

The Origin and Nature of the Genro

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INTRODUCTION

In nearly all discussions in Japanese or in English of the development of political institutions in Meiji Japan, mention is made of the Genro as the crucial policy- and decision-making body in the political process. However, little information has been gathered and systematically presented as to the origin, nature, and role of this powerful group of men. The Genro was not a legally constituted body; neither its membership nor its functions were formally defined. As a result definitive statements about it are difficult to make; historical evidence is scanty and at times leaves the student to speculate on matters of process and definition. However, in view of the increased interest in Meiji political history, especially interest in the political leadership of the period, it is important to review the available evidence in an attempt to establish as clearly as possible the origin and nature of the Genro as a political institution. When did it become a recognizable and definable body? Who belonged to it? What were the conditions which produced it? What were its primary functions and how did these fit into the total process of political life in Japan in the Meiji period? These last two questions are open-ended and would require investigation far beyond the confines of a brief article. However, some attempt will be made to raise questions in this area of analysis and interpretation and to point out possible avenues for further exploration.

This article will attempt to establish the date from which the term Genro becomes an accepted and clearly defined designation for the small group of men at the center of political power in Meiji Japan. It will attempt to establish who these men were and what their functions were as members of the Genro. It will further attempt

to analyze the political process out of which the Genro as an institution evolved, relating this process to the larger fabric of political history. This is, to my knowledge, the first attempt in English to focus on this problem and, therefore, will need correction, addition, and supplementation. If this study can effectively draw attention to the necessity for further investigation of the nature and function of the Meiji leaders and their roles, individually and as a group, in the process of political development in modern Japan, it will have served a worthy function.

The sources for any study of the Genro are at the same time too voluminous and extremely scanty. Much primary source material in the form of documents, diaries, and letters (in particular such collections as the Ito and Yamagata-Ke Monjo) is available for each of the members of the group. In addition, political biographies, analyses of the events of Meiji history, and studies of political institutions (e.g. Oka, *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi*, Tsuji, *Nihon kaoryo-sei no kenkyū*)¹ all deal in one way or another with the role and actions of the Genro. However, none of this material, with one or two notable exceptions which will be discussed later, focuses substantial attention on what factors produced the institution and when it became a definable reality. For the purposes of this study, therefore, most of this material is of little help. Fortunately there is one source of information which is directly relevant to this investigation, and on which I have relied heavily; this is part of a book by Yamada Shikazō, *Seiji kenkyū* ("The Study of Politics").² The first half of this book contains an essay entitled "The Process of the Establishment of the Cabinet System in Japan as Viewed in the Press" ("Shimbunshi yori mitaru Nihon ni okeru naikaku seiritsu no keisūki"). Yamada was a promising young political scientist at Tokyo University in late Taishō. He carried out this research as part of a program of graduate study there. His work is carefully documented and represents a major contribution to the study of Meiji leadership. The other major source of information for this study has been the newspaper files held in the Meiji Shimbun Zasshi Bunko at Tokyo University. Through the references provided by Yamada, I have been able to check carefully, not only his statements but those of others who have written more casually about the Genro. In addition to these two sources I have consulted the standard bibliography in Japanese in the field of modern Japanese political history for

interpretive and analytical statements about the Genro. In most of these there is a surprising lack of attention given to the institution. In the twenty-volume *Nihon rekishi daijiten* there is not even an entry. Only in two books, Professor Oka's *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi* ("A Political History of Modern Japan") and the *Taiheiyo sensô genin ron* ("A Discussion of the Causes of the Pacific War"), compiled by the Nihon Gaiko Gakkai,³ is there significant discussion of the Genro. Both of these treat its origin, nature, and role only briefly.

Before dealing in some detail with the results of my investigation let me state briefly the conclusions I have reached. First, I have established with some certainty that the term Genro was first used in 1892 by the press independently in a well-defined context to refer to a particular group of men as an institution. It would be unwise to attempt to set the date too exactly since the use of such a term in common parlance could only be established over a period of time. It appears in the *Chôya shûbun* for August 9, 1892. I have not been able to find the term used independently before this date, so it seems reasonable to suggest the year 1892 as the period within which the term appeared as a distinct designation for the group. Second, the Genro emerged in the years 1885-1892 as a result of the interplay of complex political forces. Its role is directly related to the establishment of the cabinet system in 1885, and its prototype performed the function of mediator and adjustor of the roles of the formal organs of government in a variety of contexts until its clear acceptance and identification as an institution. This much can be stated with some certainty. In addition, I have attempted to construct a framework within which the origin and emergence of the Genro could be analyzed in their relation to the political process as a whole.

THE GENRO DEFINED

Until recently a common mistake in discussing the Genro has been to assume that the group was related to the legally constituted body known as the Genro-in. There is no relationship between the two that I have been able to find, and I am aware of no serious scholarly research which suggests such a link.

The Genro-in was established by an Imperial command on April 14, 1875, as part of a reorganization of the Dajôkan; it was charged

with legislative functions. Its first president was Prince Arisugawa; Gotō Shōjirō was appointed vice-president. In September, 1876, it received an imperial command to draft a memorandum on the establishment of a national constitution, and a Constitutional Investigation Bureau was set up by it. Its importance declined rapidly after 1881, and it was finally abolished October 20, 1890.

The term Genro (elder or senior statesman) is an old one originating, as so many such appellations and phrases do, in the Chinese classics: specifically, it appears in the *Shih Ching* (Shi Kci). Most dictionary discussions of it relate it to the term Genkun (veteran statesman) and say that both terms are used to refer to men who have served the state with distinction. Even in the dictionary the terms are both usually linked with the Meiji leaders by some reference to "Meiji no Genkun; Genro Seiji-ka." There is much in both the dictionary and encyclopedia discussions to suggest that Genkun is the prior and more general term, the use of Genro evolving during the Meiji Period and acquiring more specific institutional meaning. Moreover, the historical evidence which I have found supports this interpretation. Therefore, I shall deal briefly with the term Genkun before discussing the emergence of the Genro as a separate and identifiable term.

The term Genkun derives from a poem by the Chinese emperor Liao Chien (sixth century) in which he uses it to refer to a distinguished servant of the state. More specifically, in Japan it comes to be used for those direct advisers of the emperor who were expected to answer Imperial queries regarding matters of state. The *Seijigaku jiten* ("Dictionary of Political Science")⁴ says that the term was applied generally to those who served with distinction during and after the Restoration. By the mid-1880's it was widely used in the press in the phrase "Isshin no Genkun" to refer to the members of the oligarchy. It is certain members of this group who, in the 1890's, come to be designated as the Genro. Let us see how this transition took place.

Through several pieces of evidence, we can trace the process of change from the use of Genkun to refer to the oligarchs as a whole, to the use of Genro to refer to a clearly defined, though never legally constituted, group in the inner circle of Meiji politicians. The first piece of evidence appears in the Imperial Rescript of April 28, 1888, which announced the establishment of the Privy Council. The

Rescript begins, "I hereby select veteran statesmen (*Genkun*) and other skilled and able persons . . ." Commentators are agreed that this use of the term *Genkun* becomes a specific point of reference from this time on. Furthermore, it is used to refer to eight men (Ito, Yamagata, Inoue, Ôyama, Kuroda, Matsukata, Yamada, and Saigo). This view is supported by the imperial letters sent in turn to Ito, Kuroda, and Yamagata after they had resigned from office as premier. Ito and Kuroda each received such a letter on November 1, 1889. Ito's letter read, "I look upon you, Count Ito Hirobuni, Imperial Adviser, noble of the rank of Jû Ni-i Kun Itto, as one to whom I can continue to look for advice as a minister of state. I further hereby make clear that it is my pleasure to consider you a *Genkun*." Yamagata received the same letter May 7, 1891, at the time of the announcement of the first Matsukata Cabinet.

The formal designation of these three men as "*Genkun*" seems, in hindsight, to have been an important step in the transition to the use of the term *Genro*. Insofar as these letters gave formal definition to the term *Genkun*, they made it less satisfactory as a general term for the oligarchy as a whole, or for the inner group who held political power. At the same time, in the period from 1889-1892, with the promulgation of the Constitution and the establishment of parliamentary government, the public identification of this small group of oligarchs as the true holders of power called forth the use of a new term and helped to give it clear definition. The emergence of the institution and the establishment of the term reflected the process of struggle and adjustment among the various factors in the political equation, a process that had been clearly identifiable from the time of the establishment of the cabinet system in 1885. We shall return to some discussion of this process later. It is important now to establish when the term was first used, to whom it referred, and what functions the *Genro* as an institution performed.

I have checked carefully the key issues of two of the leading newspapers of the period 1885-1892 (the *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun* and the *Chôya shimbun*). The first use of the term appears to have been in the issue of August 9, 1892, of the *Chôya shimbun* where the following entry appears:

The *Genro* have been meeting regularly since August 2 in order to settle the question [of the new cabinet] while the people have been waiting and wondering . . . If this cabinet is a lineup of the *Genkun*

then . . . As they established the new Cabinet [the second Ito Cabinet] the various Genro must have been thinking deeply about the problems [of instability] which have plagued previous cabinets. These have resulted from internal division not external attack . . .

Here in two separate places the term is used independently to designate an institutional grouping with a clearly implied function, that of creating the new cabinet. It is also noteworthy that the term Genkun is used in this context with a meaning that is clearly distinct and lacks any institutional nuance.

There are a number of other earlier references to the Genro, but these are not well substantiated, and in some cases seem to be premature uses of the term. Yamada Shikazō in his book refers at a number of points to the growth in the power of the Genro. In discussing the formation of the first Yamagata Cabinet in 1889 he says, "One finds no mention of the Genro Kaigi in the newspapers, but there are numerous references to secret meetings of various ministers."⁵ In reference to the formation of the first Matsukata Cabinet in May, 1891, he says, "From this article [from the *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun* for May 8] one can see clearly that this is the time of the emergence of the power of the Genro." Actually the article itself deals more with Ito's individual role as a mediator in the formation of the cabinet than with the oligarchs as a group, so that Yamada appears to be drawing a more substantial inference from this than is justified.

For a period of several years before the term Genro became established, several other colloquial references were current in addition to the use of Genkun. One of these was Rokuhaku—referring to the six counts who were the so-called "Genkun." There are frequent references in the press to meetings of the "Rokuhaku Kai."⁶ Often Sat-Cho was added to Genkun and their meetings were referred to as the Sat-Cho Genkun Kai. Another common term for these meetings was the Kuromaku Kai. (Kuromaku means the black curtain and refers to those who met in secret. It also suggests a manipulator behind the scenes.) The individuals were sometimes referred to as the Kuromaku Genkun.⁷

It is clear that the formation of the second Ito Cabinet represents an important landmark in the development of Meiji political institutions and especially in the emergence and public identification of the Genro as an institution. The Cabinet itself was known as the

last Genkun Cabinet. The term Genro came into use from this time on, so that by 1896, when the second Matsukata Cabinet was formed, a newspaper headline read "Shōhaku, Genro to Beibetsu" ("Matsukata Breaks with the Genro").⁸ Newspaper discussions of political affairs by this time carry frequent references to the Genro so that the term has come to have a well-accepted institutional meaning.

The clearest, most direct summary analysis of the emergence of the Genro is given by Yamada in the last section of his essay which is entitled "The Constitution and Convention." He says:

My thought is that those various rules of custom which are especially associated with cabinet formation cannot be considered either specifically constitutional or specifically unconstitutional. There I should next like to set forth examples of these rules which I shall call the "conventions" related to the process of cabinet formation in Japan. . . .

Section I Those who recommend candidates
for the post Premier-designate

(1) *Genro* By about 1892 it appears that the new candidate for premier was being selected and recommended to the throne . . . through consultations carried on extra-legally by a group of elder politicians in meetings known variously as the Kuromaku-Kai, the Sat-Cho Genkun-Kai, and the Roku-haku Kai. In time these meetings came customarily to be called the Genro Shūkai and finally today they generally are called the Genro Kaigi. Those who were included in this group and designated as Genro appear to have been the following ten: Ito Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo, Inoue Kaoru, Kuroda Kiyotaka, Yamada Akiyoshi, Ōyama Iwao, Saigo Tsugumichi, Matsukata Masayoshi, Katsura Tarō, and Saionji Kimmochi. There were, of course, in addition one or two others who may have received the imperial summons for questioning but it is not clear whether these "Genkun" actually received the summons or not. In addition [it should be noted that] except for Saionji, these ten were all from the Satsuma or Chōshū Han. There are such elder politicians as Ōkuma Shigenobu and Itagaki Taisuke who are omitted from those referred to as "Genro." In short, I believe that this situation resulted from the special circumstances and events of history after the Restoration, and from the power and personalities of those men who are included as Genro.

Yamada says in commenting on the establishment of the second Yamagata Cabinet of November, 1899:⁹

The thing we must note in this is that the power and influence of the Genro in the process of cabinet formation is more and more being

systematized. This is perhaps because the comparative ease with which political power—power which they had passed to the parties [at the time of the Ōkuma-Itagaki Cabinet in June, 1898] in a moment of wavering self-confidence—had returned to them gave them a sense of the position which they as Genro had attained.

A piece in the *Tokyo nichinichi* for November 5, 1898, further substantiates such a view. It said:

Since the establishment of the Meiji Constitution it has almost without exception become the settled practice for the veteran politicians known as Genro or Genkun to be summoned for questioning by the Emperor whenever a cabinet crisis occurs. When this happens it is more common for these men to consult together and report jointly than for them to present their view individually. Occasionally their conference takes place as an imperial audience [*Gozen Kaigi*] as, for instance, in June of this year when Marquis Ito resigned. Therefore the Genro actually carry responsibility as [political] advisers of the highest rank although they do not have any status in the administrative system, nor is such an organization provided for in the Constitution. This status has been conferred only through natural evolution and convention.

In distinguishing between who is a Genro and who is not there is no absolute criterion [by which to judge]. If you use the criterion of those who clearly received the Imperial designation as "Genkun who would henceforth be regarded as Daijin" then there are only two, Ito and Yamagata. [Actually Kuroda also received such an imperial letter.] If one considers those who received imperial letters of appreciation for their service when they resigned, Ōkuma and Itagaki as well as Count Hijikata must be included. However, the group actually has always been restricted to the Sat-Cho group of four Marquises (Ito, Yamagata, Ōyama, and Saigo), and three Counts (Kuroda, Matsukata, and Inose). Essentially the name Genro is used exclusively for those elder politicians who had served as Sangi [in the old *Dajōkan*]. [Actually Ōkuma and Itagaki had been Sangi, so the author of the article is confused on this point.]

Of course these men did not designate themselves as Genro. The Emperor selected the seven as recipients of imperial questions, and accordingly the public, too, attached this name to them. So it appears that in point of fact, we have a unique organ for response to imperial questions about the most important matters of state, which has been added to the highest political institutions of the Empire without any constitutional provision having been made for it.¹⁶

Yamada later quotes an Asahi press correspondent, Hayashida

Kametaro, who wrote an article entitled "Direct Conversations with Prince Ito on the Position of the Genro." Hayashida says that Ito told him:

There was no provision [for the Genro's position] in the Constitution itself. However, it developed because the Meiji Emperor gave to the [members of the] Genro commands to the effect that in the matter of cabinet formation the Genro and others (*naoto* --) after consulting among themselves should obtain imperial sanction [for their candidate].¹¹

With these contemporary analyses and Yamada's comments in mind it is appropriate to turn to present-day analyses and interpretations of the Genro system. Professor Oka comments on the Genro as follows:

One thing related to the establishment of the cabinet system of which we must take note is the Genro system. After the cabinet system had been set up the Emperor sought the advice of a few men who were known as the "Ishin no Genkun," in order to decide who should be designated to organize the next cabinet when a political change was in order. In this way it became the custom for the premier-designate to be the man whom these men recommended after consultation among themselves. As a result the men who answered the formal Imperial inquiry came by popular custom to be called the Genro. Ito Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo, Inoue Kaoru (all of Choshu) Matsukata Masayoshi, Saigo Tsugumichi, and Oyama Iwao (from Satsuma) were the ones so recognized. The Genro thus constituted occupied a *de facto* position; their position had no legal basis in the political system. Nevertheless these men actually performed a very important function as "cabinet makers." However, the Genro, as I have indicated, were all men from either Satsuma or Choshu, and so the power of the Hanbatsu through this position of their members as Genro continued very strong in political affairs.¹²

It should be noted that Professor Oka omits Yamada Akiyoshi from his list, whereas Yamada Shikazō had included him. This can be explained, perhaps, by the relatively minor role which Yamada played in political affairs. He was a military man who made an important contribution to the Restoration cause, but he does not seem to have been an important member of the so-called Genkun group. Further research is needed on the roles of Yamada, Saigo, and Oyama.

The one other statement of significance which I have found in secondary sources appears in the book, *Taiheiyō sensū genin ron*. An early chapter in the book includes a discussion of the role of the Genro as part of an analysis of the position of the Emperor and his chief advisers. This is a careful and enlightening analysis. I quote from it at some length:

Next we turn to a discussion of the Genro. When was the unique position of the Genro established? It goes without saying that from the beginning the Meiji government was in actuality a Sat-Cho Hanbatsu government. Then, by the revisions of December, 1885, the structure of the Dajōkan with the Sa- and U-daijīn, which posts had been held by various members of the Kuge and other nobility, was abolished. From then on we had a Sat-Cho government in both name and fact. The first Ito Cabinet, and the Kuroda Cabinet which followed it, were staffed from the beginning by the Sat-Cho Genkan (Ito, Yamagata, Inoue, Kuroda, Matsukata, and Saigo). However, in the next cabinet [Yamagata's first which was organized in December, 1889] while Ito, Inoue and Kuroda stayed outside, Ito was frequently consulted by the Emperor regarding a variety of matters. When in 1891 Yamagata announced to the Emperor his intention to resign, the Emperor first sent the Imperial Household Minister, Hijikata, to Ito to ask his consent to the move. Ito replied, "It is inappropriate and rather awkward for one who is outside the government to receive an imperial question on such an important matter of state as the resignation of cabinet ministers . . ." Nevertheless he did reply and recommended that either Saigo or Matsukata would be [proper] candidates. In due time the first Matsukata Cabinet was formed. Ito, Yamagata, Inoue, and Kuroda stayed out of this cabinet but worked behind the scenes (in the so-called Kuromaku-Kai) as its guardians or sponsors, and Ito and the others responded frequently to imperial questions.

In July, 1892, when Matsukata resigned, Ito, Yamagata, Kuroda, and the others received the Imperial query regarding a successor, and as a result of their joint consultation the second Ito Cabinet emerged. Thus it was because the so-called Sat-Cho clique held political power that the conventions of having the top Sat-Cho men recommend the next premier, reply to imperial queries, and become the sponsors of the cabinet came into being, in spite of the fact that there was no legal basis for such action.

The Genro group originally consisted of Ito, Yamagata, and Inoue of Choshu, and Kuroda, Matsukata, Saigo, and Ōyama of Satsuma, but with Kuroda's death in 1900 and Saigo's death in 1902, by the time of the first Katsura Cabinet we entered a time called the five Genro

Period (Go-Genro Jidai) (i.e., Ito, Yamagata, Inoue, Matsukata, and Oyama). Since Katsura was a protégé of the five Genro they answered imperial questions on secret matters of state and took an active role as sponsors of the Katsura cabinet itself. During the Russo-Japanese War Ito, as President of the Privy Council, and Yamagata, as Chief of the General Staff, participated in the Supreme War Council. At the same time there were many conferences which included the five Genro and the important ministers of state. Thus from the time of the first Katsura Cabinet the Genro system became clearly established. Since a comparatively junior follower of the Genro had become Premier the weight of the Genro's influence increased, and they came to participate not only in the selection of the next premier but also in decisions on important matters of foreign affairs and internal politics. It looked as if they had become the top leaders in the political affairs of the nation. This situation continued even after 1900 when the top Genro, Ito, died, and the system remained strong on into the Taisho Period. In 1915 Inoue died and the next year [1916] Oyama also, but Yamagata remained in good health and preserved the dignity and power of the institution. In 1922 when he died, as might have been expected, the institution began to fade. (In 1924 after Matsukata died, Saionji Kimmochi alone was left.)¹³

The above analyses and comments are, I believe, sufficient to indicate the nature and importance of the role the Genro played, as well as the composition of the group. Further discussion of the effects of the Genro system on constitutional government would be appropriate were we to consider in detail political developments in the Taisho and early Showa periods. Professors Minobe and Yoshino both take the position that the Genro performed an essential function, given the immature state of Japanese political institutions during Meiji, Taisho, and early Showa. However, for the purposes of this article it is perhaps sufficient to make note of this as an important question needing further attention. It would be particularly helpful in studying the matter to examine the period after the deaths of Yamagata (1922) and Matsukata (1924) when Saionji was left as the only Genro. There appeared in the mid-1920's an idea, perhaps supported by Saionji himself, known as the Genro Muyo Ron (the thesis that the Genro [system] was no longer essential).

THE GENRO AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS

Having traced the emergence of the Genro, attempted to establish when the term became a definable concept, and indicated the formal role of the institution in Meiji politics, I should like to suggest very tentatively a framework within which the evolution of the Genro can be analyzed as part of the total political process in Meiji Japan.

A review of the political events of the seven-year period from 1885-1892 reveals certain striking organizational and theoretical innovations. The organizational innovations included the establishment of the cabinet system itself in 1885, the creation of the Privy Council in 1888, and the promulgation of the Constitution in 1889. Among the theoretical innovations were the idea of a Genkun Cabinet (1885), the concept of *Dōi Shugi* in cabinet formation (1888), and finally, bridging organization and theory and tying them together, the institution, and the idea of, the Genro. In the end the Genro as an institution came to play the role of mediator and adjuster within the government. In turn the oligarchs had created the cabinet system and the Privy Council in the expectation that they would be able through these to adjust their differences and maintain their power. These two structural devices failed to perform this function satisfactorily, and, after the promulgation of the Constitution, having turned once more, in desperation, to a Genkun cabinet, they settled finally upon the informal device of the Genro as the best means to accomplish their end.

With the death of Iwakura Tomomi in 1881 effective political control passed to the second generation of Meiji leaders- Ito, Yamagata, Inoue, and Matsukata. During the next decade this group, while formally grappling with the problems of creating a new political system, were informally experimenting with devices which could function as means of adjustment, compromise, and maintenance of political control by the group. The establishment of the cabinet system and the Privy Council were two evidences of this experimentation, but the public recognition of the existence of the Genro from 1892 on provides evidence of the ultimate device for control upon which the leaders settled.

The establishment of the cabinet system on December 22, 1885, was an event of major importance in Japanese political history. It

represented a significant developmental stage in the transition from the use of *ad hoc* or traditional institutions and official titles such as Dajō Daijin, to the modern political system which came into being with the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution February 11, 1889. This announcement of 1885 also reflected the interaction of forces which were emerging in internal politics, and was one formalization of the same response which also produced the Genro.

The challenge of the *Jiyū Minken Undo* (usually referred to as the Popular Rights Movement) in the early 1880's had shaken the Meiji leadership and forced the promise of constitutional government. This was followed by the establishment of the Constitutional Investigation Committee, and in 1885, by the setting up of the cabinet system. A brief examination of this latter event and some interpretations of it gives insight into the informal adjustments which were taking place within the group of leaders.

Professor Oka Yoshitake in his book says:

The setting up of the cabinet system was, as the foregoing explanation would indicate, a structural reform of great importance. However, it did not bring any change in the already firmly established political control exercised by the "Hanbatsu."¹⁴

Yamada quotes from the *Jiyū-to shi* ("History of the Liberal Party"), to the effect that "the implementation of the cabinet reform . . . represented the transfer of actual power at last into the hands of Ito, Inoue, and Yamagata as the successors to Okubo and Iwakura."¹⁵ As Professor Tsuji points out in his discussion of the establishment of the cabinet system, there were critics who saw it only as the tool of the Hanbatsu, but others such as Fukuzawa welcomed its creation as a step toward a full-fledged constitutional system.¹⁶ The *Jijū Shimpo*, which reflected Fukuzawa's position, spoke of the cabinet as performing the function of "Kanmin Chōwa" (bringing harmony to relations between the government and the people). Even the sharp critics in the *Jiyūto* and *Kaishintō* welcomed its creation as a step toward constitutional government while suggesting that in practice Hanbatsu control would be secured and strengthened. The *Chōya Shimbum*, which represented the *Jiyū-to* position, in an article entitled "Administrative Reform" (*Byōdō no Kaikaku*), saw in the changes a step forward in the preparation for establishing the Diet while at the same time

emphasizing that the nature of Hanbatsu control would remain unchanged.

Whichever interpretation one accepts, it seems clear that the cabinet system represented a recognition of the realities of Japanese politics while the former pattern had not. The new system provided what the leaders hoped would be a way to preserve their own positions in fact while in form they moved toward constitutional government. It enabled them to carry on policy deliberations within a satisfactory formal framework. The first cabinets were known as Gen-kun cabinets and represented the oligarchs' first response to the new system. (The emergence of the Genro in the 1890's was the final stage in this adjustment process as far as the Meiji Period was concerned.) The primary need in order to make the system function properly was a means of consultation and adjustment of differences among the members of the oligarchy. The cabinet was supposed to provide a framework for this and did so for a time. However, by 1888 this device was no longer working satisfactorily, and two new elements of theory and practice appear. One was the establishment of the Privy Council, announced in an Imperial Rescript on April 28, 1888; the other was the appearance of a theory of cabinet formation known as Dōi-Shugi (the theory that the cabinet should be made up of men who were in agreement on matters of policy).

The creation of the Privy Council provided the formal structure for this new development. Instead of having all the group that had come to be known as the "Genkun" enter it, the cabinet was organized and run by a nucleus of the oligarchs, while the remaining ones took posts in the Privy Council. This appears to have been done in an attempt to provide for smoother day-to-day governmental operation while preserving the total position of the oligarchy. There is evidence to support this in Ito's biography,¹⁷ as well as in secondary interpretations of the role of the Privy Council. In a letter to Inoue on April 20, 1888, Ito said:

This [the Privy Council] is my own invention . . . [and he continued] When we consider the principles of our Constitution, we see that sovereignty resides with the Imperial institution. Ultimate decision-making authority has been conferred on the Emperor through a specific clause in the Constitution. In any situation in which the cabinet and the Diet reach an impasse, there are two alternatives open to the Emperor. One is to receive the resignation of the cabinet; the other is

to dissolve the Diet. In such a case there is a need for an advisory organ which can give adequate advice to the Emperor after considering the total national picture and the feelings of the public. We must create the Privy Council to perform this function for there is no other adequate institution. This is what I have decided.

The Kuroda Cabinet took office on April 30, 1888, just two days after the establishment of the Privy Council. Ito became the first president of the Privy Council and thus, far from withdrawing from a political role after his resignation as premier, he was in a position to participate actively in politics from this new post. The absence of Ito and Inoue Kaoru from important positions in the Kuroda Cabinet is evidence of this new approach in which the cabinet is composed of a nucleus of oligarchs who can agree on day-to-day policy, the remainder operating behind the scenes and in the Privy Council. This mode of operation continued through the first Yamagata Cabinet and the first Matsukata Cabinet, but by then the pressures on the oligarchy from the opposition in the Diet and in the country as a whole caused this arrangement to break down. The Privy Council did not play an important role again until the 1920's and 1930's. (Appointment to it became a sinecure. Remember Ito's resentment over being forced to become president of the Privy Council in 1903?) Evidence that this was the case is provided by the following excerpt from the *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun* of November 5, 1898. This editorial criticizes the Privy Council and the Genro system saying:

... This being the case [the Privy Council now has little function], if we are to remove its deficiencies should we not reform it, changing its membership to include all of the so-called Genro and Genkun. . . . We deplore the fact that even though the Privy Councilors exist as members of the highest advisory organ, they do not assume the role of advisers in dealing with such important matters as cabinet changes, and instead, that role is assumed by the Genro Kaigi, an institution which looks like the Privy Council but has no constitutional status. After the next cabinet takes office, we hope that it will reconstruct the Privy Council, incorporating in its membership the real veteran statesmen and other men of ability, so that in the future when a cabinet crisis occurs, the issues in which imperial decision is necessary can be handled by the highest advisory organ.

The second Ito Cabinet was a return to the original Genkun principle of active participation in the cabinet by all the oligarchs

(though Matsukata was not a member) in an attempt to meet the internal political crisis precipitated by the repressive policies of the first Matsukata Cabinet.

This last Genkun Cabinet provided a solution to the immediate crisis, but for the long run a new device was needed. The emergence of the Genro was an *ad hoc*, but effective, means of providing for the adjustment of differences and the mobilization of support for the formal organs of government. Despite repeated challenges from the parties and the Diet it remained the locus of political power throughout the Meiji Period and continued to hold the balance of power in political decision-making well into the Showa Period.

The nature and significance of the Genro and its function as I have outlined it above can perhaps best be seen in the following analysis by Professor Inada in the *Taiheiyō sensō genin ron*:¹⁸

Although the existence of the Genro system originally was the reflection of the political power of the Sat-Cho clique, we should not lose sight of the fact that national political unity was preserved by this means.

The author then goes on to say that the Meiji Constitution was modeled on the Prussian, not the English, system and therefore left important areas of state which could not be controlled by either the Cabinet or the Diet. The Meiji Constitution assumed that the Emperor would give active leadership in these areas particularly, providing the needed unifying element in relations between the civil and military arms of government. In fact, however, the Meiji Emperor himself did not provide dynamic leadership, and so the Genro, as the men closest to him, began to assume this role on his behalf. Professor Inada then continues:

The reason that the inherent problem of dualism in the Meiji system did not appear at this time (i.e., in the Meiji Period) lies clearly in the fact that by means of the Genro, who were from the Sat-Cho clique, unified national political leadership was provided through their advice to the Emperor and to the Cabinet and the military.

He then points out, supporting his stand with specific examples, the fact that at the time of both the first Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War, important decisions were made, and unity was preserved, through the active participation of the Genro. As Professor Inada has so well stated, the Genro were the mediating and unifying element without which the Meiji system could not

have worked. The unsatisfactory experience which the Meiji leaders had in their attempts to use first the Cabinet and then the Privy Council is further evidence of the vital role which the institution came to play in this period.

This explanation of the origin and function of the Genro has attempted to indicate how it can be related to other events of the period. It suggests that much more work must be done on the roles of individuals as well as in institutional analysis. I hope it can serve as a spur to further study of political leadership in Meiji Japan.

NOTES

1. Oka Yoshitake, *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi*, Vol. I (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1962); Tsuji Kiyooki, *Nihon kōryō-sei no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Kōbun-sha, 1963).
2. Yamada Shikazō, *Seiji kenkyū* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1926).
3. Oka, *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi*, I, pp. 254-255, 304; Nihon Gaikō Gakkai (comp.), *Taishō seiji sensō genin ron* (Tokyo: Shimbun Gekkan-sha, 1953).
4. *Seijigaku jiten* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1957), p. 358.
5. Yamada, *Seiji kenkyū*, p. 35.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
7. *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun*, August 2, 1892.
8. *Ibid.*, September 20, 1896.
9. Yamada, *Seiji kenkyū*, p. 49.
10. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 49-50.
11. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 87-88.
12. Oka, *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi*, I, 254-255. Oka adds that in the Taishō Period Katsura Taro and Saionji Kimmochi were added to the Genro. Katsura was a Choshu man and so only Saionji, a Kuge, of all those who became Genro, was not from the Sat-Chō group.
13. *Taishō seiji sensō genin ron*, pp. 32-33.
14. Oka, *Kindai Nihon seiji-shi*, p. 253.
15. Yamada, *Seiji kenkyū*, p. 32.
16. Tsuji, *Nihon kōryō-sei no kenkyū*, pp. 84-86.
17. Shūmpō-kō Tsūshō Kai, *Isō Himbumi den*, Vol. II (Tokyo: Tōsei-sha, 1943), pp. 585-586.
18. *Taishō seiji sensō genin ron*, p. 34.