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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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## JAPAN RISING

In 1871, less than twenty years after the US Navy's 'Black Ships' under Commodore Perry first displayed the might of the industrialized West to an isolated and still largely feudal Japan, the administration of the new Meiji Emperor sent a high-ranking delegation to the USA and Europe, to negotiate treaties and trading agreements and to investigate how Japan might modernize its political and economic institutions.

Led by Foreign Minister Prince Iwakura Tomomi, the 'embassy' of politicians, courtiers and officials set out for San Francisco on the Pacific mail steamer *America*, and thence on the Union Pacific Railroad to Washington and a meeting with President Ulysses S. Grant. It also travelled to Chicago and New York, to Philadelphia and Boston, observing the infrastructure, industries and institutions of what it soon recognized as a new land of boundless enterprise and opportunity.

After fully eight months in the USA the embassy turned its attentions to the Old World, where it spent a further year examining British manufacturing industry, German armaments and French culture; meeting crowned heads and chancellors, including Queen Victoria and Otto von Bismarck; and observing men and manners from Liverpool to Vienna, from St. Petersburg to Marseilles. It sailed for home, via the recently opened Suez Canal, in July 1873.

The Iwakura Embassy helped change the course of Japanese history, for the official report of this unprecedented epic journey, compiled by Prince Iwakura's personal secretary, the young Confucian scholar Kume Kunitake, was to play a key role in Japan's transformation into a modern industrial nation. The report was translated into English in five large volumes in 2002. This carefully prepared abridgement makes it accessible to a wider range of scholars and students, and to all who are interested in the remarkable rise of modern Japan.

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# JAPAN RISING

*The Iwakura Embassy to the USA  
and Europe 1871-1873*

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

IAN NISH



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## *Introduction*

This is an introduction to the journey of the Iwakura Embassy which was sent out by the Japanese government in 1871. It was an ambitious journey round the globe and lasted for nineteen months. The chronicler of the Mission, Kume Kunitake, skilfully indicates both the wonderment of the visitors at what they saw and the hard-working intensity of their programmes. On the other side, it shows the open-heartedness of the countries visited whose citizens were ready to show off their wares and share their technology with their unfamiliar visitors from Japan.

Kume Kunitake (1839–1931) was chosen by Prince Iwakura as his secretary for the journey. Kume, a young Confucian scholar from a samurai background, was born in the domain of Saga in the island of Kyushu, not far from Nagasaki. That port was the access-point for foreign traders, whether from China, Korea or the Netherlands, in the days of Japan's seclusion from the rest of the world. Through his father's bureaucratic connections with trade, Kume would presumably have become acquainted with some of the ways of the non-Japanese world. His experiences by the age of thirty-two were such that he was neither bewildered nor star-struck by what he discovered as the Embassy travelled round the world's capitals and met the world's leaders. On the contrary he makes shrewd observations throughout. It was Kume's task to take notes and, on his return to Japan, to edit them for publication.

### THE RELUCTANT OPENING OF JAPAN

To understand the motives for the Iwakura Embassy one needs to examine the main issue which worried the Japanese at the time, that of the unfairness of the treaties which they had been forced to sign by foreign countries which wanted Japan to end its isolation and start trading with them.

Foreign interest in Japan began with the visit of Commodore Matthew Perry of the US East India squadron on 8 July 1853 to Uraga, a small port

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at the entrance to Tokyo Bay. Perry's 'Black Ships' were symbols of technological progress which scared the Japanese. But Perry had instructions to present gifts and not to open fire. Japan was then governed by the shogun based at Edo (Tokyo), the representative of a warrior family which had kept Japan under strict control since the start of the seventeenth century. The shogun's representative accepted the letter which Perry conveyed from President Millard Fillimore and circulated it among the leadership. By this bold step Perry succeeded in breaking the seclusion which had encompassed Japan for over two hundred years. As a precaution against future foreign encroachments, the shogun authorized the building of ocean-going craft and lifted the ban on Japanese going abroad.

A year later Perry returned to Japanese waters, this time with a squadron of nine vessels, including the *Powhatan*, a steamship of 2400 tons. He called for a response to Fillimore's letter and presented the draft of a treaty. Impressed by the opulence and resources of the Americans, the Japanese concluded the US–Japan Treaty of Peace and Amity on 31 March 1854. The main provision was for the small ports of Shimoda and Hakodate to be opened, largely as harbours of refuge, but no mention was made of trade.

Within six months, the fears of the Japanese about further foreign intrusions were confirmed. The British Far East squadron under Admiral Sir James Stirling visited Tokyo Bay, demanding a treaty of a different type. Britain, which was pursuing Russian ships in East Asian waters as one aspect of the Crimean War of 1854, asked for access to Japanese ports for the repair of its naval vessels. The shogunate concluded treaties with Britain which opened the more important ports of Nagasaki and Hakodate.

The United States appointed Townsend Harris as consul at Shimoda. He succeeded in concluding on board the *Powhatan* on 29 July 1858 the US–Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce which opened five ports for international trade. These were Hakodate, Kanagawa (Yokohama), Nagasaki and (to be opened later) Hyogo (Kobe) and Niigata. The most important of these was Yokohama, which offered a good deep-water anchorage. Harris had succeeded in persuading Japan reluctantly to adopt a free-trade policy, only excluding transactions in opium.

The Dutch, Russian, British and French governments then sent their representatives to negotiate treaties with Japan. Within a month the first three had concluded treaties, adopting many of Harris's terms and incorporating 'most favoured nation' provisions. The French followed suit

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in October. But the shogunal government, which had agreed to open the country, ran into domestic opposition, especially from the emperor's court in Kyoto. Attacks took place on foreigners in the new treaty ports and on Japanese and others associated with them, notably Hendrik Heusken, the secretary and interpreter to Townsend Harris, who was killed in a night-time brawl. The shogun, unable to suppress anti-foreign violence, appealed to London and Washington to postpone the opening of the two ports and cities as specified in the 1858 treaties.

It was laid down in Harris's treaty that the ratifications should be exchanged in Washington. To that end the Japanese sent a mission to the United States in March 1860. Harris was enthusiastic about the idea and thought that it would be good for the Japanese to learn about his country. But the delegation which sailed on the *Powhatan* to San Francisco and travelled on by Panama to Washington showed no great curiosity beyond the specific task of ratification. In this respect its attitude differed markedly from that of the Iwakura Mission a decade later. It complied meekly with the programme set out by the State Department.

Because of its Civil War (1861–5) and the relatively small number of American merchants on the China coast, the United States was less well placed than Britain to take advantage of these treaties. British merchants rushed to Japan from the Chinese ports, but it was at a price. Life in Japan was not easy for foreigners and could be positively dangerous. Japanese were generally hostile to these foreign contacts, and the samurai of the Choshu and Satsuma clans were especially implicated in attacks on foreign merchants and diplomats.

This led the British government to authorize its ships to retaliate by bombarding Kagoshima, the capital of the Satsuma clan (1863). In retaliation for attacks on American and French ships off Shimonoseki, the port of the Choshu clan, the Western powers took punitive action there the following year and staged a further bombardment. The clans on the receiving end of these assaults now changed their attitude. From being hostile to foreigners and seclusionist, they showed a desire to catch up with the West and were ready to send their ambitious young samurai overseas to learn foreign skills. By the end of the decade there were many young Japanese studying abroad.

## CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT, 1868

The clans on the periphery of the country took up arms against the Tokugawa shogun, the supreme authority of the day, and a civil war

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ensued in 1867–8. The Tokugawa family was defeated and handed over power to a coalition of rebellious clans who took over in Edo. The emperor who had for centuries lived in seclusion in Kyoto was invited to become head of state; and Mutsuhito, the youngster who was later to be given the reign-title of Meiji, moved his capital to Edo which was now renamed Tokyo. This tumultuous change of government after centuries of tranquillity was described as ‘the Meiji Restoration’, implying that it was an attempt to restore imperial rule in place of that by the shogun. This outcome was not directly caused by outside powers forcing the Tokugawa to stand down, but it was certainly influenced by the difficulties the ruling family had faced in handling pressure from foreign governments. In the new government representatives of the rebellious Choshu and Satsuma clans predominated. Paradoxically these clans which had earlier opposed the treaties opening Japan now came out in favour of investigating and imitating the rest of the world in order that the new united country should be able to stand up against the West.

On the domestic front the government made fundamental social changes, abolishing the clans, ending feudalism and bringing an end to the role of the samurai. It centralized the administration. Feudal lords, court nobles and government officials were pledged to support the Charter Oath which in five articles set out the programme of modernization. The Restoration government felt confident that its new progressive measures to abolish feudalism would be welcomed in Western countries. As early as February 1868 the head of the Board of Foreign Affairs called together the diplomatic corps at the port of Kobe and informed them of the restoration of rule by the emperor. Foreign governments duly recognized the new administration.

The new government thought that the treaties of 1858 were humiliating and ‘unequal’ and blamed the Tokugawa rulers for their weakness in agreeing to them. It further emphasized its desire to renegotiate the unequal clauses of the old treaties or to devise entirely new foreign treaties. In the case of the United States, the existing treaty was due to expire on 1 July 1872 after fourteen years.

The idea had been maturing that an exploratory embassy from the new government to its treaty partners would be necessary. On 29 August 1871 Prince Iwakura Tomomi (1825–83), the aristocrat and former court official who had come to accept the need for opening up Japan to trade, was appointed foreign minister. He announced that he would head a special mission to observe Western countries at first hand and exchange views on treaty revision before starting to negotiate with the United States and the

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nations of Europe. The Embassy set off on 23 December, carrying letters from the Emperor Meiji to heads of state which constituted the mission's credentials. Iwakura was clearly charged with the task of discussing substantive issues regarding treaty negotiations; but the authority he had to sign documents that would form the basis of formalized treaties was more ambiguous. This ambiguity led to many complications for the Mission, especially in the United States.

## COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATION

The members of the Iwakura Mission were young but they all had government experience. Although Kume in his report refers to these members as 'we' and tends to omit mention of individuals by name, these were significant statesmen and strong-minded individualists. Prince Iwakura originated from the emperor's court and was a government minister. He was accompanied as vice-ambassadors by Kido Koin (Takayoshi) (1833–77) and Okubo Toshimichi, minister of finance (1830–78), who represented the Restoration government, being the most prominent politicians from Choshu and Satsuma respectively. They were assisted by deputy ambassadors: Yamaguchi Naoyoshi of the Hizen clan (1842–94), assistant vice minister of foreign affairs, and Ito Hirobumi of Choshu (1841–1909) who came from the Ministry of Public Works. The most Westernized of his senior colleagues, Ito had already spent time in London and visited Washington for six months in 1870 in his capacity as a finance official, and admitted receiving 'most valuable assistance from the Treasury Department'. By virtue of the time he had spent overseas, he was able to speak passable English and was the deputy ambassador often called upon to deliver the formal addresses at receptions.

In addition there were some 45 clerks and commissioners, who were charged with writing specialized reports. There were also junior officials and students who temporarily put aside their quest for education and were expected to run errands for the dignitaries. This made up the full complement of 108 people who left Japan's shores. It was a balanced delegation of progressive forces within the Restoration government. Apart from Iwakura, they were young men, the average age being 32. Though they already had some experience of high office, they were not always in agreement over policy, and they squabbled among themselves throughout their travels.

When they reached the United States, the visitors had access to Japan's skeletal diplomatic staff there. The Japanese minister in Washington was

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Mori Arinori (1847–89) of Satsuma. He had been trained in London for two years and gone to the United States in 1867 for study. Since his appointment, Mori had developed good contacts with the State Department and within Washington society. Though he was not a member of the delegation, he acted occasionally as interpreter and had the overall responsibility for arranging for the comfort of the visitors. His knowledge of the country put him in a strong position to argue over the course of action the ambassadors should pursue and his views were to have an important bearing on their deliberations. To assist the ambassadors, Mori was also able to assemble in Washington students who had found their way independently to the United States. Iwakura's own son was one of those already there.

It was remarkable that in a country like Japan which had recently come through civil war and 'restoration', so many important leaders could be spared for such a lengthy journey. At the point of departure, of course, it could not be foreseen that the Embassy would encounter such considerable delays as occurred in the United States and Britain. But the sheer size of the group was amazing, and created considerable administrative problems. It goes without saying that there were acute jealousies between those who were able to join the deputation and those who were left behind in Tokyo. Before the party left, there was a compact between them whereby the Embassy would not make any commitments without consulting the home government, and the Tokyo government would not take any major steps in their absence. These undertakings were not scrupulously observed, leading to bitter feelings when the party eventually returned to Japan in 1873.

The Mission had three comprehensive aims: to visit countries with which Japan had entered into treaties and raise its profile there; to inspect institutions in advanced countries which would be helpful for Japan's modernization; and to begin soundings for the revision of the treaties and present the Japanese standpoint. Before departure Iwakura said positively that he would not renegotiate the treaties while he was abroad. But it was still a primary task to ventilate the issue and try to convince opinion abroad in favour of a revision of the 'unequal treaties' which the Meiji government had inherited from its predecessors.

One historical question is why the delegates went to the United States first against the advice of a respected foreign adviser, Dr Guido Verbeck, who suggested that they should start their study in Europe. They presumably thought that the United States would be a more favourable and liberal starting-point and were perhaps suspicious of Britain after her aggressive

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inroads into China. In the case of the United States, moreover, there was an advancing frontier which had reached California, a neighbour on the coastline of the Pacific Ocean and one that was linked from 1869 by the trans-continental railroad to its eastern seaboard.

## ACROSS THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

On the morning of 15 January the US-owned Pacific mail steamer *America* arrived at San Francisco with its 108 Japanese passengers. Of these, 50 constituted the members of the Embassy, while the remainder consisted of 5 young ladies of rank, 53 young gentlemen of noble families, and domestics. They were accompanied by the Hon. Charles E. DeLong, American minister to Japan. Mrs. DeLong had custody of the young ladies, who were much the same age as her own daughters and were on their way to college. W.S. Rice of the American legation at Edo attended as interpreter, though a few of the members of the ambassadors' staff could speak tolerable English.

Kume sets out the Mission's itinerary in diary fashion. It includes a day-by-day account of the weather with (as the hot weather approached) details of temperatures. It is best to leave the text to speak for itself, but certain general points should be stressed. Japan was a non-industrial country with a small-scale agriculture. The delegates were astonished at the agricultural states they passed through. But they were equally amazed at the smoke rising from chimneys of factories in the urban centres they visited. They unquestionably suffered from culture shock, not least sartorially. One observer recounts an example of their adaptability:

Members of the Embassy appeared at the reception [in Washington in March] in complete court costume, of satin purple underskirts and rich black overskirts reaching to the knees, each one carrying a long sword at his silken girdle. This was their last appearance in what to our eyes appeared a grotesque costume . . . Not one member during their long sojourn in the Western hemisphere of 18 months, ever appeared afterwards in public, with what we would call feminine garments made of silks and satins . . . At state ceremonies they dressed in a mixed European court costume, while in public they appeared in broad cloth coats and trousers [sic], wearing chimney-pot hats and boots with elastics [which] did not improve their appearance in dignity or elegance. (Mossman, p. 433)

While this account may be exaggerated, the writer reports that the delegates were nonetheless distinguished in manner and gravity. Moreover they had within a day changed to 'attire suitable to a visiting

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diplomatic delegation'. Only the head of the Mission, Prince Iwakura, continued generally to wear the ground-length kimono appropriate for a courtier. The contrasting styles were an indication of their thinking: they were quick to adjust their mode of dress to conform to international conventions but they were also proud that Iwakura should continue to wear traditional Japanese clothes.

The Mission traversed the whole American continent by rail, a major source of interest for the new Meiji government. As soon as the Restoration government came to power, it had decided to build railways. As a pioneering venture it had started building the eighteen-mile Shimabashi (Tokyo) to Yokohama line in 1870 with the help of British engineers, to be opened for traffic in 1872. But major problems emerged – natural obstacles, the lack of finance and the scarcity of managerial skills. The ambassadors had, therefore, a practical interest in all aspects of American railroads: port facilities, tunnels, bridges and how the railways coped with gradients. They suffered for their experience. The Union Pacific Railroad on which they embarked in February could not cope with the heavy snowfalls on the Rocky Mountains and beyond, which stopped all traffic. The ambassadors were snowed up at Salt Lake City for eighteen days, visiting the famous Mormon Tabernacle and meeting Brigham Young. Despite the snow and the floods that followed, Kume reports enthusiastically about the overall rail experience:

Thanks to the admirable engineering achievement of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, we were able to cross much of this vast territory in a train, comfortably relaxing or sleeping. (Kume, p. 32)

After passing through Chicago and Pittsburgh, the delegation arrived in the capital at the end of February. On 4 March ten of its principal members were presented to President Ulysses Grant by Minister DeLong. In his address Iwakura promised to 'consult with your government on all international questions, directing our efforts to promote and develop wide commercial relations', while the president replied that 'it will be a pleasure for us to enter upon that consultation upon international questions in which you say you are authorized to engage' (Mossman, p. 433).

It was then that the Mission learnt from Minister Mori that, after the many exchanges of views he had had, there was a distinct possibility that the State Department might be responsive to the idea of revising the 1858 treaty without delay. Clearly the delegates had run into an unforeseen problem in that they had not received a specific mandate to negotiate



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before leaving Japan and had not brought adequate powers of accreditation. The crucial decision was made that two of the senior members, Okubo and Ito, should return to Japan in order to procure the necessary documents. They left Washington on 20 March for their daunting journey of 3000 miles by land and 5000 miles by sea.

Meanwhile the remainder of the delegation held intermittent discussions with various government departments and institutions and undertook sightseeing trips in the Washington area. As summer set in, they embarked at the invitation of the US government on what Kume calls 'The Journey Through the Northern States'. On 10 June they set off for upstate New York, calling at West Point, Albany, Rochester, Syracuse and on to Niagara. It was of course educational for Iwakura and his party and compensated for the delay and the intolerable heat. On their return to Washington on 22 June they found that diplomatic business was almost at a standstill. An element of frustration set in. Kume records mournfully that 'We did little worth recording. All we could do during the day was try to keep cool by taking carriage rides to see various sights' (Kume, p. 88).

Such a lengthy stay for the enormous retinue was a burden for the Americans, but Congress had made an appropriation of \$50,000 for entertaining the Japanese, so part of the Embassy's expenses was paid by its hosts. American leaders clearly saw great potential in the members of the delegation who were likely to be the leaders of Japan in the next generation.

Okubo and Ito did not return from Japan until 20 July. They brought better credentials but were given instructions not to conclude a new treaty with the United States alone but to propose convening an international conference on the subject. The Embassy went to the State Department the same afternoon only to discover that Secretary of State Hamilton Fish would not agree to negotiations alongside other powers, especially if they were to be held in Europe. Fish, like some of the Japanese delegates, was bitterly disappointed that this aspect of their discussions had come to nothing. But some delegates like Kido thought that the prospect of an immediate settlement of the treaty issue had always been wishful thinking on the part of the Japanese. The failure on this one point during their American stay arose from a lack of clarity in Japanese thinking. It was something that the Mission did not pursue during the rest of its world tour: its members ventilated the issue but merely explored the views of the countries they were visiting.

Two days later Iwakura went to the White House and announced that his party would soon be leaving the country. After short visits to Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York, on 6 August the ambassadors left from

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Boston for Liverpool. They had prolonged their stay in the United States beyond all expectations. They had been industrious: there were few cities of importance that they had not visited and few public offices or national institutions that they had not inspected. But it was disappointing that the main delegation had to spend so long marking time. If treaty revision had made little progress, there were consolations in the detailed understanding it acquired about American educational methods and institutions.

## FOUR MONTHS IN BRITAIN

Because of their protracted stay in the United States, their schedule for Britain was greatly delayed. Eventually the Mission reached Liverpool on 17 August in the middle of the holiday season. It had travelled from a pioneering society moving rapidly towards industrialization to a country which had already experienced an industrial revolution and its dire consequences. No sooner had Kume reached the south bank of the Mersey than he records:

[T]he smoke of coal fires billowed up in dense clouds [over Liverpool] to a height of two or three hundred feet, permanently darkening the blue sky. Our escorts pointed to this and said, 'The people of the city have to breathe in the midst of that black haze.' So great is the city's prosperity. (Kume, p. 139)

Between September and early November the delegates, either individually or in groups, visited twenty British cities and travelled over 2000 miles. By this time they tended to break up into smaller units and pursue their individual interests and assignments. The main body moved from London to visit industrial centres like Manchester and Glasgow with hectic daily rounds. When they reached Edinburgh, they were so exhausted by the daily round of inspecting factories and offices that their escort urged them to visit the Scottish Highlands and relax. Kume reported:

The view of the flat English landscape and of the Scottish lowlands was one of unrelieved monotony. The hills of Edinburgh were pretty enough, but there was more than this to the beauties of the Scottish landscape. (Kume, p. 166)

Duly revived by his holiday, Iwakura proceeded to industrial centres like Newcastle, Sheffield and Birmingham before returning to London. He met Foreign Secretary Lord Granville on 22 November and again five days later, making it clear that Japan's ultimate objective was to

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negotiate certain modifications to the existing treaties in order to bring them into line with the political transformations that had taken place in Japan since 1868. He also asked for the British troops stationed in Yokohama to be withdrawn. For his part, Granville complained about the lack of religious toleration in Japan and the inability of foreigners to go upcountry. There was cordiality in the exchanges but not amity. The delegation, which had waited long for Queen Victoria's return from Balmoral, eventually had an audience with her at Windsor Castle on 5 December and presented a letter from the Emperor Meiji.

## CONTINENTAL EUROPE

The Embassy arrived in Calais from Dover on 16 December at the start of its tour of Europe. Rather than deal with its visit to continental Europe country by country, let us examine in particular the general map of their travels and try to analyse what aspects interested them. The timing of their arrival in France over the Christmas period was not ideal. The initial focus of their activities was on Paris; and the visitors took part in talks with officials on treaty revision and on religious freedom for Japanese Christians. This was followed by shorter visits to Belgium and Holland, which naturally had a special link with Japan because of the existence of a Dutch settlement at Deshima in Kyushu island over the previous centuries.

The Embassy allocated three weeks for its initial stay in Germany but it in fact returned to tour the north and south of the country later in its schedule. The delegates' stay included influential interviews with Otto von Bismarck who gave them a memorable speech which was transcribed by one of the commissioners and reproduced in full in Kume's report (Kume, pp. 306–7). The impact of the German Chancellor certainly had a considerable effect on the thinking of politicians of the Meiji period on military, constitutional and other matters. By late spring the domestic situation in Japan was causing the government that remained there some alarm. It was sufficient for them to call for the return of the deputy leaders, first Okubo and then Kido. The latter, the intellectual of the Embassy, did not want to miss visiting Russia and delayed his departure accordingly.

The main party continued its circuit to Russia, which was only allocated two weeks because it was not thought to have much relevance to the problems of the emergent Japan. After this Iwakura led his members to Sweden, while Kido's group travelled round Austria-Hungary, Italy,

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Switzerland and France at a leisurely pace before arriving at Marseilles to board the ship for home. Iwakura with Kume went to Italy and Austria-Hungary where they paid several visits to the Vienna Universal Exposition. This was the first exhibition in which Japan had taken part, albeit in a modest way, and was to have a great influence on its attitudes towards exhibitions later in the century. Kume expresses pride in the Japanese artifacts on view.

The full Mission received instructions to return to Japan on 9 June so it could not complete its coverage of Europe by visiting Spain and Portugal. After spending a few weeks in Switzerland and southern France, it joined its ship on 20 July at Marseilles.

As representatives of a new nation born out of a civil war, the Japanese were anxious to visit countries with similar experiences. While in the United States they had seen changes brought about by the civil war of 1861–5, they were the witnesses of more dramatic changes in Europe. As Kume observed, they arrived in Paris in ‘France’s hour of deepest misfortune’ (Kume, p. 227). It was its defeat by Prussia which brought about the fall of the empire of Napoleon III. When President Thiers received his guests, he was beset by the problem of pushing through a republican constitution which would address the concerns of the Paris Commune and the urgent issue of raising the indemnity payable to Germany in order to secure the evacuation of German troops from French soil. Meanwhile Prussia used her victory over France to declare the foundation of the German Empire in 1871. This German unification brought together the various divergent principalities which made up the German Confederation. But, if German unification had been the result of a short, sharp shock, that of Italy had been created slowly over the previous decade. It reached its culmination when the Papal territories, the last link in the chain, were brought within the fold of a new Italy and Rome became the new national capital. These radical changes were very relevant to Japan where the problems of creating a nation out of a congeries of clans and the centralization of government in a new national capital at Tokyo were very much in the minds of Iwakura’s delegates. Although European countries approached these issues differently, the members of the Iwakura team took pains to study their common problems.

The Japanese were able to achieve their object of observing European societies with a view to using ‘the new knowledge’ for their own purposes because the governments were ready to show off their wares. But let us remember that the subjects for inspection were not entirely self-selected. The Japanese were, at one level, open to the suggestions of the foreign

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advisers who were attached to their suites and, at another, to those of the governments which were hosting their visits, and those in the local area who offered them the hospitality of their municipalities and country houses.

The general impression given by the ambassadors and their underlings was that they were collecting information on virtually any subject. But let us consider the subjects on which they concentrated.

*Industry and Trade*

Clearly factory visits were a first priority for the Japanese, who wanted to know how the new industries worked. Those visited included iron and steel plants, textile mills (cotton, wool and silk), carpets and glass. They took part in inspections of more specialized factories like the Naumann factory in Germany which supplied Japan's demand for banknotes and Swedish match manufacturers.

One of the delegation's other aspirations was to expand Japan's trade with the rest of the world. The existing trade between Europe and Japan had traditionally been limited to the Dutch and had recently been opened up by Britain and France. Now that Japan was open for commerce, the opportunity was fast approaching for all European countries to develop markets in the east. All European leaders from Prince Bismarck downwards were interested in the prospects of trade with Japan and anxious to cultivate Japanese traders. Kume remarks: '[T]he attention we have hitherto devoted to London and Paris must now be shared with Berlin and Vienna' (Kume, p. 300).

*Military–Naval*

The visitors were assumed to have military interests and were taken round battlefields, especially those connected with the Franco-Prussian war. They also visited ordnance factories, arsenals, shipyards, fleet depots and port facilities generally. Its members who came on the whole from military backgrounds were welcomed on board battleships and introduced to up-to-date military–naval technology. They asked to see military academies and barracks and attended countless military parades. They met international armament producers like Sir William Armstrong at Elswick near Newcastle and Alfred Krupp in Essen, the hub of the Ruhr.

As a seafaring nation, Japan was anxious to install modern facilities which would prevent accidents. In Britain the Commissioners of the Northern Lighthouses arranged for visits to their lighthouses off the east coast; and arrangements for the building of further lighthouses were made.

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*Introduction**Transportation*

Japan was about to launch a programme of railway building. Much as the emissaries enjoyed travelling around by rail, they were primarily interested in the lessons to be learnt from Europe's rail experience. Their country with its mountains and fast-flowing rivers was an inherently difficult terrain for railway-building and they were interested in the technology of tunnels and bridges as employed in European countries. Some members of the party also expressed a wish to travel on the London underground whose Metropolitan line had not long opened. The success of the Embassy depended greatly on innovations in transport, whether by steamship or by rail.

*Royalty*

The Japanese visitors met the crowned heads of Europe and the leading world statesmen in the course of their journey. One Japanese newspaper was impressed by their celebrity and wrote:

Kings and Queens opened their palaces to them, nobles and corporations feted them, the populace followed and ran after them . . . Had they been royal princes visiting nations where every door flies open before exalted rank, they could not have been met with more warmth, more interest or with a greater readiness to serve them. (*Japan Mail*, Feb. 1874)

They were received hospitably by every royal house and were awarded honours. Their purpose in observing courts was to discover the relationship which existed between European monarchs and their subjects. This was very relevant to the position of the new Japanese emperor, who had only been on the political scene for three years. But the dignitaries were treated with respect wherever they went and also studied the constitutions of republican states like the United States, France and Switzerland.

*Institutions*

Turning to the cultural front, the Embassy had a wide remit to visit hospitals, universities and schools (including charity schools and girls' colleges). Occasionally they attended theatres, though their appreciation was limited because their knowledge of foreign languages was often inadequate. They were frequently to be found at museums and exhibitions.

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On the related issue of religion, the Embassy could not escape the wrath of foreign statesmen who championed the cause of the Christian churches in Japan. The Restoration government whose representatives they were was rather vulnerable on this subject. It had persisted with the imprisonment of Christians at Urakami in Nagasaki domain. The US government and virtually all the European governments were, therefore, quick to raise officially with the visitors the need for Christian missionaries and converts to be protected under the new enlightened regime. These representations were successful and the outcome was that the Tokyo government announced in March 1873 that the prohibition of Christianity would come to an end, that signs banning it would be removed and that a policy of tolerance towards Christian believers would be observed. The 3000 Catholics imprisoned at Urakami were released and returned to their villages. This shows the influence wielded by the commissioners, even when abroad.

Kume, expressing a personal view, was far from convinced. He is critical in his observations on Christianity. His comments on the Christian churches and Christian statuary which he found in the United States are less than complimentary. When he moves to Britain, he observes that 'the intensity of religious observance dropped a degree, but when we moved from Britain to France, it dropped one or two degrees more. Indeed, nowhere on the continent of Europe did we see anything to compare with the strength of religious practice in America and Britain' (Kume, p. 223). His perceptive conclusion is that 'those brought up on the political morality of East Asia cannot imagine the influence which religion exerts [in the world]' (Kume, p. 280).

On its return journey the party travelled through the Suez Canal. They paused at Aden and the port of Galle in Sri Lanka (then British Ceylon). After they were forced to pass by Singapore because of an outbreak of typhoid, they did manage to visit hotels in Saigon, Hong Kong and Shanghai. This afforded them the opportunity to see colonialism and the spread of the great European empires at first hand.

By 13 September 1873 when the main body reached Yokohama, most of the other delegates had already returned. They found Japan in a dangerous state and not very welcoming. They made it clear that they favoured the cause of reform but found that Japan had to establish peace and stability before they could deal with the implementation of the findings reached during their travels. Kido, the deputy leader of the group, prepared an important memorandum in October advocating constitutional government, perhaps the single most significant outcome

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of the Mission. But reforms took time, and the leaders were determined not to rush them. In any case, Kido, who returned home as a sick man, retired from politics in 1874 and died three years later. His colleague, Okubo, died at the hands of an assassin in 1878. Prince Iwakura, who survived an attempt on his life in 1874, died in 1883. It was, therefore, the youngest of the leaders, Ito Hirobumi, who became an imperial councillor and steered through the developments in Japanese politics and industrialization for the rest of the century. Ito had had a large hand in the preparation of the Mission and was able through his public-works connections to make significant appointments of foreign nationals to posts in Japan. After four decades of public service, his life eventually ended in assassination in 1909 by a Korean. Japan itself remained a dangerous place to be a politician.

## KUME ASSEMBLES THE EVIDENCE

After the return of the mission, Kume was charged with writing its official report, which was entitled *Tokumei zenken taishi Bei-Ō kairan jikki* (literally, ‘the true version of the tour of the special embassy to the United States and Europe’). This was eventually published in 1878 in five volumes. Four reprints were issued up to 1883, and it is estimated that the overall total of copies sold was 3500. In his reports each country is given a ‘survey’ and each major city which was visited by the Embassy is described in a ‘record’. There are at the end four chapters with general observations. The author also notes with regret that he was only able to include one or two things out of every thousand on which he had taken notes. While it was an official publication, it does contain many reflections which must have come from the pen and thinking of Kume himself and could not be attributed to the leaders he served.

Kume clearly bore in mind that his readers were generally ignorant of the rest of the world but knew enough to be intrigued by it. His chapters include a geography and history lesson for each country. While the text is, at one level, simplistic, there are passages which show remarkable shrewdness and penetrating insights. First, an insight from the United States where the Embassy visited first and stayed for over half a year:

Such people [Europeans] opened up and pioneered this land of freedom and have nurtured their spirit of enterprise here. Although they say that this country has relied on new creativity, new development and new immigrants, in reality America is a land of people who, in Europe, felt the urge for independence and self-government most strongly. (Kume, p. 104)



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Then some insights on the comparative league-table of countries in Europe as Kume viewed them:

In both England and France, for example, civilisation flourishes and industry and commerce prosper together. However, when one looks at the products of Belgium and Switzerland, the achievements of their peoples in attaining independence and accumulating wealth would impress even the largest nation. Prussia is a large country and Saxony a small one, but the latter is by no means inferior to the former in the industrial arts. Conversely, Russia is a large country, but it cannot stand alongside these nations. (Kume, pp. 429–30)

Kume's report had an impact on a Meiji Japan which was ambitious for change. The lessons he drew came not from any one country but from the cumulative impression of the countries which the Embassy had visited. These formed the database for the remarkable grassroots transformation that took place in Japan as the reign of the Emperor Meiji progressed. Apart from Kume's work, but associated with it, were the many specialized reports compiled by the junior officials who accompanied the Mission. It seems to have targeted certain countries on its itinerary as special areas for study, e.g. Britain for information on the industrial revolution, and Germany for military information. In the United States it would appear that the officials were particularly trying to understand its forms of government, local, state and national, and its educational methods. They painstakingly studied the basic laws of the American constitution with the help of Japanese scholars already at US universities and paid many visits to legislatures. These comparative studies, ranging over the northern hemisphere, were to lead in time to far-reaching constitutional amendments and to the introduction of universal education which was vital to nation-building in Japan.

Kume was discriminating and not averse to criticizing what he saw. He was full of gratitude for foreign hospitality the Mission had received and appreciative of the privilege of observing and studying foreign societies at close quarters. But on occasions Kume is less than impressed. As we have seen earlier, he reports unfavourably on Western religion. Another specific case was on a visit to West Point in the United States which had refused to accept Japanese cadets on security grounds in contrast to Annapolis Naval College where they were readily admitted. On attending manoeuvres there, he writes:

We often observed large and small cannon in target practice, but compared with Japanese soldiers American gunners rarely hit the targets, giving us the impression that their gunnery skills were rather backward. In nimbleness of fingers and speed of reaction, the Japanese are superior to the Americans and the Europeans. (Kume, p. 78)

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There was an essential ambiguity about the Embassy itself. On the one hand, the Japanese leaders of the time were fearful and suspicious over the imperialist ambitions of the West. On the other, they admired the West and wanted to learn from it. So their fundamental object was to study the West in order to resist the West. Let us remember that the Iwakura Mission was proud of the progress which the Restoration government had made in the three years it had been in power. But they were also open-minded and full of curiosity about improvements that could be made for their greater security.

Kume himself merits a final word. His report was an outstanding piece of work, containing shrewd analysis and compelling observations. This was recognized by the Japanese government; and he was appointed to various official posts connected with compiling Japan's national history. The oversight of this important task passed in 1888 from the cabinet office to Tokyo Imperial University where Kume became a professor lecturing in *kokushi* (national history). But in 1892 he published a controversial article about the role of Shinto which displeased conservative scholars of the day. His views became notorious; and he was forced to resign from the prestigious state university. By a paradox Kume, who had been the chronicler of new Western values, became a casualty of older Eastern values. He later joined what became Waseda University, a private college, where he taught into his 80s. He died in 1931 at the age of 91, more than half a century after the publication of the monumental study which made his name.

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### *Note on the text*

The original account of the Iwakura Embassy, compiled by Kume Kunitake, was published in Japanese in five volumes in 1878 under the title *Tokumei zenken taishi Bei-Ō kairan jikki*. A complete English translation, also in five volumes, was published by The Japan Documents in 2002, edited by Graham Healey and Chushichi Tsuzuki, entitled *The Iwakura Embassy 1871–73: A True Account of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary's Journey of Observation through the United States of America and Europe*. The English translation was made by Andrew Cobbing, Martin Collcutt, Graham Healey, P. F. Kornicki, Eugene Soviak and Chushichi Tsuzuki.

This one-volume abridgement of the English translation was prepared by Chushichi Tsuzuki with the assistance of R. Jules Young. A new introduction to the abridged text has been written by Ian Nish.

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