

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Writers of contemporary history face a curious paradox. Because they have lived through the period they describe, they should have an easy time writing about it. But in fact, the contemporary historians' task is far more intractable than is that of the medievalists who have no direct experience of the world they study. The medievalists' task is made easy by the fact that moth and rust have destroyed much of the evidence for their period. By contrast, evidence at the contemporary historians' disposal is, for all practical purposes, limitless. For every volume of *Kamakura ibun*, for example, there are shelf miles of official papers, private papers, books, periodicals, photographs, and films documenting even a single year of the twentieth century. This embarrassment of riches provides contemporary historians with an amount of material that the medievalists cannot hope for even in their wildest dreams, yet this abundance limits what contemporary historians can confidently understand in a lifetime. Contemporary historians can explore a narrow problem definitively in a way that medievalists cannot, but they have more difficulty grasping the larger context of that problem.

In a sense, contemporary historians know too much but understand too little. Although the medievalists may never really be sure how Minamoto Yoritomo died, they can have few doubts about Yoritomo's place in history. On the other hand, even though the health and political problems of a contemporary politician like Tanaka Kakuei are chronicled in the daily press, the contemporary historians cannot be entirely confident about their assessment of Tanaka, if only because he is still alive and his biography not yet complete. The contemporary historians' difficulties in finding the proper purchase on the history they study were aptly summarized by Geoffrey Barraclough:

The very notion of contemporary history, it has been maintained, is a contradiction in terms. Before we can adopt a historical point of view we must stand at a certain distance from the happenings we are investigating. It is hard enough at all times to "disengage" ourselves and look at the past dispassion-

ately and with the critical eye of the historian. Is it possible at all in the case of events which bear so closely upon our own lives?¹

Contemporary historians, like physicians who treat themselves, are simultaneously subject and object. Even if they participated only as observers in the events they describe, they are still part of them. The immediate past is likely to have affected their lives in a way that the remote past has not, and the mood of their own time is intertwined with that of the period they are studying. Historians are likely to think about World War II quite differently in 1980 than they did in 1950 or will in 2010 if they live that long. And their change in view will be affected not simply by the discovery of new evidence or a more sophisticated synthesis of monographic studies, as it might be if they were thinking about the Gempei War. Rather, it will have been affected by the passage of time. What has happened since the end of the war will color their perceptions of why it happened and what it meant.

The difficulty of establishing perspectives on contemporary history complicates the problem of periodization. There are obvious historical punctuation points, but the shape of the whole text is not always clear. This volume, for example, deals with “twentieth-century Japan.” Twenty-five years ago, historians of Japan might have questioned whether this constituted a coherent historical period at all. Although it probably would have made some sense to see the years from 1895 to 1945 as a chronological unit, unified by the rise and fall of the Japanese empire, what was to be done about the postwar period? How could it have been made to fit with the preceding half-century? Some would have answered: “It does not fit. The Japanese have made a clear break with their militarist and expansionist past. Postwar Japan is a new society, peaceful and democratic, and it is entirely different from prewar Japanese society.” Others would have been quick to doubt whether Japan had really changed or whether many of the forces at work in prewar Japan were not still active and influential in the postwar period too. And such historical assessments would have reflected political judgments about the direction of Japan’s future rather than a dispassionate attempt to chart the trajectory of Japan’s development.

There is a strong and obvious case to be made that the twentieth century is not a coherent historical unit. The year 1945 constitutes a major dividing point in modern Japanese history, second in importance only to 1868. It is easy to see on one side of that divide a

1 Geoffrey Barraclough, *An Introduction to Contemporary History* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1967), pp. 14–15.

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Japan ridden with internal conflict, plagued by economic fluctuations, feared and hated by its Asian neighbors, and locked in a confrontation with the advanced capitalist nations; and on the other side, a Japan unified by a national political and social consensus, enjoying sustained economic growth and affluence, and at harmony with both its Asian neighbors and other capitalist nations. In short, on the one side of that divide is Imperial Japan, and on the other is Japan Incorporated. The contrast, we are aware, is a caricature, but as someone once observed, a caricature often resembles its subject more than a photograph does, for it captures an essence, not a likeness. Certainly, many Japanese would testify to the importance of postwar change. The generation of Japanese alive in 1945 witnessed a dislocation in their own lives, and in that of their society, as radical as any before or since. In 1968, the centennial year of the Meiji Restoration, two out of three persons responding to an *Asahi shinbun* opinion survey considered the Pacific War the most important event in the preceding century – only 14 percent mentioned the Meiji Restoration. Clearly, 1945 will remain for many a decisive turning point in modern Japanese history.²

Yet as we enter the final decades of the twentieth century, the dimensions of that divide seem less and less formidable. The continuities between prewar and postwar Japan are clearer than they were in the immediate postwar period. Much contemporary history has been written not by historians but by social scientists, and the hegemonic historical paradigm in most social sciences is an evolutionary model, stressing long-term developmental trends. This model has indeed shaped our understanding of twentieth-century history. To be sure, the model comes in several varieties – that of the Marxists, of the “modernization” theorists, and of the developmental economists – each offering different interpretations of twentieth-century Japan. The Marxist view stresses the growth of a society dominated by monopoly capital, riven by class struggle, and propelled into territorial expansionism before the war, and characterized by neocolonialism and “managerial fascism” after the war. The more bland and less dramatic view of the modernization theorists has seen Japan developing steadily into a secular mass society, increasingly bureaucratic in character, and converging toward a pattern of impersonality and equality in social relations characteristic of Western society. Finally, the developmental economists – who can no longer

2 The survey was conducted in August 1968 and reported in the September 20, 1968, edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. Cited in Akio Watanabe, “Japanese Public Opinion and Foreign Policy, 1964–1973,” in *The Foreign Policy of Modern Japan*, ed. Robert A. Scalapino (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), p. 111.

be accused of practicing a “dismal science” – have charted basic continuity in Japan’s modern economic growth, interrupted but not broken by the political and military upheavals of the mid-century. All these views, whether optimistic or pessimistic in their assessment of twentieth-century Japan, share the assumption that beneath the surface pattern of change, the historical process is a seamless web spun on an evolutionary loom.

Change and continuity are themes with which contemporary historians must deal more often than do other historians. In broad terms it is possible to see the social, economic, and political patterns that link the Japan of 1980 with that of 1900, yet what gives twentieth-century history its texture are the subtle variations, and the sometimes-not-so-subtle transformations, within those patterns. When to emphasize change – the variations and transformations – and when to emphasize continuity – the overall patterns – is to some degree an arbitrary choice for historians, depending on the scale, duration, and purpose of their project. As the several chapters of this volume indicate, social or economic historians are more likely to argue for continuities than are political or diplomatic historians. Yet the important thing to bear in mind is that either emphasis is likely to yield insight into the overall shape of twentieth-century history.

But where does the twentieth century begin, and where does it end? Collective human behavior, always unruly and unpredictable, is not easy to fit into the tidy compartments we use to mark the passage of time. Periodization is arbitrary, especially when historians are *in medias res*, as contemporary historians always are. Curiously, it is easier to set a terminal date than a beginning date for this volume’s coverage. The two “shocks” of 1972–3, the sudden revaluation of the yen and the equally sudden leap of world oil prices, marked the end of the postwar era of rapid economic growth. Although in the long run the Japanese managed to overcome many of the economic and political problems created by these two shocks, it is convenient to set a boundary there.

The beginning is less easy to define. A strong case can be made that the “twentieth century” began well before the turn of the century, in that certain long-term problems and trends that have affected Japan well into the twentieth century were already visible then. Certainly many of the authors of this volume would agree. Professor Crawcour begins his discussion of economic change in the mid-1880s; Professor Peattie begins his discussion of the colonial empire in the mid-1890s;

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and Professor Mitani begins his discussion of political parties in the late 1890s. Others have suggested that the 1890s saw a remarkable shift in the mood of Japan.³

We shall probably be not too wrong if we adopt 1895 as the beginning of the twentieth century. Whereas the victory over China was a “shock” different from those that Japan experienced in 1972–3, it had a decisive impact on the subsequent history of the country’s relations with the outside world. In regard to the economy, the end of the war was also an important turning point. For the first time, many Japanese leaders began to think of Japan as an industrial and commercial nation, not as an agricultural one. The sudden inflow of Chinese indemnity money helped finance Japan’s development of heavy industry, especially iron and steel; the indemnity also enabled Japan to shift to the gold standard; the opening of the China market provided an additional stimulus for Japan’s textile industry; and the government began to promote more actively the export of Japanese manufactured goods. By 1895 there was no question that an industrial revolution was well under way.

In politics too, the year 1895 marks the beginning of a shift away from rule by the Meiji oligarchs to a new generation of political leaders. In December 1895 the Jiyūtō reached an entente with the Itō cabinet, the first of a series of temporary alliances between oligarchic prime ministers and political parties in the lower house of the Diet during the late 1890s. When Itō Hirobumi resigned from the premiership six years later, he was the last of the Meiji oligarchs to serve in that office. Even though the oligarchs continued to play an important role as *genrō* (elder statesmen), their influence gradually receded during the next two decades. Power passed into the hands of younger leaders drawn from the military, the civil bureaucracy, and the political parties. As we shall see, their authority was narrower and less stable than that of the oligarchs, and the shift that began in 1895 was therefore of considerable significance.

3 As Kenneth Pyle observed, “Somewhere in the terrain of the late 1880s and early 1890s lies a major watershed in modern Japanese history. On one side lies a Japan occupied with domestic reform; a curious, self-critical, uncertain Japan; a Japan still in the making, preparing for the future, impelled by a robust and often naive optimism; above all, an experimental Japan, open to the world, trying new institutions, testing new values, intent on reordering her society and government. On the other side lies a Japan with a renewed sense of order and discipline in her national life; a Japan less tractable, less hospitable to social reform, less tolerant of new values; a self-esteeming Japan, advertising her independence and destiny; above all, a Japan with a heightened sense of her own unity and exclusiveness.” Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 188.

JAPAN AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD:
FROM AUTONOMY TO DEPENDENCE

Without doubt it is in Japan's relations with the outside world that the most striking historical discontinuities are to be found.⁴ The end of World War II looms as a major historical marker. Before 1945 the leaders of Japan were consumed by an obsession with national defense and with preserving freedom of action in international affairs. Although they cooperated with other world powers through alliances or treaties, they did not wish to be subordinate to or dependent on any foreign nation. The drive for national autonomy began with the drive to end the "unequal treaties" in the 1890s and accelerated in the 1920s and 1930s. By contrast, after 1945, independent action in world politics nearly disappeared as an option for the national leadership, and until the early 1970s, the dependence of Japan on a foreign power, the United States, was palpable and undeniable. No prime minister was willing to take a foreign policy initiative considered contrary to the interests of the United States, and few leaders advocated the creation of a truly autonomous military force able to defend the country without outside support, such as Japan possessed before 1945.

This dramatic shift in Japan's relations with the outside world—from autonomy to dependence—was part of a broader change in that world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, European expansion was at its peak. European colonial domination had been extended over much of the non-Western world; balance-of-power politics in Europe affected the state of politics in the world; and decisions over the fate of hundreds of millions of non-European peoples were made in the European capitals. Just two generations later, the European colonial empires had been toppled and supplanted by complex networks of trade, foreign aid, and security agreements; an international market dominated by European capital, products, and technology had been replaced by one governed by several regional economic systems; and a world in which Europe was the cultural center had become one of enormous cultural diversity. The imperialist order dominated by the nations of the European peninsula had given way to a complex multi-polar international system dominated by two great superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union.

As the first non-Western nation to emerge as a world power, Japan

⁴ A survey of prewar Japanese foreign policy may be found in Ian Nish, *Japan's Foreign Policy, 1868–1942: Kasumigaseki to Miyakezaka* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977).

played a significant but complicated role in bringing about these great changes in the international order.⁵ Because it was the only world power to have experienced imperialist intrusion, however briefly, in the late nineteenth century, Japan's prewar foreign policy acquired a peculiar ambivalence. On the one hand, having successfully resisted Western political encroachments and negotiated its way out of the unequal treaty system imposed on the country in the 1850s, Japan served as a model and inspiration to anticolonialist movements in all parts of Asia, even as far away as India. On the other hand, as Japan acquired its own colonial territories in Taiwan, Korea, and southern Sakhalin, established a sphere of influence in southern Manchuria, and enjoyed the privileges of a treaty power in China proper, its leaders came to share the same anxieties, aspirations, and ambitions as those of the Western imperialist nations. (For example, the first international diplomatic gathering attended by Japanese representatives was the Peking Conference of 1900, convened to deal with the settlement of the Boxer Rebellion, an outburst of popular xenophobic antiimperialism.)

These conflicting aspects of Japan's peculiar international position at the turn of the century led its leaders to practice a curious form of antiimperialist imperialism. They could run with the hare or hunt with the hounds, as external circumstance and internal interests dictated. As the first Asian nation to modernize, Japan attracted the interest of anticolonial and antiimperialist political movements throughout Asia. Even before the turn of the century, a handful of would-be reformers in Korea and China looked to Japan for the secrets of national wealth and strength. The Japanese victory over Russia in 1905 made it clear to other non-Western peoples that the Europeans were neither omnipotent nor invincible. It is no accident that during the first decade of the twentieth century, Indochinese anticolonial nationalists like Phan Boi Chau and Chinese nationalist reformers like Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Sun Yat-sen sought refuge or support in Tokyo, nor is it surprising that Japanese sympathizers tried to encourage them. The Pan-Asianist idea that Japan, as the first successful non-European modernizer, was obligated to assist the uplift of less fortunate neighboring peoples enjoyed wide currency from the beginning of the century onward.⁶

5 Richard Storry, *Japan and the Decline of the West in Asia, 1894–1943* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

6 For a pioneering work on Japanese Pan-Asianism, see Marius B. Jansen, *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954). Another informative work is by Joshua A. Fogel, *Politics and Sinology: The Case of Naitō Kōnan (1866–1934)* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).

But if victory over Russia gave hope to anticolonialist movements around the world, it also intensified the Japanese quest for freedom of action. Japan's acquisition of colonies on the Asian mainland, especially on the Korean peninsula, was intended to reduce Japan's defense vulnerability, but ironically it had the opposite effect of increasing its concerns over national security. As its boundaries of empire expanded, so did its zone of vulnerability. After Japan's triumph over Russia in 1905, the army general staff demanded more manpower to defend the new colonial possessions, and the navy asked for a larger fleet. Far from allaying strategic anxieties, an imperialist foreign policy fed them, and military expenditures continued to grow.

The contradiction between imperialist foreign policy and antiimperialist Pan-Asianist rhetoric became all too apparent during World War I. The withdrawal of Western power prompted Japanese leaders to pursue the country's interests, unconstrained by concern over Western reaction. Japan's declaration of war against Germany licensed the Japanese seizure of the German concessions on the Shantung peninsula as well as its Pacific territories, and the absence of countervailing Western power emboldened new attempts to secure a hegemonic position in China, first through the Twenty-one Demands and then through the Nishihara loans. And at the Versailles conference, the Japanese delegation assiduously protected its newly acquired hold over its Shantung and German Pacific colonies. It thus became increasingly clear to many Asian nationalists that Japan was as much a threat as a model. In 1917 Phan Boi Chau, the Indochinese patriot who had based his anti-French movement in Japan shortly before the Russo-Japanese War, declared that Japan had superseded all the European powers as the most dangerous enemy of Asia and that Japanese policy toward its Asian neighbors – Korea and China – was cut from the same cloth as that of the European colonial powers.⁷

At the beginning of the century the Meiji leaders had accepted the imperialist order as normal, and they had dealt with the European colonial powers within a framework of international law and balance-of-power politics. But their successors in the 1920s and 1930s had to deal with a world in which imperialism was increasingly under attack. Wilsonian internationalism trumpeted the right of national self-determination; Leninist antiimperialism called for the oppressed peoples of the world to light the spark of world revolution; and indigenous

⁷ Cited in David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 16, n. 2.

nationalism throughout the non-Western world challenged colonial regimes. The post-World War I leadership faced a far different set of policy options than their Meiji predecessors had. It was no longer necessary to accept the old imperialist order and all that came with it.⁸

The first alternative was to follow the lead of the Western powers but to insist that Japan was the paramount regional power in East Asia, with needs and interests that required special recognition or concessions from the European powers. For example, Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijūrō, a pro-Western diplomat who advocated close cooperation with the Anglo-American powers, never lost sight of the fact that Japan needed an independent military capacity and that its interests, particularly in East Asia, did not always jibe with those of the Western powers. The second alternative was to assert that Japan, because of its proximity to East Asia and its growing political and economic interests there, should act with little concern for the attitudes or reactions of the European powers there. The foreign policy of Tanaka Giichi, described by Professor Hata, best represented this alternative. The third alternative was to assert that Japan had a vital historical mission to overturn the existing international status quo, dominated by the European imperialists, and to pave the way for the construction of a new international order based on a new set of moral and political principles. Kita Ikki, for example, called on Japan to raise the “virtuous banner of an Asian league and take the leadership in a world federation which must come.”⁹

During the 1920s, Japanese foreign policy shifted back and forth between the first and second alternatives. Hoping to forestall renewed imperialist rivalry in East Asia and fearful of a naval arms race, the Japanese government cooperated with the attempt at the Washington Conference (1921–2) to establish regional collective security arrangements in East Asia. But during the rest of the decade, Japanese leaders periodically asserted their inclination to treat Japan as a regional power with interests in East Asia that overrode the imperative of internationalist cooperation. Covert dabbling in Chinese warlord politics in Peking and in the provinces, as well as Japan’s independent position at the Peking Tariff Conference in 1925 and Japan’s two Shantung expeditions in the late 1920s, gave notice that Japanese interests were not completely served by multilateral cooperation. The

8 A standard account of the period is by Akira Iriye, *After Imperialism: The Search for a New Order in the Far East, 1931–1941* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

9 George M. Wilson, *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883–1937* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), chap. 4.

shifts in Japanese foreign policy between cooperation and independence prompted both domestic and foreign observers to characterize it as “dual diplomacy.”¹⁰

After 1931, however, Japanese foreign policy turned toward the third alternative—the assertion of complete autonomy from the other imperialist powers.¹¹ The occupation of Manchuria by the Kwantung Army, Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations, the difficulty of reaching an agreement on naval arms limitations at the London Conference, and the increasingly frequent assertion of slogans like “Asia for the Asians” reflected the Japanese leadership’s desire to loosen its moorings to the European imperialist camp. Those moorings were finally and irrevocably cut by the unanticipated, though not unwelcome, outbreak of war with Nationalist China in 1937. The Pan-Asianist ideas that had enjoyed currency at the turn of the century acquired new vigor in the notions of a “New Order in East Asia” and the “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” Although both of these visionary conceptions of Japan’s historic role in world politics were rationalizations for a policy of expansion already under way, they did reflect a widespread belief that the imperialist order established by the European powers in the nineteenth century had come to an end and that the world system would be reorganized into economically self-contained and politically autonomous supranational regional blocs.¹²

Even though the Japanese were not successful in establishing their Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, they did manage to destroy the foundations of European colonial domination throughout East and Southeast Asia. If the European war represented the turning point in the transition from an old world order dominated by the

10 Cf. Akira Iriye, *After Imperialism*. See also Gavan McCormack, *Chang Tso-lin in Northwest China, 1911–1928: China, Japan and the Manchurian Idea* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1977), pp. 119–26.

11 There are many excellent works on the foreign policy of Japan during this period: James B. Crowley, *Japan’s Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930–1938* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966); James W. Morley, ed., *Japan Erupts: The London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928–1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); James W. Morley, ed., *The China Quagmire: Japan’s Expansion on the Asian Continent* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); James W. Morley, ed., *Deterrent Diplomacy: Japan, Germany and the USSR, 1935–1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); and James W. Morley, ed., *The Fateful Choice: Japan’s Advance into Southeast Asia, 1939–1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980). The four works edited by Morley are translations from the multivolume series *Taiheiyō sensō e no michi: kaisen gaikōshi* published by the *Asahi shinbun* press in 1962–3.

12 See William Miles Fletcher III, *The Search for a New Order: Intellectuals and Fascism in Prewar Japan* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), chap. 7; Gordon Mark Berger, *Parties Out of Power in Japan, 1931–1941* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), chap. 4.