

Sources of Japanese Tradition

SECOND EDITION

VOLUME 2

INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS

Chapter 37

THE MEIJI RESTORATION

The Meiji Restoration, like the Taika Reform of the mid-sixth century, was a major turning point in Japanese history. Just as the Taika Reform opened Japan to the incorporation of new ideas and institutions from China, which led to a profound restructuring of the Japanese polity and society, so the Meiji Restoration opened Japan to similar influences from the West. While most scholars agree that the Meiji Restoration ushered in Japan's modern age by creating the political, economic, and social institutions that governed Japanese lives until World War II, both the nature and the interpretation of this event remain controversial. Was the Restoration a simple coup d'état in which one part of Japan's feudal elite replaced another? Was it a revolution? If a revolution, what kind of a revolution was it? Did the Restoration reflect class interests or ideology? Did the Restoration leaders have clear plans? Was the Restoration the product of internal changes that reflected the social and economic transformation of late Tokugawa Japan? Or was it largely foreign induced? Such questions continue to be debated by students of modern Japan and are still of great interest to historians. What is generally agreed, however, is that in its broad sense, the Meiji Restoration transformed Japan in less than forty years from a backward feudal nation into one of the world's great powers.

EDICT TO SUBJUGATE THE SHOGUN TOKUGAWA YOSHINOBU

In a narrow sense, the Meiji Restoration consisted of a coup d'état that was announced on January 3, 1868, when troops from Satsuma and Chōshū seized the Imperial Palace in Kyoto and declared an “imperial restoration.” Two months earlier, on November 9, 1867, in response to a request made by Ōkubo Toshimichi, Satsuma and Chōshū had obtained a secret imperial rescript to overthrow the shogunate. Its harsh language leaves it open to question, although it appears that Iwakura Tomomi vouched for its veracity.

Minamoto Yoshinobu [Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun], borrowing the authority of successive generations and depending on the strength of his pack of bandits, has wantonly impaired the loyal and the good, and has frequently disobeyed imperial commands. In the end, not fearing to distort the edicts of the late emperor, and not caring that he has plunged the populace into an abyss, his all-pervasive evil threatens to overturn the Land of the Gods. We are father and mother of the people. If We fail to strike down this traitor, what excuse shall We have to offer to the spirit of the late emperor? How shall We make Our profound amends to the people? This is the cause of Our grief and indignation. It is unavoidable that the period of mourning be disregarded. Implement the wishes of Our heart by slaughtering the traitorous subject Yoshinobu. When you have speedily accomplished this great deed to save the nation, you will enable the people to enjoy the lasting peace of the mountains. This is Our wish. See to it that you are prompt in carrying it out.

[Ishii, *Boshin sensō ron*, pp. 66–67; trans. in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, p. 115]

LETTER OF RESIGNATION OF THE LAST SHOGUN

Despite Yoshinobu's decision to restore political rule to the emperor on the same day (November 9, 1867), thereby formally terminating the Tokugawa shogunate, and despite efforts by moderates from Tosa such as Sakamoto Ryōma and Gotō Shōjirō to create a plan of government that would have included the Tokugawa in a new shared administration with other domains, the Satsuma and Chōshū loyalists decided to pursue the subjugation order and plunged the nation into the Boshin civil war, which lasted until the summer of 1869. Yoshinobu's willingness to submit to imperial authority and to surrender Edo Castle with minimal resistance can be attributed in part to his consciousness that in the background stood the aggressive Western powers that had already pressured Japan into signing the unequal treaties and appeared to be seeking further concessions. Even the last shogun was fully aware that Japan would have to become a centralized state in order to defend itself against the outside world, as his letter of resignation notes.

My ancestor [Tokugawa Ieyasu] received more confidence and favor from the Court than any of his predecessors, and his descendants have succeeded him for more than two hundred years. Though I fill the same office, almost all the acts of the administration are far from perfect, and I confess it with shame that the present unsatisfactory condition of affairs is due to my shortcomings and incompetence. Now that foreign intercourse becomes daily more extensive, unless the government is directed from one central authority, the foundations of the state will fall to pieces. If, however, the old order of things be changed, and the administrative authority be restored to the Imperial Court, and if national deliberations be conducted on an extensive scale, and the Imperial decision be secured, and if the empire be supported by the efforts of the whole people, then the empire will be able to maintain its rank and dignity among the nations of the earth.

[*Hōrei zensho*, 1867, p. 1; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, pp. 2–3]

EDICT TO FOREIGN DIPLOMATS

While the legitimacy of the new government was being contested on the battlefield, the Meiji leaders were quick to indicate to both domestic and foreign audiences the role and position of the emperor, Mutsuhito, who was still only a boy of sixteen. On February 3, 1868, the emperor issued the following edict.

The Emperor of Japan announces to the sovereigns of all Foreign countries and to their subjects that permission has been granted to the Shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu to return the governing power in accordance with his own request. We shall henceforward exercise supreme authority in all the internal and external affairs of the country. Consequently the title of Emperor must be substituted for that of Tycoon, in which the treaties have been made. Officers are being appointed by us to the conduct of foreign affairs. It is desirable that the representatives of the treaty powers recognize this announcement.

[Satow, *Diplomat in Japan*, p. 324]

THE CHARTER OATH

Placing the emperor squarely at the heart of the new polity, the Meiji leaders acted quickly to consolidate their rule. The Charter Oath of April 1868 is one of the most important and intriguing documents that was issued in the name of the young Meiji emperor by the men who carried out the Restoration. The oath is usually viewed as expressing the progressive side of the Restoration. It also has been interpreted as underscoring the generally hostile attitudes of the samurai from the western clans toward

the old order and their eagerness to make room for a new leadership group. While many historians have seen the Restoration as a top-down event in which one segment of the samurai class replaced another segment of that class in what T. C. Smith labeled “Japan’s aristocratic revolution,” more recent scholarship has come to view the Restoration not simply as a narrow political event and internal power shift but as a broader change in which new intellectual, economic, and social forces were at work in a way that included considerable bottom-up participation. The ferment of late Tokugawa society is now perceived not only through the lenses of the discontented samurai who, in the name of loyalty to the throne and antforeignism, wanted to create a new Japan but also through the social strife, discontent, and disorder expressed in new religions, millenarian movements, mass pilgrimages, urban riots, and peasant uprisings. As George Wilson noted, “The samurai elite and the popular movements were simultaneously groping for a new and stable order in Japan.”¹ There can be no question that the Charter Oath was designed as a general policy pronouncement intended to rally the greatest degree of popular support behind the Restoration. Its vagueness allowed it to be interpreted later along diverse lines, but it was equally difficult to overlook the strong focus on the public and popular concerns. This indicates that the new administration was not unaware of the broader changes apparent in late Tokugawa socioeconomic life.

By this oath, we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.

[*Meiji boshin*, pp. 81–82; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, p. 8]

THE CONSTITUTION OF 1868

The constitution of June 1868 was promulgated in the emperor’s name to confirm the original intentions of the Restoration leadership. Article I of the constitution reiterates

1. Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan*, p. 80.

the Charter Oath, and the rest of the document was designed to flesh out the original policy lines outlined in the earlier document. Articles II, III, V, and IX indicate that the writers of this document were influenced by Western concepts of representative government and attempted to implement the idea of the separation of powers. At the same time, the constitution shows that the Restoration leaders had to walk a fine line between asserting new prerogatives for the throne and court and avoiding an open attack on established feudal authority. The document provides further insights into the dual nature of the Restoration. It clearly shows the Meiji leaders considering Western constitutional ideas and democratic principles while simultaneously implementing a system of formal government structures based on the earlier centralized system borrowed from China in the seventh century. The administrative structure spelled out in the appendices of this document, which are not reproduced here, reveal that the Restoration leaders sought from the outset a strong government that would be administered by a ruling oligarchy. At the same time, they also felt compelled to cater to the new political forces that wanted greater public participation in government and a more popular system that might implement such participation. These elements, the search for top-down control and the desire for bottom-up participation in government, constituted the fundamental and often contradictory forces that shaped Japanese politics well into the twentieth century.

I. (Restates the Charter Oath)

II. All power and authority in the empire shall be vested in a Council of State, and thus the grievances of divided government shall be done away with. The power and authority of the Council of State shall be threefold, legislative, executive, and judicial. Thus the imbalance of authority among the different branches of government shall be avoided.

III. The legislative organ shall not be permitted to perform executive functions, nor shall the executive organ be permitted to perform legislative functions. However, on extraordinary occasions the legislative organ may still perform such functions as tours of inspection of cities and the conduct of foreign affairs.

IV. Attainment to offices of the first rank shall be limited to princes of the blood, court nobles, and territorial lords, and shall be by virtue of [the sovereign's] intimate trust in the great ministers of state. A law governing ministers summoned from the provinces (*chōshi*) shall be adopted, clan officials of whatever status may attain offices of the second rank on the basis of worth and talent.

V. Each great city, clan, and imperial prefecture shall furnish qualified men to be members of the Assembly. A deliberative body shall be instituted so that the views of the people may be discussed openly.

VI. A system of official ranks shall be instituted so that each [official] may know the importance of his office and not dare to hold it in contempt.

VII. Princes of the blood, court nobles, and territorial lords shall be accompanied by [no more than] six two-sworded men and three commoners, and

persons of lower rank by [no more than] two two-sworded men and one commoner, so that the appearance of pomp and grandeur may be done away with and the evils of class barriers may be avoided.

VIII. Officers shall not discuss the affairs of the government in their own houses with unofficial persons. If any person desire interviews with them for the purpose of giving expression to their own opinions, they shall be sent to the office of the appropriate department and the matter shall be discussed openly.

IX. All officials shall be changed after four years' service. They shall be selected by means of public balloting. However, at the first expiration of terms hereafter, half of the officials shall retain office for two additional years, after which their terms shall expire, so that [the government] may be caused to continue without interruption. Those whose relief is undesirable because they enjoy the approval of the people may be retained for an additional period of years.

X. A system shall be established for levying taxes on territorial lords, farmers, artisans, and merchants, so that government revenue may be supplemented, military installations strengthened, and public security maintained. For this purpose, even persons with rank or office shall have taxes levied upon them equivalent to one-thirtieth of their income or salaries.

XI. Each large city, clan, and imperial prefecture shall promulgate regulations, and these shall comply with the Charter Oath. The laws peculiar to one locality shall not be generalized to apply to other localities. There shall be no private conferral of titles or rank, no private coinage, no private employment of foreigners, and no conclusion of alliances with neighboring clans or with foreign countries, lest inferior authorities be confounded with superior and the government be thrown into confusion.

[*Meiji boshin*, pp. 87–89; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, pp. 8–10]

THE ABOLITION OF FEUDALISM AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF THE MEIJI STATE

The Restoration leaders were fully conscious of the need to create a newly centralized nation-state that could compete with the Western powers. To achieve this end, they realized that Japan would have to move beyond the decentralized feudal system, with its more than 250 separate feudal domains that had marked the Tokugawa age. Several crucial steps were taken to move ahead with the abolition of feudalism.

MEMORIAL ON THE PROPOSAL TO RETURN THE REGISTERS

In 1869 the lords of four of the most important feudal domains—Chōshū, Satsuma, Hizen, and Tosa—agreed to return their lands to the emperor and sent a memorial to

the throne to that effect. The Return of the Domain Registers, as this act was called, was followed by new administrative regulations to govern the *fu* (urban districts) and *ken* (prefectures).

Your servants again venture to address Your Majesty with profound reverence. Two things are essential to the Imperial administration. There must be one central body of government, and one sovereign authority which must be preserved intact. Since the time when your Majesty's ancestors founded this country and established a basis of government, all things in the wide expanse of heaven and all things on earth to its furthest limits, have belonged to the Emperor from generation to generation. This is what is known as "one central government." And the sole power of giving and of taking away, which renders it impossible for the nobles to hold the people in subjection in virtue of their land, or to deal with the smallest piece of ground at their pleasure, or to seize and treat despotically any individual of the humbler classes, this is what is understood by the term "one sovereign authority."

The administration of the Emperors was conducted entirely on this principle. They conducted the government in their own persons, the name and reality of power were combined, and consequently the nation was tranquil and contented. But from the time of the middle ages the administration became lax, and the authority of the Emperors came to be a plaything. . . . Everywhere men of influence, but of unprincipled character, took advantage of the existing disorder to promote their own interests, and the weak became food for the strong. . . . Finally the Mikado's [emperor's] government lost all real authority and was entirely dependent upon the will of the shogunate. The boundless despotism of the shogunate lasted for over six hundred years, and during this interval violent dealings with land and with the people were carried out by stealth under pretense of the Imperial authority. . . .

When the Tokugawa family rose to power, half the country was held by them and their relatives. In addition new families rose up. These houses took no heed of the question of whether their lands and subjects had been received in grant from the Imperial court. It was commonly said by members of these houses: "Our possessions were gained by the military power of our ancestors." But there is little doubt that those ancestors had originally raised forces, plundered the Imperial storehouses, and laid forcible hands on the treasures they contained and had braved the penalty of death in the execution of their designs. Those who break into storehouses are commonly termed robbers, but no suspicion was attached by the nation to those who seized upon the land and people. This confusion between right and wrong is terrible indeed.

Now that we seek to establish an entirely new form of government, it is incumbent on us to take care to preserve intact both one central body of government and one sovereign authority. The land in which your servants live is the land of the Emperor, and the people whom they govern are his subjects.

Neither the one, nor the other can belong to us. We entreat Your Majesty to issue such Imperial Decrees as may be deemed necessary to deal with the lands and the people of the four clans represented in this memorial, and to make such changes as Your Majesty may think proper. We also beg that all laws, decrees, and military regulations, extending even to military dress and accouterments, may be issued by the Central government, so that all matters of state may be decided by one and the same authority. In this way both name and reality will be secured, and this country will be placed upon a footing of equality with foreign powers. . . .

[*Hōrei zensho*, 1869, p. 42; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, pp. 29–32]

IMPERIAL RESCRIPT ON THE ABOLITION OF THE *HAN*

On August 29, 1871, an imperial rescript formally disbanded the feudal domains (*han*) and promulgated the prefectural system across the nation. In effect, this spelled the end of feudalism in Japan.

We are of the opinion that in a time of radical reform like the present, if We desire by its means to give protection and tranquillity to the people at home and to maintain equality with foreign powers abroad, words must be made to mean in reality what they claim to signify, and the government of the country must center in a single authority.

Some time ago We gave Our sanction to the scheme by which all the clans restored to Us their registers; We appointed governors for the first time, each to perform the duties of his office.

But owing to the lengthened endurance of the old system during several hundred years, there have been cases where the word only was pronounced and the reality not performed. How is it possible for Us, under such circumstances, to give protection and tranquillity to the people, and to maintain equality with foreign nations?

Profoundly regretting this condition of affairs, We now completely abolish the Clans (*han*) and convert them into Prefectures (*ken*), with the object of diligently retrenching expenditure and of arriving at convenience of working, or getting rid of the unreality of names and of abolishing the disease of government proceeding from multiple centers.

Do ye, Our assembled servants, take well to heart this Our will.

[*Hōrei zensho*, 1871, p. 283; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, pp. 32–33]

THE LEADERS AND THEIR VISION

The leaders of the Restoration who came to power in 1868 were largely young and low- to middle-ranking samurai from the four domains of Satsuma, Chōshū,

Tosa, and Hizen, plus a few courtiers, like Iwakura Tomomi, who surrounded the emperor. Most of these men initially harbored strong antiforeign biases that emerged from the combination of loyalism and xenophobia that had fueled the Restoration. But in the early Meiji years, such sentiments were quickly jettisoned. Talented, young, and ambitious, they were determined to create a new, viable Japan. With few ties to the past, they were prepared to move in new directions. The abolition of feudalism and the centralization of the new Meiji state were among their highest priorities. At the same time imbued with a strong nationalistic sentiment, they were equally concerned with maintaining sovereignty against the threat of the Western powers. As the foregoing documents show, the men who were directing the transformation of Japan were less concerned with protecting tradition than with learning the secrets of Western wealth and power in order to strengthen Japan. The goal that most of these men agreed on was that Japan had to penetrate the opponents' camp, master the West's civilization, including its weapons, and use them to protect the national interest. While the West played an important role in this process, it was never an end in itself. As the Charter Oath noted, Japan would seek knowledge from around the world, but the goal was to shore up the foundations of imperial rule. Although the ends were clear, the means to those ends often elicited serious debate. What kind of culture should Japan develop? What should lie at the core of that culture? How were Japanese peasants to be transformed into citizens of the modern state?

In the 1870s, such debates raged both inside and outside government circles. At the same time, a group of reform bureaucrats consolidated their position within the administration. They included men like Ōkubo Toshimichi from Satsuma and Kido Takayoshi and Itō Hirobumi from Chōshū. Their priority was to preserve stability and order within Japan while maintaining national sovereignty abroad. For leaders such as Kido, Ōkubo, and Itō, the main question remained how to steer a middle course between the liberal influences of Western political structures and the essential despotism of the Japanese emperor system, which they identified with the Japanese national polity. What they searched for was a way to “civilize” and “Westernize” Japan without harming the prerogatives of the throne.

THE IWAKURA MISSION

The Iwakura Mission (1871–1873) played a key role in shaping the views of the Restoration leaders. The mission took half the leadership group—including Ōkubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi, and Itō Hirobumi—as well as fifty students, to the United States and Europe for two years. This sojourn abroad played a crucial part in transforming the vision of the men who created modern Japan. Ostensibly, it was a mission designed to renegotiate the unequal treaties and

was led by the court noble Iwakura Tomomi. But it served as an eye-opening experience for most of its members. Faced with Western wealth and power, these men realized that Japan would require significant reforms in its economy, social system, and political institutions before it could achieve equality with the West. In the process, Westernization became a central theme of the Restoration.

KIDO TAKAYOSHI'S OBSERVATIONS OF EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Although in historical perspective, the Meiji leaders are often regarded as conservative, they also were quite innovative. As we can see in the following letter written by Kido Takayoshi from the United States, they were concerned not only with shoring up their own and the emperor's authority but also with dealing with broader issues such as education and the need to transform Japan socially and culturally to meet the demands of modernity. Clearly, the issue for Kido was that Japan could not become a modern state if it did not have an educated and enlightened citizenry. While education could serve as a means of control, it also retained, as men like Fukuzawa Yukichi recognized, the potential for liberating the citizens from state authority.

When it comes to things like schools and factories, it is impossible to tell you everything, for it defies description. From now on, unless we pay a great deal of attention to the children, the preservation of order in our country in the future will be impossible. . . . Maintaining a stable state will be difficult unless we consider social conditions and pay attention to social evils. Nothing is more important than schools for improving social conditions and uprooting social evils. The civilization we have in our country today is not a true civilization, and our enlightenment is not true enlightenment. To prevent trouble ten years from now, there is only one thing to do, and that is to establish schools worthy of the name. A long-range program for the stability of our country will never be carried out if we have only a small number of able people; we have to have universal adherence to the moral principles of loyalty, justice, humanity, and decorum. Unless we establish an unshakable national foundation, we will not be able to elevate our country's prestige in a thousand years. The creation of such public morals and the establishment of such a national foundation depend entirely on people. And the supply of such people in endless numbers over a long period of time clearly depends on education, and on education alone. Our people are no different from Americans or Europeans of today: it is all a matter of education or the lack of education.

[Kido Takayoshi to Sugiyama Takatoshi, January 26, 1872, in *Kido Takayoshi monjo*, vol. 4, p. 320; trans. adapted from Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, pp. 54–55]

KIDO ON THE NEED FOR CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT

As one of the drafters of the Charter Oath, Kido is said to have insisted on Article IV: “Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.” While on the Iwakura Mission, he became an early supporter of constitutional government for Japan. On March 1, 1872, he wrote the following.

In the first year of the Restoration, we worked out the five-article Charter Oath hastily and had it accepted by the leaders, daimyo, and court nobles, setting out the direction for the people’s future. But now it is time for us to have an unshakable fundamental law. Therefore, from now on I want to concentrate my attention on matters such as the basic laws and governmental structures of other countries.

[*Kido Takayoshi nikki*, vol. 2, p. 142; Irokawa, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*, p. 56]

KUME KUNITAKE’S ASSESSMENT OF EUROPEAN
WEALTH AND POWER

The official chronicle of the Iwakura Mission was produced by Kume Kunitake, Iwakura’s chief secretary. Like the other members of the embassy, Kume was a careful observer. As the following suggests, he, too, believed that through cautious planning, Japan could catch up with the West. Impressed by the European nations’ wealth and power, he noted that much of this was the product of recent history. After going to an exposition in London, Kume wrote the following, whose implications for further reforms in Japan are obvious.

Most of the countries in Europe shine with the light of civilization and abound in wealth and power. Their trade is prosperous, their technology is superior, and they greatly enjoy the pleasures and comforts of life. When one observes such conditions, one is apt to think that these countries have always been like this, but this is not the case—the wealth and prosperity one sees now in Europe dates to an appreciable degree from the period after 1800. It has taken scarcely forty years to produce such conditions. . . . How different the Europe of today is from the Europe of forty years ago can be imagined easily. There were no trains running on the land; there were no steamships operating on the water. There was no transmission of news by telegraph. Small ships plied navigable rivers; sailing ships crossed the high seas, horse-drawn carriages trod the roads, letter carriers ran between stations. Soldiers, using copper cannon or flint rifles, fought within a restricted battle area. Woolen cloth was the finery of the wealthy. Cotton was a rare good from across the seas. . . . Although the fashions of France were the shining example for all of Europe, England was the first to

break away and create out of its traditions the crafts and customs appropriate to itself. England had gradually stimulated other nations to produce what they can do best. At present, the crafts of Europe vie in beauty with each other. It is just as if a variety of trees and flowers were growing profusely giving off a fragrance. These were our thoughts after seeing the Kensington Exposition. Those who read this record should reflect upon the lesson to be drawn for Japan.

[Kume Kunitake, *Tokumei*, vol. 2, pp. 58–59; MM]

KIDO'S OBSERVATIONS ON RETURNING FROM THE WEST

The following statement by Kido shows the evolution of his ideas after returning to Japan from the United States and Europe in 1873. Like other Meiji leaders, he was concerned about the institutionalization of authority, which was initially exercised by individuals under the emperor. As Kido saw it, such an arbitrary exercise of power should be replaced by the rule of law. In this sense, he remained true to the progressive impulses of the Restoration and was a herald of the constitutional movement that blossomed in the late 1870s and 1880s. What struck Kido most about the West were the constitutional processes limiting those in power and providing a sound basis for orderly change. Indeed, in a long preamble to the passage quoted here, he asserts as a universal law of history that the rise and fall of nations are determined by their fidelity to constitutional order. Kido praised the so-called constitution established under the Charter Oath but expanded the need for a more popularly based governmental structure. His analysis confirms at the same time both his firm commitment to greater popular participation in government and the gradualist approach toward change that marked the nature of early Meiji reforms. The heart of his argument reads as follows.

In enlightened countries, though there may be a sovereign, still he does not hold sway in an arbitrary fashion. The people of the whole country give expression to their united and harmonious wishes, and the business of the State is arranged accordingly, a department (styled the government) being charged with the execution of their judgments, and officials appointed to transact business. For this reason all who hold office respect the wishes of the whole nation and serve their country under a deep sense of responsibility, so that even in extraordinary crises, they take no arbitrary step contrary to the people's will. The strictness [of the constitution] of these governments is such as I have just described, but as [an] additional check upon illegal acts, the people have parliamentary representatives whose duty it is to inspect everything that is done and to check arbitrary proceedings on the part of officials. Herein lies the best quality of these governments. But if the people are not yet sufficiently enlightened, it becomes necessary, at least for a time, that the Sovereign should by his superior discernment anticipate their unanimous wishes and act for them in arranging the affairs of State and in entrusting to officials the execution of their wishes. By this means he will gradually lead them forward in the path of en-

lightenment. Such a course is consonant with natural principles, and I am inclined to believe that the thought of the Emperor when he inaugurated by an oath his energetic policy was based on this idea. My belief is that although Japan is not yet ready for parliamentary inspection of the affairs of state, in the importance of its laws and the magnitude of its affairs it is no different from those countries of Europe and America the conduct of whose governments embodies the will of the people. It is important that our officials should not be forgetful of their responsibility and should take as their model our five-clause Constitution. . . .

Every citizen's object in life is to preserve his natural liberty by exercising his rights, and to assist in carrying on the government by sharing its obligations. Therefore, [these rights and obligations] are specified exactly in writing and men bind themselves by a solemn promise to permit no infringement of them, but to act as mutual checks on each other in maintaining them. These writings are what we call laws. The laws grow out of the Constitution, for the Constitution is the root of every part of the government, and there is nothing which does not branch out from it. For this reason, every country, when the time comes for changing its constitution, bestows on it the greatest care and the ripest consideration and ascertains to the full the general wishes. No new measures are put in force unless they are imperatively called for by the circumstances, [nor are any adopted] lightly or hastily. In a country whose sovereign generously decides to meet the wishes of the people the greatest care must be taken to ascertain them with accuracy, the internal conditions of the country must be profoundly studied, what the people produce must be taken into account, and, most important of all, policies must be suited to the degree of civilization of the people.

Again, in ordering the affairs of a nation, its strength must be taken into account. If not, one good will be converted into a hundred evils. The poor man's son who tries to rival the son of the rich man ruins his property and his house, and in the end does not make a show equal to his rival. Those who order the affairs of a nation should remember before taking action, to consider the due sequence of measures, and should proceed by gradual steps in nourishing its strength, for no nation ever attained to a perfect state of civilization in a single morning.

[Kido Takayoshi, *Shōgiku Kido-kō den*, vol. 2, pp. 1563–68; McLaren, *Japanese Government Documents*, pp. 571–75]

CONSEQUENCES OF THE IWAKURA MISSION: SAIGŌ AND ŌKUBO ON KOREA

The Iwakura Mission determined the course of the Restoration. The leaders who had gone abroad came back convinced not only that the political reno-

vation of Japan would have to advance and move in the direction of a constitutional system but also that national education, large-scale factories and industrialization, and the development of a modern military system should be Japan's highest priorities. There were additional implications. The first was that Westernization would be needed to achieve these goals. The second was that Japan was still a weak and backward nation and that any aggressive military adventures should be curtailed until further reforms were carried out at home.

Kido Takayoshi and Ōkubo Toshimichi, who along with Saigō Takamori, represented the three leading figures of the Meiji government in the 1870s, came home impressed by the scope of Western wealth and power. Their experiences confirmed their conviction that Japan's future, including its military potential, depended on its successful renovation. At the same time, they continued to be committed to a program of gradualist reforms that sought change while preserving social stability and the imperial prerogative. In this, they faced considerable challenges. More than ever convinced that wealth and power were linked, they faced the need to industrialize Japan. They also realized that a new military structure based on conscription would have to be implemented. The last vestiges of feudal privileges would also have to be eliminated, and a new tax structure established to provide state revenues. Finally, both education and information would be needed to prepare the Japanese citizens for an expanded role in government and the establishment of a future constitutional order.

The initial challenge that Ōkubo rushed home to meet, however, was more immediate and pressing. It stemmed from a proposed expedition against Korea that was being spearheaded by Saigō Takamori. A samurai and military leader from Satsuma, Saigō had long been closely allied with Kido and Ōkubo. Perhaps the most charismatic figure of the Restoration, he was a giant of a Japanese, almost six feet tall and weighing two hundred pounds. He had enormous shoulders, a bull neck with a collar size of nineteen and a half, and large piercing eyes under big bushy eyebrows. So commanding was he in appearance that it is said almost everyone introduced to him "bowed his head in spite of himself." But he was known less for his fearsome appearance than for his heartiness, which attracted young men to him in great numbers, and for his magnanimity and forbearance, which, when he was chief of staff of the imperial armies at Edo, caused him to spare the shogunal capital from the final ravages of war. The quintessential samurai, Saigō's charisma was clearly attached to the old order, and he was one of the few Meiji leaders who never visited the West.

By the early 1870s, Saigō enjoyed great popularity and the unique rank of field marshal, but he proved to have less influence in government councils than did those who urged rapid changes in Japanese society, to which he was opposed. Especially disturbed by the treatment of the old warrior class and by the process of Westernization, which he felt would undermine traditional values, he wished to strengthen the position and spirit of the samurai by employing them to improve Japan's military situation. Japan could not resist the West, he

was convinced, unless it had Korea and China at its side. Fearing Russia particularly, he believed that Korea had to be won over quickly, by force if necessary. In the face of obvious hostility from the Korean government, however, Saigō favored first sending an ambassador whose certain execution by the contemptuous Koreans would provide ample pretext for war. As the emissary who would thus meet death, he offered himself.

When his plan was rejected in favor of Ōkubo's policy of peace and internal reform, Saigō withdrew from the government along with other prominent Restoration leaders, such as Itagaki Taisuke, Gotō Shōjirō, and Etō Shinpei. Having earlier suffered patiently in exile for his loyalist convictions and activities, he was prepared to retire quietly to Satsuma and bide his time. Nevertheless, when his more hot-blooded followers openly resisted government forces, his sense of loyalty and comradeship impelled him to join them in the Satsuma Rebellion. When the rebellion was crushed in 1877, the life that Saigō was prepared to offer his country was lost for his friends. But his death, like that of Yoshida Shōin, made him a hero to future generations of Japanese patriots. Moreover, the failure of his rebellion marked the last stand of feudal opposition to the Restoration and confirmed the path of modernization that Kido and the others had adopted.

LETTERS FROM SAIGŌ TAKAMORI TO ITAGAKI TAISUKE ON THE
KOREAN QUESTION

In the summer of 1873, Saigō wrote eight letters to his friend Itagaki Taisuke on the Korean question. Three of these follow. All show Saigō's sincerity and straightforward simplicity.

July 29 [1873]

Thank you so much for coming all the way to visit me the other day.

Has any decision been made on Korea, now that Soejima is back? If the meeting has yet to take place, I should like to be present despite my illness if I am informed of what day I may attend. Please let me know.

When a decision is at last reached, what will it involve if we send troops first? The Koreans will unquestionably demand their withdrawal, and a refusal on our part will lead to war. We shall then have fomented a war in a manner very different from the one you originally had in mind. Wouldn't it be better therefore to send an envoy first? It is clear that if we did so, the Koreans would resort to violence and would certainly give us an excuse for attacking them.

In the event that it is decided to send troops first, difficulties may arise in the future [elsewhere]. Russia has fortified Sakhalin and other islands, and there have already been frequent incidents of violence. I am convinced that we should send troops to defend these places before we send them to Korea.

If it is decided to send an envoy officially, I feel sure that he will be murdered.

I therefore beseech you to send me. I cannot claim to make as splendid an envoy as Soejima, but if it is a question of dying, that, I assure you, I am prepared to do.

August 14 [1873]

Should there be any hesitation at your place with reference to my being sent, it will mean further and further delays. I ask you therefore please to cut short the deliberations and to speak out in favor of my being sent. If we fail to seize this chance to bring us into war, it will be very difficult to find another. By enticing the Koreans with such a gentle approach, we will certainly cause them to give us an opportunity for war. But this plan is doomed to fail if you feel it would be unfortunate for me to die before the war or if you have any thoughts of temporizing. The only difference is whether [my death comes] before or after the event. I shall be deeply grateful to you, even after death, if you exert yourself now on my behalf with the warm friendship you have always shown me.

August 17 [1873]

Last evening I visited the prime minister's residence and discussed my plan with him in great detail. . . . However, I could not help feeling uneasy when he said that he would wait until the return of the [Iwakura] mission. I have never meant to suggest an immediate outbreak of hostilities. War is the second step. Even under the present circumstances, grounds for starting a conflict might be found from an examination of international law, but they would be entirely a pretext, and the people of the nation would not accept them. But if we sent an envoy to tell the Koreans that we have never to this day harbored hostile intentions and to reproach them for weakening the relations between our countries, at the same time asking them to correct their arrogance of the past and strive for improved relations in the future, I am sure that the contemptuous attitude of the Koreans will reveal itself. They are absolutely certain, moreover, to kill the envoy. This will bring home to the entire nation the necessity of punishing their crimes. This is the situation that we must bring to pass if our plan is to succeed. I need hardly say that it is, at the same time, a far-reaching scheme that will divert abroad the attention of those who desire civil strife and thereby benefit the country. The [adherents of the] former government will lose the opportunity to act and, having to refrain from creating any internal disturbance, will lose the country once and for all.

[*Dai Saigō zenshū*, vol. 2, pp. 736–38, 751–52, 754–56; FN]

ŌKUBO TOSHIMICHI'S REASONS FOR OPPOSING THE KOREAN EXPEDITION

Although he had been a boyhood friend of Saigō Takamori, Ōkubo Toshimichi was less devoted to upholding the former samurai values and preserving the old system.

He was also more a politician than a military figure and thus saw the threat to Japan in terms different from Saigō's. If Saigō was the quintessential samurai, Ōkubo, by comparison, can be seen as the quintessential bureaucrat. Ōkubo's consuming passion was internal order and systematic progress, which contrasted with Saigō's more immediate concerns for directing Japanese energies abroad. Ōkubo shared Kido Takayoshi's long-range vision and possessed a tenacity to pursue that vision over time. He also was capable of transcending domain loyalties and attracted to his side talented young men from other domains, such as Itō Hirobumi from Chōshū and Ōkuma Shigenobu from Hizen. Although he was the chief architect and driving force behind the transformation of Japan along modern lines in the 1870s, Ōkubo's bold rejection of Saigō's planned Korean expedition and firm commitment to eliminate all feudal privileges, both of which led to the Satsuma Rebellion, ultimately cost him his life. In 1878, with the course of the Restoration clearly established, Ōkubo was assassinated by six former samurai. Indeed, all three of the major Restoration leaders—Ōkubo, Kido, and Saigō—died within a year of one another in 1877/1878, leaving the completion of the Restoration to their understudies, like Itō and Ōkuma. In 1873 it was Ōkubo's cold, clear logic that won the day in the council of state over Saigō's impetuous and dramatic appeal for a war with Korea.

The most mature consideration and forethought are essential to govern the nation and to protect the land and the people. Every action, whether progressive or conservative, should be taken in response to the occasion and, if it develops unfavorably, should be abandoned. This may entail shame, but it is to be endured; justice may be with us, but we are not to choose that course. We must act as our greatest needs dictate, taking into account the importance of any problem and examining the exigencies. We have here the problem of dispatching an envoy to Korea. The reasons why I am in no great haste to subscribe to the proposal come from much careful and earnest reflection on the problem. The gist of my arguments is as follows:

1. Because of His Majesty's supreme virtue, sovereignty has been restored, and extraordinary achievements have been made to bring about today's prosperity. However, His Majesty's reign is still young, and its foundations are not yet firmly laid. The sudden abolition of feudal fiefs and the establishment of prefectures are indeed a drastic change unusual in history. A look at the situation in the capital seems to indicate that the change has been accomplished. But in the remote sections of the country there are not a few who have lost their homes and property and who are extremely bitter and restless because of this measure. . . . Within the last two years, how many scenes of bloodshed have taken place unavoidably? Owing to their misunderstanding of public proclamations or their misgivings about rising taxes, the ignorant, uninformed people of the remote areas have become easy victims of agitation and have started riots. A careful consideration of these facts is the first argument against any hasty action regarding Korea.

2. Government expenditure today is already tremendous, and there is the difficulty of matching the annual revenues with the annual expenditures. To start a war and to send tens of thousands of troops abroad would raise expenditures by the day to colossal figures; and should war be prolonged, expenditures would continue to soar so as to necessitate heavy taxes or a foreign loan, with no prospect of repayment, or the issuance of paper notes with no hope of redemption. . . . Our loans from foreign countries now exceed 5 million [yen], but we have no definite plan for their repayment. Even if a definite plan is evolved, the undertaking of the Korean venture would, in all likelihood, lead to a considerable deviation from our plans. It would be so disastrous as to preclude any chance of salvation. This is my second reason against any hasty action regarding Korea.

3. The government's present undertakings intended to enrich and strengthen the country must await many years for their fulfillment. These projects, in the areas of the army, navy, education, justice, industry, and colonization, are matters that cannot be expected to produce results overnight. To launch a meaningless war now and waste the government's efforts and attention needlessly, increase annual expenditures to enormous figures, suffer the loss of countless lives, and add to the suffering of the people so as to allow no time for other matters will lead to the abandonment of the government's undertakings before their completion. In order to resume these undertakings, they would have to be started anew. . . . This is the third reason against the hasty commencement of a Korean war.

4. In looking at the sum total of our country's exports and imports, there is an annual shortage of exports of approximately 1 million [yen]. This deficit must be made up in gold. If gold in such quantity leaves the country, there will be a corresponding decrease in the country's gold reserves. At the present time the currency in use in the country consists of gold and paper. If gold is reduced, it will, in itself, impair the credit of the government, reduce the value of the paper notes, and cause considerable hardship to the people. It will produce a situation for which there may be no remedy later. . . . Now, without examining the wealth or poverty of our country or without clarifying the strength or weakness of our army, if we should hastily launch a war, our able-bodied youths would be subjected to hardships both at home and abroad, and their parents, out of worry and trouble, would lose their will to be thrifty or to work hard. . . . It would inevitably lead to the impoverishment of our country. Such a state of affairs would be a matter of serious concern, which is the fourth reason against any hasty venture in Korea.

5. Turning to foreign relations, we note that for our country, Russia and England occupy the position of foremost and greatest importance. Russia, situated in the north, could send its troops southward to Sakhalin and could, with one blow, strike south. . . . Thus, if we crossed arms with Korea and became like the two water birds fighting over a fish, Russia would be the fisherman

standing by to snare the fish. This is a matter of constant vigilance and is the fifth reason against a hasty venture in Korea.

6. England's influence is particularly strong in Asia. It has occupied land everywhere and has settled its people and stationed its troops [in those places]. Its warships are poised for any emergency, keeping a silent, vigilant watch, and are ready to jump at a moment's notice. However, our country has been largely dependent on England for its foreign loans. If our country becomes involved in an unexpected misfortune, causing our stores to be depleted and our people reduced to poverty, our inability to repay our debts to England will become its pretext for interfering in our internal affairs, which would lead to baneful consequences beyond description. . . . This is the sixth reason against hasty action in Korea.

7. The treaties that our country has concluded with the countries of Europe and America are not equal, as they contain many terms that impair the dignity of an independent nation. The restraints they impose may bring some benefit, but these treaties also contain harmful elements. England and France, for example, on the pretext that our country's internal administration is not yet in order and that it cannot protect their subjects, have built barracks and stationed troops in our land as if our country were a territory of theirs. Externally, from the standpoint of foreign relations, is this not as much a disgrace as it is internally, from the standpoint of our nation's sovereignty? The time to revise the treaties is close at hand. The ministers in the current government, through their zealous and thorough attention, must find a way to rid the country of its bondage and to secure for our country the dignity of an independent nation. This is an urgent matter of the moment which provides the seventh reason why a hasty venture in Korea should not be undertaken.

I have argued in the foregoing paragraphs that a hasty Korean war should not be precipitated. . . . Before dispatching an envoy, the question of whether or not to embark on a war should be settled. Should the decision be to wage war, then more than a hundred thousand men for the campaign abroad and for the defense of the country should be raised. Moreover, additional tens of thousands of men should be called to escort the envoy. Although it is difficult to estimate in advance the enormous cost of ammunition, weapons, warships, transports, and other expenses, it may well reach into tens of thousands daily. Even if the campaign makes a favorable start, it is unlikely that the gains made will ever pay for the losses incurred. What would happen if the campaign dragged on for months and years? Suppose total victory is gained, the entire country occupied, and the Koreans permitted to sue for peace and to indemnify us. Still, for many years, we would have to man garrisons to defend vital areas and to prevent any breach of the treaty's terms. When the entire country is occupied, it is certain that there will be many discontented people who will cause disturbances everywhere, making it almost impossible for us to hold the country. In considering the cost of the campaign, and the occupation and de-

fense of Korea, it is unlikely that it could be met by the products of the entire country of Korea. Then there is Russia, and there is China. Although it is argued, on the basis of one or two conversations among officials or on the tacit understanding of officials, that Russia and China would not interfere in the Korean affair, there is no actual document to confirm it. Even if such a document existed, who can say that the governments of these two countries would not plot and take advantage of the opportunity to bring about a sudden and unexpected calamity? It is certainly not difficult to find an excuse to break an earlier promise. If we permit the initiation of such a great venture, blithely and with no consideration for such an eventuality, we shall in all probability have cause for much regret in the future. . . .

Some argue that Korea's arrogance toward our country is intolerable. But as far as I can see, the reasons for sending an envoy extraordinary seem to be to look for a positive excuse for war by having him treated arrogantly and discourteously. We would then dispatch troops to punish them. If this is the case, it is clear that this venture is to be undertaken, not because the situation makes it unavoidable or because there is no other way, but rather because the honor of the country will have been sullied and our sovereignty humiliated. I consider such a venture entirely beyond comprehension, as it completely disregards the safety of our nation and ignores the interest of the people. It would be an incident occasioned by the whims of individuals who have not seriously evaluated the eventualities or implications. These are the reasons why I cannot accept the arguments for undertaking this venture.

[Kiyosawa, *Gaiseika to shite Ōkubo Toshimichi*, pp. 28–31; FN]

THE MEIJI EMPEROR

The Restoration was carried out in the name of the Meiji emperor, Mutsuhito, who in 1868 was a mere boy of sixteen. With time, he grew into a formidable figure, perhaps one of the greatest individuals to occupy the Japanese throne since Emperor Tenchi, who was responsible for the Taika Reform of 645. Asukai Masamichi, a late-twentieth-century biographer of the emperor, referred to him as “Meiji the Great,” in the way that Peter the Great and Frederick the Great were seen in Russia and Germany. And yet unlike Queen Victoria, who was his contemporary, Meiji never kept a diary and wrote almost no letters. As Donald Keene noted in his biography of the Meiji emperor, there is hardly anything now extant in the emperor's handwriting. Even very few photographs, perhaps no more than three, exist of him in an age when most Meiji leaders were widely photographed. Instead, what knowledge we have of the emperor comes largely from the men who worked with him and who venerated him as the leader of the circle dedicated to transforming the country into a modern state. With time, the emperor became increasingly shrouded in mystery as the

Meiji leaders used him to structure the ideology of the imperial state. This was particularly true after the 1890s, but earlier he seems to have functioned more as part of the group that set Japan on its new course. He worked closely with Kido Takayoshi, Ōkubo Toshimichi, and Saigō Takamori. His respect for Saigō was such that even after his death as a “rebel” in 1877, the emperor subsequently pardoned him in view of his earlier contributions to the Restoration. Many of the edicts issued in the Meiji emperor’s name—such as the Charter Oath, the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors, and the Imperial Rescript on Education—were composed by his advisers, but it seems unlikely that they could have been issued without his sanction. Keene also noted that the one remaining clue to the emperor’s personal feelings can be found in the more than 100,000 poems he composed during his lifetime. But here, too, the majority were transcribed by others. In short, the Meiji emperor remains largely an enigmatic figure; his official presence was clearly larger than life, and for many Japanese he came to symbolize the whole era of renovation and reform that covered his lengthy reign from 1868 to 1912.

LETTER FROM THE MEIJI EMPEROR TO HIS PEOPLE, APRIL 7, 1868

On the day the Charter Oath was promulgated, another letter was presented by the emperor to his subjects. The content of this letter suggests that the court realized that in creating the modern state, the relationship of the emperor to his people was of paramount importance. At the same time, few Japanese had any notion of who the emperor was. When peasants were asked whether they knew of the emperor’s existence, they replied in the negative and shrewdly added that if there was such a being, their taxes would be higher. The task of the emperor’s advisers, therefore, was to make him known to the public through the imperial “progresses,” which took the emperor to virtually every part of Japan in the first half of the Meiji period. As the following letter suggests, the emperor was himself concerned about the gap that had grown between the court and the public and hoped to remedy the situation.

Ever since, quite unexpectedly, We succeeded to the throne, young and weak though We are, We have been unable to control Our apprehension, day and night, over how We are to remain faithful to Our ancestors when dealing with foreign countries. It is Our belief that when the authority of the court declined in the middle ages and the military seized power, they maintained on the surface worshipful respect of the court, but in reality their respect intentionally isolated the court, making it impossible for the court, as the father and mother of the entire people, to know the people’s feelings. In the end, the emperor became the sovereign of the multitude in name only. This is how it happens that although awe of the court today is greater than ever before, the prestige of the court has diminished correspondingly, and the separation between those

above and those below is as great as that between heaven and earth. Under these conditions, how are We to reign over the country? Now, at a time of renovation of rule of the country, if even one of the millions of people in this country is unable to find his place in society, this will be entirely Our fault. Accordingly, We have personally exerted Our physical and spiritual powers to confront the crisis. It is only by stepping into the shoes Our ancestors wore in ancient times and throwing Ourselves into governing the country that We fulfill Our Heaven-sent mission and do not violate Our duty as the ruler of the hundred millions.

In ancient times Our ancestors personally disposed of all state affairs. If anyone behaved in a manner inappropriate in a subject, they themselves would punish the guilty. The administration of the court was simple in every respect, and because the emperor was not held in awe, as he is today, emperor and subjects were close; those above and those below loved each other; the blessings of heaven pervaded the land; and the majesty of the country shone brightly abroad. In recent times the world has become much more civilized. At a time when every other country is progressing in all directions, only our country, being unfamiliar with the situation prevailing in the world, stubbornly maintains old customs and does not seek the fruits of change. It fills Us with dread to think that if We were idly to spend a peaceful existence in the palace, enjoying the tranquillity of each day and forgetful of the hundred years of grief, Our country would in the end be subject to the contempt of all others, bringing shame to Our ancestors and hardship to the people. For this reason We have sworn, along with many officials and daimyos, to continue the glorious work of Our ancestors. Regardless of the pain and suffering it may entail, We intend personally to rule over the entire country, to comfort you, the numberless people, and in the end to open up the ten thousand leagues of ocean waves, to proclaim the glory of our country to the world and bring to the land the unshakable security of Mount Fuji. You of countless numbers have become accustomed to the evils inherited from the past and to think of the court only as a place to be held in awe. Not knowing the acute danger threatening the Land of the Gods, you manifest extreme surprise when We bestir Us, and this has given rise to doubts of every kind. The people are confused, but if a time should come when they prevent Us from carrying out Our plans, this would mean not only that We had wandered from the Way of the ruler but that they had caused Us to lose Our ancestral patrimony. You of countless numbers give due consideration to Our aspirations and join with Us. Cast away private thoughts and choose the general good. Help Us in Our work and ensure the safety of the Land of the Gods. If We can comfort the spirits of my ancestors, this will be the greatest happiness of Our life.

[*Meiji tennō ki*, vol. 1, pp. 649–52; trans. in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, pp. 140–41]

COMMENTS FROM THE IMPERIAL PROGRESS OF 1878

The imperial progresses were important in two respects. On the one hand, they provided the emperor with a better idea of the condition of his people. On the other, it gave his subjects a chance to observe their ruler. Often these trips were less than pleasant for the sovereign, but he faithfully followed the course laid out for him by his advisers. The progress of 1878 was particularly difficult for the emperor. The route took him to Urawa, Maebashi, and then through Nagano Prefecture to the Japan Sea coast. Day after day, it rained and the roads were deep in mud. Often the emperor had to get out and walk because the paths were too clogged and impassable for his palanquin. His accommodations were also surprisingly rustic. When he spent the night at Izumozaki, his quarters were not only cramped but also invaded by swarms of mosquitoes. When his chamberlains tried to persuade him to take refuge under a mosquito net they had set up for him, he replied:

The whole purpose of this journey is to observe the suffering of the people. If I did not myself experience their pains, how could I understand their condition? I do not in the least mind the mosquitoes. . . . Years later (in 1899) the emperor recalled the journey in this *tanka* [poem]:

<i>natsu samuki</i>	It's now long ago
<i>Koshi no yamaji wo</i>	Since I traveled mountain roads
<i>samidare ni</i>	Soaked by the spring rains
<i>nurete koeshi mo</i>	In Koshi, where it is cold
<i>mukashi narikeri</i>	Even in the summertime.

[*Meiji tennō ki*, vol. 4, pp. 490, 528; trans. in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, pp. 300–301]

A GLIMPSE OF THE MEIJI EMPEROR IN 1872

BY TAKASHIMA TOMONOSUKE

While we know little about the Meiji emperor's personal feelings and attitudes from his own hand, occasionally we are given glimpses of his more human side by those who worked with him. We know, for example, that he was a formidable drinker, although he rarely drank to excess. At the same time, he was thoroughly dedicated to his official duties. The following portrait of the emperor, composed by his chamberlain Takashima Tomonosuke in 1872, gives such a view.

He was a heavy drinker, and sometimes he would assemble his favorites among the chamberlains to have a drinking party. (I can't take much saké, so I generally escaped.) Men like Yamaoka Tesshō and Major Counselor Nakayama [Tadasu] were heavy drinkers who never refused saké, no matter how huge the quantities.

They were his drinking partners. The saké cup His Majesty used at that time was not the usual small size but a big cup, as big as the cups from which the lower classes drink tea, and he would have it filled to the brim before he drank.

His diligence was extraordinary. Every morning he would rise early and go to his office, not retiring to his private quarters until five or six in the afternoon. Sometimes he did not leave even then but would command, "This evening let's have a party in my office." He would talk for hours, until late at night. Then, when it was time for His Majesty to go to bed, people would at once bring bedding from the back palace. It was by no means unusual for us chamberlains to spend the night in the corridors on night duty.

[Asukai, *Meiji taitei*, p. 148; trans. in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, p. 174]

CHARLES LANMAN'S DESCRIPTION OF THE MEIJI EMPEROR IN 1882

Foreign diplomats and dignitaries also were able to interact with the emperor and empress, and some commented on the emperor as they saw him in comparison with other sovereigns they had met. Charles Lanman, who served as secretary to the Japanese legation in Washington, provides us with the following assessment.

Unlike many of the princes and royal personages of Europe, he is not addicted to self-indulgence, but takes delight in cultivating his mind; sparing no pains nor personal inconvenience to acquire knowledge. Although still young he frequently presides at the meetings of his Privy Councillors. . . . He often visits his executive departments, and attends at all the public services where the Imperial presence is desirable. While prosecuting his literary as well as scientific pursuits, he subjects himself to the strictest rules, having certain hours for special studies, to which he rigidly conforms. In his character he is said to be sagacious, determined, progressive and aspiring; and from the beginning of his reign he has carefully surrounded himself with the wisest statesmen in his Empire, and these have naturally assisted in his own development; so that it is almost certain that the crown of Japan has been worn in this century by one who was worthy of the great honor.

[Lanman, *Leading Men of Japan*, p. 18]

THE MEIJI EMPEROR'S CONVERSATION WITH HIJIKATA HISAMOTO ON THE OUTBREAK OF THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR

Although Japan fought two major foreign wars, the Sino-Japanese War (1894/1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904/1905), during the Meiji emperor's reign, he seems to have been reluctant to go to war in both instances. In 1894, asked by the imperial household minister, Hijikata Hisamoto, whom to send as an envoy to report the outbreak of war to the Ise Shrines and the tomb of his father, Emperor Kōmei, he is

reported to have replied in the following outspoken manner that shows he did not always agree with his ministers (although he later did send the requested envoy).

Imperial Household Minister Hijikata Hisamoto visited the emperor to ask which envoys he wished sent to Ise and the tomb of Emperor Kōmei [his father]. The emperor answered, “Don’t send anybody. I have not been in favor of this war from the start. It was only because cabinet ministers informed me that war was inevitable that I permitted it. It is very painful for me to report what has happened to the Ise Shrine and the tomb of the previous emperor.” Hijikata, astonished by these remarks, admonished the emperor, “But Your Majesty has already issued a declaration of war. I wonder if Your Majesty might not be mistaken in giving me such a command.” The emperor flew into a rage and said, “Not another word out of you. I don’t wish to see you again.” Hijikata withdrew in fear and trepidation.

[*Meiji tennō ki*, vol. 8, p. 481; trans. in Keene, *Emperor of Japan*, pp. 482–83]

A POEM BY THE MEIJI EMPEROR ON THE EVE OF THE
RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

The emperor’s ambivalence about going to war was also suggested at the time of the Russo-Japanese conflict. Despite the immense public outcry for war with Russia, the emperor left behind a poem that suggests he felt troubled about going to war. This poem was later read by his grandson, Hirohito, before the policy conference that led to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. One of the great ironies of the Meiji period can be seen in the emperor’s personal commitment to peace and the expansive imperialist policies pursued by his advisers, who on several occasions took the country to war in his name.

<i>Yomo no umi</i>	On all four seas
<i>Mina harakara to</i>	I thought all men were brothers
<i>Omou yo ni</i>	Yet in this world
<i>Nado namikaze no</i>	Why do winds and waves
<i>Tachisawaguran</i>	Now rise and stir?

[*Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, vol. 5, p. 153]