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978-0-521-51385-2 - Japan Rising: The Iwakura Embassy to the USA and Europe 1871-1873

Kume Kunitake

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VOLUME I

The United States of America

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Preface

These volumes contain the record of the daily activities of the Embassy which left Japan on December 23rd, 1871, and returned on September 13th, 1873 – about one year and nine months later. It was led by Iwakura Tomomi, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Europe and the United States.

The Embassy first crossed the Pacific Ocean and traversed America, then sailed across the Atlantic and travelled around England and Scotland. After that, it crossed over to Europe to visit France, Belgium, Holland, Prussia, Russia, Denmark and Sweden, subsequently passing through Germany to Italy, Austria and Switzerland. From there it went to southern France, and from the Mediterranean it sailed through the Arabian Sea into the Indian Ocean and the China Sea and so back to Tokyo. Thus, the Embassy visited most of the major cities and towns in the continents of America and Europe.

During the journey through the West, the secretaries collected all the official documents and also kept a diary of formal functions and meetings with foreign dignitaries. The councillors, who had been dispatched by various government ministries, gathered information and made numerous detailed reports pertaining to the politics, education, military affairs and commerce of each country, and these were later compiled into several large volumes. In addition to the official business of the ambassador, this book records all the facts and the actual situation observed in each region. Thus, it is called a ‘True Account’ of a ‘Journey of Observation’. It omits discussion of social events, diplomatic exchanges and political meetings – the main objective of the Embassy – because these are covered in other books and reports.

Dispatching an ambassador is a remarkable privilege. It is the most important and respected type of delegation, and for Japan to be able to take advantage of this is truly an unparalleled achievement. We must consider ourselves fortunate to have enjoyed such an exceptional

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opportunity in these times. The Meiji Restoration [1868] has brought about an unprecedented political transformation in Japan. Three elements were essential to this transformation: 1. Curtailing shogunal power and restoring direct rule by the emperor; 2. Amalgamating the varied administrations of the feudal domains to make a unified polity; 3. Reversing the country's isolationist policy and deciding on the degree to which it should be opened. Any one of these reforms would have been difficult to accomplish; to attempt all three at once, in a hazardous period of rapid change, was to attempt a miracle almost beyond human capability.

When we consider what has come about, we realise that everything was related to changes in world affairs. The seclusion laws had to be removed, come what may. With the country's opening, we needed a united government. Having unified the government, the power of the shogunate had to be restrained. Even the German Confederation and the Italian Papacy have not been immune to the tide of world events; numerous reforms there, tentative at first, were later successfully implemented. Japan's reform movement is no different, and the principles of our domestic politics have already been established. In order to lay the foundation for diplomatic exchanges with other countries, we have availed ourselves of this exceptional opportunity to dispatch an embassy abroad. From now on, those who hold the reins of power must recognise the aims and intentions of the reform movement and maintain its momentum. The general populace should also be made aware of its importance so that they cannot but encourage its progress.

In all the countries we visited, the ambassador presented his credentials. It was our duty to establish diplomatic relations on our government's behalf. It was also our responsibility to observe and report on local customs on behalf of the Japanese people. Therefore, each day we were fully occupied and had scant time for rest. We covered great distances in the heat and cold, travelling to remote areas to visit farms and ranches. In the cities we observed the operation of industries and commerce. Whenever time permitted we met and talked with specialists in various fields. Our journey could not be compared to that of wandering literati or religious pilgrims, who are free to move as they please. In the West it is believed that government is an assembly of the people, so an embassy dispatched by a government is regarded as representing the people.

The fact that officials in each country treated the Embassy with great hospitality indicated their cordial feelings towards our people. By showing us what their countries had to offer in achievements and productivity, they demonstrated friendship and sought favour from us as

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representatives of Japan. Ambassador Iwakura realised this and urged us to spare no effort in conveying where we went and what we saw to our countrymen at home.

Among the many interesting places we visited, some were made accessible to us through the kindness of that country's rulers. On occasion we were the official guests of the government (as on our tour of the northern states of America). At other times we were invited by reception committees (as on our inspection tours in England and Scotland; half of this 'True Account' is made up of such visits). We were also received by the ordinary citizens of cities, towns and villages (especially in America and Britain). We were invited by factory owners to visit their factories; we accepted invitations from noblemen, prominent figures and commoners.

When we arrived at a destination, we would hasten to an hotel to unpack and immediately set out on a tour of observation. We spent days on trains with screaming wheels and screeching whistles, careering through billowing clouds of smoke amid belching flames and the smell of iron. Soot and smoke caked our bodies and flew into our eyes. When darkness fell and we reached our hotel rooms, we scarcely had time to wipe off the dirt before it was time for the next banquet. We had to be dignified at table. We wore out our eyes and our ears at theatres. No sooner did we go to bed at night than it was time to wake up, with representatives from the next factory awaiting us. As a result, many marvellous sights and unfamiliar sounds filled our days. Day by day, our bodies and nerves grew exhausted, and we became weary of splendid dinners. We wished, just once, to enjoy the simple pleasures of drinking plain water and lying with our heads pillowed on our bent elbows, but to do so would have damaged our relations with other countries.

As I edit these volumes, I recall the wonderful sights and sounds we saw and heard on our travels to some of the most distant parts of the earth. With the passage of time, those memories now seem like images of splendid mountains engraved in my heart. Our travels are already fading into a fleeting dream, and our hardships are like wounds which have already healed. My thoughts and feelings at this time may only be appreciated by those who have experienced a similar lengthy journey.

This edition takes the form of a journal. Rather than embellishing the narrative with anecdotes and hearsay, I have tried to report exactly what we saw when we were seeing it. Because of this, an account of a factory visit, for example, may end abruptly and a description of an old palace begin. Or, when I am describing the beauty of a landscape, the reader may suddenly encounter statistics for production and trade. If the

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narrative seems disjointed in places, that is because it is essentially a record of events as they occurred.

In Western arts, sciences and technology, theory and practice are distinct from each other. Theory lies in so-called general rules; practice involves working with actual machinery in different fields. Neither should be favoured above the other; nor should one be neglected at the expense of the other. The main purpose of this 'True Account' lies in explaining the practical and reaffirming the theoretical. If errors have crept into my descriptions of the technological processes, readers should be able to correct them by the application of theory.

Since returning to Japan, I have constantly revised my work by referring to books on physics, chemistry, mechanics and related subjects, statistics, official reports, history, geography, politics and law. Furthermore, I made summaries of the official reports submitted by the various councillors. In the cities I recorded our conversations with doctors and scholars and have added relevant comments. In many sections I have reconstructed from memory, or patched together, what I was told.

The world is moving as rapidly as a turning wheel. The affairs of mankind rise and fall like waves in the open sea. My pen never left my hand from the day we set sail in December 1871 until our return in September 1873. I then spent several months preparing these volumes, and later expanded and revised each of them several times. Three years have now elapsed, and many developments have occurred in the world at large. Hardly a week goes by without some changes in commerce, law or international relations. I describe thriving silk industries in England and France, but since then they have declined in value every year. Moreover, changes in the price of tea from the British colony of Assam in India have had a major effect on Japan. Nevertheless, if the countries we visited remain at peace and their civilisations advance, I expect them to flourish still further in the next five years.

January 1876

Kume Kunitake
Private Secretary to the Ambassador

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CHAPTER I

The Voyage Across the Pacific

December 21st, 1871. Winter solstice.

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Europe and the United States Iwakura Tomomi and Vice-Ambassadors Kido Takayoshi, Okubo Toshimichi, Itō Hirobumi and Yamaguchi Naoyoshi, with a retinue of councillors and officials from various ministries, totalling forty-eight in all, left Tokyo for Yokohama, where they stayed at several inns.

December 22nd. Fine.

On this day relatives and friends who lived in the capital came to attend farewell parties before the long voyage. At six in the evening a dinner was given at the Yokohama Court House for the consuls and ministers representing various foreign countries.

December 23rd. Fine; rain at night.

The recent fine weather has continued and the cold is not unduly severe. At dawn this morning the frost was especially heavy, and the sun rising over Japan seemed extremely bright. At eight o'clock everyone gathered in the Prefectural Office. We left there at ten and went by carriage to the harbour, where we boarded steam-launches.

At that moment a nineteen-gun salute was fired from the shore battery in honour of the Embassy. That was followed by a fifteen-gun salute to mark the return to the United States of the American minister in Japan, Mr. [Charles E.] DeLong. Smoke from the cannon drifted over the bay and the echoes of the salvos resounded over the waves, with the reverberations continuing for some time.

All the members of the Embassy and the students who were going to study in America and Europe – making a total of fifty-four peers, former samurai and commoners, and including five girl students – embarked on the mail-boat. As each found his or her assigned cabin and attended to unpacking the luggage, for a time there was considerable confusion. At

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noon a cannon was fired to signal our departure; the anchors were raised and the paddle-wheels began to turn. Sailors on the decks of the many foreign warships in Yokohama Bay all manned the rigging and doffed their caps in salute as we passed. We were followed for several miles by a crowd of well-wishers in a flotilla of small boats.

Our ship was called the *America*. Reputed to be the most elegant vessel in the Pacific Mail Steamship Company fleet, the *America* was 363 feet long, 57 feet wide and 23 feet deep, with 8 feet above the deck. The steam-power was said to be 1,500 horsepower. (This seemed to refer to the actual horsepower, but it seems much too weak for the tonnage, so we probably misheard.) Its displacement was 4,554 tons. There were 30 first-class cabins and 16 second-class ones – 46 in all. The vessel could carry 92 passengers. Under Captain Doane were 24 officers and 79 sailors and stewards, making a complement of 103. The ship was powered by a balance-wheel steam-engine driving external paddle-wheels.

That day we moved out of Yokohama Bay and sailed along the Bōsō Peninsula and through the waters off Sagami and Izu. We could see snow on the slopes of Mt. Fuji, which, with the ranges of Hakone-Ashigara, glittered in the evening sun. The scenery was magnificent and we all looked back nostalgically, feeling sad to be leaving the landscape of Japan behind.

December 24th. Morning fine; strong wind.

From this morning we entered the sea-lanes of the Pacific Ocean. At noon our position was latitude 33°38' N. Our longitude (this is measured from the Greenwich Observatory in London) was 142°38' E. We had travelled 210 nautical miles from Yokohama. Such information was posted daily in the saloon for the benefit of the passengers. Crossing an ocean, there is little to see all day. You realise the ship is advancing only by the sound of the paddle-wheels. All you can hear are the rumble of the engines and the churning of the paddle-wheels as the ship lumbers forward. We enjoyed looking at the daily notices to learn how many degrees of longitude the ship had crossed and changing our watches each day. This was far more enjoyable than arriving at an inn after a day's journey.

We crossed the Pacific in a total of twenty-two days, covering 4,853 nautical miles. We did not see so much as the silhouette of a single island, so there was really nothing much to record. Although we steamed south to latitude 30°, there is little difference in temperature at sea, unlike on land. However, it was often a little warmer than in Japan. At the time of our crossing, the weather in the Pacific Ocean was rather like the rainy

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season in Japan. Rain began to fall on the night of our departure. White clouds gathered and for more than ten days it rained most of the time. Although it was the time of the full moon, the fact that we could hardly ever see it intensified our feelings of loneliness. When the wind rose, the waves towered upwards; the rolling of the ship was severe and it made one very dizzy. However, when the wind dropped, the ocean was as smooth as water in a dish.

The twenty-first day of the eleventh month by the lunar calendar was New Year's Day, 1872, by the Western calendar. On the previous evening everybody gathered in the saloon. All kinds of liquors were set out on silver trays, including champagne, brandy, and a concoction of other alcoholic drinks called 'punch'. While drinking this, people chatted until midnight. This is similar to the Japanese custom of staying up until midnight to welcome the New Year.

On the seventeenth day of the twelfth month by the Japanese lunar calendar a thanksgiving ceremony called '*Daijōe*' [Great Enthronement Festival] was held in the Imperial Palace. Although we were in the midst of an ocean voyage, we distributed champagne around the ship in order to make a toast to wish Emperor Meiji a long life. Ambassador Iwakura wore formal court robes. He greeted the Western passengers and explained the ceremony. Mr. DeLong, the American minister, translated his speech into English, whereupon all the passengers stood and raised their glasses. Speeches are given to express sentiments at formal occasions and dinners, and they are especially frequent in America and Britain. During the voyage, members of the Embassy started giving speeches from this day on.

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CHAPTER 2

A Survey of the United States of America

When Columbus of Spain discovered the continent of America it was the Meiō era [1492–1501] in Japan. As is well known, the land he discovered was not the one which later became the United States of North America.

A representative government was established in Virginia in 1619 (with a governor sent from England to represent the Crown). This was the age of Queen Elizabeth I [James I] in England, where disputes over religion had erupted. Among Protestant believers there was a group called the 'Independents', who pleaded for the right of religious freedom. They were not satisfied with the English style of Protestantism, and in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers – William Bradford and Edward Winslow among them – boarded a boat and sailed to America. Making landfall at Cape Cod, they pledged themselves to Heaven and established a colony in what is now the state of Massachusetts. This marked the opening of the continent of America. Subsequently, the Englishman William Penn founded the state of Pennsylvania, and Henry Hudson founded the state of New York. In addition, Danes and Frenchmen opened up various areas of wilderness. Eventually, these became British possessions and the English kings dispatched governors to oversee them. Provincial governments were established with the king's authority to rule each colony.

Because the British were eager to extract as much of the wealth of this country as they could, illegal taxes were imposed. Leading advocates of people's rights such as Patrick Henry and Samuel Adams voiced bitter criticism of these impositions and refused to submit to them. Although the British recognised the force of their arguments, they were reluctant to relinquish the profits from the colonies and passed a law imposing a heavy tax on tea. Superficially, the British appeared to make concessions to the colonists, but in reality they monopolised the taxes levied. The American colonists resented these policies to an increasing degree. They formed a national party which started a rebellion in 1774 to challenge British rule and in 1776 asserted their independence. A republican

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confederation of thirteen states was established, and [George] Washington was appointed commander-in-chief. A militia of citizen-soldiers was raised and the colonists fought the British for eight years.

Most Americans loathed royal authority as if it were a viper. The famous Patrick Henry and many others declared that a presidency was merely kingship under another name, but they finally agreed to the idea of federalism, saying that their apprehensions would be allayed if Washington would accept the presidency. From these debates the present government of the United States came into being in 1789.

Thus it is that all the people of this country grow up breathing the air of democracy. They respect each other as equals without discrimination. In their dealings with other people, they mix easily and without formality; they are sincere and friendly. They go about their affairs calmly and without being constrained by others. They are truly free citizens of the world.

The defects in the American character are that the people make light of public authority, resulting in laws having little effect and individuals asserting their own rights. Officials accept bribes and factionalism is rampant within the established parties. Yet Americans have long been accustomed to this style of government and have created a thoroughly democratic polity. They would not wish to return to the peace of monarchical rule. Nevertheless, when such an attitude spreads to foreign countries, it can divide ruler from subjects, and once established institutions are overthrown, the foundations of the nation are shaken and disturbed. France was the first to suffer such troubles, and later Spain was subjected to similar evils. For this reason countries in Europe established constitutional governments and preserved national unity and peace.

America was originally a federation of thirteen states with a population of less than 5,000,000. In the last ninety-six years, the work of opening up and colonising the land has advanced rapidly. Today thirty-seven states have been established and America has become a great nation of some 39,000,000 people. The United States is a new country, only two or three hundred years old. It covers an area equivalent to the whole of Europe, and we can observe the hard work and diligence of its people in promoting the country's development and wealth, and the wise and far-sighted effects of the policies of state and municipal governments. Many crops are grown throughout the land, and profit is obtained by harvesting them, their value being further enhanced by efficient distribution. Water transportation is of the greatest importance in collecting and distributing products effectively.