

INTRODUCTION

The seventeenth annual Midwest Conference on Asian Affairs—held at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, fell in the hundredth year since the boy-emperor Mutsuhito, in a Kyoto ceremony, chose the reign name Meiji, marking the onset of a period of rapid change in Japanese society. It was thus appropriate to use this centennial, a time for celebrations, commemorative publication, and historical controversy in Japan, as the focus of the 1968 Conference program. Not all the papers presented dealt with Japan and the Meiji era, but the best of those that did have been gathered together in this volume.

We were very fortunate in having as our keynote speaker at Kalamazoo—whose lecture then became the first selection within these covers—one of the leading specialists in Japanese history, Professor Marius Jansen of Princeton University. Professor Jansen paints in broad strokes, but with the sure hand of a master calligrapher, the character of and causes for change in the Meiji period. In his comments on the pattern of change, now usually referred to as modernization, he focuses on the nature of leadership and on the context in which these leaders worked.

Professor Jansen reminds us that despite the comparative orderliness of Japan's rapid transformation, there was much confusion. Confusion extended from feudal rulers to peasants when they were confronted with new institutions, new roles to play, and new patterns of power. Some were so frustrated by this confusion that they sought to restore important aspects of the old order by destroying the most "objectionable" representatives

of the new. Professor Jansen points out that these opponents of change more often became popular heroes than did the major leaders of the Restoration. Thus prominent assassins often gained widespread sympathy and even respect.

Professor Sidney Brown of the Department of History of Oklahoma State University describes in some detail in his contribution one of the most important assassinations in the Meiji era, and the public reaction to it. The assassins were in the tradition of the *shishi*, self-styled "men of high purpose," who were usually ex-samurai. Loyalty, duty, courage, and daring were their watchwords; direct action was their style. While such men directed their attack against the shogunate in its last days, after the Meiji Restoration their commitment was to the old order. In both eras they acted in the name of the emperor.

Professor Jansen has pointed out some of the continuities in Japanese life from Meiji to the present. In that spirit it might be appropriate to suggest a link all the way from the feudal swordsmen who cut down the home minister in 1878 to the student revolutionists of today. The link with contemporary rightists is more obvious, but despite their very different goals, even the neo-Marxist-anarchist in Tokyo today seems to share something of the *shishi* style. Courage in action, devotion to an "ideologically" defined duty, and loyalty to fellow conspirators are at least as important as the ultimate objective, often only dimly viewed.

Professor Barbara Teters, of the Department of Political Science of Iowa State University, has contributed a chapter which

describes a different type of assassin, in no sense a popular hero, and in this case unsuccessful in his attempt on the life of the visiting Romanov crown prince, Nicholas. This instance reminds us that such acts of violence against key figures have more than once been used by Japanese who wanted to change the direction of their nation's foreign policy. (There was, therefore, a very sound basis for the decision to cancel President Eisenhower's trip to Japan in 1960.)

Professor Teters' paper concentrates more, however, on the impact of this incident on Japanese judicial practice than on the motivation or fate of the assassin. Thanks to the forceful personality and firm convictions of the chief justice of the supreme court, the catalyst of an assassin's daring did not erode, but actually strengthened, a judicial system which, at least in its higher reaches, was struggling for independence from political intervention. In this piece on the Otsu Jiken, Professor Teters is more impressed with the order than with the disorder in this stage of Japanese modernization.

The two subsequent pieces in this volume concern the impact of Meiji Japan abroad. Much has been written about Japanese expansionism in the Meiji era. That is certainly one of the less happy aspects of this remarkable period, an aspect which receives more attention from Japanese than from American scholars. But here, in pioneering research in original sources, Professor Frank Wong, Department of History, Antioch College, and Professor E. Thadeus Flood of the Department of History of the Univer-

sity of Santa Clara have described aspects of the spill-over of Meiji Japan into Asia.

Professor Wong's chapter discusses the significance of the Meiji constitution for Ch'ing reformers in Peking. Despite the close study the Chinese made of the Japanese polity—remarkable in itself for a people accustomed to being Japan's cultural creditor, not debtor—Meiji-style reforms were not effected in China in time to save the throne. In fact, the attempt to do so in The Hundred Days was overturned by the backward-looking empress dowager. It is doubtful, however, whether the empire would have survived even if the Japanese model had been faithfully followed. Professor Jansen's stress, in his essay, on the favorable context in explaining the "successes" of the Meiji period seems to point up the "failures" in the case of China.

In the midst of speculation today about whether the Japanese pattern of modernization is applicable to Asia's many "late-starters," it is well to remember that even in the late nineteenth century, when it was most relevant, it was not emulated. Professor Wong points out that despite considerable knowledge of Japanese experience, Chinese officials interpreted what they learned in terms of their own stake in the regime. Thus the reforms finally instituted in the twilight of the Ch'ing dynasty were something less than sweeping.

Thailand, like China, had an ancient monarchy reeling from the blows of Western impact. She did not have the degree of contact with Japan that China did, however. She did not share a

cultural tradition, nor was she threatened by Japan's remarkable military ascendancy. Furthermore, by learning directly from the West, the Thai under King Mongkut had begun the modernization process even before the accomplishments of the Meiji era became known to them. It is not surprising, therefore, that Professor Flood, despite extensive research in Thai archives, has found no evidence that Bangkok reformers saw Japan as their model.

This is not because the Thai were ignorant of Japanese developments. Like the Chinese, they sent a constitutional study mission to Tokyo. They also became aware of the enterprising Meiji spirit through the escapades of ex-samurai adventurers. This Professor Flood calls Thailand's "*shishi* interlude." In an excess of zeal and a dearth of planning or common sense, the *shishi* failed miserably in their efforts to establish Japanese agricultural colonies in Thailand. Despite some financial backing in both Japan and Bangkok, persistent failure dried up even this support. Though preaching Pan-Asianism and anti-Westernism, the adventurers did not strike a sympathetic chord in the Thai elite, who remained very open to Western influences.

Returning to the *shishi*—where we began in Professor Brown's research—we are reminded that they influenced not only the style of later domestic politics but that of foreign policy as well. There are striking parallels, for instance, in the attitudes of the nineteenth-century *shishi* in Thailand and of the more idealistic proponents of the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere;

e.g., Colonel Suzuki, who led the Burma Independence Army in 1941. This is, of course, no hoary plot, but simply a common thread in outlook and behavior of one type of Japanese.

This collection of studies on Meiji Japan was originally undertaken in connection with the aforementioned centennial. As Professor Jansen points out, the centennial itself, as well as the meaning of the Meiji Restoration, has been a subject of great controversy in Japan.* Present-day ideological commitments cause scholars to raise the basic issue whether Japan's history is triumph or shame, something to be honored or scorned. The counterestablishment suspects the government of using the Meiji centenary to glorify the past in order to build support for conservative policies.

American scholars would certainly prefer to simply note that 1968 is one hundred years after 1868 and to stay clear of this argument. But the American viewpoint has itself become a subject of debate. In fact, many more than the Marxist scholars in Japan criticize American historians for painting too bright a picture of Japan's modernization. Too little attention, it is said, is paid to the dark side, the violence, the human costs of Japan's progress. Some Americans would counter that Japanese intel-

* For a fuller discussion see John W. Hall, "Reflections on a Centennial," *Journal of Asian Studies*, XXVII: 4 (August 1968), 711-20.

lectuals often appear to be congenital pessimists, reluctant to give fair weight to the good alongside the bad.

And yet there may be some validity in the Japanese scholars' critique. Even if there is, however, it can hardly be applied to this volume. While none of us would deny the remarkable achievements of the Meiji era, of which Professor Jansen takes note, the studies here remind the reader of the persistence of certain feudal values and thus of the unevenness of progress. Some American scholars—especially those who are not Japan specialists—may be so impressed with Japan's ability to maintain internal order during spectacular economic growth that they would subtly suggest to today's modernizers in Asia that Japan is worthy of emulation. The last two papers of *this* volume have described two cases in which the "Japanese model" was not followed. Yet China and Thailand were the only other independent monarchies in Asia at the turn of the century, those polities in which the Meiji reforms would seem to have been most applicable.

This volume makes no pretense at grand theory or at dramatic new discovery. Nor can any work of diverse authorship hope to be entirely consistent in its interpretations. But if American scholars have ever been guilty of over-selling Meiji accomplishments, the error is not repeated here.

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