

Japan's Modernization

The Iwakura Mission to Scandinavia in 1873

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The rising economic power of Japan after the Second World War awakened increasing interest in the country and the reasons behind its astonishing success within the general public as well as the mass media. The academic world responded by organizing a series of conferences assembling scholars from the fields of history, politics and economics. These conferences became famous for their focus on what was to be labelled the “modernization” of Japan, preceding its impressive appearance in the markets of the world.²

This phenomenon was, in fact, not entirely new to students of history. Japan had first captured world-wide attention with its unexpected victory over Russia in the war of 1904-05. Western powers began to accept Japan as an equal, at least in military terms. Japan was a newcomer but had adapted with amazing speed to the production and utilization of Western technology. Certainly, the Second World War caused a harsh and discouraging setback, but from the sixties onwards one easily gained the impression of Japan as a phoenix rising from the ashes. The aforementioned conferences – organized in the United States and summed up in useful and convincing publications – did not lead to a temptation to solve the “secret” of Japan’s success once and for all, and to provide an easy answer to the questions raised.

Still, the fact that a nation that was bogged down in feudalism, primarily agrarian and had a pre-modern social order until the second half of the 19th century, headed straight towards such rapid industrialization elicited enough fascination to be looked upon as a possible model for other nations confronted with similar circumstances. Studies exist comparing Japan with India and Turkey, and these take the standpoint gaining from Japan’s experience.³ One author even attempts to discuss the moder-

nization of Nigeria alongside Japan’s successful past. Nor did the People’s Republic of China hesitate to direct its attention to the mechanisms of the Meiji Restoration and its results. It is extremely difficult to directly compare the development of nations, since each has its own particular history, traditions and characteristic cultural attributes. Nevertheless, impetus and motivation, attitude and studiousness deserve to be seen transgressing borders, and in this connection the so-called Iwakura Mission was a good example, which is much more than merely an anecdote in Japan’s modern history. Its successes and, to be frank, at times its failures provide a wonderful mirror of Japan’s metamorphosis into a modern society.

Domestic and Foreign Crisis

By the mid-nineteenth century Japan had to cope with domestic problems, as well as with foreign affairs. A Chinese phrase, rendered in Japanese as *Naiyu gaikan* (troubles at home and dangers from outside), was used at the time. Today we would say domestic and foreign crises.

Like most social crises in the world, it also manifested itself in economic conflicts. To meet financial difficulties, the domains were forced to reduce the stipends of samurai retainers and to levy additional taxes on peasants. These added economic burdens on the large number of samurai retainers and the peasantry fostered antagonism between them and the domain governments and created serious social crises.⁴

Moreover, the Western powers were just beginning to encroach on Asia. China was defeated in the Opium War (1840-42) and England was increasing its influence on the Asian continent. There would have been nothing to fear from the intrusion of Western powers if Japan had provided itself with an adequate means of defence, but the country totally lacked the military means to resist

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the International Conference on “The Asian Values and Vietnam’s Development in Comparative Perspective,” Hanoi, in 1999. I wish to thank professor Peter Pantzer for his generous help with this article.

2. For example, there is a series of six volumes, published by Princeton University Press for the Conference of Modern Japan on the Association for Asian Studies: *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, edited by Marius B. Jansen (1965); *The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan*, edited by William W. Lockwood (1965); *Aspects of Social Change in Modern Japan*, edited by R. P. Dore (1967); *Political Development in Modern Japan*, edited by Robert E. Ward (1968); *Dilemmas of Growth in Prewar Japan*, edited by James William Morley (1971); *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, edited by Donald H. Shively (1971).

3. For example, *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey*, edited by Ward, R. E. & D. A. Rustow (1964).

4. See, for example, Beasley 1972:42–54.

outside aggression. The over 200-year-old seclusionist policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate was challenged. Finally, the expeditions of American Commander Perry in 1853-54 forced the Bakufu to open up the Japanese ports of Hakodate and Shimoda to American ships for supplies and trade, subject to local regulations. Great Britain followed the American example. In 1855, the signing of a treaty gave the southern Kurile islands including Etorofu to Japan, and other islands north of these to Russia. Three ports - Nagasaki, Shimoda, and Hakodate - were opened to Russian shipping. In the same year Japan signed a similar agreement with the Netherlands (Kato 1986: 43-46). In 1858 Japan signed commercial treaties with the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, and with Portugal and Prussia in 1860.

The Scandinavian countries did not come in the first round of nations that established commercial treaties with Japan. Denmark had to wait until 1867 and Sweden until 1868, in case the Dutch minister to Japan signed on behalf of the Danish and Swedish governments.⁵ These treaties contained three main aspects. Firstly, Edo and certain ports, among others Yokohama (Kanazawa) were opened to foreigners. Secondly, a very low scale of import duties was imposed upon Japan and lastly nationals of these and 14 other countries with which such treaties were signed in the following years were exempt from the jurisdiction of Japanese courts of law.

France annexed the colony of Cochin China in 1862, after which the protectorate of Cambodia was established in 1867. This was soon followed by French penetration, admittedly with little initial success, in the region of Haiphong and Hanoi. Russia took over the coastal area between the Amur and the Korean frontier from China, and founded Vladivostok, which means "Ruler of the East," close to this frontier (Storry 1968: 96; 106).

Finally, in 1868 Emperor Meiji issued the proclamation: "Restoration of Imperial Government." The name Edo was changed to Tokyo. In the spring of 1869 the Meiji Tennô moved to the new capital from Kyoto.

From Old to New

Discussing the complexities of Japanese "modernization" is a difficult task. Certainly, the story already begins in the Edo-period. A researcher would be compelled to study early technological development, which in many ways was related to: 1) the need for enhancing agricultural productivity; 2) the growing importance of trade and manufacture throughout the country; 3) the coming into existence of an increasingly well-to-do and self-reliant

township population in competition with the gentry of warriors (*samurai*) – who were losing more and more of their inherited dominance; 4) the Japanese experience in dealing with foreigners; 5) an astonishingly sophisticated educational system.

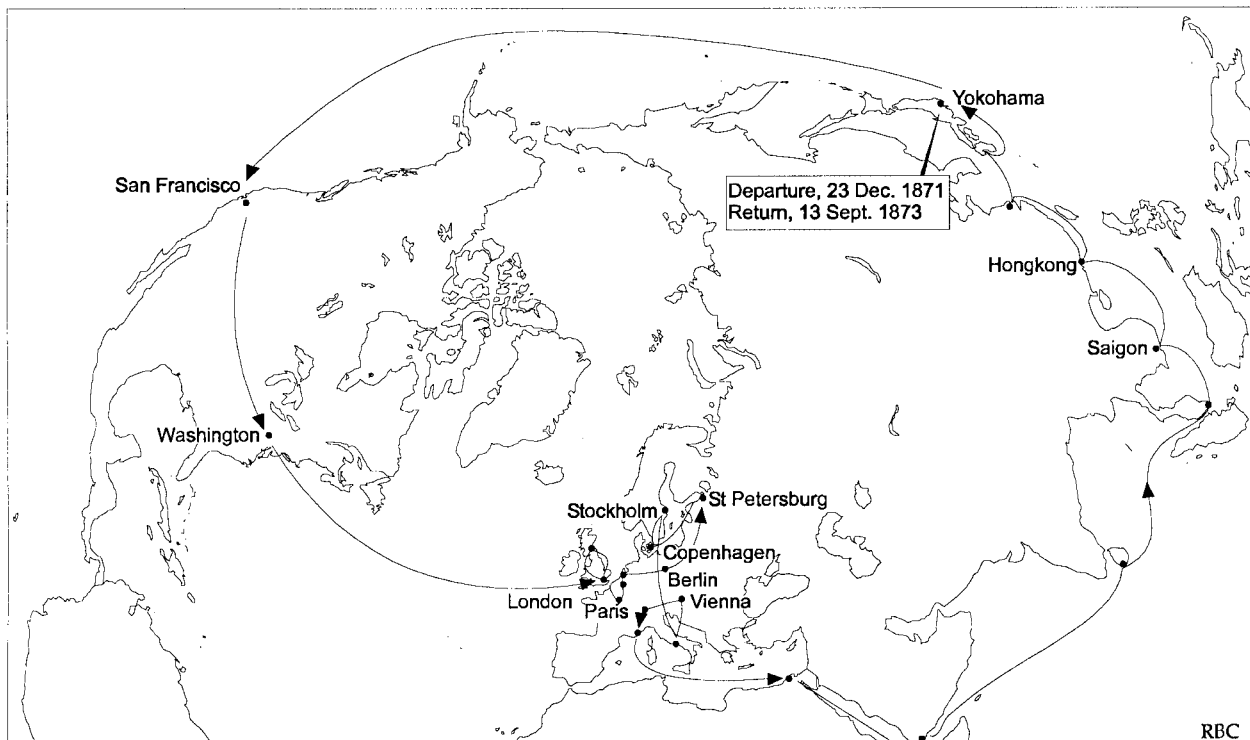
At the end the scholar would have to investigate the problem of the unequal treaties and their impact on Japan. However, I will not dwell on these factors further now but turn directly to the Iwakura Mission and its fate. The unequal treaties - the first of them concluded with five of the Western powers in 1858 - provided extreme difficulties for every Japanese government. Though officially called treaties of friendship, navigation and commerce, they deprived Japan of its full sovereignty and the right to control its trade. A revision of these treaties was therefore a top priority of Japan's foreign policy. This was, or rather should have been, the main aim of the Iwakura Mission, which we shall now accompany on its tour to the Western treaty powers. The mission left by ship from Yokohama harbour in December 1871 in order to cross the Pacific, heading first for the United States, and was full of energy and optimistic about its aims. The Japanese government spared no cost or pain in the attempt to achieve these long-cherished treaty revisions and dispatched a mission as high ranking as never before or since. The first minister, acting as a pleni-potentiary and extraordinary ambassador, was Iwakura Tomomi (1825-83), a man close to the royal court who had played an important role during the Meiji Restoration and who had been invested with the position of "chancellor to the right" - today we might call his position that of prime minister.

Four vice-ambassadors had been allocated to him, three of them with the rank of government ministers - Okubo Toshimichi (1830-78), Kido Koin (1833-77) and Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909). Thus, half of the government left Japan, trusting that the other half would faithfully fulfil its responsibilities at home, just as the mission would try to reach its objectives abroad on this important journey. To ensure the continuance of their policies during their absence, Iwakura and the key members of his mission had obtained assurances from the "caretaker government" who remained at home. The latter had promised that no important appointments or policy changes would be made during the absence of the Iwakura Mission (Borton 1970:100).

Necessity of Progress

The Iwakura Mission consisted of more than a hundred administrators, scholars of various disciplines, and students. They sailed on 23 December 1871 from Yokohama

5. For further information on Japanese-Danish and Japanese-Swedish relations, see for example Lidin 1984:11-66, and Edström 1997:1-7.



Route of the Iwakura Mission to Europe, 1871-1873

and returned to Nagasaki on 13 September 1873. According to their original plans, the mission should have spent about ten and a half months on the entire journey. But since negotiations on the revision of treaties with the United States and the other Western powers turned out to be one-sided affairs and took much longer than expected, the time spent on the journey had to be continuously extended, and in the end an extra year went by. Thus the duration of the excursion covered a total of almost two years (Tanaka 1997:8).

Among the 42 students who joined the mission in order to study in America and Europe were five girls, the first ever to study abroad. They were in fact “guinea pigs” for Japan’s new education system.⁶ The idea here was that women should also learn from the West to improve their intellectual abilities, with special regard to methods of child rearing and education. It was recognized that, for the development of Japanese civilization, improved education of forthcoming generations was essential. For this purpose, well-educated and enlightened mothers were needed.

The youngest member of the group, Tsuda Umeko (1865-1929), was only seven (!) years old. She grew up in Washington D.C., raised by an American host family, and

studied at private schools. Many years later, after her return to Japan she founded an English School for Women, later named Tsuda College. It has remained one of the bastions of women’s higher education in Japan to this day. Umeko met, in fact, a lucky fate. Two of her older companions (the eldest being sixteen!), became ill almost immediately when transplanted into the completely unfamiliar surroundings, and had to be sent back to their native land without starting, let alone completing, their studies in America. This experiment of separating children from their families at such an early age for duties in the service of the nation has, understandably, never been repeated.⁷

Besides aiming to find a way of revising the “unequal treaties”, the mission intended to achieve recognition for the new imperial regime and to study and be informed about modern Western achievements, with a view to seeking a model for the new Meiji government, in power for only a couple of years, to follow (Tanaka 1997: 8). However, the negotiations failed. They failed in the United States, and they failed all the more in England, as both powers had considerable imperialistic interests in Asia and were determined to protect their advantages over Japan. Iwakura and other members of the mission

6. The Ministry of Education had been established in the summer of 1871, and a team of experts with Western advisers was beginning to work on the draft of a compulsory education scheme when the embassy left (See, for example, Nagai 1971:35–76)

7. See, for example, Furuki 1991:xi-xiv.

made the painful realization that Japan had not yet made sufficient progress with its internal reforms to be able to negotiate successfully with the Western nations, and recognized the necessity of modernization in order to deal with Western countries as an equal.

Consequently, the mission was instructed to gain as much practical knowledge as possible of foreign governments, industries, and public works. They therefore spent the majority of the tour travelling in 12 countries, all respective treaty powers. They did so realistically, without great political expectations, visiting public institutions, various factories, schools, military installations, dockyards, prisons, museums and so forth.

In order to encourage the public in Japan to begin the process of modernization and to gain its understanding for the mission's journey, the mission decided to publish a comprehensive account of the information and data they would collect during their journey. A Confucian scholar, Kume Kunitake (1839-1931) was appointed as official diarist to compile a record of the mission's activities.

Kume, under personal instructions from Iwakura, kept a daily account of all of the embassy's tours and excursions, receptions and discussions, explaining new inventions or describing scenic spots, omitting only very confidential business, for example the question of treaty revision.

The work was financed by the government and published in 1878 as *Tokumei Zenken Taishi Bei-Ô Kairan Jikki* (A True Account of the Tour in America and Europe of the Special Embassy) in five impressive volumes, richly illustrated with depictions of places of interest throughout this diplomatic ramble around the world. The mission's account contains its observations and analyses of Western politics, economics, society, military systems, education, culture, history, religion and philosophy, among many other things.

Kume used the classical Japanese and Chinese literary style and made frequent references to Chinese philosophy, history, and poetry. It is a comparative study of Western and Eastern culture and is, as one of our leading contemporary scholars on Japan's modern history concludes, a kind of an "Encyclopaedia of the West" (Tanaka 1997:10).

Pleasant Observations

Visits to museums and exhibitions were some of the most pleasant undertakings of the mission's members. The World Exhibition in Vienna especially impressed them. They stayed in Vienna for a couple of weeks altogether and used four days in all in visiting the exhibition. It was certainly the best opportunity the mission had to observe the "world" as a whole in a very short time and to com-

pare the cultures, art and industrial progress of the different countries of Europe as well as of the Orient.

The exhibition appeared as a microcosm of the planet for them. As Kume wrote: "It seems to me as if the planet is so miniaturized that it can fit into this park" (*Jikki* V: 35). He described the aims, meanings and history of various World Exhibitions as well as that of several museums. In the mission's account there were many detailed notes about industrial products, from machines for agriculture and the weaving industry to medical instruments and handicrafts, as well as the fine arts of every country.

The differences in the products of the various countries were compared, for example French and Italian art were considered the best in Europe, but the Italians had more sense for natural and classical beauty. The Belgians had a character similar to that of the French, their technology and art resembled each other. The products of Austria and Prussia shared a similar style and were of good quality, but those of Austria seemed more luxurious. The Dutch had a great number of abilities. Among their products there were a lot of excellent diamond- and lacquer goods. Russia produced great numbers of scientific instruments, but its other wares were not as good as those of France, Germany, Italy and Austria. Denmark exhibited a very small number of wares and they were quite uninteresting. The Persians wove excellent carpets. The products of China at the exhibition were not particularly special.

Kume appreciated the European oil paintings very much and was deeply disappointed at the Japanese oil paintings exhibited. In his words, "they are not even as good as the painting of European children." The Japanese traditional paintings of flowers and birds were extremely pleasant, but the portraits looked so awful "that one sweated" in shame and fear. Kume was very pleased that the visitors were so fond of the Japanese souvenirs sold at the exhibition. He concluded that free (liberal) minds were the most important sources of creative works in every discipline (*Jikki* V: 32-50).

In addition to the world exhibition in Vienna, the mission's members also visited museums wherever they went. Not only the large world famous museums in England and France, but also the National Museums in Sweden and Denmark were their program list. During their five days in Stockholm they visited the National Museum of Sweden twice and a very detailed report about the collection was made in the mission account (*Jikki* IV: 172-174,177-178).

When they visited the Danish National Museum, they were especially impressed by the ethnographical sections. Kume was able to be reflective on his origin again and wrote: "If one comes from Japan to Europe, one finds eve-

rything is [here] so excellent and gauzy that one cannot avoid feeling ashamed of its [our] old-fashioned, dull [things]. However, it seems that very often the Europeans dislike the pomp and discover the natural originality in the Oriental wares.” Kume stated that the essence of learning new techniques was in ascertaining the originality (instinct) and collecting other existing wisdom. The ultimate aim was to support industry and trade and strengthen the country (*Jikki* IV: 146-148).

Every part of the account contains comments on what might be useful for Japan’s modernization. But the most essential tendency of the mission’s account with regard to reform or modernization is the perfect combination of tradition and modernity.

Solution Models

The mission’s members paid considerable attention to political and social structures, industries, military affairs, infrastructures and education (particularly elementary education for the masses). They soon realized how much domestic reform was necessary before the Western Powers would begin to consider Japan as an equal.

They did not, however, lose their critical sense while observing and learning from the West, and concluded that reforms should occur gradually, with regard for Japan’s own particular circumstances and traditions. They were, of course, also aware of the fact that continued reliance upon tradition was as risky as radical change. The phrase *wakon yōsai* (Japanese spirit, Western sciences) suggests a harmonious solution.

The mission intended to add to its existing knowledge of Western political practices and theories to Japan’s modernization. In the course of the journey it realised that no Western country individually could provide an ideal model for Japan, but rather that Europe on the whole had produced a higher form of civilization than that of East Asia. In the mission’s account, Kume made a probing analysis of German culture and society. It was often pointed out that the German example could be most relevant for Japan, since both nations shared similarities in their recent problems and present aims: restoration of the monarchy, political centralisation and unification, popular education, the security of its frontiers, recognition abroad, and the development of commerce and industry.

England was said to enjoy both freedom and order because reformers had moved carefully and gradually, building upon tradition and avoiding the destructive revolutionary tendencies of the French. Kume referred to

the Eastern classics to illustrate the best approach to reform and the basic responsibilities of government and education. To achieve wealth and power, a people must work hard, be self-reliant, trustworthy and obedient. Abroad, national dignity must be upheld; at home, there must be peace throughout the land.⁸ Rulers should adopt policies, which conform to the manners and customs of the people. In Germany, for example, Bismarck and the Kaiser were undertaking many reforms, but their policies were in accord with the customs and traditions of the German people (*Jikki* IV: 220).

Love of History

The mission’s members were greatly impressed by the way which the Western countries preserved and cherished their history, culture and arts. Kume linked the recent spurt in Western material civilization to a longer historical preparation. The progress did not really occur overnight. It was not the destruction of the old order by the new, but the perfection of tradition by degrees. “No matter how much we grow and change, we remain products of the past.” The people of the West were assisted by their love of history. They kept a careful record of it and built upon it. They probed the past for secrets, visited ruins, collected documents, recorded tales, and made excavations of ancient sites. They revered the study of new things as well.

Japan should do these things too, stressed Kume, and “we must not lose any old pieces of paper, not even a part of a letter” (*Jikki* IV: 56, 217-21). He seemed so convinced by his own words that he began work on editing Japanese history and criticizing Japanese historiography following the publication of this account in 1878.⁹

The concerts and operas sponsored by the several European royal families and governments inspired Iwakura considerably and he began to patronize the traditional Japanese theatres, *Nō* and *Kabuki*, on his return from the journey. Kume was deeply impressed by the Bible-reading, church-going habits of the Americans and the English. It amazed him that the city streets were so quiet on Sundays and that shops and offices shut while people worshipped. In Scotland he discovered that tourists who stayed in their hotels and did not go to church on Sundays were scolded. This kind of religion, he had to admit, motivated people to undertake projects and get things done. But he also stated that the upper classes in Europe made an outward show of honouring religion, while in actuality they used it as a tool to gain the people’s support of particular policies and to ensure obedience

8. See Mayo 1973:33.

9. See Sugiya 1997:16-17.

to authority (*Jikki* I: 39). During the journey Christians often said that Japan was hostile to Christianity and petitioned the religious freedom in Japan. Iwakura therefore promised them that Japan would not issue any further anti-Christian legislation. The restrictions on those Japanese professing to be Christians were removed on 24 February 1873, before the mission's return home.¹⁰

In Sweden, although the mission's visit was after the elimination of the restrictions, the mission was confronted with the same questions, which were presented by representatives of the Evangelical Alliance in Stockholm. This alliance consisted of pastors, businessmen and parliamentarians (Edström 1998: 143). It is most likely that the ambassador assured them of the recent grant of religious freedom in Japan.

Denmark and Sweden

Since both Denmark and Sweden also established the inequality treaties with Japan in the second half of the 1860s, the Iwakura Mission's purpose was to renegotiate with these two governments. These two governments, however, did not want to lose their commercial advantages in Japan and they therefore excused themselves with the Dutch who had made the treaties possible. Nonetheless, the Scandinavian governments welcomed the mission because of their commercial self-interests.

The Iwakura Mission visited Denmark and Sweden from 18 to 30 April 1873. The group stayed first in Denmark between 18 and 23 April and continued their trip to Sweden, where they spent a week. The account on Denmark is one third shorter than that on Sweden (including Norway). This was not only because they stayed two days longer, but also their interest in Sweden - a bigger country with more industrial accomplishment than Denmark - was relatively stronger. This is also obvious from the fact that Kume did not mention in the account the several industrial sites¹¹ that the mission's members visited in Copenhagen (apart from the dockyard), while their visits in Stockholm to a textile factory, a match factory, a cheese factory¹² and the Bolinder Iron Works Co. were reported in detail.

In the early morning of 18 April, the mission arrived at Korsør from Kiel by ship. Kofoed, the secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs met them there and accompanied them to Copenhagen. As they arrived at the Copenhagen station, they were welcomed by Julius Sick

as a representative of the royal family, Captain Jensen and Sublieutenant F. Wulff. They were brought to the Hotel Royal at Ved Stranden 18, today's Domus Technica. It was a relatively small-scale group of 11 or 12 people, compared to the group which had departed from Tokyo in 1871, because part of the delegation had to leave for Japan (Nagashima 1993:168-169).

The group visited the Foreign Ministry on the same day of their arrival and met King Christian IX the next day. On the third day they visited the National Museum and did some sightseeing in the city. They did not seem to be very much impressed by the beauty of Copenhagen.¹³ "The capital of Denmark is quiet and empty and not that beautiful, but there are many nice buildings such as the Royal Palace, St Nicolai Church, the town hall" (*Jikki* IV: 152).

In the evening there was a big welcome banquet for 200 people at Børsen. For the next evening the Danish King organized a ball for them. The account recorded that the King enjoyed the ball and accompanied them until three o'clock in the morning (ibid p.151). Apart from their official audience with the King and a meeting in the Foreign Ministry, they also visited the military arsenal, the Great-Northern Telegraph Company and some factories.

On 23 April, impressed by the Danes and their hospitality, the mission left for Malmö where Carl Lewenhaupt, the head of the Trade and Consular Bureau of the Foreign Ministry, and Count C. E. de Champs, Lieutenant of the Coastal Fleet of Sweden welcomed them and accompanied them to Stockholm. They arrived at Stockholm the next day and were accommodated in the Hotel Rydberg.

The Swedish welcome reception and cultural programmes provided to the mission were equally as impressive as that of Denmark's. During the next afternoon of their arrival the mission's members had an audience and dinner with the king, Oscar II. There was also a ball that evening called the Innocence Ball, a great event in the social life of Stockholm at the time (Edström 1998: 139-141). The mission's study programme in Sweden was, as usual, filled with visiting industrial sites, a naval yard, museums and schools, amongst others.

Scandinavian Education

Wherever the mission went its members paid much

10. See, for example, Anesaki 1963:337-38.

11. Nagashima pointed out that they visited several industrial sites such as the Holmblad Gum Factory?

12. Edström identified as Mälareprovinsens mejeriaktiebolag (The Mälaren Province Dairy Co) (1998: 144).

13. The members also learnt from the famous Danish weather that even if it was spring as they arrived in Copenhagen, "there was still snow and grass and trees were not yet sprout." It also said that it had been often cloudy and foggy and windy as well. According to the account in Denmark "130 days rain and 32 days cloud" (*Jikki* IV:138).

attention to military matters such as structure, strength and quality of the forces and military factories, and their visit to Scandinavia was no exception. The Danish, as well as the Swedish and Norwegian soldiers, were described as “strong”. The Danish naval dockyard impressed them a great deal (*Jikki* IV p.149-151), and so did the Swedish one – the Bergsunds Mekaniska Verkstad¹⁴.

As mentioned above, apart from strengthening the military force and forwarding industrialization, the raising of the level of education was the most important task of the Meiji government. Therefore, the mission paid considerable attention to Western education matters. The account gave a very short general statement on the widespread Danish school education – “Even in Europe there are not so many countries with the same standard” (*Jikki* IV p.140).

It provided a fairly lengthy observation on Swedish schools, following a visit to an elementary school, which is identified by Edström as the Klara Folkskola. The most interesting aspects for the Japanese education at that time were that most of the pupils of the Swedish school were children of “poor people” and the pupils did not need to pay for anything; that girls and boys were “not separated” and learned the same subjects; and the philosophy of teaching: teaching should be easily understandable, and should avoid boring pupils or forcing them, otherwise they would lose their interest in learning (*Jikki* IV: 191).

National Differences

The mission perceived that the Scandinavians had been barbaric and brutal warriors in the past, but they were now civilized and straightforward, brave and strong. And they were all excellent in navigation and had an active shipping trade (*Jikki* IV: 134,157). For example, “The number of Denmark’s ships is comparable with that of Russia although it is a small country,” and “Norway is the number one in Europe in terms of the proportion of population and number of ships” (ibid p. 165).

The mission’s account says that “The Danes, Swedes and Norwegians are divided into three countries and into three ethnic groups, but they originally belonged to the same race” (ibid p.166). However, Kume also made small distinctions between the three peoples. The Danes were described in general, as “straightforward (modest), hard working and not intoxicated by prodigal and luxury lifestyles. [In this respect] they are the number one in Europe” (ibid p.140). “The Norwegians are strong people and good at sailing while the Swedes are lively and

able and dextrous” (ibid p.166). The Scandinavians were again distinguished from the Germans. Kume illustrates his astonishment about the difference between the Germans and Danes as follows: “The border between Germany and Denmark is neither mountain, nor sea. It is only a flat field but, even after thousands of years, the people are still so different, as though they built a border of nature. That could be called a miracle” (*Jikki* IV: 133). He did not, however, compare characteristics.

Observing the characters of different nations seemed to be one of Kume’s hobbies. He often mentioned the characters of different nations. For example, at that time the Germans were considered slow and disciplined, and Kume even wrote down a joke he was told on his journey:

In Europe, they say that if an Englishman, Frenchman, German, and American are assigned a task and given six hours to complete it, the American will finish in four hours and spend the rest of his time taking a stroll or wandering around. The Frenchman will finish in four hours and then dine and sing songs. The Englishman will take five hours and then work on something else for another hour. But the German will not be finished even in six hours and will resume the task in the evening, continuing to work even in his spare time (*Jikki* II: 43).¹⁵

Another illustrative example is that Kume described the Chams and Malays in South East Asia as brave and impatient people: “They easily became annoyed and shouted. It was then difficult to calm them down. Even small matters made them angry and gnash their teeth and bellow” (*Jikki* V: 317).

An Imprint of Japan

The Scandinavian image of the Japanese was also limited by superficial observation. For example, the Swedish minister to London, Rothschild, reported that the mission’s members whom he saw in London were “most distinguished personalities” and had “an unusually high level of culture for Easterners.”¹⁶ People in Stockholm were curious to see the Japanese.

There was a big crowd assembled at the central station as they arrived and the following day outside the hotel where the mission members stayed (Edström 1998: 140). But the public was a little disappointed that the Japanese wore western uniforms and did not really look as much exotic as they might have imagined. The Japanese language must have sounded alien to the Swedes. One Swedish weekly reported that “their way of

14. Okuda, “Iwakura shisetsudan ga mita Sueden,” p. 57.

15. Cited in Mayo 1973:46.

16. Letter from Rothschild to Adlercreutz, 21 August 1872. Cited in Edström 1997: 4.

speaking revealed something strange and old-worldly, like some ghost from the age of chivalry just emerging among us, and just breathing the air of the new age long enough to obtain modern clothes and cursorily orient themselves in the most peculiar differences of the new age from their own.¹⁷ Danish newspapers also reported that the Japanese mission's members looked exceptionally distinguished.¹⁸

Loaded with positive impressions and new information, and leaving a curious "distinguished" image behind them, the mission continued its journey from Sweden to Germany on 30 April. They crossed altogether from Malmö to Copenhagen, where the party was divided; one group with the ambassador took the train to Hamburg via Korsør, the other half, including Kume, went by boat to Lübeck and proceeded from there to Hamburg, where both parties joined up again.

As in the other Western countries, the Japanese were not able to convince the Scandinavians to negotiate the unequal treaties. Their stay in Scandinavia was only a small episode in their long journey to the West. What they obtained during their short stay were friendly hospitality from the two countries and an illustrative impression of the countries.

They also left an imprint of Japan and the Japanese in Scandinavia. Nonetheless, they collected information on Nordic history, military as well as naval, education and industry, especially the match production techniques in Sweden. As Nagashima (1993:160) concluded "They saw things in Denmark only in connection with the imperative of how to make Japan 'rich and strong'." And the interests of Denmark and Sweden in the Japanese mission were out of commercial and domestic political reasons.

Denmark's intention was no more than to bring a breath of fresh air to the tedious political scene, which had not yet recovered from defeat in 1864, and expand the business of the Great Northern Telegraph Company (Det Store Nordiske Telegraf-Selskab) in Japan (ibid p. 178).

Sweden's interest was also propelled by the expansion of trade. Furthermore, the newly enthroned king, Oskar II, intended to influence Swedish foreign policy and it was also a good opportunity to invite the high-ranking Japanese mission to confirm the diplomatic relations which were established in 1868.¹⁹ The return trip to Japan took the mission from Marseilles to Alexandria,

then on to Aden, Bombay, Calcutta, the Malacca Straits, Singapore, Saigon, Hong Kong, Canton, Shanghai, and finally home to Nagasaki. Kume was just as indefatigable in collecting information during their short trips ashore in these countries as he had been in Europe, but his descriptions are condescending.

He contrasted the clean prosperous foreign sections of these port cities with the dirty impoverished indigenous areas. A point which can be considered as a critical observation of the European colonial powers, but also as a reflection of Asian backwardness and the "advanced" Western civilization, which Kume and many other Japanese admired at that time.

Future Constitution

The journey of the Iwakura Mission is one of the most intriguing events in Japan's recent history, and can undoubtedly be seen as an important step within the framework of understanding the modernization of Japan. It could not achieve its original aim of revising the unequal treaties, but the members of the mission were sobered by what they had observed abroad and were more convinced than ever that Japan's primary task was to strengthen its internal economy and military power.

The first major decision that the mission influenced strongly upon its return was that of calling off the planned expansion into Korea.²⁰ Its voice soon initiated reforms in every aspect of education, military and industry. One of the vice-ambassadors, Ito Hirobumi, later returned to Europe to study political philosophy in Berlin and Vienna in preparation for the drafting of Japan's future constitution. This constitution, proclaimed by the Meiji Government in February 1889, was the last and most crucial step in furthering Japan's progress. In conclusion, the awfully long and laborious dealings with the Western powers for their consent to revise the unequal treaties forced the Japanese government to make greater efforts to hasten the process of modernization. Japan hurried its modernization because it had to protect itself from possible colonization by Western countries, and in order to amend the unequal treaties with foreign nations.

Finally, in 1894, after a quarter century of painstaking efforts from every Japanese government consequently in office, the problem of revision of the unequal treaties had been largely resolved. The end of the fight for equality

17. "Ett japanskt drama," *Samtiden*, cited in Edström 1997:17.

18. See Nagashima 1993: 178.

19. See Edström 1998: 134-138.

20. In the early months of 1872, Japan had sent official envoys to Korea to negotiate a treaty and to open up the country from its seclusion. Saigon, who had great confidence in the newly established conscript army, recommended an aggressive policy. In October 1873, the Emperor ordered the government to concentrate on internal improvements and to forget about a military expedition to Korea (Borton 1970:101).

with the West was in sight. When other Western countries had agreed to repeal the unequal treaties, a new Danish-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was signed in 1895, followed by the new Swedish-Japanese treaty in 1896. These were the beginning of equal relations between Japan and Scandinavian countries. If the political form of a nation shapes its development and history, the history and culture of a nation effects the form of its politics. The Japanese ambassadors were most impressed by the standard of industrialization in England and America, but also inspired to a great extent by Germany, a young and rising nation among the other European empires. The Prussian type of constitution, eventually to be introduced in Japan, is rooted somehow in this experience.

The journey of the Iwakura Mission took place almost a hundred and thirty years ago. It was a time when Japan found itself in crisis in domestic as well as in foreign matters, as well as in a period of transition. From that time on until today more than a century has passed. Many things have changed since then, with problems solved or made insignificant. Still, both the diary left to us by Kume and the efforts of Iwakura Tomomi and his mission to cope with new developments and to accept the challenge of the West despite the heavy emotional and financial burdens of carrying out their task, are as convincing today as then.

The Iwakura Mission's vivid accounts and recordings provide valuable reading to help us in understanding the problems of a country forced to balance her traditional society and culture with the needs of accepting new methods of modern development. It also provides a lively illustration of the Japanese perception about the various European peoples and their society and civilization at that time.

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