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Profound Forces in the Making of Modern Japan

Abstract: The structure, governance, institutions, principles, and norms of the international system have decisively influenced modern Japan's international behavior and its domestic political structure. It is a common characteristic of the conservative elites to vigilantly monitor and to adapt to its workings. This strategic style is a legacy of premodern influences and the formative experience of the Meiji Restoration. Each of the major transformations of the international system since the mid-nineteenth century induced sweeping changes in Japan's foreign policy and domestic institutions. The end of the cold war system is doing likewise. Historiography should reflect this powerful influence.

A principal obligation and one of the most demanding challenges for the historian of any country is to understand and explain the deeper processes of history—what the British historian A. J. P. Taylor often referred to as "the profound forces"—that impel a nation along one course rather than another.[1] What have been the driving forces that made modern Japan? What are the dynamics of change in modern Japanese history? These broad questions of causality are particularly poignant at the present moment in history when Japan in many ways seems on the threshold of major changes in its institutions and national purpose. One may wonder what motive forces drive this change. Issues of causation are an intellectual challenge that historians must constantly wrestle with: how much weight to give to long-term trends as opposed to immediate events, the general versus the particular, the role of the individual and of the accidental, and so on. In this essay, I make a case

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1. See Paul Kennedy, "A. J. P. Taylor and 'Profound Forces' in History," in Chris Wrigley, ed., *Warfare, Diplomacy, and Politics: Essays in Honor of A. J. P. Taylor* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1986), pp. 14–28.

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for paying more attention than we historians have to the influence that the changing structure of the international system has exercised on the course of modern Japanese history.

The outside-in influence on the making of Japan's foreign policy and on the political character of Japan's domestic institutions has been more powerful than is usually acknowledged. Explanations of Japan's international behavior have generally been from the inside out, locating its sources primarily within Japan—in its social and economic system, its domestic politics, and its ideological movements. Similarly, there has also been a tendency to overlook the ways the structure of the international system played a large role in shaping Japan's core domestic institutions.

Over the last two generations, historians of modern Japan have been preoccupied with the internal forces for change. We have poured our energies into explaining Japan's emergence by concentrating attention on domestic factors and have tended to underestimate powerful external influences. There are a number of reasons for this underestimation. First, it was a reaction to the superficiality of earlier emphasis on the Western impact which John Whitney Hall in 1968 dismissed as "the sleeping beauty interpretation" for its depiction of the arrival of the Western world prodding a slumbering people to awaken to the challenges of the modern world.[2] As the field of Japanese studies matured, we turned away from this initial superficial approach. Second, Japan's post-World War II withdrawal from international politics probably reinforced this preoccupation with domestic events. Historians' interests have mirrored the inward-looking concerns, the isolationism and introspection, of the Japanese people themselves over the last 60 years. Third, because Japan's success in industrializing appeared unique, historians set out to explain Japan's emergence as a great economic power as the achievement of the distinctive institutions and values of Japanese society. Fourth, even when writing about Japan's foreign affairs, historians tended to focus on domestic politics as the source of foreign policy in part because there is a strong intellectual tradition that holds that the internal organization of states is the key to understanding their external behavior. Analysis of internal defects of the state is often used to explain aggression abroad. If these defects were eliminated, the causes of war might be eliminated. The thesis that democracies do not make war is an example of this approach.

Fifth, recent historiographical trends, which are broader than the field of Japanese history but which have deeply affected it, have encouraged this preoccupation with the internal dynamics of Japanese society. The historical discipline increasingly focused its attention on studying groups in society

2. John W. Hall, "The New Look in Tokugawa History," in John W. Hall and Marius B. Jansen, eds., *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 64.

estranged from power and influence, individuals and groups previously neglected and oftentimes voiceless. New questions of culture, mentalité, and subalternity have drawn historians' attention. The approach of the "new history" has not only downgraded the influence of elite decision making, it has also tended to underrate the external environment of modern Japan.[3] Looking back over three decades of scholarship on modern Japan published in *The Journal of Japanese Studies,* I am struck by how relatively little was published in the field of international relations. Or, to take another example, a reviewer in *JJS* of the volume of proceedings of the Conference on Meiji Studies held at Harvard several years ago observed that there "is little attention paid to international affairs of any sort. Even panels devoted to 'Meiji International Relations' and 'Meiji Japan and the Continent' tend to be more concerned with matters of primarily domestic import."[4] The relative neglect of the powerful influence of the outside on the domestic institutions in the Meiji period misses possibly the most notable characteristic of the period.

This is not to say that historians have ignored outside influences. We have, to be sure, written about the influence on Japan of foreign models, foreign ideas, foreign advisers, foreign crises, a foreign occupation. Also, Japan has frequently been seen as a reactive country, responding to particular events in its external environment such as the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry, or the onset of the Great Depression, or the outbreak of a world war in Europe, and so on. Japanese government policy in recent decades is described as reactive to outside pressure (*gaiatsu*), as when the United States uses the leverage of its market access or security guarantee to bring about a change in Japanese policy.[5]

Influence of the International Order

What I propose for greater emphasis by historians is a more fundamental and persistent external influence. We need to see how the nature and workings of the international order—its structure, governance, institutions,

3. Several Stanford scholars summed up: "Historians have recently been more concerned with the disenfranchised, the alienated, the invisible, and with social and cultural history—areas where conventional standards of evidence are problematic because often the evidence does not exist. History as a whole has been increasingly drawn to the humanities, where postmodernism, with its ambivalent stance toward the possibilities of an objective epistemology, holds the high ground." Stephen H. Haber, David M. Kennedy, and Stephen D. Krasner, "Brothers under the Skin: Diplomatic History and International Relations," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 34–43.

4. W. Dean Kinzley, *Journal of Japanese Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp. 198–201.

5. See, for example, Kent Calder, "Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the 'Reactive State,'" *World Politics,* Vol. 40 (1988), pp. 517–41; also see Akitoshi Miyashita, "Gaiatsu and Japan's Foreign Aid: Rethinking the Reactive-Proactive Debate," *International Studies Quarterly,* Vol. 43 (1999), pp. 695–732.

principles, and norms—have decisively shaped modern Japan by channeling its behavior and shaping its domestic institutions. Historians of modern Japan have made little use of the insights of the body of international relations theory that has developed over the past several decades. The study of international order—how it is devised and sustained, why it breaks down, and how it is reestablished—has important implications for understanding the course of Japanese history. Especially important is the approach that explores and elaborates how the external environment of states exercises strong influence on a state's domestic structure.

Realism, the dominant theoretical tradition, depicts the interactions of states seeking wealth and power as generally anarchic, not in the sense that they are chaotic but rather that there are no formal organs of government that are supreme. Some semblance of order is achieved by the strongest nations which use their power to construct frameworks of norms and practices—sometimes called "the rules of the game"—that will secure their interests. The dominant states, relying on their military, economic, and cultural power and prestige, shape the institutions that govern or, at least, influence the interactions among states. The values and interests of the dominant states establish the prevailing mores or ideology that legitimates their dominance and gives the system its distinctive character. The international system socializes its major actors. Competition among them provides strong incentives for similar behavior and adoption of similar institutions. The core domestic institutions of the most successful nations become the subject of emulation by other nations. Competing to survive and prosper, states must rely on themselves. Those states that do not heed the cues of the international system and do not take steps to adapt to the distribution of power in the world will suffer harm and may lose their independence.

At momentous times in modern history, the structure of the international system undergoes profound change. Pressures for change in the system build over time. The distribution of power and the relative strength of nations are subject to constant change. Nations rise and decline owing to their uneven rate of growth and to the technological and organizational breakthroughs that bring advantage to one state or another. Some states grow more rapidly than others. The strong states must constantly see to their sources of power lest they become wedded to the status quo and lose their vitality. Follower states are motivated to improve their position in the international system by emulating the sources of strength of the dominant powers. Those that are successful in emulating the stronger states may find ways of speeding their growth and enhancing their power. Eventually, a newly risen power may find its interests unsatisfied by the existing order. It may seek to revise that order or even come to believe that its interests lie in contesting and overthrowing the order and its rules and institutions. If it succeeds in challenging the old order, often through warfare that results in a new distribution of

power among states, a fundamental change in the organization and governance of the international system occurs. An important strand of realist theory, briefly summarized here, stresses the influence that changes of the system, such as the end of the cold war, have on the domestic affairs of nations.

Modern Japan has been profoundly affected by such changes of the international system. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the forces of the international system broke in upon the natural isolation and free security that Japan had always enjoyed. Thrust from island remoteness onto the stage of world history, Japan was subject to vast new forces. The deeper processes in its history were fundamentally altered. Heretofore, except for the occasional influence of events on the continent, Japan had been able to stand free of external forces; it could choose if and when it would receive foreign influences. Its wars were almost always civil wars. Japan's history had been largely an internal affair, shaped almost entirely by forces within the islands. Premodern Japanese history was, as John Whitney Hall, one of its preeminent interpreters, summed up,

> almost completely an indigenous affair, and the roles and the motivations of its main actors were created and sustained by the conditions of the Japanese environment. To this extent Japan offers the ingredients of a closed system in which the norms of political life have been relatively fixed and in which influences intruding from outside have been few and easily identified.[6]

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, external pressures became a constant influence on Japanese decision making. The dynamics of its history were profoundly changed. Drawn abruptly into the maelstrom of international politics, its sovereignty infringed for the first time, Japan's era of free security disappeared. Japan lost control of its relations with the outside world. It became subject to forces beyond its reach. The drama of political change in Japan was now played out on a larger stage. Japan could remain aloof from the Sinocentric system, but not the new order imposed by Western imperialism. The gap in military and industrial power was too great to resist.

The structure of this first new order in modern East Asia played a major role in delegitimizing Japan's ancien regime and in patterning state formation under the new regime. The Meiji Restoration proved to be a revolutionary event designed to accommodate to the norms, rules, and institutions of a new international order. The new state was not a reflection of Japanese society so much as it was an adaptation to the external system. It did not grow naturally out of the old. To an extraordinary degree, the politics and institutions of the Meiji period were channeled by the outside-in influence. Theorists seeking evidence of the origins of the modern state in the pressures of the external environment could do no better than to cite the Japanese case.

6. John Whitney Hall, *Government and Local Power in Japan 500 to 1700* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 6.

In almost every aspect, the modern Japanese state was designed primarily to meet the challenge of imperialist pressure. Following the Meiji Restoration, the goals of foreign policy dominated all policymaking, including domestic reform. As Natsume Sōseki memorably observed, Japan's modern development was an "externally generated" one (*gaihatsuteki no kaika*) with all the painful consequences for the Japanese psyche that flowed from that.[7]

Japan has responded to systemic change, meaning the breakdown of an international order and the creation of a new one, by fundamentally altering its foreign policies and domestic institutions to suit the new conditions in its environment. Few countries have revised their domestic orders so sweepingly to meet the needs of new configurations of international order. Since entering the modern world, Japan has experienced five fundamental changes in the East Asian order:

1. the collapse of the Sinocentric system and the establishment of the Western imperialist order in the mid-nineteenth century;
2. the end of the imperialist system after World War I and the beginning of a new American-inspired system worked out through several treaties negotiated at the Washington Conference in 1921–22;
3. the disintegration of this American-led system and the anarchical situation of the 1930s that prompted Japan to create its own East Asian order;
4. destruction of Japan's new order and the establishment of a new American-dominated liberal order after 1945 and the beginning of the cold war;
5. the end of this cold war bipolar system with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Each of the first four transitions in the international system resulted in fundamental changes in both Japan's foreign policy as well as in its domestic institutions. Japan adapted in each case to the conditions of a new order. The fifth transition in the external order, which came with the end of the cold war, set in motion great changes in the international system which have yet to produce a settled new international order in East Asia and the world. But Japan is already responding to the flux by moving steadily away from the policies that guided it during the cold war and beginning a major restructuring of its domestic institutions, including revision of its constitution.

Unusual Responsiveness of Japan to the International Order

From the beginning of its modern history, Japan's external setting exercised decisive influence in determining the course of the nation. Neverthe-

7. Natsume Sōseki, "Gendai Nihon no kaika," in *Natsume Soseki zenshū,* Vol. 12 (Tokyo, 1936), pp. 352–80.

less, as powerful as the outside-in influence of the international environment was, there was never anything inevitable or determinist about the result. In different countries statesmen react differently to the same environment. Even where the influence of the external environment is the strongest, a considerable margin of choice remains. No matter how constraining the international system might be, Japan did have choices to make in dealing with its position. Japan's international behavior emerged from the choices made by its leaders.[8]

States vary in their skills, attitudes, and perceptions toward international affairs. Some states are more responsive and sensitive to the workings of the international system and what will serve their national interest than are others. Some ignore external threats; others may hide from them by taking refuge in their inherited institutions and by reaffirming and strengthening tradition. The choices a state makes depend on domestic politics, especially on its leaders, their perceptions, and the strength of its institutions. "Statesmen, not states, are the primary actors in international affairs, and their perceptions of shifts in power, rather than objective measures, are critical."[9]

The international system shaped modern Japan not only because of its inherently powerful outside-in influence, but also because modern Japanese leadership was extraordinarily sensitive to the system, determined as a matter of strategy to act in accord with its movements, and intent on designing policies and institutions to take advantage of its conditions. Japanese conservative elites have been vigilant in monitoring the workings of their external environment. They were keenly attuned to the structure of the system, that is, to the distribution of power, the relative standing of different actors in the system, and its hierarchy of prestige. Even during the foreign occupation of their country after World War II, which is surely the most constraining impact that the international system could conceivably exert, the Japanese made critical choices. Since there was always more than one way to respond to the external environment, elite politics often revolved around competing responses. The workings of the external order had to be assessed. A determination of how best to adapt had to be made. Making choices was often a contentious affair.

For reasons found deep in their inherited strategic culture, Japan's conservative elites gave priority to the challenges from the outside, keenly aware that Japan's precarious position in the international system required it. Modern Japanese leaders have regarded the structure of the international system as an established condition to which they must respond as deftly as possible; it is a configuration of power to which they must adapt in order to

8. See the comparative study of individual Japanese and Italian leaders: Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children: Leaders and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

9. Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 42.

pursue the nation's interests. Their realist pursuit of national power and their opportunistic adaptation to the configuration of power in the world often meant that preserving the ideals of Japan's cultural heritage must take second place. Henry Kissinger aptly observed that "it seemed as if Japan had a finely calibrated radar that enabled it to gauge the global balance of power and to adapt its institutions to its necessities, confident that no adaptation could disturb the essence of Japanese society."[10]

The reaction of Japanese leaders had much in common with the reaction of nineteenth-century realists in the continental European tradition who were also engaged in an intense struggle for survival. The geopolitical vulnerability of Prussia to the dangers posed by the rivalries and warfare of the European state system led advisers to the Prussian monarchy to counsel "the primacy of foreign policy" (*der Primat der Aussenpolitik*). Faced with the threat of being conquered, occupied, and made subservient, they asserted that all aspects of state policy must address the external challenges.

The historian Leopold von Ranke wrote in his famous 1833 essay on "the great powers" (*die grossen Mächte*) that the struggles among them had become so intense that the domestic character of a state must be shaped above all to meet the constant challenges that these rivalries and warfare posed. He stressed the determining force that foreign policy exercised in the life of states. The phrase *der Primat der Aussenpolitik* became associated with this view. Later, counseling the Prussian state, Ranke urged that it organize itself internally so as to succeed externally. Competing to survive in the international system, states must rely on themselves. The existence of the state depended upon constant struggle. "The world has been parceled out," he added. "To be somebody you have to rise by your own efforts. You must achieve genuine independence. Your rights will not be voluntarily ceded to you. You must fight for them." Patriotism and the unity of the state were essential. Domestic policy had to be subordinated to the exigencies of foreign affairs. The dangers of war and defeat required that foreign policy take precedence. "The position of a state in the world," he wrote, "depends upon the degree of independence it has attained. It is obliged, therefore, to organize all its internal resources for the purpose of self-preservation. This is the supreme law of the state."[11]

Such realist thinking was also characteristic of the Meiji leaders. They came to the same conclusions by their own cultural path, but there can be no doubt that they shared common assumptions with their Prussian counterparts who also came out of a military and feudal background. It was no accident that Tokyo Imperial University invited one of Ranke's disciples

10. Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), p. 323.

11. Theodore H. von Laue, *Leopold Ranke, the Formative Years* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 167.

to come to Japan in 1887 and establish a history department. During his 16-year tenure, Ludwig Riess educated a generation of students in Ranke's views.[12]

Long-term change in Japanese society—in the economy and in thought—prepared the way for its modern revolution, as several generations of historical research have amply demonstrated; and the trauma of its entry into the international system, the forced opening of Japan by Western gunboats, set a pattern of casting Japan's internal structure to meet the demands of the outside order. Because it evoked the deeply embedded values of the Japanese in their struggle for the radical change that was required to preserve their national existence, the Restoration cast a long shadow over their subsequent history. It constituted a tradition, a set of history's lessons of how to approach the international system. It epitomized Japan's sense of purpose, its guiding values, its goals, and its strategy for achieving them. The Restoration was driven in great part by the competitive demands of the international system and the determination to adapt the nation's policies and institutions to succeeding in that system. Japan's entire domestic infrastucture was remodeled to respond to the challenges of the imperialist order. It would be difficult to find a more profound example in world history of the *Primat der Aussenpolitik* than Meiji Japan. While other Asian states resisted the new international order that Western imperialism imposed, Japan alone responded through all-out emulation of the institutions of the great powers. Playing by the rules of the game, within the space of a generation, Japan became itself an active participant in the system.

In their perception that all aspects of society must be mobilized to confront foreign encroachment, the Meiji leaders were of the same mind as the realist advisers to the German government in this same period. The social historian Otto Hintze, who counseled the German government early in the twentieth century, held that the state was less a reflection of the internal evolution of society than it was a creature of the external environment:

> The state is by no means solely determined by society. For the state is not merely a government internally but a sovereign power externally. Throughout history power has been the main goal of the activities of the state; hence its structure depends at least as much on the conditions of its external power position as on the social-structural conditions of its internal governing activity. Since the state must adjust itself not only internally, but also externally to the conditions of its existence, the external setting must surely influence the internal social development.[13]

12. P. C. Emmer and H. L. Wesseling, eds., *Reappraisals in Overseas History* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 1979), pp. 200–204.

13. Reinhard Bendix, ed., *State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Political Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 156.

Hintze drew the grand conclusion that "throughout the ages pressure from without has been a determining influence on internal structure."[14] In counseling the German government, Hintze, like Ranke, argued that it was necessary for the state to organize itself internally so as to succeed externally. He emphasized not only the strong military posture, the political organization, and the foreign policy that Ranke had stressed as essential to the external security of the state, he also maintained that the government should direct all activities, including education and especially economic activities, toward strengthening Germany against foreign powers.[15]

The extent of Japan's continuing vulnerability and the strength of its ambition for national power and status dictated a readiness to organize the domestic infrastructure of political-economic institutions to meet the demands of success in foreign policy. Under the changing conditions of its regional environment, Japan followed a strategy of organizing the nation internally in order to succeed externally. This adaptive capacity is most evident at times of fundamental change in the international system. On particular issues, domestic circumstance might prevail in decision making, but in the long run and in the bigger picture of calculating strategy and shaping the society's institutions, it was the paradigm of international order and its fundamental changes that influenced the deeper processes of modern Japan. When the paradigm shifted, the Japanese as a matter of strategy adapted in a fundamental and pervasive way to all aspects of the external order. From the Meiji period on, there persisted a close correlation between the modus operandi of the international system and the character of its domestic institutions.[16]

14. Felix Gilbert, ed., *The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 183. Charles Tilly's dictum that "war made the state and the state made war" is of the same approach. Tilly refined and expanded Hintze's belief that "all state organization was originally military organization." Tilly observed how the major attributes of state formation were made in the crucible of preparation for war: "The building of an effective military machine imposed a heavy burden on the population involved: taxes, conscription, requisitions, and more. The very act of building it—when it worked—produced arrangements which could deliver resources to the government for other purposes . . . . It produced the means of enforcing the government's will over stiff resistance: the army. It tended, indeed, to promote territorial consolidation, centralization, differentiation of the instruments of government and monopolization of the means of coercion, all the fundamental state-making processes. War made the state, and the state made war." Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 42.

15. Gilbert, *Historical Essays of Otto Hintze,* p. 11. The exposed position of Germany in Central Europe required it to adapt all of its domestic institutions to the exigencies of constant military conflict. "Commodore Perry's Black Ships," wrote the international relations theorist Jack Snyder, "played the same role for Japan as encirclement in Central Europe played for Otto Hintze's Prussia." Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 116.

16. See Donald C. Hellmann, "Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy: Elitist Democracy Within an American Greenhouse," in Takashi Inoguchi and Daniel I. Okimoto, eds., *The Political Economy of Japan, Vol. 2: The Changing International Context* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 345–78.

Japan's Strategic Style

The behavior of nations, like individuals, is shaped by elements of heredity and environment, which through history respond to problems and experiences and in time build up relatively stable patterns of response. These patterns, although persistent, are by no means immutable, but evolve as a people absorb new experiences and encounter changes in their environment. They may change gradually over time, but they are not erased. There is innovation in the patterns as new challenges are encountered, but there is great conservativeness too. These recurrent patterns of behavior constitute a distinctive set of national attitudes, habits, and principles with which this people approaches its problems. They are distinctively manifest in the nation's foreign policy and in the interaction the nation has with its external environment.

As the eminent French authority on international politics Raymond Aron observed, states acquire different "styles of being and behaving" that persist through time.[17] This style springs in part from intrinsic factors of geography and the nation's natural endowments. "A position on the map imposes upon the diplomacy or upon the strategy of a state," Aron continued, "certain orientations which are likely to be lasting, if not permanent."[18] Within that geographical setting, the centuries of experience are transformed over time into second nature, producing cultural traits which Montesquieu called "the spirit of a nation." This esprit forms an important formative influence on its international behavior and, as Aron allowed, gives a "relative consistency in the 'style' of foreign policy," but it must not be used as a sufficient explanation of any particular policy. As Aron wisely observed,

> The "spirit of a nation" which Montesquieu speaks of is a notion as equivocal as that of national character, but perhaps preferable because it emphasizes the share of culture and the historical heritage. "Mankind [Montesquieu wrote] is influenced by various causes: by the climate, by the religion, by the laws, by the maxims of government, by precedence, morals, and customs: whence is formed a general spirit of nations." The French nation was not born as it is now, it has become what it is as a result of the events which it has lived through, of the customs which have been slowly established and of the mode of government. A result more than an origin, the spirit of a nation renders a destiny intelligible as a particular fact, but it must not constrain investigation; it helps understanding, but it must be explained.[19]

17. Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations,* Richard Howard and Annette Baker Fox, trans. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p. 279.

18. Ibid., p. 287.

19. Ibid., pp. 289–90. In the years since Joseph Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones observed a persistent neglect of "national styles of strategy," there has developed considerable interest in strategic culture as an explanation for a state's international behavior. Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), chapter one. See also Joseph Nye and Sean Lynn-Jones, "International Security Studies: A Report on a Conference on the State of the Field," *International Security,* Vol. 12, No. 4 (1988), pp. 5–27.

The wellsprings of modern Japan's international behavior lie in the long years of isolation during Japan's premodern history. Patterns of strategic culture have deep roots in history, but they are continuously subject to refinement and are variously affected by more recent historical experiences, such as regime change, new ideological influence, problems of technological transition, and change in the nature of elite politics.

The strategic style of modern Japan's leadership is a legacy of premodern influences and the formative experience of the Meiji Restoration. The most important historical legacy in shaping the modern strategic culture was the long experience with feudalism which implanted the values of Realpolitik. In fact, the Tokugawa system was, in some sense, a microcosm of the international system and the competition among fiefs was analogous to that among nations. The term *kokueki,* which is today translated "national interest," had its origins (like *fukoku kyōhei*) in the competition among domains to keep up with the latest and most successful techniques and institutions. The Meiji leaders instinctively gave priority to the value of power and its symbols. The overriding concern in feudal society with the maximization of military power as a condition of survival meant that power and its symbols were the source of security and prestige.[20] Feudal society instilled a profound respect and attention to power in all its manifestations. In *Bunmeiron no gairyaku,* Fukuzawa described the overriding concern with power (*kenryoku no henchō*) as the distinguishing characteristic of Japanese society. The Meiji leaders were sensitive to all aspects of power in the international system; they were ready to accommodate it as well as to pursue it. They adapted swiftly to the institutions of informal imperialism—treaty ports, tariff control, extraterritoriality. They seemed instinctively to grasp the importance of adjusting to and using its norms. International law which had been invoked to infringe Japanese sovereignty was used to enable Japan's own advance in the imperialist system. The "vocabulary of power" was mobilized to undermine the residual influence of the Sinocentric system and to legitimate the Japanese colonization of Korea.[21]

There were other premodern influences that prepared them for the international system. One of the most important was the traditional attitude toward learning. Emulation was never regarded as slavish or even demeaning but was simply the accepted way of learning. The Japanese did not have the same barriers of cultural and religious self-absorption that in other countries impeded learning from other civilizations. Effective borrowing and adaptation rested on their tradition of apprenticeship learning which, as Thomas

20. See the discussion in Albert Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), pp. 361–74.

21. Alexis Dudden, *Japan's Colonization of Korea: Discourse and Power* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

Rohlen describes it, gave them the disposition to "scan the external environment objectively" and the capacity to "grasp the essence of other social and technological orders." This pattern of learning was valuable in encouraging the propensity to adapt to external reality. In a splendid essay on Japanese learning, Rohlen writes of the qualities that made Japanese attentive to the outside world:

> We might also distinguish between societies preoccupied with expressing their own "reality" to the rest of the world and those oriented toward perceiving carefully what lies outside. *In Japan's case, the accommodative inclination has been dominant* . . . . While some nations perfect the art of communicating their own virtues and worldview for political or religious reasons, Japan has emphasized listening and detailed observation . . . . This "objectivity" starts, I think, with *a basic cultural disposition to an adaptive posture and with a fundamental epistemology that emphasizes exterior rather than interior truth.* The "other" orientation and context-specific qualities of the language and of Japanese social relations are relevant here, just as is the generally nonproselytizing nature of the Japanese approach to religion. That is to say, the fundamental character of the Japanese cultural pattern is strongly oriented to learning from others.[22]

Japan's role in the international system has not been driven by great transcendent ideals or universal principles. Quite the opposite. Japan's international behavior has been marked by its pragmatic, often opportunistic, pursuit of power. Akira Iriye observed that Japan has generally pursued "a foreign policy without ideological principles (*mu-shiso no gaikō*)."[23] This pragmatic bent perhaps owes partly to the fact that religion never attained an ascendant position or an institutional center equivalent to Rome from which it could propound norms for the political world. As Eiko Ikegami writes, "unlike the medieval Church, which asserted the existence of universal standards of truth and justice that were greater than secular sovereignty of one European country, the medieval Japanese Buddhist temples did not establish normative and transcendental values to which the secular authority should, in theory, be subject."[24] Whatever the reason, modern Japan's conservative leaders were exemplars of the maxim that conservatism is "the negation of ideology." They did not cling to any particular conservative theory. They did not vest their "confidence in any general political or economic

22. Thomas P. Rohlen, "Learning: The Mobilization of Knowledge in the Japanese Political Economy," in Shumpei Kumon and Henry Rosovsky, eds., *The Political Economy of Japan, Vol. 3: Cultural and Social Dynamics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), pp. 326–27. Italics added.

23. Irie Akira, *Nihon no gaikō: Meiji ishin kara gendai made* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1966), p. 27.

24. Eiko Ikegami, *The Taming of the Samurai: Honorific Individualism and the Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 186–87.

principle equally applicable to—and equally abstracted from—all societies."[25] They did not begin with a grand design for refashioning the social order from top to bottom. Theirs was a conservatism of the concrete and particular. They invariably favored the pragmatic to the doctrinal approach. Although foreign policies might from time to time be given ideological justifications, they were more pretext than motivation.

One of contemporary Japan's leading strategic thinkers, Ambassador Okazaki Hisahiko, responded to an American journalist who asked him if there were any fixed principles in Japan's foreign policy: "The histories of our two countries are different. Your country was built on principles. Japan was built on an archipelago."[26] Okazaki did not elaborate on this Delphic assertion, but one may surmise what he meant. An island nation further from the continent than England, with a homogeneous population and poor in natural resources, Japan's modern outlook on world affairs was shaped by its geography as well as the unique history that was the legacy of this geography. Japan was a natural nation-state, not one forged by drawing lines on a map or constructed from common beliefs. Okazaki doubtless also had in mind that Japan could not afford to take a stand on principle; its island economy and geopolitical position made it too vulnerable; its peculiar dependence on trade left it with a feeling of insecurity that engendered a persistently opportunistic foreign policy. Resource poor and a late arriver in the modern world, Japan was uniquely vulnerable to shifts in the international system.

Owing to the realist values deeply embedded in its strategic culture, modern Japan became an adaptive state. The late Kōsaka Masataka, a leading authority on Japanese foreign policy, emphasized the passive, situational, and reactive patterns in the Japanese approach to international norms:

> Japan is a natural nation-state; the idea that a state is created by a common will and contract has not existed in Japan. Japan has existed and will exist, regardless of the will and action of its people. Hence, norms are considered to be created by nature, not men . . . . The logical conclusion from such a view of the world is that the task for the Japanese is to adapt wisely to the international situation to secure its national interests, and not try to change or create the mysterious framework.

In Japan's historical experience, whether in domestic or in international society, norms are "either given from above or called forth by the situation. They are not created by men through multilateral action. Therefore, Japanese will

25. This maxim is attributed to H. Stuart Hughes. See David B. Hart, "A Most Partial Historian," *First Things,* No. 138 (December 2003), p. 35.

26. Okazaki Hisahiko, "Ajia chōtaiken e no shinsenryaku," *This Is Yomiuri,* August 1992, pp. 42–90; translated as "Southeast Asia in Japan's National Strategy," *Japan Echo,* Vol. 20 (special issue 1993), p. 61.

observe norms when they are given in a clear form."[27] The distinguished political scientist Kyōgoku Jun'ichi has written, in the same vein, that in Japan's experience, "the world has been a 'given' surrounding Japan, which makes a real impact on Japan, but which cannot be modified by the efforts of the Japanese. The world is nothing but the 'framework' or the setting which can change only mysteriously."[28]

Modern Japan's propensity to accommodate its external environment owed much to attitudes embedded in its premodern historical experience. From the middle of the nineteenth century on, Japanese statesmen repeatedly referred to the need to discern and conform to the powerful impersonal forces that seemed to control their environment. They perceived Japan as vulnerable to historic forces too powerful to tame and control, and they tried to operate in accord with these forces and use them to Japan's advantage. It was a significant part of their realist traditions that Japanese leaders sought to read the direction of the flow of events, what they called "the trend of the times," and to act in accordance with it—seeking not to change it but rather to move with it in ways that would work to their advantage. Somewhat akin to sixteenth-century Italians, especially Machiavelli, who spoke of an external force of nature that controlled state behavior, Japanese leaders expressed a respect for the great impersonal forces of history. They saw themselves maneuvering within the constraints of these great forces. The ability to adapt, essential to pragmatic, opportunistic, and realist pursuit of power, drew strength from this tendency to regard conformity to the trend of the times as a supreme virtue.

Many distinguished scholars writing on Japanese national character have observed this tendency. Yanagita Kunio stressed the Japanese deference to *taisei,* which denoted a kind of dynamic force controlling human affairs. He pointed out that while the term *taisei* had long been common in Oriental languages, it assumed special significance for the Japanese. Without a frontier to influence national character by offering a haven for original and unusual views, the tendency to assimilate was always strong. Yanagita discerned in the Japanese political tradition a climate of respect for the ability to change easily and adapt to the dominating trends, to read the feelings of others, to sense the atmosphere of a given situation, to protect oneself by allying with the powerful. He observed a tendency in Japanese history to regard adaptation to the trend of the times as a great virtue: "The emergence of a new trend would produce the urge to comply before it was too late, without thorough evaluation. In scholarship and politics, as well, the tendency to

27. Masataka Kosaka, "The International Economic Policy of Japan," in Robert A. Scalapino, ed., *The Foreign Policy of Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 224.

28. Quoted in ibid., p. 224.

join in and assimilate was strong . . . . people increasingly sought positions at the vanguard of the trend."[29]

Maruyama Masao similarly cited this tendency to conform to the environment as a key aspect of Japanese political psychology. Foreign observers, he wrote, are often baffled by two contradictory tendencies in Japanese politics: the difficulty of making change and the rapidity with which change takes place. Maruyama's explanation is that a reluctance to break with the present is set off by the readiness to accommodate the realities of the time which, he wrote, is the hallmark of the pragmatic and nondoctrinaire nature of Japanese conservatism, in contrast to the stubborn and principled conservatism in Europe. Therefore, in Japanese politics, he adds, it is difficult to take the lead in reform but once it is underway change spreads rapidly.[30]

Japanese leaders spoke frequently of being subject to powerful forces controlling their environment, which they referred to as *sekai no taisei* (trends of the world), *jisei* (trends of the time), *shizen no ikioi* (natural forces), or *hitsuzen no ikioi* (inexorable forces), all terms denoting a kind of dynamic force in human affairs impelling events that was beyond the ability of leaders to control. The Meiji leaders frequently characterized their adaptive and emulative policies as impelled by great impersonal forces. The term *jisei* was a key concept used in the widely read *Nihon gaishi* (Unofficial history of Japan), written in 1837 and read by all the Meiji leaders. In this book, often said to be the most popular history of Japan in the nineteenth century, the author Rai San'yō used the concept to denote a trend in human affairs, generated by past events, which if ignored could frustrate the aspirations of even the most able and virtuous of men. The perceptive statesman understood the nature of these forces, foresaw the outcome of change, adapted to it, and so paradoxically was even able to direct and control change. Sanyo's writings were favored by the Meiji leaders, especially Itō Hirobumi. Itō justified Japan's adoption of constitutionalism as adjusting to the inevitable trend in human affairs. In his *Rikken kaitai ni kansuru ikensho* (Opinion on constitutional government) written in 1880, Itō explains why Japan must change its domestic structure and adopt constitutional and representative institutions:

> Today conditions in Japan are closely related to the world situation. They are not merely affairs of a nation or a province. The European concepts of revolution, which were carried out first in France about 100 years ago, have gradually spread to the various nations. By combining and complementing each other, they have become a general trend [*taisei*]. Sooner or later, every

29. Yanagita Kunio, *Nihonjin* (Tokyo: Mainichi Shinbunsha, 1976), pp. 1–2.

30. Maruyama Masao, *Senchū to sengo no aida* (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1976), pp. 347–48.

> nation will undergo changes as a result . . . . The trend of the times has brought [this] about, and human efforts cannot control it.[31]

World War I undermined the imperialist system in East Asia and led to the creation of the next new regional order. The United States emerged from the war as the new world power and asserted a new set of organizing principles that would revolutionize the system. Woodrow Wilson's principles were intended to do away with the norms of imperialism, to end reliance on balance-of-power politics and secret treaties, and to replace them with ideals of international liberalism: self-determination, arms limitation, free trade, and collective security. Having striven so fiercely to accommodate to the rules and mores of the imperialist system, the Japanese were stunned by the abrupt change in the international system. Nevertheless, Japan's initial response was similar to its Meiji one. Japan chose to accommodate the demands of the new order. It accepted the prevailing rules of the Washington System even though its liberal principles had no basis in Japanese experience and were designed to contain Japanese power. Japan's conservative elite not only revised its foreign policies, it sanctioned a newly proclaimed democratic politics at home that would accord with the new international norms.

After his appointment as the first party prime minister, Hara Kei acknowledged the "new world trends" represented by Wilsonianism and said it was inevitable that Japan should move in accord with them. Hara had always expressed belief in adaptability and pragmatism as a key to political success. As a youthful journalist, Hara had written in 1881: "Nothing is more conducive of difficulties than not knowing the trend of the times [*jisei*]; nothing is more essential for governance than gauging the *jisei* . . . . To be in a position of power and not know which way the tide is running is very dangerous." After entering the cabinet in 1904 he repeated the wisdom of his younger days: "The greatest need of administration is to be in accord with the forces of nature [*shizen no susei*] and to take appropriate measures."[32] Hara had visited the United States in 1908 and had come away convinced of its latent influence in world affairs. "He vowed that an understanding with the United States would be a basic prerogative for Japanese policy. This was because America represented the inevitable trend in human affairs; to him it seemed obvious that the vitality of American people, nurtured by democratic institutions, indicated the wave of the future."[33]

31. *Itō Hirobumi den,* Vol. 2 (Tokyo: Shunbō Kōtsui Shōkai, 1940), pp. 193–94. See also George M. Beckmann, *The Making of the Meiji Constitution* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1957), p. 132.

32. Mitani Taichirō, *Nihon seitō seiji no keisei* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1967), pp. 19–21.

33. Akira Iriye, *Across the Pacific: An Inner History of American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1967), p. 111.

Makino Nobuaki, de facto head of the delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, was the second son of Ōkubo Toshimichi and strongly inclined toward the accommodative approach that the Meiji oligarchs had adopted toward the international structure. The new Wilsonian order might be bewildering; nevertheless, Japan had no choice but to follow the new norms or face isolation; they were the trends that would govern international politics. Only through accommodating these trends, Makino thought, could Japan successfully pursue its interests: "Today it is a worldwide trend to honor pacifism and reject oppression. Everywhere in the world the so-called Americanism is advanced, and conditions have definitely altered from the days of the old diplomacy." Before leaving for Versailles, he told his colleagues on the Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs that Japan must adapt to the new principles of "fair play, justice, and humanitarianism."[34] This acceptance and accommodation to the norms of the new system were, in the first place, undoubtedly a reflection of Japan's relative power position, but as Hara's repeated reference to the world trends suggests, the swift accommodation to the new realities and norms of the international system was reinforced by the instinctive attitudes deeply embedded in Japan's historical experience.

The abrupt transition from Taisho democracy to the politics of fascism has always been a challenge for historians to explain. In most accounts, the profound change in the external environment has not yet received the full attention it deserves in explaining the change in domestic politics. The Washington System was a house built on sand. It relied upon the hopeful expectation that peaceful commercial competition would replace armed rivalries. It turned out to be heavily dependent on economic performance and when "the great storage battery of the North American economy . . . ran dry, the new order of the 1920s disintegrated."[35] The Anglo-American powers failed to underwrite the new system they had created. They abandoned the principles upon which the system was based by retreating into isolationism and adopting protectionist measures. The Washington System crumbled under the impact of world economic depression. International liberalism was everywhere in retreat. The increasing anarchy in the international system provided strong incentives for Japan to improve its power position. The formation of exclusive economic blocs appeared to be the trend of the times to which Japan must adapt to protect its interests. In a truly momentous change for the Japanese, the British, who had advocated free trade since the opening of Japan, abandoned their time-honored commitments to the gold standard

34. Akira Iriye, "The Failure of Economic Expansionism: 1918–1931," in Bernard S. Silberman and H. D. Harootunian, eds., *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taisho Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 241.

35. Ernest R. May, "Foreword," in Erik Goldstein and John Maurer, eds., *The Washington Conference, 1921–22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor* (London: Frank Cass, 1994).

and the venerable commitment to international liberalism, instead turning the empire into a closed unit by adopting a system of trade preferences among the Commonwealth countries. The French had their empire. German economic policies were designed to create a dependent economic sphere in Central Europe. The Soviets had closed Russia's borders.

As Japanese leaders saw the liberal international order crumbling, their external world anarchic and devoid of rules or enforcers, their security concerns and strategic objectives reasserted themselves. Other powers were forming closed regional spheres, the international system was collapsing, fascism seemed to be the wave of the future. Japan must have a fully mobilized homeland and an autarkic regional base in preparation for protracted conflict. There could be no more extreme example of the adherence to the principle of *der Primat der Aussenpolitik* than the total war planners. In their view, all aspects of domestic society had to be subject to the demands of the competitive international system. The leading proponent of total war thought was General Ishiwara Kanji who studied in Germany for three years where he came under the powerful influence of one of Ranke's disciples, the military historian Hans Delbrück.

Owing to the characteristic disposition of Japanese conservatives to adapt, the institutions of fascism were introduced from above by the existing elites, in contrast to Europe where they came about through upheavals that overthrew the political system. A prominent political scientist and a confidant of Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, Rōyama Masamichi observed that it had always been the characteristic of Japan's political institutions that they were changed and adapted to meet the circumstances of the time.[36] Establishing a new order in Asia called for the creation of a new order at home. Once again, there persisted a close correlation between the modus operandi of the international system and the character of Japan's domestic institutions.

Western historiography on the origins of the Pacific War has focused its attention on Japan's internal politics, especially the increased influence of the military in the domestic political order following the Manchurian Incident, as the source of Japan's aggressive foreign policy in the 1930s.[37] Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto, observing that "many studies of Japanese fascism have placed overriding emphasis on domestic factors, even in explaining

36. Royama Masamichi, *TōA to sekai: shinjitsujo e no ronsaku* (Tokyo: Kaizo-sha, 1941), pp. 52–53.

37. As Michael Mandelbaum observes, "The Western historical reconstruction of the origins of World War II has placed the blame on Japan's internal politics, which are generally considered to have produced an aggressive foreign policy that culminated in the December 1941 attack. An 'inside-out' explanation of Japanese behavior gained wide acceptance after the war." Michael Mandelbaum, *The Fate of Nations: The Search for National Security in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 341.

Japan's foreign policy," suggested that preoccupation with an inside-out approach provided an inaccurate picture:

> To what extent were domestic developments contingent upon and determined by external context and the international environment? Just as the shape of the world in the mid-nineteenth century helped to determine Japan's internal politics then, did not the shape of the world in the 1920s and 1930s shape Japanese domestic politics? . . . It seems to us that an understanding of the 1930s requires much wider and more systematic analysis of the international system than has been done so far . . . . There are gaping holes in our knowledge of how the external environment affected pre-war Japan. There is a growing body of theoretical literature in the field of international relations which can be usefully tested on the case of pre-war Japan.[38]

Although many years have elapsed since their essay, historians have been slow to take up their suggestion and carefully examine the influence of the international system and the elite perception of it.

After World War II, Japan's leaders found new ways to implement their strategic style. Historians examining the reemergence of postwar Japan have described the success of an empowered bureaucracy in transforming wartime institutions into a high-growth system. But it is useful to understand that the economic institutions and the 1955 political system that supported it had such remarkable success in considerable part because they were an adaptation to the conditions of the external system. The war produced two major settlements—two sharply divergent organizations of the international system.[39] Although they became intertwined, they had different origins. There was, first, a liberal-democratic order that the United States had planned during the war. This was the order that gave birth to the Bretton Woods system for promoting international trade and economic development and to the establishment of a multitude of new institutions including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The other post-World War II settlement, which draws the greater attention because of its perilous political struggle, was the cold war order, marked by a bipolar balance of power, nuclear deterrence and stalemate, and political and ideological competition between the Western and Soviet blocs.

This reordering of the international system afforded a defeated and outcast Japan with an unexpected opportunity to restore its position as a major power. The liberal-democratic order established an international free-trade regime that Japan was able to make the most of by creating a national system of political economy. Japan developed industrial policies and a distinctive set of illiberal institutions to take advantage of this new international system.

38. Peter Duus and Daniel Okimoto, "Fascism and the History of Prewar Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 39, No. 1 (November 1979), pp. 65–76.

39. G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 163.

Pursuing policies of economic nationalism within a free-trade order would not ordinarily have been indulged, but because the United States was locked in a life-or-death struggle with the communist bloc and gave priority to Japanese economic recovery and to the health of its security alliance with Japan, the strategy succeeded. The cold war structure allowed Japan to depend on the United States for its security and to concentrate exclusively on economic growth and to depend on American forbearance in the face of this strategy.

The opportunities were recognized by a prime minister who was a master of the lessons of Japan's strategic culture. Yoshida Shigeru was a political heir to the Meiji paradigm of adaptiveness to the international system and honed it to its most elaborate and sophisticated form. The postwar Japanese state, the institutions of high economic growth, were shrewdly fitted to the circumstances of both the Pax Americana and the cold war international system. After the American occupation ended, Japan's postwar leaders fashioned a strategy for Japan to rise as a great economic power by once again reorganizing itself internally to succeed externally. It was another occasion for the *Primat der Aussenpolitik.* The unique cold war foreign policy of Japan which is best characterized as "mercantile realism" evolved as Japan characteristically responded to the structure of the international system.[40] Japan stayed on the sidelines of the cold war and bound itself in a series of self-abnegating restrictions: no overseas deployment of troops, no nuclear arms, no participation in collective defense arrangements, no power projection capability, no arms export, no sharing of defense technology, no more than one per cent of gross national product for defense expenditure, no military use of space. The realist pursuit of maximizing power was now concentrated exclusively on economic competition in which the instruments of power were productive efficiency, market control, trade surplus, strong currency, foreign exchange reserves, advanced technology, foreign direct investment, and foreign aid.

The institutions of the developmental state had their roots in the wartime years, but they were now adapted in such a way as to permit Japan to benefit from the new order, probably more than any other country. As a MITI viceminister remarked, "Japan has usually considered the international economic order as a given condition and looked for ways in which to use it."[41] The cold war anchored Japanese politics for more than four decades, offering ample time to adapt to its constraints and opportunities. Japan's domestic infrastructure was so intimately tied to its cold war foreign policy that it led Igarashi Takeshi to call it a "domestic foreign policy system."[42]

40. Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security,* Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 171–203.

41. *Look Japan,* September 10, 1986.

42. Igarashi Takeshi, "Peace-Making and Party Politics: The Formation of the Domestic Foreign-Policy System in Postwar Japan," *Journal of Japanese Studies,* Vol. 11, No. 2 (Summer 1985), pp. 323–56.

Japanese foreign policy had rarely been guided by abstract principles. In the postwar period, this nonideological nature was made explicit—even consciously stressed as a matter of strategy. Miyazawa Kiichi, Japan's most durable postwar leader and an unswerving adherent of the Yoshida strategy, maintained that Japan's constitution made it a "special state" and precluded it from normal participation in international politics. Accordingly, Japan could not justify promoting any point of view other than its own self-interest. Japan's foreign policy, he told an interviewer in 1980, "precludes all value judgments. It is a pretense of a foreign policy. The only value judgments we can make are determining what is in Japan's interest. Since there are no real value judgments possible we cannot say anything . . . . We watch the world situation and follow the trends."[43]

As Japan's economic power and self-confidence burgeoned in the 1980s, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro tried to break from Japan's characteristic approach. He attempted an internally generated, proactive rather than adaptive stance toward the international order. Rather than an opportunistic approach to foreign affairs, Japan would have its own ideals. Rather than emulating others, Japan would provide a model for other countries. Japan must play the role of leader in the international system and set forth its own self-generated objectives and principles.

After his first G-7 summit meeting, held in Williamsburg, Virginia, in May 1983, buoyed by the rising tide of expectation in his leadership and believing he was single-handedly transforming Japan's role in the world, Nakasone wrote exultantly in his diary:

> This must be the beginning of a new era in our diplomacy. Departing from the traditional, reactive [*hito no kaoiro ukagau*], wait-and-see [*hiyorimi*], opportunistic [*rikōteki*] style, I behaved broad mindedly and led the meeting with my own strategy and with my goals of [promoting] the interests of the free world and Japan. I believe that I made the boldest diplomatic move in the postwar world next to Yoshida's peace settlement [in 1951]. [Japan] has not been, thus far, able to make good use of its capability as an economic major power from the standpoint of international politics. I made 100 per cent use of it. It is the true value of politics . . . . This new emergence of Japan in international politics must be maintained, and this status must not be curtailed or abandoned. Such will be the single most important qualification for Japanese leaders from now on.[44]

Despite an extraordinary effort at self-generated reforms, in contrast to earlier interludes of change at the time of the Restoration and after World

43. Tahara Soichirō, "Sōren wa kowai desu ka," *Bungei shunju,* March 1980.

44. Sekai Heiwa Kenkyūjo, ed., *Nakasone naikaku shi: shiryō-hen* (Tokyo: Chūōkōron, 1995), pp. 631–32. See also Kamiya Matake, "Japanese Politics and Asia-Pacific Policy," in Ezra F. Vogel, Yuan Ming, and Tanaka Akihiko, eds., *The Golden Age of the U.S.-China-Japan Triangle, 1972–1989* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 69–70.

War II when external influence provided the stimulus, Nakasone's agenda was largely unrealized. His failure is especially significant because it demonstrated the limits of the Japanese system. That is, so strong and embedded was the Japanese trait of dependence on the external structure to provide the motive force for change in Japanese politics that Nakasone's determination to fashion a self-generated new direction ultimately failed. It would take the stimulus of powerful external events, the collapse of the cold war system, to prod Japan to reform its foreign policy and its domestic institutions. Japan would undertake fundamental change when a new order in East Asia stimulated it.

After the Cold War

The reversal of Japan's fortunes in the 1990s is not easy to explain. It might have been possible to blame the tide of troubles that swept over Japan simply on economic policy errors, except that it soon became apparent that the troubles had deeper sources than economic mismanagement. This "lost decade" revealed pervasive problems that pointed to widespread institutional fatigue, social malaise, and loss of national purpose. There are different ways to frame an analysis of this crisis. Most analyses concentrate on conditions within Japan—on the failures of economic policy, on the lack of political leadership, on the causes of social malaise. They concentrate on the proximate sources of trouble. At a deeper level, the roots of this crisis can be traced to radical changes in Japan's external environment and the difficulty Japan encountered in dealing with them. From the perspective proposed in this essay, it should not be a surprise that Japan encountered great difficulties when the cold war came to a precipitous end and the international order has yet to settle into a new equilibrium.

In East Asia no new framework was established. Old issues (a divided Korea, the Taiwan issue, an unconcluded peace treaty between Japan and Russia, communist governments in several states) were left unresolved from the previous order. Deep and destabilizing changes in the distribution of power within the region together with accelerated economic and technological development created a dynamic new environment whose structure was still indeterminant.

Japan's external environment in the post-cold war era was changing in such fundamental ways that leadership was deeply conflicted over how to respond. First, the developmentalist institutions that characterized Japan's capitalist economy, which Japan had shaped during its century-long catch-up period, confronted a new phase of global capitalism for which they were clearly unsuited. The nature of capitalism itself and the technological paradigm underlying it were entering a new and unprecedented phase. The end of the cold war removed the constraints from economic globalization that the

autarkic policies of communist governments had posed. National economies were increasingly linked through trade, financial flows, and foreign direct investment by multinational firms as the American government, the new World Trade Organization, and the European Union promoted further market liberalization. A new technological paradigm bringing a revolution in communications and information fueled these developments.

Second, the end of the cold war eroded the effectiveness of a foreign policy and domestic infrastructure that had been purposefully adapted to the bipolar order. The Persian Gulf War marked the end of international forbearance for Japan's mercantilist policies. Besides beginning the unraveling of the grand strategy of Japanese foreign policy, the end of the cold war also radically transformed the context of Japanese domestic politics. A political system whose establishment in 1955 had been organically tied to the international order was bound to be undermined by a fundamental change in that order.

Third, Japan confronted a radically transformed regional environment. Since the beginning of its modern history 150 years earlier, Japan had grown accustomed to a weak and passive Asia which it could comfortably expect to dominate. Only in the post-cold war decade did it become apparent that the regional order had vastly changed. The conspicuous dynamism and change in its immediate external environment meant that Japan's relations with its Asian neighbors became a new, more complex and demanding challenge for which little in its previous history adequately prepared it. Among the world's regions, Asia experienced the greatest uncertainty in the post-cold war period. The regional interregnum offered no clear paradigm to which Japan might relate to reshape the character and purpose of its institutions.

It was not coincidental that Japan suffered a period of drift and immobilism at a time when the tectonic plates of the international system itself were shifting and the nature of the international system was uncertain. The ill-defined future was reflected in the gridlock in Japanese politics. Uncertain what shape the new paradigm would ultimately take, Japan's conservative leaders floundered, unable to discern from the indeterminate trends a clear new direction in which to take the nation. Kōsaka Masataka discussed a historic pattern of Japan's difficulty in reaching consensus in situations of great uncertainty in the framework of their international environment. "Consensus is obtained without great difficulty when the nature of the task is clear. Often, for instance, the Japanese have been good at adapting to strong, decisive pressures from outside. But when the situation is blurred they are in trouble."[45] Consensual decision making is ponderous when the external environment offers no clear discernible order or direction. The characteristic adaptive approach loses its power to shape decisive responses.

45. Kosaka, "The International Economic Policy of Japan," p. 224.

The prominent economist Nakatani Iwao, a reformer deeply frustrated by the slow pace of change, consoled himself by recalling that it was a matter of national style for Japan to observe historical trends and move with the tide. He acknowledged in a 1996 book how ineffective Japan had been in carrying out deregulation and reform of its economy. Discussing the institutional obstacles and the complacency of the people, and seemingly ruling out all self-generated sources of change, he nonetheless concluded that Japan would ultimately change—and with surprising speed. Listen for echoes of the old reliance on the *jisei.*

> When we [Japanese] carefully perceive the change in the times [*jidai no henka*], the change in history [*rekishi no henka*], the change in the surrounding environment [*kankyō no henka*], when we perceive all aspects of these changes, and when we precisely grasp the direction of these changes, then an overwhelming number of Japanese will correctly understand the meaning of the historical turning point facing present day Japan and will begin to move in the correct direction and the reform of Japan will take place with unexpected rapidity.[46]

The change in Japan's external environment since 1990 has been profound and the historic dynamics that have driven modern Japan are now at work. Fundamental change in the structure of the international system and in the global political economy early in the twenty-first century are leading Japan to reassess the strategies adopted for the cold war era and to prepare once again for a markedly different future. In response to new conditions, the self-binding restrictions that kept it on the sidelines of international political-military affairs are incrementally being set aside.[47] Economic policies and institutions are being steadily adapted to the challenges of globalization.[48] There are unmistakable signs that the nation is on the verge of the kind of sea change that has often surprised foreign observers. The nature of its new position in the international order is not yet clear, but Japan is on the threshold of a new era in the way it relates to the international system. Its future foreign policy will be very different from the grand strategy that Yoshida Shigeru pioneered. Its cold war role as a merchant nation and the core domestic institutions associated with that role will then seem part of a distinct past.

To give a full account of the motive forces that have shaped modern Japan, historians must integrate the structure of the international order into their explanations. It is important not only because of its inherently powerful

46. Nakatani Iwao, *Nihon keizai no rekishiteki henkan* (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 1996), pp. 345–46.

47. Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Re-emergence as a 'Normal' Military Power," *Adelphi Paper* 368–9 (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2004).

48. Ulrike Schaede and William Grimes, eds., *Japan's Managed Globalization: Adapting to the Twenty-first Century* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003).

ability to set the limits of a state's ability, to offer incentives and set constraints, but also because Japan's conservative elite has demonstrated a recurrent pattern of adapting strategically to changes in its structure. It is wise to conclude that "international relations and domestic politics are therefore so interrelated that they should be analyzed simultaneously, as wholes."[49] For while the effects of the international system on Japan were powerful, it has been the strong and persistent disposition of the elites to give primacy to the demands of foreign affairs that has constituted an essential source of Japanese behavior.

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49. Peter Gourevitch, "The Second Image Reversed: The International Sources of Domestic Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Autumn 1978), pp. 900, 911.