empire* (New York, 1876), p.8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

after victory in a brief civil war, launched a programme of radical reform.

A key step in this programme was the abolition in 1871 of the great domains, the *han*, whose territory and population became subject directly to the authority of the imperial government, instead of to that of hereditary lords. A start was also made on removing the legal, political, and economic privileges of the samurai class. Before long the samurai's sword had become an heirloom, chiefly of ceremonial and psychological value, as its military function devolved upon the rifles of a conscript army; while continuing social and political prestige began for many samurai to have a hollow ring, as their revenues, compulsorily exchanged for government bonds, were eroded by inflation. The government, too, moved away from a feudal basis of finance. In 1873 the network of local dues in kind, on which it had hitherto depended, was replaced by a land tax, centrally assessed and payable in cash. By that date Japan already had her first railway line; several Western-style factories, shipyards, and arsenals; a decree establishing a national system of education; and a Japanese translation of Samuel Smiles's *Self-help*.

In considering the origins of all this it is tempting to look for parallels in the history of Europe. One might turn to the English or French Revolutions, perhaps, for the Meiji Restoration is not unlike them in its significance for the subsequent political development of the country, in the complexity of its causes, in the methodological problems which it poses for the historian. Yet there is at least one sense in which parallels of this kind break down. The emergence of modern Japan is not only part of the history of revolutions, or of the growth of the modern state. It is also part of the history of Asia's response to the West, as much a part of it as is Indian independence, or Chinese communism. For Japan set an example which gave a major impetus to Asian liberation movements in the first half of the twentieth century, just as she seems destined to afford a model of economic development in the second. And she did so because of her success in resisting the threat of Western dominance fifty years earlier.

This is not to deny that external stimuli had a place in other revolutions, too. Yet in Japan their effect seems to have gone deeper, been more pronounced. When Yoshida Shōin referred to the 1858 treaties with the West as 'the shame of the nation',<sup>1</sup> or when the author of *Genji Yume Monogatari* described the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in D. M. Earl, *Emperor and Nation in Japan* (Seattle, 1964), p. 207.

events of the 1850s as 'the continual pollution of our country by the visits of the outer barbarians',<sup>1</sup> they were expressing a fairly familiar kind of anti-foreign feeling, and doing so in language which was certainly no more intemperate than that which has been used by other patriots in other times and places. This is also true in a sense of Shionoya Tōin, when he wrote of European calligraphy:

Now as regards the shape of foreign letters, they are confused and irregular, wriggling like snakes or larvae of mosquitoes. The straight ones are like dogs' teeth, the round ones like worms.<sup>2</sup>

But behind this rather superficial language of abuse there was the germ of a recognition, not only that Japan's political independence was at stake—that 'the mist gathering over China', as Tōin put it, might 'come down as frost on Japan'<sup>3</sup>—but also that the threat extended to the country's whole way of life. The foreigners, after all, were barbarians, and therefore hostile to civilization as the Japanese knew it. Hirano Kuniomi, a samurai loyalist, writing in 1862, made these fears explicit. The newly opened ports, he argued, were likely to become foreign bases, reducing Japan to a state of military helplessness, 'like a dragon with its body cut across, the head severed from the tail'. Then:

Once this point were reached, we should no longer possess the means of expelling the barbarians. We could but fold our arms [in compliance], changing our ways by the use of foreign dress and a sideways script, stomaching the stench of meat which the foreigners bring with them.<sup>4</sup>

Thus to Hirano, outlandish dress, an alien script, and the eating of meat symbolized a conflict of cultures. To many of his contemporaries the symbol was Christianity, which they had been brought up to regard as 'the evil sect', an ideology capable of corrupting their society from within and so destroying it. Such beliefs lead directly to the debate, which has continued with varying intensity ever since, about the proper limits to the adoption of Western habits and ideas. To a greater extent than

<sup>1</sup> E. M. Satow (trans.), *Japan 1853-1864, or Genji Yume Monogatari* (Tokyo, 1905), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> R. H. van Gulik, 'Kakkaron, a Japanese echo of the Opium War', *Monumenta Serica*, iv (1939-40), 539.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 500.

<sup>4</sup> Hirano Kuniomi to Yoshida Shigeyoshi, 6 May 1862, in *Junnan rokkō* (3 vols., Tokyo, 1933), i, pp. 346-9.

it is now fashionable to admit, 'modernization', to a nineteenth-century Japanese, was 'westernization'.

For this reason, controversies over the nature and causes of the Meiji Restoration have a dimension which it is not common to find so prominently in discussion of the English and French Revolutions. One has to ask not only what was the significance of peasant revolt and samurai impoverishment, of the growth of 'bourgeois' wealth and class differentiation in the village, of the origins and extent of imperial loyalism, but also what was the function of nationalism as a political force. To read the letters and diaries and memorials of politically active Japanese in the third quarter of the nineteenth century is to realize that considerations of national dignity and prestige loomed large in their thinking. The slogan *jōi*, 'expel the barbarians', was important precisely because it evoked so strong an emotional response.

What is much more difficult, of course, is to assess how far that emotion helped to shape, or to attain, political ends. It has long been accepted by historians that the need to win Western recognition, as a prelude to securing revision of the 'unequal' treaties, was one motive for social and legal reform in the Meiji period. Equally, patriotism was a key element in later politics, both within the constitution and outside it. It was cited as justification for political assassination and attempted *coups d'état*. In recent years scholars have also sought to show how nationalism influenced the outlook and behaviour of entrepreneurs, and hence the nature of commercial and industrial activity.<sup>1</sup> But these wider issues are not here my primary concern. Instead, I would like to take up a more limited theme: the importance of nationalism for political institutions at a point rather earlier in time. I propose to concentrate, in fact, on the fifteen years after 1858, during which the Tokugawa were overthrown and major decisions were taken about the shaping of the Japanese state. For the events of this period decided who was to hold power in Japan at a critical time. Its atmosphere, I believe, conditioned their ideas of how that power should be used.

Several factors contributed to the rapid growth of nationalism in Japan. In an island group, the geographical limits of the state were easy to define. There was a tradition of political unity, of which the emperor was the symbol and the power of the

<sup>1</sup> See J. Hirschmeier, *The Origins of Entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), and B. K. Marshall, *Capitalism and Nationalism in Prewar Japan* (Stanford, 1967).

Shōgun a practical reminder. Even the most independent of feudal lords paid it lip-service. The social and political order was coherent enough, and uniform enough, to give men a sense of belonging to something more than the family and locality; and it was reinforced by possession of a common language and a common culture, together with a degree of literacy sufficient to ensure that the community of ideas was not limited to the ruling class.<sup>1</sup>

National consciousness had been heightened by a long record of relations with China and Korea, of wars and diplomatic missions, of trade, of religious and literary exchanges, in all of which Japan had been treated by her neighbours as a single entity. The relationships with European missionaries and merchants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had also played a part. So, too, did the decision to break them off: seclusion served to give the differences between 'Japanese' and 'foreign' a sharper edge. In a society which regarded the writing of history as a highly reputable form of intellectual activity, these things were not forgotten. Hence the concept of 'Japan', as something belonging to a category of ideas which included not only China and Korea, but also England, Russia, America, Holland, and France, did not have to develop *ab initio* with the arrival of Commodore Perry's ships.

To this it must be added that Japan had the advantage of being long threatened, but not attacked. As early as the period of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in Europe, Russian activities in the Kurile islands and Sakhalin were provoking in Japan a reconsideration of the defence of her northern frontiers. Knowledge of the British conquest of India, of the acquisition of Penang and Singapore, of the growth of the China trade, drew attention to a further danger from the south, which China's defeat in the Opium War seemed to make greater and more imminent. Japanese writers began to urge their government to take steps to defend the country from invasion. In 1825 one of the most influential, Aizawa Seishisai, had already begun to criticize those who could not see the need for this:

Some say that the Westerners are merely foreign barbarians, that their ships are trading vessels or fishing vessels, and that they are not people who would cause serious trouble or great harm. . . . If I ask such people about the state of their preparedness, about their ability to forestall an invasion, they stare blankly at me and know not what to say.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See R. P. Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (London, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Translated in R. Tsunoda and others, *Sources of Japanese Tradition* (New York, 1958), p. 597.

By writing in this way, Aizawa helped to create an awareness of danger which the appearance of Perry's 'black ships' eventually confirmed. Their arrival, we are told, threw the capital into something approaching panic.<sup>1</sup> It certainly prompted a debate about policy which spread rapidly from official circles to the samurai class as a whole. In the course of it, widely varying solutions were proposed for the country's difficulties. Many took refuge in a reassertion of tradition: seclusion, the prohibition of Christianity, the limitation of foreign trade. Others sought an outlet for their emotions in personal violence. For some years after 1858 foreigners in the treaty ports and Japanese who had dealings with them lived in constant fear of armed attack. At a further extreme were those who advocated territorial expansion as a means of military defence. As Yoshida Shōin put it, in urging an extension of Japanese power to Kamchatka, Manchuria, Korea, Ryūkyū, Formosa, and the Philippines:

If the sun is not ascending, it is descending. If the moon is not waxing, it is waning. If the country is not flourishing, it is declining. Therefore to protect the country well is not merely to prevent it from losing the position it holds, but to add to the positions which it does not hold.<sup>2</sup>

Of more immediate importance to the theme of this lecture is the fact that many Japanese reactions to what they conceived of as Western encroachment had from the beginning involved also the concept of 'reform' at home. In its most limited sense, such reform was concerned with weapons, military training, and the financial measures designed to make it possible to pay for them. More widely, it raised the whole question of the adoption of Western science and technology. These had been demonstrated again and again to be more effective than anything Asia could produce. In the Opium War, China had crumbled before them, despite her size and reputed power. Ought not Japan, therefore, to use them in her own defence, to 'use the barbarian to control the barbarian', as some reformers urged? Sakuma Shōzan, writing immediately after the conclusion of the Perry treaty in 1854, dismissed contemporary Japanese learning as being irrelevant to current needs, so conceived:

What do the so-called scholars of today actually do? [he asked] . . . Do they, after having learned the rites and music, punishment and

<sup>1</sup> According to *Genji Yume Monogatari*: 'The city of Yedo and the surrounding villages were in a great tumult; in anticipation of the war which seemed imminent, the people carried their valuables and furniture in all directions to conceal them in the house of some friend living farther off . . .' Satow, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Earl, *Emperor and Nation*, p. 173.

administration, the classics and governmental system, go on to discuss and learn the art of war, of military discipline, of the principles of machinery? Do they make exhaustive studies of conditions in foreign countries? Of effective defense methods? Of strategy . . . Of the knowledge of computation, gravitation, geometry, and mathematics? If they do, I have not heard of it.<sup>1</sup>

Sakuma's reward was death at the hands of an anti-foreign assassin, ten years later. But his ideas had taken root. After 1868 they became the justification, not only for the study of Western science, especially in the context of military and industrial skills, but also—on the principle of 'know your enemy'—of world geography, political thought, economics, even European literature. The nature of modern Japan's educational system owed a great deal to his line of argument.

It was much easier to win acceptance for proposals of this kind than one might have supposed. Their motive was patriotic and hence respectable. To be sure, they offended many traditional scholars and hereditary experts of various kinds, but these were not, in the last resort, the men who wielded power in Japanese society. 'Western studies', as they were called, did not seem to challenge, except indirectly and remotely, the social and political order, at least at its higher levels. Few, therefore, saw it as a threat to the régime.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, the threat to the régime, if such it was, came in the first instance from men who did not entirely agree among themselves about the policies to be pursued towards the West. They were led by Aizawa Seishisai's lord, Nariaki of Mito, head of one of the three senior branch houses of the Tokugawa. Nariaki consistently urged that Japan must resist foreign demands, even to the point of war. Resistance, he argued, would arouse the country's fighting spirit and so ensure those long-term changes in behaviour which were necessary to the preservation of independence. He found allies, though not always acceptance of his arguments, among the other lords: Matsudaira Keiei of Echizen, another powerful Tokugawa relative; Shimazu Nariakira of Satsuma, whose domain covered almost three whole provinces and was the second largest in the country; and Yamauchi Yōdō of Tosa, greatest of the lords of Shikoku. All were energetic and able—able, that is, by the standards,

<sup>1</sup> Tsunoda, *Sources*, pp. 611–12.

<sup>2</sup> One might note in passing the contrast with China, where the Confucian literati *were* the men of power, so that a threat to their beliefs was a threat to the system.



admittedly not very high ones, which could be applied to the great feudatories of their day—and had a reputation as reformers in their own territories. All were well served.

All, moreover, were men in whom a concern for the safety of Japan went hand in hand with a desire to change in some degree the distribution of authority. Nariaki was a chauvinist, who, notwithstanding his anxiety to establish new methods of cannon-founding in his fief, subscribed to the mystique of the sword; Shimazu saw salvation in the conclusion of treaties and the development of foreign trade as means to the adoption of the West's military technology; but from these contrasting premises they moved to remarkably similar political conclusions. To them, the task of national defence was beyond the capabilities of the Tokugawa Shōgun, acting alone. It needed the active co-operation of the great lords and the full resources of their fiefs. These could be had—at a price. Specifically, there must be changes in high places, such as would restore confidence in the country's leadership. In 1854 this meant a demand for the appointment of Nariaki as commander-in-chief. In 1858 it meant putting forward one of his sons, Hitotsubashi Keiki, as the Shōgun's heir. In addition, there would have to be a reduction in the financial and other demands made on the great lords by the Shōgun's government, so that they might be free to devote more of their revenue to armament. More generally, to quote Matsudaira Keiei,<sup>1</sup> 'the services of capable men must be enlisted from the entire country; peacetime extravagance must be cut down and the military system revised; . . . the daily livelihood of the whole people must be fostered; and schools for the various arts and crafts must be established'. By such means, he said, 'We will . . . in the end make glorious for ever our country's honoured name and shatter the selfish designs of the brutish foreigners.'

Clearly such policies were not only directed towards strengthening Japan *vis-à-vis* the West. They were also concerned with securing a greater share of power for the men who urged them. The ambition was in no way inhibited by the fact that some of the men pursuing it were the Shōgun's relatives. But because they already enjoyed rank, wealth, and power in considerable measure, they sought only to weaken the central authority to their own advantage, not to destroy it altogether.

<sup>1</sup> Matsudaira Keiei to Rōjū, 10 January 1858, translated in W. G. Beasley, *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy 1853-1868* (London, 1955), pp. 179-80.

They never argued that the office of Shōgun should be abolished, still less that the lords themselves should be deprived of lands and influence. Rather, they envisaged a reform from within, an adjustment which would leave the system itself intact.

This was not to be true of their successors. Nariaki and his colleagues failed in 1858 because they provoked the Shōgun's hereditary vassals into a closing of the ranks which was at least temporarily effective. In the 1860s the survivors of the group failed again, this time because of their inability to take up a truly radical position. Yet their intervention in national politics had helped to bring about certain changes which moved Japan a little nearer to becoming a modern state: *first*, they had opened the way for a number of able men of lesser rank—chiefly their own subordinates—to take an active part in politics; *second*, they had publicly emphasized that there were some issues which were 'national', in the sense of overriding the obligations both of feudal loyalty and civil obedience.

This second point is important to an understanding of the loyalist movement which developed after 1858. Many samurai, bitterly resentful of the 'unequal' treaties concluded in that year, turned against the government which had signed them, only to find that they got no help from their lords. These were either indifferent to the appeals with which their followers bombarded them, or had been so recently brought to order by the Bakufu (the Tokugawa government) as to be helpless to oppose it. Some samurai, therefore—the *shishi*, or 'men of spirit', they were called—sought a basis of organization which might be independent of the domain. For the most part they found it in the formation of leagues and blood brotherhoods, or similar but less formal groups, that is, bodies which were dedicated to acts of terrorism as much as to the promotion of particular articles of policy. Murder, armed conspiracy, placarding the streets of the capital with anti-foreign and anti-Tokugawa notices, local risings, all these came within their scope, contributing to a general atmosphere of turbulence in the early 1860s and provoking a number of clashes with the treaty powers.

Unable to cite feudal loyalty in justification of what they did, the loyalists sought legitimacy by asserting the emperor's sovereignty. The emperor, they claimed, supported their views, though he was not always in a position to say so; and the imperial authority, by immemorial tradition, was superior to that of Shōgun or feudal lord. In this were the seeds of the argument that was to enable Japan to construct a modern

centralized state: to reject almost *in toto* the political institutions of the immediate past, while continuing to maintain that what was done was essentially Japanese, not western. In 1868 the Shōgun was to vanish, taking with him the responsibility for all that was unacceptable in the old order of things. The emperor was to be 'restored', a focus of nationalism and a symbol of the new Japan.

Yet it would be wrong to assume that all this was already being envisaged by the *shishi* of the early 1860s. True, they often stated the doctrine of imperial sovereignty in the most extravagant terms. And it is true that hostility to the Tokugawa house led them to insist that it be stripped of its authority. But this did not necessarily lead them to conclude that an effective, or autocratic, imperial rule must take its place. For example, Takechi Zuizan, who went further than most in speculating about the character of a reformed régime, proposed only that the Imperial Court be enfeoffed with the provinces round Kyōto; that it assume direct responsibility for policy decisions; and that feudal lords be required to perform duties of ceremonial attendance, as well as those of official service, at the Court instead of at the Shōgun's castle. In other words, the emperor was to take over the Shōgun's functions as administrative head of state and feudal overlord, but not, presumably, to exercise any closer control over the feudal lords than the Tokugawa themselves had done.

The reason for this limitation of objectives—which is characteristic of the times, not exceptional—is, it seems to me, straightforward. Takechi, like most of those who worked with him, was not consciously a revolutionary. He did not seek to overthrow society as a preliminary to making it into something more in accord with what he thought was 'right'. Far from it: his purpose was immediate and specific. In his own words, quoted from the memorial in which he put forward these proposals, 'unless the policy I have recommended is carried out, the plan for expulsion of the foreigners cannot succeed'.<sup>1</sup> Or, as his associate, Hirano Kuniomi, put it, the loyalist movement existed to 'extend the imperial authority to all parts of the country and provide a basis for lasting national security'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the power of the West seemed to these men to be so great that only a truly united Japan could hope to resist it. Unhappily,

<sup>1</sup> Draft memorial of intercalary 8th month (September/October) 1862, printed in *Takechi Zuizan kankei monjo* (2 vols., Tokyo, 1916), i, pp. 119–24.

<sup>2</sup> Letter of 6 May 1862, cited on p. 80, n. 4 above.

they said, the Tokugawa, by their weakness and self-seeking, had forfeited the trust of the people and could not therefore provide the leadership which the country needed. Hence some other focus of unity must be found. Logically, this should be the emperor, because he transcended factional divisions. Under him, all Japanese, including the Tokugawa, could work to save the country. It was a policy by no means irreconcilable with that of the reforming lords, for all that the one group is usually called 'conservative', the other 'radical'.

The *shishi* failed to gain their ends, just as the reforming lords had done. 1863 and 1864 were years of turmoil in Japan, in both foreign and domestic affairs. They saw the bombardments of Kagoshima and Shimonoseki by foreign squadrons; several abortive loyalist risings; one successful and one unsuccessful *coup d'état* in Kyōto, bringing a possibility of civil war. In the course of these events, many of the extremist leaders were killed or executed, and the loyalists lost their foothold in the capital. What is more, many of the survivors lost their faith in the practicability of expelling the barbarian. From this time on, the slogan *sonnō-jōi*, 'honour the emperor, expel the barbarian', though it continued to have a powerful emotional effect, with which all political leaders had to reckon, came less and less to be descriptive of an actual programme. Instead, men talked more of *tōbaku*, 'destroy the Bakufu', or *fukoku-kyōhei*, 'enrich the country, strengthen the army'. And in these changed circumstances, leadership of the anti-Tokugawa movement passed to a relatively small number of samurai of middle rank from key domains in the south-west and west—Saigō and Okubo of Satsuma; Kido and Takasugi of Chōshū; others of similar background in Tosa and elsewhere—who set themselves to the task of bringing together the reforming lords and the loyalist *shishi* in an alliance which would have real strength to set in the scales. By the end of 1867 they had done so to such good purpose that the last of the Shōgun, the former Hitotsubashi Keiki, was persuaded to resign. His avowed reason, reflecting the preoccupations of the age, was that by resigning he would open the way for a new administration under which 'our country will hold its own with all nations of the world'.<sup>1</sup>

I am here concerned, not with the 'how' of this, but with the 'what'; not with the details of the political process by which Keiki's resignation was secured, but with the ideas of the anti-

<sup>1</sup> Keiki's memorial of resignation, dated 9 November 1867. It is translated in J. H. Gubbins, *The Progress of Japan 1853-1871* (Oxford, 1911), p. 305.

Tokugawa leaders about what they were setting out to do. These went through several stages before becoming in the full sense *tōbaku*. Saigō and Ōkubo, for example, had at first tried to co-operate with the Bakufu, with a view to gaining for Satsuma—that is, for their own domain—a voice in the formulation of policy. This approach broke down in 1864. It was replaced by an attempt to use the Court against the Bakufu by manipulating the emperor and some of his officials, but this, too, failed, when put to the test at the end of 1865. From that point Satsuma began to move into agreement with Chōshū, as part of a plan to exert pressure directly through an alliance of great lords, acting in the emperor's name. Even this was shown to be ineffective early in 1867. And only then was the decision taken to use force, if necessary, to destroy the Tokugawa altogether.

Given the pragmatic approach which was implicit in these successive changes of immediate objective, it is not surprising that the documents of the period are imprecise about the institutional content of what was being proposed. Two things stand out: *first*, that the goal of political action was conceived to be national unity; *second*, that unity was a step towards *fukoku-kyōhei*, which was itself a means of strengthening Japan against the West. On these points, as on the need to use the emperor to give legitimacy to what was done, there was general agreement. For the rest, discussion of the ultimate shape of the Japanese polity seems to have been left to those who were less burdened with the cares of day-to-day politics.

One such man was Iwakura Tomomi, perhaps the ablest of the Court nobles, certainly the most famous after 1868. Because he had the ear of the emperor, he had a vital role in the political manoeuvrings of Satsuma and Chōshū. At the same time, he was reluctant, as a Court noble, to envisage a future in which either a Shimazu of Satsuma or a Mori of Chōshū would be simply substituted for the Tokugawa. This led him to conclusions rather different from those which had been reached by Takechi and Hirano in 1862.

In the spring of 1867 Iwakura set out in a memorial<sup>1</sup> his own ideas as to the form of government which should be adopted in Japan. Its purpose was 'to make the 60-odd provinces of our imperial country into a single imperial stronghold', by subjecting the feudal lords to regional governors appointed by the

<sup>1</sup> Memorial of 3rd month (April/May) 1868, printed in *Iwakura Tomomi kankei monjo* (8 vols., Tokyo, 1927-35), i, pp. 288-300.

Court. These governors, who might be either Court nobles or feudal lords, would have a general responsibility for ensuring that the domains in each area conformed with central policy. They would also have the task of increasing national wealth—to promote both government tax and the people's welfare—by fostering agriculture. A system of schools, teaching Confucian principles, would ensure a supply of 'men of ability', while preserving a 'Japanese', as against a Western, ethic; and all these measures would serve to establish a basis on which 'to enhance the imperial prestige in the world at large'. To this end, the Court must take over direct responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs. It must accept the treaties which the Shōgun had concluded, while seeking to modify them to Japan's advantage; and it must send a mission to the countries of Europe and America, partly to establish good relations with them, partly, by studying conditions overseas, to learn the lessons which might make Japan strong. A little less than five years later, Iwakura himself was to go abroad as the leader of such a mission.

In the context of the present discussion, the interest of this document is not that it foreshadows a number of Meiji policies, but that it represents a Japanese response to the Western threat which is little influenced by Western models. The machinery by which Iwakura proposed to exercise control over the domains owed more to pre-feudal precedents in Japan than to anything the history of the West could offer. Moreover, the document's emphasis on Confucian training, its acceptance of the fact that the feudal system must continue in some form, the language in which economic policy was described, even the references to 'men of ability', all these were the familiar coin of traditional debate. Only the foreign policy proposals were essentially new.

Nevertheless, it is from about this point in time—early 1867—that a knowledge of Western institutions began to have its effect on Japanese politics. Since 1858 there had been a foreign community of consuls, missionaries, and traders in the treaty ports, many of whom were ready to expatiate on the advantages of the Western way of doing things. In addition, a number of Japanese had been abroad, either officially or secretly, as diplomats or as students, long enough to acquire fairly detailed information about European and American systems of government, law, commerce, and industry. Both groups, the foreigners in Japan and the Japanese with some experience overseas, had

much to say that was of interest to men whose purpose it was to make Japan 'equal' in the eyes of the world.

The best-known examples of foreign advice were provided by the British and French diplomats in Japan. The French Minister, Léon Roches, hoped, by backing the Tokugawa, to gain a privileged position for his country. He therefore urged the Shōgun in 1866 and 1867 to remodel his army on Western lines, so as to make it strong enough to overawe the great lords; to tax the domains; and to reorganize the Tokugawa administration into something more like a specialist bureaucracy. France, he said, would help with a military mission, possibly a loan.

The proposal was one which appealed to a number of the Bakufu's officials, though in the event Keiki lacked the courage to put it fully into effect. It also had much in common with some of the policies of the Meiji government. On the other hand, it is the British minister, Sir Harry Parkes, who is usually given the chief credit—or blame—for counselling the Shōgun's enemies, who eventually formed that government. In fact, both Parkes's intentions and his influence have been a good deal exaggerated. One of his young subordinates, Ernest Satow, certainly seems to have given Saigō, in particular, some very indiscreet advice; but Parkes himself, to judge from his official papers, did no more than act in the light of what he conceived to be British interests, that is, to support those who might promote conditions of stability and order in Japan, in which trade could flourish. This led him in 1867 to express approval of various suggestions for a kind of council of great lords, or even a bicameral assembly, since this seemed the best chance of avoiding a civil war and bringing about a settlement of domestic disputes. For the same reason he later welcomed Keiki's resignation. It gave some prospect, he said,<sup>1</sup> 'of the unworkable Government of Japan being replaced by an intelligible system'. More, it might make possible the abolition of 'a system of feudality ill organised and acknowledging no control', which 'we must desire to see ended'.

Once he had established relations with the new régime, Parkes continued to press this theme. To him, the domains were a source of unruly samurai, who were likely to attack foreigners without warning or provocation. Therefore they were best brought under the control of the central authority, which

<sup>1</sup> Hammond Papers (F.O. 391), vol. 14: Parkes to Hammond, Yedo, 28 November 1867.

appeared to be more friendly. He made the point in a private conversation with Iwakura in January 1869:<sup>1</sup>

The Government of the country having now been reconstituted under the Mikado, it is obvious that the latter must be supported by a central organisation and by material power; and although much may still be left to local administration, still certain cardinal functions of government . . . should be conducted from the centre, and means should be found to correct the disintegration which has so long been the leading feature in the Japanese polity.

On other occasions Parkes advocated the building of telegraphs and railways, urging not only economic reasons, but also their value as a means of strengthening the government's power in the provinces.

Both Roches and Parkes, then, the one before and the other after 1868, were urging the Japanese to establish a centralized state which would be recognizable as such by Western standards. So were those Japanese who had studied Western political models. For example, Terajima Munenori, a Satsuma man who had been one of Shimazu Nariakira's advisers in the 1850s and was to become Foreign Minister in 1873, wrote a memorial in November 1867 recommending that the lords surrender their domains. A little over a year later there was a similar proposal from one of the younger men, Itō Hirobumi of Chōshū. Itō had been briefly a student at University College, London, in 1863; was eventually to be Prime Minister and Prince; and was at this time governor of one of the areas taken over from the Tokugawa. National unity, he argued,<sup>2</sup> was essential if Japan were to be able 'to meet countries overseas on equal terms and have a civilised and enlightened form of government'. To achieve it, the independent power of the domains must be destroyed. For divided authority and a fragmented military force would make it impossible 'to avert foreign contempt and make the imperial prestige resplendent beyond the seas'.

Itō was a member of the so-called 'reform' faction in the early Meiji government, which urged the adoption of a wide range of Western ideas and institutions, not only because these were necessary to Japan's survival, but also—and increasingly—because they were 'civilised and enlightened'. Opposing them

<sup>1</sup> F.O. General Corres., Japan (F.O. 46), vol. 106: Parkes to Stanley, Confidential, No. 5, Yokohama, 13 Jan. 1869.

<sup>2</sup> In an undated memorial, written in December 1868 or January 1869. It is printed in *Itō Kō zenshū* (3 vols., Tokyo, 1927), vol. i, part 1 (separately paginated), pp. 165–8.



were conservatives who thought that this was to go too far and too fast: things Western were distasteful, they said, even though circumstances might make them inevitable in Japan. The conflict of views is not unlike that which obtained in the 1850s between the Tokugawa officials who welcomed, and those who only grudgingly accepted, the opening of treaty relations with the West. There is the difference that in the 1870s the argument had shifted to new ground, to a discussion of how far the Westernization of Japan should be permitted to go. There is also the difference that Japan by that time had a government which was capable of keeping its extremists in order. Ōkubo, Iwakura, and a few others were able, in the name of unity, to hold a balance between opposing groups until they judged it politically feasible to abolish the domains and begin dismantling the privileges of the samurai class. This opened the way for a spate of new measures in 1871–3 and a considerable strengthening of the 'reform' faction. In the same years the Iwakura mission to America and Europe gave an opportunity to key members of the government to see personally—and in the case of Iwakura and Ōkubo, for the first time—what was involved in the task of matching Western strength. As a result, they, too, became 'reformers', if less radical than some. By the end of 1873 Japan was set upon a modernizing course which could only have been substantially modified by the overthrow of the Meiji leaders themselves. This, no group was able to achieve. Indeed, the most effective opposition thereafter was to come from a 'popular rights' movement, which was no less committed to the pursuit of national strength than was the government whose authoritarian methods it deplored.

One conclusion to be drawn from all this is the not very startling one that Japan's approach to the revision of political institutions, even at the earliest stage, was conditioned by the same factors as applied to her modernization as a whole. The impetus came from fear of the West; the broad lines of development were determined by Japan's own needs and problems; and it was often no more than the form of what was done—perhaps, too, its rationale—that depended on foreign example.

This said, however, one is still left with some questions. Not least, why was it that Japan's response to the West was so effective, compared with that of other Asian societies? Why was it that in Japan nationalism—if this is indeed the explanation—was strong enough to overcome traditional attitudes and

bring about revolutionary changes in the distribution of political, social, and economic power?

It might be argued that in those Asian countries which were subjected to Western rule, nationalism was forced by circumstance into a preoccupation with the problems of 'liberation' to the exclusion of 'reform'. Be that as it may—and the subject is not capable of proper discussion here—the argument cannot easily be applied to China. China, after all, was never colonized by the West. More, she possessed from the beginning some of the characteristics which in Japan are held to have been conducive to the growth of nationalism—indeed, China's cultural cohesion and tradition of political unity were a good deal stronger than those of Japan—and she developed in the mid-nineteenth century among sections of her ruling class a similar set of attitudes concerning the dangers of Western encroachment. Thus it was a Chinese, Wei Yüan, writing in 1844, who put forward the idea of 'using the barbarian to control the barbarian', which exerted so great an influence on Japanese opinion in the next few years.<sup>1</sup> Yet China failed, before the twentieth century, to make those basic changes in social and political structure that might have made strength in the modern sense attainable to her; and when she *did* begin to make them, it was as the result of a revolution—or rather, a series of revolutions—which involved an almost complete rejection of the nation's past. China's nationalism, therefore, though it certainly became a vital political force, was very different in character from that of Japan.

China's 'failure' is as significant historically as Japan's 'success'. Comparative study of the two phenomena can throw a good deal of light on both. Nevertheless, it is with Japan that I am here concerned; and despite the attractions of the comparative theme, it is to Japan that I propose to limit my concluding remarks.

There are a number of factors which it is customary to cite in explanation of Japan's modernization. Some of them I have referred to already. In addition, one must recognize that the Japanese, conscious as they were of belonging to a civilization

<sup>1</sup> In the preface to his *Hai-kuo t'u-chih*, Wei Yüan described the purpose of his book as being 'to show how to use barbarians to fight barbarians, how to make the barbarians pacify one another, and how to employ the techniques of the barbarians in order to bring the barbarians under control'. The passage is translated in W. T. de Bary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition* (New York, 1960), p. 675.

that was in origin Chinese, may well have found it easier to accept the realities of Western superiority in certain spheres than they would have done had their own culture seemed to be an entirely indigenous growth. This has a direct importance for the study of political institutions. Tokugawa scholars and officials, trained in the Chinese tradition, were well aware that their country's form of government differed greatly from that of China. They were even accustomed to debating the respective merits of the two.<sup>1</sup> They found nothing very new, therefore, about advocates of bureaucracy questioning the virtues of 'feudalism', nothing deeply offensive about European systems of administration, which seemed, in fact, to have much in common with those of China.

Yet there is, I think, more to it than this. Japan, alone among the countries of Asia, developed a form of feudalism which bears close comparison with that of Western Europe, even though under the Tokugawa it had come to possess features which in Europe are to be found neither in feudalism nor in the early modern state. Thus in a wider perspective it can be said that Japan, too, moved from a feudal to an industrial society, as did, say, England and France, notwithstanding the great differences in timing and in the nature of the intermediate stages of historical growth. This, no doubt, accounts for some of the similarities between the Meiji Restoration and the English and French Revolutions. Indeed, it has been frequently argued by Japanese scholars, notably the economic historians of the 1920s and 1930s, that in the late Tokugawa period Japan was undergoing the same kind of changes as marked the breakdown of feudalism in Western Europe: the feudal nobility was losing its economic power to a rising merchant class; its political control was being challenged by peasant revolt; and government, both centrally and locally, was becoming more bureaucratic, less dependent on personal loyalties.

Recent work<sup>2</sup> has brought a change of emphasis. The search for the origins of what is called 'Meiji absolutism' has led historians to a concern with the *incompleteness* of such changes, rather than the changes themselves. They point to the inability of the Tokugawa merchant class to succeed either to political or

<sup>1</sup> See Asai Kiyoshi, *Meiji ishin to gunken shisō* (Tokyo, 1939), especially pp. 38-45.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Tōyama Shigeki, *Meiji ishin* (Tokyo, 1951); Seki Junya, *Hansei kaikaku to Meiji ishin* (Tokyo, 1956); and Shibahara Takuji, *Meiji ishin no kenryoku kiban* (Tokyo, 1965).

to economic power in the Meiji period. By this estimate the Meiji Restoration was clearly not a bourgeois revolution. Nor was it a proletarian one: peasant revolt was suppressed by the army and police of the new central authority, not eliminated by reform. Indeed, the goal of national strength, it is argued, was pursued to the detriment of both social justice and political equality within Japan.

The view advanced by economic historians in the 1920s was influenced by the knowledge of European history. That of post-war historians has often had its motivation in contemporary politics. But they have it in common that they see the origins of modern Japanese society *primarily* in developments which took place inside Japan, independent of Western influence. I think they overstate their case<sup>1</sup>—I hope this lecture will have helped to show why—but I am far from rejecting the argument altogether. For one thing, there are some aspects of modern Japanese history which cannot be satisfactorily explained by the thesis of Western influence alone, even when one includes in this, not merely the actions and example of the West, but also the effect of Japanese reactions to them. The composition of the new ruling class, though it took shape as a result of decisions made by the Meiji government—legislation concerning samurai privilege, landholding, taxation, and so on—depended in the last resort on social changes which had already taken place before 1868. Similarly, traditional attitudes and institutions did not invariably make way for Western, or modern, alternatives, at least down to 1945. The 'emperor system' is one example of this. The Confucian ethic and the nature of personal relationships within the family, the firm, and the community, are others.

To return, then, to our question about why Japan's response to the West was so much more effective in modifying basic national institutions than was nineteenth-century nationalism elsewhere in Asia. The explanation seems to rest on two assertions: first, that Japanese nationalism itself was for a variety of reasons stronger than that of other Asian countries, in the sense of engaging the emotions of a substantial proportion of the population and so becoming a considerable political force; second, that it had its impact on a society which was already changing in ways which were more or less appropriate, rather than hostile,

<sup>1</sup> Some leading Japanese historians also think so, not always for the same reasons: see, for example, Oka Yoshitake, *Kindai Nihon no keisei* (Tokyo, 1947); Sakata Yoshio, *Meiji ishin shi* (Tokyo, 1960); and perhaps one should also include Tanaka Akira, *Meiji ishin seiji-shi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1963).

to the emergence of a modern state. The two strands are not easy to disentangle from each other. Nor is it likely that the evidence will ever enable us to decide with confidence which of them should be given the greater weight. Nevertheless, the study of the relationship of the one to the other, of the external factors to the internal, of the political to the socio-economic, is of a kind which has a fascination and an importance for the historian, such as to make it unlikely that the debate concerning it will quickly end.