

What Was “That War” All About?

A Japanese Perspective on World War II



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Translated by Keiko Asanuma



Woodblock print of the Yahagi Bridge in Okazaki by Hiroshige

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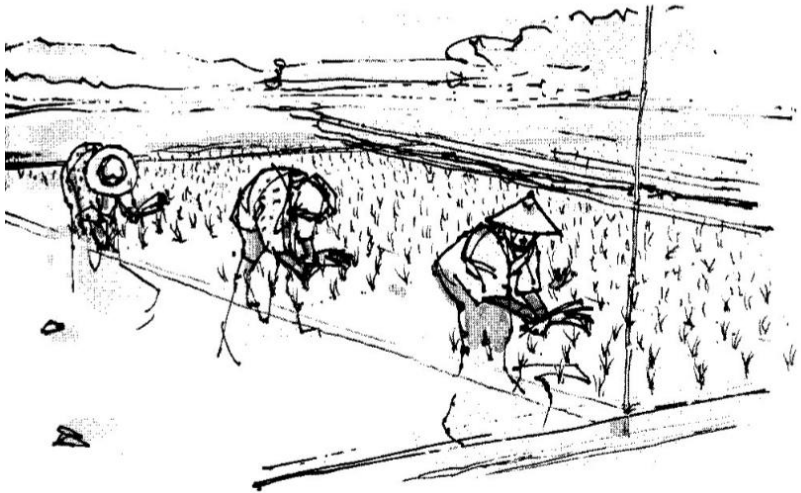
Seiken Sugiura

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*Rice planting during the war,
the same manual toil that had been done for centuries*

Foreword

About “That War”



August 15, 1945

Whenever the hot summer comes, I always recall August 15, 1945. It was the day we learned that Japan had lost WWII. On that day, I was 11 years old, in fifth grade at an elementary school. My family was living in Okazaki, near Nagoya, in central Japan.

It was a very hot day. We were in the midst of our summer vacation. We had been informed the day before that there would be a broadcast by Emperor Hirohito at noon. The Emperor was God then, and it had been unthinkable to directly see or hear him. “If the Emperor will be telling us something very important, whatever could that be?” The whole nation was buzzing in wonderment.

It was reported that earlier in the month large-scale bombs had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, causing huge destructions. The notice of the Emperor’s announcement was issued just as we were sensing that the frequency of air-raid alarms had been dramatically reduced,

At the time, many households did not have a radio. As my family had one, many from the neighbourhood gathered at our house. The voice of the Emperor, which we heard for the first time in our lives, was hardly audible, disturbed by the electric noise of the poorly performing radio. We intermittently heard such expressions as “Endure the unendurable” or “Peace for the eternity.” It was assumed that the war had ended.

Grown-ups, like my grand-mother and parents, were surprisingly calm. My grand-mother told me that we had lost the war. I was a “military boy” then and firmly believed in what I had been thoroughly brain-washed – that this country would never but never be defeated. My mind went blank. I still recall that powerful shock of over seven decades ago as though it was only yesterday.

Two simple questions arose in my young mind. One was “Why did we lose the war, which we had been taught and ardently believed to be impossible?” Another question was “What was this war all about?”

It took a relatively short time for the first question to clear away as I grew up in the post-war era. The overwhelming gap in the material “power” with the allied nations was manifestly evident. We were defeated as we should have been.

But then why did we start such a reckless war, in which defeat was obviously inevitable? The second question that arose in the mind of “the military boy” on that day has remained in my heart well into today, over seven decades since the end of the war.

The Egregious War

Our nation was literally in the state of “the country in ruins but mountains and rivers”¹ at the time we accepted the Potsdam

¹ From a well-known 8th century poetry by Li Po, a Chinese poet

Declaration.² Big metropolises like Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka, middle-size cities and small towns were all in ashes. Even rural areas, if they had military or other production facilities, were completely destroyed. The tragic destruction of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami of Northeast Japan made many of us recall scenes from the horrible destruction of defeated Japan.

An enormous number of lives were lost – over one million soldiers and over two million civilians. An even a larger number of Japanese were injured. Scores of millions lost everything - homes, assets, jobs. It would be impossible to calculate the cost of sacrifices the Japanese people had to make. If one tried, it would be astronomical. That was the stark reality of losing the war.

Moreover, it was not only the Japanese that had been victimized by that war. Korea and Taiwan had been colonized by Japan at the end of the 19th century, and their nationals had endured fates far worse than the Japanese. Human and material losses of the allied nations - that did not initiate the war - were also enormous. But the ones dealt the particularly cruel blows were the peoples in China and the countries in Southeast Asia that had become the main battle fields. The war victims in these

² A declaration issued by the U.S. President, the U.K. Minister and the President of China in Potsdam, Germany, on July 26, 1945, urging Japan to surrender the war unconditionally.

regions were far larger than the actual warring nations. It is estimated that 30 million innocent lives were victimized throughout Asia.

The scars that our military boots left on these peoples and communities, who had nothing to do with the cause of the war, were so deep. Many still have not recovered from the damage. Indeed, that war was egregious even for the victors.

Today, seven decades since the defeat, WWII has become just one chapter in our history. Perhaps, the question, “What was that war all about” which arose in my childhood mind can be rephrased into “How should that war be evaluated in the long history of this nation?”

I personally regard the series of wars, which Japan engaged on foreign soils from the Sino-Japanese War of 1898 to WWII, as a “Fifty-Year War” (Details in Chapter 4). On this basis, I have searched for some clues to the question of my boyhood.

As we apprehend that war within the continuity of our history, nobody in right mind could possibly conclude that “It was a just war.” I say this because, simply put, opting for such an egregious war could never have come out of our history and our spiritual and cultural traditions.

Twice in Japanese history, we dispatched warriors across the sea; in the mid-7th century and in the late 16th century. In both cases, we invaded a small part of the Korean Peninsula only

briefly. Once the battles were considered disadvantageous to us, we quickly retreated our soldiers to minimize the loss. Neither invasions are considered so blatant as WWII.

Admittedly, internal fighting and warfare have ranged from our earliest history. And out of these civil wars, the warrior class was born during the medieval time. The chivalry spirit (*bushido*) that sprang from it became a major spiritual pillar of the Japanese nation. But as I ponder on the heart of the bushido, I find no rationale whatsoever for engaging in the sort of gross warfare as WWII.

Ieyasu Tokugawa³, a hero of the 16th century civil wars, eventually united a divided country and founded the Edo Era (1603-1867). He was from my home area of Okazaki. He would have never acted the way our 20th century militaries did. During the civil wars, Ieyasu never engaged in any warfare that was clearly disadvantageous for his troops. He carefully surveyed the situations before setting up a strategy, and only engaged in battles when he became sure that he would not lose. Although he once experienced a defeat by the Takeda Clan⁴, he had nevertheless left

³ Ieyasu Tokugawa (1543-1616) was the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate and began the Edo Era, during which period Japan had no civil wars for nearly three centuries.

⁴ In 1573 Ieyasu lost to Shingen Takeda at the battle in the present-day Shizuoka.

a powerful reserve force in his home castle and would not allow the Takeda troops to attack his castle. He never failed to minimize the loss to his troop's warring capacity. And he always ensured not to harm the soldiers of the defeated enemies unnecessarily. It is well known that he tried his best to encourage those he defeated to join his side.

Warriors and people were treasures for warring generals in the medieval civil wars. It was thus a natural principle for the leaders then to avoid meaningless battles in order not to exhaust their warriors and subjects. It was not unusual for them to seek truce and leaders sometimes offered their own lives to the enemy to protect their troops and territory.

We lost WWII as we clearly were doomed to. Opting for such a reckless and foolish war had never been in the principle, spirit or cultural tradition of the Japanese history until the Meiji Restoration⁵ in 1868. The leaders of the Meiji era governments aspired to make Japan a prosperous, strong and civilized like the countries in the West. They worked hard to “catch up” with the West. It is inconceivable that they wanted to leave their descendants in “the country in ruins but mountains and rivers.” Why was there such a vast difference between the aspirations and

⁵ The Tokugawa Family that had ruled Japan for nearly three centuries with a feudal system and isolationist foreign policy returned national governance to the Imperial Household, after Japan was pried open by the US.

the result?

Why could we not have surrendered at least one year before the end of the war, by which time our defeat had become certain? Had we so decided, there would not have been the tragedies of Okinawa, Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The enormous loss of lives and assets throughout the country could have been avoided. Incredible as it seems today, the military authorities were advocating the “decisive battles in the mainland” and were training the people to attack the invading enemy soldiers with bamboo spears.

The principal mission of government is to protect and preserve the life and assets of its people. Why did Japan abandon this principle? An historical author, the late Ryotaro Shiba⁶, a heavy smoker who wrote on a period between the early 1930s until the end of the War, said “...that era was not Japan. There are impulses inside of me wanting to throw an ashtray at that irrationality...” His words truly resonate with me.

The eight decades from the Meiji Restoration until the defeat in WWII have already become an ancient history today. I believe it is our task today, after seven decades since the end of WWII, to reflect on the process during those eight pre-war decades – why and how the aspirations of the Meiji Restoration

⁶ 1923-1999. A popular Japanese historical writer. This quote was drawn from his “The Frame of This Nation.”

resulted in the defeat in WWII. We must draw a vital lesson from it for the future course of this nation.

Five Non-Righteousness

The ancient Chinese historical book “Springs and Falls” focusses on China in the period from 700 B.C. to 450 B.C. It is believed to have been edited by Confucius. The book talks about “five states of non-righteousness” - not being moral, not knowing one’s strength, not respecting parents, not clear with words, not recognizing crimes – in a passage describing the death of a general and fall of his state due to a war.

The book attributes the fall of the state to the absence of these five righteous values. These five non-righteous points are often used in East Asia as a good reference to evaluate wars. These, to me, are good criteria to re-examine Japan that dashed into WWII. I am struck by how applicable they are to Japan in the years before and during WWII.

We were not moral, but greedy. We did not know our strength and were simply ambitious. We were not clear with our words and tended to adhere to pretexts. And we could not even punish those who committed war crimes. Of course, we were defeated as we should have been. On the path to that war, the leaders of the Meiji Era actually committed the five non-righteousness deeds. Consequently, we lost the war and stood on

the verge of national ruin.

What I Wish to Convey to Our Descendants

There are two reasons that made me, an octogenarian, decide to leave this book for our descendants.

First, I have ceaselessly asked myself “What was that war all about” ever since that day of the defeat. The second is a thought that if the generation that experienced and directly knew that era extracted their thoughts about that war, it may become useful for our children and grand-children,

I will elaborate this in Chapter Five, but my own summary of “that war” as a historical lesson would include the following five points.

1. We must never again engage in such an egregious war. This is the determination of all those who survived on August 15, 1945. It is unlikely that we will be militarily attacked by another state. If that happened, we would have to fight to protect our national territory and people, for which we need a minimum necessary military capability (in fact, Japan already has that). But we should never use that capability to dominate the territory of other countries or use our forces outside of our national archipelagos that may result in killing other nationals.
2. We must never abandon the fundamental principle of popular sovereignty nor the other four principles of pacifism.

democracy, basic human rights and international cooperation prescribed in the present Constitution. The Meiji Constitution had become the starting point of “that war” by alienating the people from politics. I must thus warn that it would be a disastrous mistake to advocate to revise the present peace Constitution.

3. We must not keep the island mentality that are oblivious of the real world. Our planet is composed of many regions, ethnicities with long histories, traditions and unique cultures that mutually exchange and cohabit in interdependence. The Japanese nation is just one of them. We must drill this fact into our hearts and make efforts to understand and interact with other nations. Japan is an island country, detached from the Asian Continent. Due to nearly three centuries of the Isolation Policy of the Edo Government, we are so imbued with a unique island mentality. We are still not accustomed to direct contacts with foreigners and their cultures. We thus can so easily fall into the state of island mentality. We must be aware of this reality and constantly self-examine our thoughts and attitudes towards others.
4. Because the path to WWII resulted in such enormous sacrifices of the people, we must tacitly argue that the top policy priority of our state is the stability, enhancement and upgrading of people’s livelihood. The utmost attention must

be paid to ensure that such a policy must be harmonious with or at least not harmful to those of other countries and regions,

5. The state neglected the lives and assets of its nationals during WWII, and the “State Shintoism” helped distorting politics. Because of these historical facts, I genuinely believe that the state must respect the lives of the people. I also believe that religions can illuminate the heart of the people and inspire them to create a compassionate and peaceful society. As for us, the people, we must recognize that all the living beings on this planet cohabit interdependently. We must ensure that we create a human society that respects human lives as much as possible.

My Wandering Stage

The ancient Indian Brahmins divided human life into four stages and tried to live accordingly. The Brahmins were the cast that was engaged in religious ceremonies and activities. These four stages were studying, rearing a family, living in the forest and wandering. In the studying stage, the youth of course studied. In the family-rearing stage, young adults obtained a job, married and reared children. In the living-in-the forest stage, those past middle aged left their homes, lived in woods or mountains to discipline themselves in order to be enlightened. In the wandering stage the elderly tried to serve their state and communities.

I reflect my own life in terms of these four stages. My studying stage was from birth just as Japan was headed to the Asian-Pacific War, then growing up in the post-war chaos and studying at the University of Toyo where I met many students from Asian countries.

My family-rearing stage began with employment by a steel company, then changing jobs to an NGO that supported students from Asian countries. Then I got married and was blessed with children, passed the bar examination in the mid-thirties becoming a lawyer.

My forest-living stage may be the quarter of a century of very demanding political life after opting to run for the House of Representatives shortly before turning fifty.

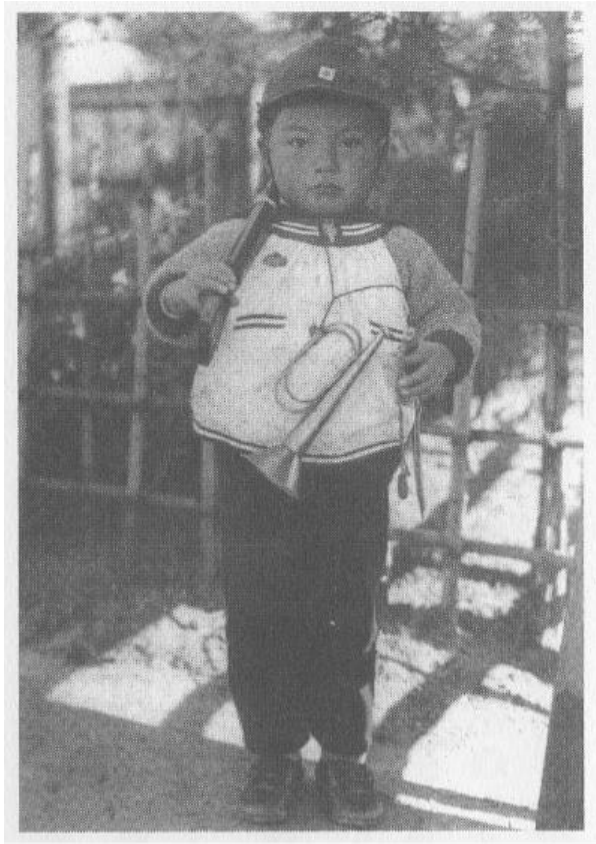
Since retiring from politics, I have been in the wandering stage of my own life. It is precisely because I am in this final stage of life that I have decided to audaciously write what I feel my generation – the generation that experienced World War II but is becoming so scarce everyday – could leave to our posterity.



A scene in Asakusa, Tokyo in 1945

Chapter 1

Life During World War II



The author as a military boy in 1937

Before I attempt my analysis of WWII, it may be useful for the readers if I present my recollections of childhood life and social norms in a rural village in central Japan. It will be representative of the time, since almost half of the Japanese lived in rural areas, engaged in either agriculture or fisheries.

Life in the Village

The village I was born and grew up in, Yahagi in Aichi Prefecture, was poor, but less so than colder or isolated regions in Japan. Even though eight decades had passed since Japan had opened up to the world and begun its process of modernization, rural life as I experienced it obviously had not changed much from the feudal time of the Edo era.

There were very few modern conveniences. Single-truck railways, very infrequent buses, only one vehicle in the village (a three wheeler in the agricultural co-op branch), and very few bicycles. All of us walked on unpaved narrow winding roads to get anywhere. There was only one telephone in the co-op, which all of the villagers used when necessary.

The co-op also had a newspaper corner, where literate people went to read papers. Each household was allowed only one electric lamp with a long chord to be carried wherever it was needed in the house. We had no running water. We burned dried rice or wheat straws and pieces of woods for all the heating.

There was no clinic in the village and only one piano in the school. Clothing was all recycled and torn clothes repaired with patches until no more mending was possible. Our daily footwear were straw slippers we made ourselves.

But the sleepy pastoral beauty of the rural village was comforting to children, despite the war. Quaint thatched roof farm houses were surrounded by beautiful rice paddies, fields and woods. Since the surroundings offered seasonal bounties of nature to us, we never really had to go hungry until towards the end of and after the war when many Japanese starved. The air and the waters of the streams and rivers were crystal clear ensuring a healthy life. The changing seasons offered children plenty of resources to play despite the absence of any man-made toys.

Until I entered Yahagi South Elementary School, I rarely left our village, with the occasional exceptions of visiting our relatives for weddings and funerals or other family events. Outside our village, children of similar ages bullied us, sometimes throwing pebbles at us. Of course, the reverse was also true. The village was a very closed and exclusive world for children.

Sketches in these pages illustrate the village life during the war, most of which were exactly as had been for centuries.



Children at play



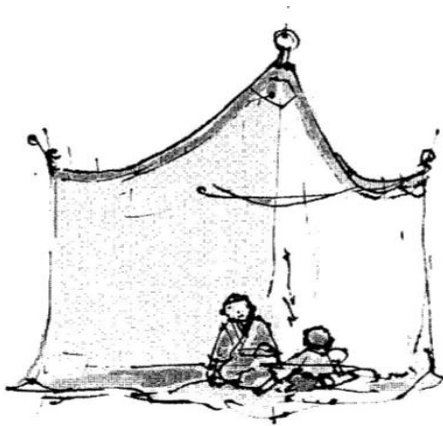
Catching fish at Yahagi River



Heating water for the bath tub; carrying water from a well and burning woods were children's tasks. Above are typical snacks, mostly from our fields and yards



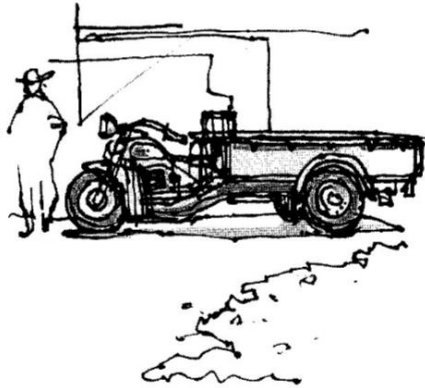
Rice straw sandals we made ourselves



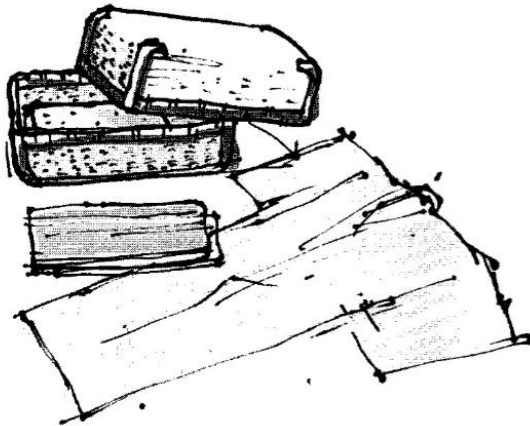
Summer; mosquito net to sleep under



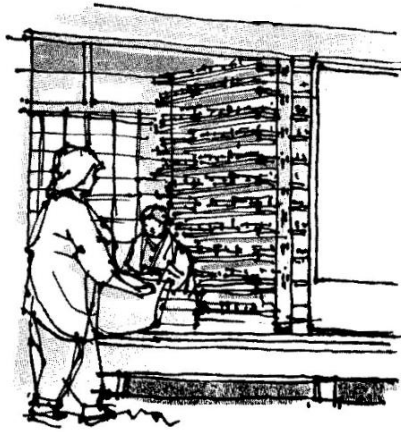
Winter; a charcoal stove and a hot-water bottle



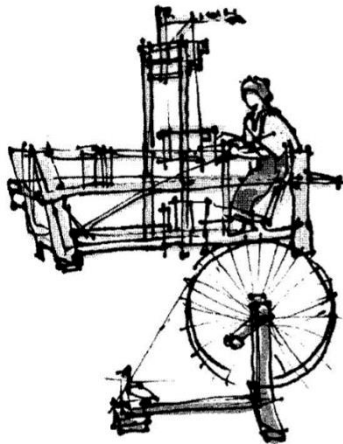
Tri-wheeler truck, the only motorized vehicle in the village



Kimono and obi, and a basket to store off-season kimonos



Shelves to grow silkworms



Weaving cotton

Once we entered the elementary school, the clans changed. Children from some 20 villages attended the school, and we became friends with those earlier “enemies.” But the school formed a larger closed and exclusive world. Yahagi had four elementary schools, each forming its own world. It was thought dangerous to enter the territory of other schools. My memories until the end of the war, thus, are only confined to the area surrounding the Yahagi South Elementary School (except for a year during the third grade that I transferred to Nagoya where my father was teaching.)

After the war, all the pupils from four elementary schools attended the same junior high school, all becoming friendly. I recall vividly the sense of “enemies of yesterday are friends today.”

There was no major factory in Yahagi, but across Yahagi River to East stood the Okazaki Castle built by Ieyasu Tokugawa in the early 16th century. Okazaki had been traditionally a prosperous silk-producing area. After the Meiji Restoration, textile factories were built by major corporations. Many girls from the poor Northeast region of Japan and elsewhere came to work in these textile factories. I later read how difficult, and tragic in many cases, life was for these factory girls, but I had no way of knowing this as a child.

In the northwest section of Yahagi, there was a small naval airport. It was also a training ground for pilots-to-be, but I never saw any fighter plane or bomber. Towards the end of the war, air raids were rampant throughout the mainland Japan. I could not believe the large formation of B29s flying leisurely over us, perhaps 10,000 meters up in the sky. After we had lost the command of both air and sea, carrier-based aircraft such as Grumman and Lockheed began to fly over us. When I saw them nearby, I almost fainted from terror.

Social Norms during the War

When I was born in 1934, Japan had already been at war with China. The whole society was painted by a single war color. In retrospect, the recollected scenes are surrealistic. Everyone seemed so hotly enthusiastic about the war. This enthusiasm reached its peak on December 8, 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, and continued until the day of our defeat on August 15, 1945.

The life-long objective of all the boys of my generation, without any exception at least in my village, was to become a military officer. We were thoroughly brain washed. The highest form of life for us would be to participate in this “holy war” and die for the sake of the God-Emperor. This spirit was elevated to the level of an absolute conviction in our

childhood hearts. I, too, was a military boy, training my body daily to become tougher and studying to enter either a military or naval academy.

I recall now how comical were the attitudes of the grownups reflected on my young heart. “Japan is a God’s country, the Emperor is a Living God, and people as his subjects have to show absolute loyalty to the Living God. Since the Japanese are the children of God, we are superior to other nations. The United States and the United Kingdom are brutal savages that oppose this God’s country. If all the subjects were to fight with a single heart, the God’s country could no way lose the war” was what we heard daily. “A hundred million people into one heart” was the slogan of the day. The war was justified as a “holy war aimed at Japanese world domination.”

In those years, the Japanese behaved very despicably towards other Asians. The deplorable prejudice may have been a product of the ideology of “leaving Asia to join the West.” This process of learning the advanced Western civilization had formed ever since the Meiji Restoration. It was common for the Japanese to call the Chinese and Koreans with names, which a sane person could not bear to even listen. The Chinese were thought to be weaker fighters and the Koreans were considered mere colonial subjects.

The Chinese and Koreans had for two millennia taught us writing characters, the spiritual cultures of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, social and legal systems, diverse technologies, and much more. Decent societies could and should never allow such despicable and prejudiced attitudes toward anyone, particularly toward those societies to whom we owed such great debts. Perhaps this indecent superiority complex was triggered by our victory in the Sino-Japanese War at the end of the 19th century. I could only say now that it was truly obnoxious and deplorable.

The political slogan of the time was: “Annihilate the American and British brutal savages!!” This slogan was rampant in the media that was controlled by the military. It shows how the Japanese military leaders were utterly out of their mind to fan people’s enmity against Americans and Brits. These Westerners were living in far more advanced Western civilization which Japan had tried so hard to emulate since the Meiji Restoration. Yet most Japanese had never even seen a single Westerner in their lives. This abnormal mentality, which is a mixture of inferiority complex towards the Westerners and superiority towards the Asians, was engulfing the entire nation.

Ryotaro Shiba, who was already a soldier at the end of the war, wrote of his anger at the end of the war, “I thought what an idiotic country I had been born into. I assumed then that it

must have been different in Japan once upon a time.” What he meant by “once upon a time” was until around 1890. To him, what led the Japanese to wrongly perceive their nation was the victory in the Russo-Japanese war. He deplored that the military leaders in the 1930s had turned the state itself into a casino like gambling chip. I could not agree more.

My Father and Grand-Mother

At this point, I would like to briefly refer to two of my family members, my father and grand-mother who had an enormous impact on my childhood.

When I was a third-grader, I transferred to a school in Nagoya where my father was teaching. He was born in 1905 as the second son of a farmer in Yahagi, our home village. By then the compulsory education had become all six years of elementary schools. He was a very bright boy, graduating as the top pupil from the elementary school I also attended later.

Because of poverty, he gave up the idea of advancing into an ordinary junior high school and instead entered an upper elementary school. And like most of the good rural students, he aspired to become a teacher and entered a teacher’s college, first in Aichi Normal School and then to Hiroshima Upper Teacher’s College. After graduating from there, he taught in schools in Nagoya all his life.

Although I could not live much with my father, because I spent most of my childhood years at the home village, I deeply respected his dedication and commitment to education. One incident, in particular, struck me profoundly. It was shortly after I was elected to the House of Representatives in the mid-1980s as a conservative Liberal Democratic Party member. He was so cooperative and helpful to the leftist Japan Teacher's Association that had been created after the war. I asked why, because he was by then in a management position in the public school system.

“We had to send so many of our pupils and students to battlefields, and most of them could not come home. This was our greatest regret as educators. We must never, but never repeat such a war. All the teachers share the conviction that our uniting and upgrading education are essential to prevent the disaster from occurring again. And it is this shared conviction that is moving the Japan Teachers' Association,” he explained. I understood rather belatedly then the powerful sense of regret that all of my teachers must have felt all these decades.

While my father was teaching in Nagoya, my grandmother and mother, together with the children, stayed in the home village, and engaged in farming. Both of these adult women were such hard workers, toiling from very early in the morning until very late at night. They never rested. Even on the

day our surrender was announced, and thereafter, they kept working as though nothing had changed.

During the couple of years that my family lived in Nagoya with my father, my grand-mother visited us several times. She had loaded a baby cart with rice and vegetables and walked 40 kms, pushing the heavy cart. It used to take her almost ten hours to get to our home in Nagoya. She probably wanted to save the transportation cost that would have been charged had she taken a train. Such strong will power and physical durability were not unusual for women of her generation.

It is said in Japan that one's encounter with religion begins with a human being. For me, very fortunately, that person was my grand-mother. She could not attend an elementary school due to the family poverty and thus was illiterate. But perhaps she learned Buddhist sutras from the priest in our temple, and had not only memorized an extensive spectrum of sutras but also understood their meanings. She never missed morning and evening prayers and chanting.

It became my habit since very early childhood to kneel by her side and chant in front of the family altar. Before I entered elementary school, I had already acquired the notion that "the omnipotent Sun is watching us." This used to be taught to Japanese children so to stay away from anything bad or naughty. Believing that Buddha nature is in all living beings, the grand-

mother did not even swat a mosquito. It was she who taught me the importance of life, to live with “little desire and know fulfilment” and to live always smiling.

I gradually became conscious of the “presence of an infinite being that transcends any human power” and naturally acquired the discerning sense of what is allowed and what is not. I feel so fortunate now to have learned ethical values as a child through our daily life. In terms of character formation, I believe such teachings are far more important for children than exposing them to tough competitive studies.

Children’s Evacuation

Towards the end of 1944, at about the time Japan lost Saipan and Guam, fears grew that the Japanese archipelagos would inevitably be bombed. The evacuation of the children in urban areas to the countryside began. At the time, I lived in Nagoya where my father was teaching and attended an elementary school there.

Towards the end of the third grade, the school decided to evacuate pupils to a rural area. I wanted very much to join the group evacuation but my father chose to move his family back to Yahagi, our home village. Although it was an evacuation of a sort, it was a home-coming to the village I had been so familiar with. It was great to play around with my cousins and the brats

of the village. While several of the transfer pupils evacuated from cities had been bullied, they spared me as an old friend.

City children in Nagoya evacuated to a temple in the village soon after I returned home. But the city children were totally different from the village brats. They hardly ever left the temple and we really did not become friendly during some 18 months that they stayed in our village. These children often vandalized our fields, as they had no idea about how our crops grew. Deeply troubled farmers would give fruit to them to stop the field destruction, instead of scolding them. They had pity for the little ones that had to leave their parents in the city. Such compassions always worked.

Delivering Metals to the Government

Upon returning to the village, I first noticed that all the brass ornaments of the family altar had been replaced by ceramic ones. In order to supplement strategic materials like iron, everyone was ordered to surrender any metallic items to the government. Even the iron bell of the temple was gone and old farm tools were taken.

The mottos of the day -- “Will not want anything until we win,” or “Luxury is our enemy” -- were repeated everywhere to elevate our willingness to fight. Of course, even if we wanted anything, it was not available, because the war regime mobilized

everything they needed, including our belongings.

Pine Root Oil

Children above the fourth grade were mobilized to do the very arduous labour of extracting oil from pine tree roots. The pretext was to use the oil for airplanes and military vehicles. Big pine trees had to be cut off and the ground dug very deep to get the huge roots out, which, of course, had to be done by adults.

The children only had a supplementary role of carrying the dug-up soil to other places. We were often ordered to engage in this task. Of course, we willingly helped each time, but it resulted in centuries old pine trees disappearing from temples and shrines. And I am quite sure that the extracted pine oil did not help the fighting capacity of our planes.

Playground turned into potato fields

Towards the end of my fourth grade, it was decided to turn the school playground into sweet potato fields to help the food shortage throughout Japan. The playground had hardened like concrete, as children had used it for all kinds of sports for decades.

All the upper grade children had to bring a tool from home to dig and till the ground. This tough work took us many days. We finally planted sweet potatoes in the ground, but

shortly thereafter the war ended and the playground produced only one harvest of a few skinny potatoes. It was due to the poor soil and no fertilizers. We later learned that all the elementary school playgrounds throughout Japan had been turned into potato fields.

Towards the end of the war, we were ordered to increase the production of edible food. Instead of rice, cultivation of sweet potatoes, which produced more per hectare, was encouraged. As most of the fields became sweet potato fields, beans had to be planted on the edges of fields. And as the delivery of rice and wheat to the government was required more and more, even farmers could no longer eat rice.

Drying grasses and eating grasshoppers

Drying grasses and collecting grasshoppers were among the tasks allotted to children. Grass cutting had always been done as they were valuable fertilizers, but it had earlier been the task of adults. Before and after going to the school and on holidays, including summer vacations, we had to cut and collect grasses wherever they grew and dry them on the roads.

The dried grass was collected at the school and delivered to the military as feed for military horses. During the summer months, we walked on the fragrant dried grasses to go to school. Of course, grasses had no time to grow tall in those

days. While cutting grasses was an arduous task, walking on the dried grasses and its incredible scent remain a fond memory for me even today.

Grasshoppers that had usually been eradicated were now collected at the school. They were boiled and delivered to the government as food.

Conscription and Drafting

Towards the later years of the war, we saw no young men in our village. More and more young men were drafted. The village shrine frequently had ceremonies to send the drafted young men off to the battle fields. Many of these young men never returned. After the war, large tomb stones were erected for them, whereas those who had not gone to war were buried in small family graves.

Men who were rejected from conscription were drafted to work in military factories. Those from our village were assigned to work in factories around Nagoya. I learned that even those with higher educations were mobilized. Because of this, all the farm work had to be done by women, elderly men and children.

Even elementary school children like us were depended upon as labourers, and were treated as ordinary farm hands. During the busiest farming time – planting seedlings and

harvesting – rural schools were closed from one week to ten days. I began to help with farm work seriously from the fourth grade on, when I returned from Nagoya. By the time the war ended, I boasted that I was an expert on farming.

Foreigners and Foreign Goods

I never saw any foreigners then. Although there were some immigrants from Korea and Taiwan, since they had Japanese family names, I had no way of discerning them.

Nobody had the experience of visiting abroad. We were not taught anything about foreign things at the compulsory educational level. The only things I remember are, because of Buddhism, I learned that there is a place called India where the Buddha was born, and of the travels made by ancient Chinese monks to the western China. These stories inspired our imaginations.

There were absolutely no Western books or goods. The world of our village in those years was no different in this sense from the Edo Era Japan that had been closed to foreign countries.

The only time I ever saw a Western face was that of an American pilot. Shortly before we were defeated, an air raid alarm went off. As terrified children were rushing home from the school, a formation of Grumman planes flew over us. One Grumman dove to a very low level towards the small airport on

the north of Yahagi. It seemed only 40-50 meters above us, and I was clearly able to see the pilot's face, who was looking at the group of terrified elementary school children through his sun glasses. Suddenly, his machine gun began to fire shots. We scrambled to a sweet potato field to escape from the horror, but shots seemed to keep aiming at us. I did not think I was alive until the terrifying sound of the gun had gone. I still remember very vividly the face of that American soldier and the horrifying fear that numbed me.

From Air Raids to Defeat

Since the end of 1944, air raids on the Japanese archipelagos were happening at full scale. Radio programs began in early 1945 to so frequently warn us of air raids. The large formation of B29 bombers took two routes from the southeast sea. One went to Tokyo and its surrounding cities and the other to Osaka and its nearby areas. The latter also bombed central Japan. Whenever the radio broadcasted that a B29 formation was heading northward, we had to scramble for safety.

During the early stage of bombing, night raids were more frequent. We were ordered to turn off any lights during night-time raids. Since each household was allowed only one lamp, we only had to cover it with black cloth. Eventually, these raids took place in broad day light. Whenever air raid alarms

went off while we were at school, we all rushed home in groups. Of course, some of us were a bit glad that class-room lessons were stopped, despite the fears that overwhelmed us.

I don't recall when I first saw the large formation of scores of B29s flying over us. Sometimes anti-air craft missiles were shot up from the ground, but the B29s were flying far above the height where these shots exploded. They were probably flying at 10,000 meters above us, seemingly rather leisurely. Watching them really dumbfounded us.

On one spring night in 1945, Nagoya (about 40 kms away from us) was bombed very heavily. I watched the red flames that seemed brighter than any sun set we had seen from a river bank. Immediately thereafter, a five-member relative family moved into our house with only few belongings. We cleaned out the warehouse and they lived there with us for nearly a year until they were able to go back to a temporary barrack in Nagoya.

While the air raids initially focussed on military facilities and factories in major metropolises like Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, they gradually became non-discriminatory and smaller cities were bombed. Toward the end of the war, bombardments from warships or Carrier-based aircrafts, such as Lockheed and Grumman, joined the air raids. When the naval base in Toyokawa was bombed from a U.S. warship, we heard

the tremendous sound of explosions, even though we were about 50 km away from Toyokawa.

On the night of July 19, Okazaki, which had no military base, was bombed by a large B29 formation. I awoke to the air raid alarm siren and the sound of incendiary bombs being dropped like a harsh rain. The eastern sky was completely red with flames as we watched Okazaki burn across the river.

What flabbergasted us the most was that even our rice paddies in shallow water burned. Many oil flames that must have split off from incendiary bombs fell upon our village. In order to protect our thatched-roof houses from fires, villagers frantically poured water from buckets where these flames fell. The next morning, we saw our rice fields looking like the surface of the moon. As it was shortly after the rice seedlings had been planted, the villagers were dazed to see most of the budding rice plants completely burnt.

The incendiary bombs that had fallen on the rice paddies were collected at the village shrine. When I first saw the scary hexagonal bombs in a mound, it chilled me to think that had some gone off course a little, they could have hit us directly. At the same time, a doubt rose even in the child's mind. I could not help but wonder whether we could really win this war if the entire country was facing similar disasters. And the question "Why are we fighting?" popped up. Of course, I knew enough

to keep these questions to myself.

Okazaki, with its quaint old buildings dating back to the Edo era was nearly destroyed. More than a thousand people died from bombing. Many of those who survived lost their houses and all their belongings. They crossed the river and took refuge in our village.

Country Destroyed but Mountains and Rivers

After the defeat, I went to Nagoya alone. I wanted to know how the city where I had spent a couple of years as an elementary school pupil, had fared. When I got off the train at Nagoya Station, a flattened city appeared in front of me. The only things that stood up were the skeletons of burned out buildings and some chimneys. There were no complete buildings left standing. Although people were busily reconstructing the city, most of them lived either in air-raid shelters or temporary barracks. That shocking scene is still vivid in my brain.

The city section I had lived for two years was completely flattened because of the Mitsubishi aircraft engine factory in the neighbourhood. The area was bombed several times, but because the bombs dropped were not incendiary bombs, some houses were spared.

The river bank I used to play with friends had huge holes everywhere and it was not possible to walk there. I was so

saddened to discover that many of my childhood friends had lost their lives in the river. Although I could not cry out loud, a huge lump in my throat remained for days. At the time of the bombings, most people escaped to the river that was flowing away from the Mitsubishi factory, hoping the river would protect them, but only to be bombed in the river.

The Mitsubishi factory was the target of heavy air raids from a very early time of the bombing, and over 5000 died in the immediate neighbourhood alone. Of course, had our family delayed our evacuation by half a year, death would have been our fate, too. I was very grateful for the decision my parents had made. But that was war, and we have to remember that the Japanese military was engaged in similar or worse atrocities abroad.

When the war ended, the entire nation was more or less in dire difficulty. But the Japanese, who had migrated to the Asian continent, faced even harsher fates. Not only soldiers and military people but several million civilians had to evacuate their homes as defeated enemies who had once dominated the native population. They had to return to Japan in hostile environments where life was not guaranteed.

Many lost their life on the way home. Sixty hundred thousand soldiers were taken to Siberia, and many children were left as orphans in Manchuria. I was deeply moved and grateful

to find out much later that thousands of these orphans had been raised by the local people. Several millions, who had migrated to the Asian continent, returned home penniless. Some of these people returned home to our village.

Japan lacked all the basic necessities -- food, clothing and housing -- after the defeat. It seemed like the “hell” which adults used to teach small children to keep them from misbehaving. The Japanese fell into such a “hell” because we fought this egregious war which we were destined to lose.

Only the beautiful mountains and rivers remained, as depicted in Li Po’s famous poem of twelve centuries earlier.



A well-disciplined boy waiting for the cremation of his younger brother in Nagasaki and enduring his sorrow like a little soldier. It could have been me, had I not been born and raised in my home village. Pope Francis printed the photo on a card and asked to disseminate it on January 2, 2018. The photo was taken by U.S. Marine photographer Joe O'Donnell immediately after the war.

Chapter 2

Reflecting “That War” in a Historical Context



It would be useful to have an overview of the scope and definition of “that war,” its position in the modern world history as well as its implications on the post-war Japanese economic activity and political and social norms. I am presenting below my personal interpretation. Even though I am not a historian (I am a lawyer, who was in national politics for 25 years and now back to practicing law), I lived through the war and have spent over seven decades since its end trying to figure out what “that war” was all about. My discourse is not academic, but I hope it presents one Japanese man’s perspective on his nation state during that particular and horrid period of the 20th century, the century which my political mentor, the late Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, termed as the “century of glory and remorse.”¹

When Did “That War” Start?

Views on when World War II (WWII) actually began, of course, differ by how one looks at “that war” in the context of Japanese and world history. The Pacific theatre of WW II actually began in December 1941 and ended in August 1945. Japan and China, however, had fought for a decade triggered by the Manchurian

¹ Takeo Fukuda said that while incredible economic and technological advancements were made in the 20th century, which vastly improved the lives of people throughout the world, it was also the worst century in terms of horrifying bloodshed, inhumanness and unforgettable tragedies.

Incident in 1931. This is why many consider that the Japanese involvement in WWII lasted for 15 years.²

To me, Japan was warring constantly for half a century from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century. The first foreign war Japan fought in the modern era was the first Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. It was a war between Japan and the then called “the Sleeping Lion (giant)” of Asia – the much decaying Qing Dynasty of China. Simply summarized, the two countries clashed over who would control the Korean Peninsula, which had been China’s tributary state for centuries. Japan that had been building up modern military forces and had ambitions to influence the Korean Peninsula quickly won this conflict.

The victory made Japanese very confident of its increasingly stronger military capacity. China paid Japan massive war reparations, which amounted to double Japan’s annual national budget of the time and exceeded the actual war costs. China also conceded Taiwan to Japan and several lucrative rights in Manchuria. Korea became independent of China but largely under the supervision of Japan. The whole experience might have implanted in the mind of many Japanese a dangerous and wrong idea that war is actually a profitable venture.

² Emperor Akihito, for example, spoke in his New Year’s greeting in 2015 that it was extremely important to learn from this war that began with the Manchurian incident and to consider what sort of a nation Japan ought to be in the future.

The Russo-Japanese War followed a decade later, which was fought because of the rivalry between the two countries over Manchuria and Korea. Russia had long wanted sea ports that did not freeze in winter and had already obtained two major ports in Liandong Peninsula, near Korea, from the Qing Dynasty. Fearing that Russia might take over Korea, Japan waged war against it. Japan came out victorious, though barely, through the arbitration of US President Theodore Roosevelt.

Japan again acquired territories, including the southern half of Sakhalin from Russia and later Liandong Peninsula from the Qing Dynasty plus some railroad rights in southern Manchuria, among others. The railway rights gave Japan an excuse to send military forces to protect the railways. Five years after the Russo-Japanese War, Japan simply merged Korea into Japan.

A decade after the Russo-Japanese War, WWI broke out. Although Asia was not a main battle theatre, Japan sided with the UK because of the Anglo-Japan Alliance that had been concluded in 1902³. There were hardly serious battles in East Asia during WWI. Japan emerged on the victorious side, and

³ The alliance was concluded in 1903 and, after two renewals (in 1905 and 1911), was terminated in 1923 at the Washington Disarmament Conference. It was the most important diplomacy of pre-WWII Japan. Initially, the UK (fighting the Boar War) wanted to check the expanding powerful Russian army that had occupied Manchuria, which met the Japanese interest, although UK stayed out of the Russo-Japanese War.

acquired Qingdao, the German colony, in China and the Marshall Islands in the Pacific.

I see a thread in terms of the Japanese attitude that runs through all these wars. Emerging as a victor in each of these wars made the Japanese increasingly confident and arrogant. We began to perceive ourselves not only as the greatest military power in Asia but also even a major power globally. War became an increasingly tempting method of expanding national territory and enriching the nation.

Economic motivations, of course, have been a predominant factor in most wars throughout human history. The situation in Japan in the early 20th century was no exception. The inevitable consequence of this was that disastrous WWII and the total destruction of the country.

I thus consider all the wars that Japan fought abroad during this time span collectively as a “Fifty-year War.” In addition, ever since Japan won the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), our military forces were in Korea directly and indirectly controlling the peninsula. Korea nominally became independent of the Qing Dynasty China after the first Sino-Japanese War, but Japan outright merged the peninsula in 1910. Needless to say, there were constant frictions with native Koreans throughout the 50-year War, and the enmity sadly has not dissipated much even today.

Wars Japan Fought and Military Incidents (1894-1945)

First Sino-Japanese War	1894-95 Japan won
Colonization of Taiwan	1895
Russo-Japanese War	1904-05 Japan won
Acquisition of South Sakhalin	1905
Japan merged Korea	1910
World War I	1914-1919 Japan on the winning side and acquired German colonies in Asia & Pacific
Siberian Intervention	1918-1922
First Shantung Intervention ⁴	1927
Jinan Incident	1928
Willow Article Lake Incident ⁵ and the Manchurian Incident	1931
Establishment of the Manzhou Guo ⁶	1932
Japan leaves the League of Nations	1933
Marco Polo Bridge Incident ⁷	1937
Second Sino-Japanese War	1937-45
Battles of Khalkin Gol ⁸	1939
Invasion into French Indo-China ⁹	1940-45
World War II	1941-45 Japan surrendered

Notes to the list on page 6

⁴ **First Shantung Intervention:** Known as 5.3 disaster in China. Reacting to attacks by Chang Kai Shek's Nationalist forces on Japanese in Jinan in Shantung Province, Japan dispatched a military force. Military clashes took place the following year with the Chinese Nationalist forces.

⁵ **Willow Article Lake Incident:** A railway explosion plot schemed by the Japanese military in Manchuria that triggered the Manchurian Incident (called 9.18 disaster in China), in which Japan and China fought but ended with the Japanese occupation of the entire Manchuria.

⁶ **Manzhou Guo:** A Japanese puppet state (putting Pui, the Last Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, as the Head of the State) that existed in Manchuria in 1932-1945.

⁷ **Marco Polo Bridge Incident:** Known as 77 Incident in China. A clash between the Japanese military and the Nationalist Chinese forces at Marco Polo Bridge southwest of Beijing, which triggered the second Sino-Japanese War.

⁸ **Battles of Khalkin Gol:** A series of battles between Japan and the USSR on the Manchurian-Mongolian border, where Japan sided with its puppet Manzhoguo and USSR with Mongolia that had become a Communist state in 1922.

⁹ **Invasion into French Indo-China:** Today's Vietnam was under the Vichy French Regime (a puppet regime of Hitler) then, which made it easy for the Japanese military to negotiate to make inroads into the Indo-Chinese Peninsula. The Japanese army and Vichy France agreed to jointly govern French Indo-China, battles did take place between Japan and the French Indo-Chinese forces.

The international background, situations and the characteristic of each of the above wars were, of course, different. As I said earlier, one common thread ran through all our wars. One by one, these wars increasingly strengthened the national fever and policy inclination to uphold our military strength above all else. This was all the more so as Japan kept winning and gaining territories until the disastrous WWII.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Japanese victories in the first Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War fanned this national fever to become an ever stronger military power in Asia and possibly in the world. Thus, I believe my terming of this series of wars as the “Fifty-year War” could not be too far off.

Within Modern World History

When Japan was pried open to the West in the mid-19th century, our leaders were astonished to see how much more advanced the Westerners were. They understood immediately how much behind Japan was in every aspect of modern civilization. They realized how the rest of Asia was one after another being subjugated by the advanced Western powers.

This realization invoked fears that Japan may be the next victim. It also convinced them that the only way out for Japan was to open the country to the world and learn Western

thinking, technologies and tactics as quickly as possible. The national goals of the new Meiji Era Japan became “enriching the nation and strengthening the military” and “civilized enlightenment” in the Western style. In the course of industrializing and civilizing the nation, however, the successive Meiji governments leaned more and more heavily on strengthening the nation’s military capacity.

A global historical perspective is essential, when one discusses his country’s war history. I therefore need to briefly describe what the Japanese found in the outside world when it opened its borders in the mid-19th century.

The Western world at the time was already in the modern era. My definition of the “modern era” in world history, admittedly in an over-simplified term, spans two centuries (early 18th to early 20th). This era was marked politically by the rise of nation states and economically by rising capitalism, which first took hold with the industrial revolution in Great Britain. It was the era when capitalism was developing in Europe, and spreading to other parts of the world.

Two centuries prior to this modern era, colonialism had begun as Spain and Portugal explored the world. Colonialism went hand in hand with mercantilism. Later, the industrial revolution made colonies increasingly essential, as all of these states needed to secure raw materials and markets for their

products and to maintain and expand their leaping productivity.

Colonial powers shifted from the Portuguese and Spanish of the 16th century to the British. A little later, the Dutch, Belgians and French joined the competition for colonies, further intensifying already fierce rivalries. The United States, which itself was a British colony, became independent in 1776 and joined the competition later. Much later, the Germans joined the competition. So, what the Japanese faced, after two and a half centuries of total isolation, was these fierce rivalries and ferocious competitions by major Western powers to acquire more and more colonies.

The Asian region, particularly China and India, prospered from ancient times until the beginning of the modern era. It is known that China's GDP was the largest until the early 18th century. By the latter half of the 18th century, however, the two Asian giants became targets of the West, which had gained more wealth and power by then. Together with Africa and the Americas, most of the economically stagnant Asian nations were either colonized or semi-colonized by the Western powers by the mid-19th century when Japan opened up to the world.

Politically, this was the time when leading Western European states and the U. S. began to change from authoritarian monarchism to democracy. Under the slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity or similar ideals, modern and democratic nation

states – either as republics or constitutional monarchies - were born. In terms of competing to gain colonies, however, they were no different from the previous absolute monarchists.

We must also keep in mind that throughout this modern history of the world, Christianity went hand-in-hand with colonialism. It established its dominant position as the world's leading religion and the spiritual backbone of the West and its colonies.

Japan Joins the Modern World

Japan kept its isolated position during most of the period when the West vigorously engaged in colonial expansion. The Tokugawa Government, which had unified the country in the early 17th century, first abolished the spreading of Christianity inside Japan, out of fears that Christians would not be loyal to the feudal system the Tokugawas had implemented. Gradually, Japan cut off all the interactions with all of the Western powers, except the Dutch who were allowed to trade through a small island off Nagasaki. Even the neighbouring Asian countries of China and Korea, with whom Japan had traded with for over a millennia, were allowed to interact with Japan only through one small port on a remote island.

Japan was left alone in isolation for so long for probably two reasons: (1) because the Japanese archipelago is situated at

the far eastern edge of the Eurasian continent making it cumbersome to reach and (2) because of its poor natural resources, it was not attractive. So we were spared of Western attempts to colonize us, although China, India and most of the neighbouring nations fell, even if partially. Japan's two and a half century isolation and independence, however, deprived the Japanese of any knowledge about the world.

Isolation also ingrained a peculiar and profound island mentality in Japanese culture. Being a “frog in a well” – an ancient Chinese proverb meaning not knowing outside the well – made us think that only superficial outward emulation of the Western way would allow us to catch up. This mind-set handicapped us for so long that our capacity to think geo-strategically in a proper perspective was almost non-existent.

In the mid-19th century, through the Western pressures initiated by the American naval ships, Japan was pried open to the outside world and the nation suddenly found itself exposed to the torrents of the world affairs and the powerful West.

Japan's Modernization

The four American steamships led by Commodore Mathew Perry arrived in 1853. The Japanese called the steamships “black ships” because they were made of black iron, something they had never seen. The U.S. was seeking the right to dock their

ships for fuelling, and the demand completely shook up the already ailing feudal Tokugawa government. Japan was forced to open up to the world. The US.-Japan Treaty of Amity and Commerce concluded by the Tokugawa Government and the US Administration five years later was followed by similar treaties with France and the U.K. Consular jurisdiction was granted to these foreign countries and Japan had no right to impose tariff. These were considered unequal treaties very similar to the ones the West had imposed on China and other Asian countries earlier.

A civil war followed between the Tokugawa government and those who were opposed to the opening of Japan while advocating the return of governance to the Imperial Household. After a truce, the governing authority was returned to the Emperor and the Meiji Government was established in 1867. The winning side, however, had to abandon its opposition to the opening of the country. By then, colonization or semi-colonization by Western powers had proceeded throughout Asia. The new Japanese government felt their country was no exception as a target of the West.

The nascent Meiji Government understood the acute need to counter the advancement of the Western powers with a far more advanced and modern industrial and technological capacity. The new leaders felt the acute pressure to attain and sustain real independence. They quickly opted national policy

measures to modernize and industrialize the nation in Western manners by learning and emulating the Western systems of the day. The mottos of the Meiji Government became “enriching the nation and strengthening the military,” “civilized enlightenment” and “promoting new industries.”

The Meiji government first adopted a centrally-controlled governing system. This government directly controlled the entire country by dispatching appointed governors to each prefecture. This differed from the rather federal-system type of governing during the Tokugawa era, in which daimyos (feudal lords) had governed their respective territories. Modern central ministries, such as the Ministry of Justice, Interior, Finance, etc. were created to concentrate power into the hands of the government. The Western military system was installed and a drafting system was introduced. A new taxation system was implemented. A compulsory education system was introduced and higher educational institutions were created.

Most of these were initially guided by Western advisors, but a great many Japanese were also sent to Western universities to study their methods. All these concentrated Japanese efforts in the latter half of the 19th century were guided by belief in an authoritarian vision of national destiny. Nonetheless, it helped solidify the foundation for modernizing the Japanese nation.

The Meiji government also aggressively promoted a new industrial policy and proactively took in the western civilization. There had been a very rigid hereditary class system during the Edo Era – the warrior class (though forbidden to engage in wars for 270 years) was the highest class, followed by farmers, craftsmen and merchants in that ranking order. This class system was abolished, the freedom of residency and professions was recognized and freedom of faith was also guaranteed. The solar calendar system was adopted and the warrior clothing and style were forbidden, including carrying of swords. Bureaucrats were obligated to wear Western clothing, imports of Western goods were encouraged, and above all learning the Western thoughts and ways were impending. However, the Meiji system was not democratic.

As such, the new Meiji government dashed to modernize Japan in the Western manner. It declared the Meiji Constitution in 1889, patterned after the authoritarian Prussian state constitution. It established the Imperial Parliament, with voting rights given only to high tax payers. The single-minded focus of advancing the goals of “civilizing,” “prosperous state with strong military” and “promotion of new industries” led Japan on a half-century path towards that “Fifty-year War.”

One of the most important policy measures then was to encourage families to procreate as many children as possible.

When I was growing up, it was not unusual to see a family of 9-10 children. It is believed that at the time of the Meiji Restoration, Japan's population stood at about 30 million. This had increased by 2.5 fold within seven decades by the beginning of WWII. The motivation to expand the population was to equip the nation with a sufficient supply of soldiers. But the resulting over-population in the small archipelagos, where 85 percent of land space is non-productive mountains, eventually led Japanese leaders to eye on Manchuria as a potential colony to feed the surplus population.

Japan was quite successful in its modernization. Its industrial base expanded spectacularly. By the initial years of the 20th century, Japan's military capability seemed almost comparable to some of the Western countries. Japan became, by far, the strongest nation in Asia. Because of these remarkable achievements, Japan began to seek to enter into the fiercely competitive theatre of colonialism, which Western powers had been doing for several centuries. Japan aggressively sought to acquire markets and colonies on the pretext of protecting its own national security. And we dashed on the straight path towards what I call the "Fifty-year War."

"That War" and the Japanese Economy

To what extent did Japan succeed in making the state prosperous during the seven decades from the Meiji Restoration until

WWII?

At the time of the Meiji Restoration, Japan was an agricultural nation. Its per capita GDP was said to be around US\$250 at the current value, according to the economist Isamu Miyazaki¹⁰. It is comparable to today's very poor developing countries. Japan was very poor, indeed. Incredibly, such a poor country aspired to become on a par with the advanced West and held the ambition to dash on the path towards a military power.

Miyazaki estimated that the economic growth rate of Japan for seven decades until the start of WWII averaged at around 4-5 percent per annum, higher than those of Western states at that time. Nonetheless, this still made Japan's GDP per capita at the time of the entry into WWII at around US\$6,000 at the current value. That would have ranked Japan only at the level of today's upper middle income developing country.

The objective of "enriching the nation," which the Meiji Government initially had pursued, was only on its mid-path, when the government began to place highest emphasis on building up the national military strength. In other words, the fruit of economic growth that was gained through the policy of industrial promotion helped very little in upgrading the national

10 In his Graphic Explanation of the Japanese Economic History, 2010, third edition, Iwanami Publishing House.

livelihood. Miyazaki pointed out that while Japan succeeded in industrialization, the accompanying militarization dragged down the living standards of the people. Because of this overly lopsided mobilization of financing wars, Japan's social development remained long delayed and largely hampered. The gap between the rich and poor kept growing throughout the pre-war years.

Particularly left out from Japan's modernization and industrialization were rural areas. At the time of the defeat in WWII, agricultural and fishing villages accounted for about half of the population and most of the national land. These villagers, however, had to live in such dire and protracted poverty, not so different from their ancestors in the feudal Edo Era, even though seven decades of economic and industrial development had taken place. Most villagers had to go to urban areas during the agricultural off-season to earn some cash. Selling off daughters in times of poor crops never ceased. The tragic stories of the poor and their situation are unthinkable to the post-war Japanese generations. The heavy burden of the wars made the situation particularly harsh for the rural people.

War costs were massive, according to Miyazaki. The first Sino-Japanese War of 1898 cost 230 million yen (thrice the national annual budget of the time); the Russo-Japanese War of

1904-05 cost 1,820 million yen (6.5 times the national budget), the Siberian intervention cost 1,550 million yen; and the Japan-China War and WWII combined cost prohibitive 760 billion yen (33 times the aggregate GDP and 280 folds of the national budget).¹¹

These war costs were financed by increased taxes and issuance of government bonds. The outstanding amount of government bonds jumped from 6.2 billion yen in 1930 to 143.9 billion yen in 1945. The only way to compensate such overbearing debts was through hyper-inflation (about 250 percent over five years) in the post-war years and by the harsh lowering of national living standards.

All of the Japanese, of course, had to endure the acute poverty and deprivation of the post-war years under such hyper-inflation. Being in a rural area without any industry, we seemed doubly hit – by the austerity and by the fact that pre-war Japan’s overall development had bypassed us. If we, in the relatively blessed agricultural area on the sunny Pacific side, were so deprived, the situation in the north or in the mountains regions was beyond our imagination. Incidentally, the post-war changes and transformations throughout the country were simply dazzling. My home village today is unrecognizable for anyone

¹¹ All figures are the actual costs of the time. The costs of the second Sino-Japanese War and WWII become the staggering 4,400 trillion yen (or US\$4.4 trillion) at the current value.

who lived there before the war. Just as the stark poverty, deprivation, inconveniences and heart aches we experienced before, during, and after the war must be incomprehensible to the young generation today.

Blacked out Text Books

At this juncture, I feel the urge to mention a shocking post-war experience that made a young boy question our value system from its very foundation. Among so many shocking abrupt changes imposed on us immediately after the war, one particularly abominable experience sticks out in my mind. It turned me into a great sceptic at the age of 11.

One day, the occupational forces ordered schools to black out most of the school text books we had been using - particularly of Japanese, geography and history. This had to be done by us pupils with Japanese ink made out of charcoals at the instruction of our teachers, who had been teaching us to follow and believe exactly the words of what we had to black out.

I can never forget the question that arose in my young mind “If we are not allowed to learn these, are these not true? Were they teaching us lies? And what are they going to teach us now? I cannot believe the authorities anymore.” Because it took some time to establish new education policies and because there was such a dire shortage of pulp and paper, it was not until two

years later that new text books approved by the occupation forces came out. The use of blacked out text books was combined with the acute shortage of teachers, due to male teachers having been drafted to the war. The education of those two years was in utter confusion. Of course, the students in higher schools suffered far more than us in elementary schools.

I often still feel the urge today, to totally black out the war years with charcoal ink, just as I had to black out text books. Japan, which had tried to modernize the country out of a feudal system, instead, entered a long, dark tunnel with no visible exit. I can say that it was a time of pitch darkness that was so alien to the spiritual and cultural traditions that the Japanese people had once upheld and which we could have been proud of.

The leaders of the Meiji Restoration declared “civilizing,” “enriching the nation with a strong military” and “promoting new industries” as the national slogans. They set up the foundation of the “modern” Japanese state. Later on, as elder statesmen, they guided a new generation of leaders. Now, as they have long passed away, there is no way we can find out what kind of a nation state they actually wanted to build for Japan. We can read some of their thinking from patchy diaries and other remaining writings that they left behind. It is inconceivable that these leaders wanted to force their country and nation to the edge of extinction.

The basic stance of these leaders was to catch up with the West, following the path of these more industrially, economically and militarily advanced nations. I am quite sure they did not wish to sacrifice so many lives, including the foreign people who perished in numbers ten times as many as the Japanese. One can assume that what they actually were dreaming of was today's Japan – the Asian nation that has caught up with the West economically, technologically and even democratically.

The Fifty-year War must have been the worst nightmare for them, just as it was for all of us whether we perished or endured the hardship. If there had been no war, if we could have only averted the war, what kind of enlightened progress could we have achieved and contributed to the world? Instead, there was total destruction and great shame.

Again, I have to ask “*What was that war all about?*”

Chapter 3

Why Could We Not Have Avoided That War?



*Japan attacked Pearl Harbour in Dec. 1941,
which triggered the Pacific War*

Learning from History That Repeats Itself

WWII is a stark historical fact for us and for the world. It was the pitch black period for Japan, so alien to the principles and spiritual and cultural traditions of our long history. It remains as a burden we and our posterity will have to continue to bear.

Thucydides, a great historian of Athene in the fifth century BC, wrote, “History repeats itself” in his book, History of the Peloponnesian War. He stated that that one should learn the real unfolding of events from past historical facts so that one can reason out how the future will unfold.

What are the very important lessons from the historical facts of that 50-year war? On the day of the unconditional surrender, all the people that had survived in this scenically beautiful land were resolved that we must never, but never repeat such a gross and tragic mistake. We were determined to rebuild the nation that would live for peace. For that reason alone, we must constantly ask ourselves “What lessons must we learn from the whole process that led to that egregious war?”

Almost all the historians agree that the principal cause pushing Japan towards entering WWII was the Japanese military establishment that chose to act on its own wish, combined with the failure of the political regime to prevent the military dictatorship. By the time Japan entered WWII, our governing system had become one in which the military ruled the political class and military affairs were given the utmost priority over

anything else.

Many reasons and causes, which allowed the military dictatorship in those years, require diverse and in-depth discussions. Here, I would just like to point out five factors that ultimately led Japan to the military dictatorship after the Meiji Restoration. The first was the Imperial Constitution of Japan (hereinafter called the Meiji Constitution) and its defects that provided the base for the governing structure of the nation state aspiring to modernize and westernize.

The Imperial Constitution (1889-1945)

The Meiji Constitution and the Fifty-year War

The Meiji Constitution was promulgated on February 11, 1889 as a “gift from the Emperor to his subjects.” Immediately after the Meiji Restoration, it was acutely recognized that a modern nation state needed a constitution as the basic law plus a parliament that “reflected” the will of the people. In 1881, an imperial ordinance was issued that a parliament would be established by 1890. The Meiji Government began to prepare for promulgating the constitution. Hirobumi Ito¹ led a team to study several European constitutions and select one to emulate.

¹ The pivotal drafter of the Meiji Constitution and the first, fifth, seventh and tenth Prime Minister of Japan, assassinated in Korea in 1910.

They chose the Prussian Constitution as a model, because of its strong authoritarian tenor, and drafted the Meiji Constitution to be very similar to it.

The date the Meiji Constitution was to become effective was stipulated in an imperial ordinance as follows: “The Imperial Diet (parliament) shall be convened in 1890 and the opening date of the Imperial Diet shall be the date the Constitution shall become effective.” The first general election was held in 1890. On November 29, 1890, the date the Imperial Diet was convened and opened, the Meiji Constitution became effective and was implemented.

There was neither deliberations on the substance nor its approval procedure. The constitution was not legislated to reflect the public will by any means. There was no deliberations in the parliament for clarifying the thinking of the “legislators.” The Meiji Constitution was vested with the exclusive power to interpret and manage all the affairs and decisions of the administrative, legislative and judiciary branches. The Constitution had the grave defects from its birth.

The Meiji Constitution had already been declared when the first Sino-Japanese War took place in 1894-95. So all the history of what I call the “Fifty-year War” unfolded under the Meiji Constitution. One can say, therefore, that the first eighty years of the modern history of Japan was the history the Meiji Constitution. I therefore cannot avoid the examination of the

Meiji Constitution when reflecting my long-held question of “What was that war all about?”

The Meiji Constitution stipulated in Article 1 “The Empire of Japan is governed by the Emperor from the historically unbroken Imperial Family”. Article 4 stipulated “The Emperor is the Head of State and controls the right of sovereignty” And from Article 5 to 17 stipulated the Emperor’s authority over legislature, administration and military.

With the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution, Japan became the first “constitutional monarchy” in Asia, and this provided a great driving force to modernize the nation. However, it cannot be denied that a far more powerful authority was vested in the Japanese Emperor, when compared to other existing constitutional monarchies. While Japan appeared to aspire to establish a national governance structure based on the separation of powers into three branches as in the Western world of the time, it was so thoroughly insufficient.

I must, in the final analysis, argue that the fundamental cause for the “Fifty-year War” was the absolute deficiency of the Meiji Constitution – its immature birth and various defects in its composition. When I think of how its drafters must have really sweated blood to draft the Meiji Constitution, I am only bitterly disappointed that their strenuous effort could not avert the catastrophe it caused.

What follows are brief descriptions of the legislative and administrative authorities under the Meiji Constitution.

Legislative Power

The Meiji Constitution stipulated the legislative power as follows: "The Emperor exercises the legislative power with the agreement of the Imperial Diet" (Article 5) with Chapter 3 (Article 33-54) stipulating the details of how the Imperial Diet functions. However, since the Emperor's Imperial Ordinances were also defined in Article 8 and 9, the legislative power was not the sole prerogative of the parliament.

Furthermore, Article 7 stipulated that the power of convening, opening, closing and prorogation of the Diet sessions belonged to the Emperor. This made the legislative authority of the Diet extremely limited. Above all, the fatal deficiency was that the Diet did not have the authority to nominate the Prime Minister, his cabinet members and principal bureaucracy staff.

The only power the Imperial Diet had was the right to approve fiscal policies, including the budget (Article 64), customs duties (Article 62), government bonds and other debts (Article 63). But the Diet was constrained on expenditures related to the Imperial Household (Article 66) as well as spending based on the supreme power of the Constitution (Article 67). In case a budget was not enacted, the Diet was allowed to implement the amount of the previous year's budget.

Overall, the authority of the legislative body was very small.

Administrative Power

Premised on the administrative power belonging to the Emperor, the Meiji Constitution had only one article (Chapter 4, Article 2) about it. Article 55 stipulated that the state ministers were responsible to assist the Emperor, elucidating that each minister was responsible only to the Emperor. After the enactment of the Meiji Constitution, the elder statesmen responded to the quest of the Emperor to recommend the Prime Minister. Each minister was not responsible to the Diet, which had no constitutional authority to either appoint or dismiss the ministers.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister had no authority to appoint or dismiss the cabinet ministers either. He was on an equal footing with other state ministers and his role was merely chairing the cabinet meetings.

Judiciary Power

Unlike the legislative and administrative branches, some autonomy of the judiciary branch was guaranteed. The courts were independently able to implement their power (Article 57), albeit under the name of the Emperor and based on laws. Along with the progress and streamlining of both the civil and criminal modern laws, the judiciary branch played a certain role in establishing the “rule of law” in pre-war Japan. It is notable that

a jury system was introduced into the criminal laws in the late 1920s.

The defective “Immortal Great Law”

The imperial message at the time of the Meiji Constitution’s promulgation declared that it was the “Permanent Great Law of the Japanese subjects of today and future.” As for any future revisions, “When a revision is necessary, an imperial ordinance shall set the agenda for deliberations in the Imperial Diet.” (Article 73). So, any motion to revise a Constitution required an Imperial ordinance, meaning that revisions would be at the will of the Emperor. Neither the decision of the Diet nor the will of the people could revise the Constitution.

For me, the fact that the Meiji Constitution was made immortal even structurally was its fatal defect. And I consider that defect as the primary cause of that Fifty-year War.

Patriots’ Revolution

The Meiji Restoration was a sort of revolution, but the one who carried it out was, of course, not the Emperor. It was accomplished by lower class warriors in the Western and Southern Japan. Why did these “revolutionary leaders” choose such a regime? The regime placed at the apex of state authority the Imperial Household that had neither the governing capability nor any intention of governing. As all of these revolutionaries

are long gone, there is no way we could ascertain what they had in mind. I believe the reason they opted for that imperial system was the unshakable and resolute conviction they had in their vision.

Initially, they had a very powerful moral commitment to resuscitate Japan as a modern state modelled after the Western states and they risked their life to topple the Tokugawa Shogunate in attaining their goal. Second, the “Reverence for the Emperor” and the “Restoration of the Imperial Rule” were the justifiable creed of their commitment.

After attaining the Meiji Restoration, they borrowed the authority of the Emperor to propel modernization. Any major reforms would be done under the name of the Emperor but the actual governing authority would be kept in their own hands. They were genuinely burning with this sense of mission to build a modern state. To me, the Meiji Constitution was the literal expression of their confidence. Although all the authority and power concentrated on the Emperor in formality, in actuality neither authority nor power was given to him.

So, a regime was created, in which the legal form and actual management were completely contradictory. Seen from another angle, an abominable and totally irresponsible regime was born, in which the Emperor who could not assume any responsibility in actuality assumed total responsibility legally. Any revision could only be made by the imperial ordinance,

which meant that constitutional revisions were in effect impossible. That was a very critical defect, indeed.

The Meiji leaders appeared to pay no heed to this deficiency. They were attaining a revolution on their own. In fact, they built into the Meiji Constitution their own fortress in the name of the Privy Council.

Once enacted, the nature of law is such that it begins to walk on its own with the passage of time, quite independently of the intentions of those who draft and promulgate the law. It was exactly what happened with the Meiji Constitution. Nonetheless, it is true that after its birth, many wise leaders made utmost efforts to establish the division of powers in managing state affairs.

Rectifying Constitutional flaws

For example, the Imperial Diet realized the fatal constitutional flaw that the legislative branch did not have the authority to nominate the Prime Minister. They thus gradually established a tradition of having the leader of the largest political party as the Prime Minister who would appoint his cabinet ministers. The defect of having only the Emperor able to dissolve the parliament was rectified by allowing the legislature to exert its own will through votes of confidence or non-confidence.

It is a fact that in the 1920s there was a brief period when enlightened attempts were made to take a more democratic

approach. Sadly, all such efforts failed.

It was nonetheless better while the elder statesmen of the initial Meiji governments were still around. As they left the political scene one by one, it became impossible to rectify the defects of the Imperial Constitution. The revolutionary leaders lost their grip over political affairs with the passage of time, and a generation that did not understand the ideals of the Meiji revolution began to take over power. They turned Japan into a state in which nobody understood where the ultimate responsibility for state actions lay.

The governability of the Meiji Constitution, in particular, management of the supreme commanding authority of the Emperor, became inapplicable by the mid-1920s. The elder statesmen initially had assisted the Emperor after the Meiji Restoration and covered various structural defects in political authority of the Meiji Constitution. The last such elder statesman was Kinmochi Saionji². With his demise in 1940, it became no longer possible to supplement the defects of the Meiji Constitution. I believe this was one cause of WWII.

Eventually, the military took over the actual power of running the state affairs. This led to a catastrophic end. The Meiji Constitution, however, was fortunately for us terminated by the

² 1849-1940 A political leader, with diverse portfolio including Prime Minister of Japan, a scholar and elderly statesman who appointed Prime Ministers.

defeat in WWII.

The second major cause that allowed the military dictatorship, I believe, was turning Shinto into the state religion and to have the people spiritually support the national governance mechanism.

State Shintoism

About Shintoism

In the first year of the Meiji Era (1868), the new government quickly decided to make Shintoism, the religion of the Imperial Household, the state religion of Japan. The Ministry of Divinities was established and all the Shinto shrines throughout Japan were placed under its control. Shinto priests became civil servants and Shinto was placed above all other religions.

This, together with placing the Imperial Household at the apex of the power structure, strengthened the ultra-nationalistic trait of our history. I believe this largely helped pave the way to that dreadful war.

As I was born in 1934, by the time I became aware of my surrounding, Japan had already been at war in China. From that time until the defeat in World War II, the world in the child's mind was one of feverish bewilderment. It seemed as though something bizarrely unnatural had entered into the mind of adults. They told us, "Japan is the God's country, the war is holy

and enemies are brutal savages. There is no way our country, where the Emperor is God, could lose the war. The Yamato nation³ is superior to all other nations and we will unite the world by spreading the ideology of *Hakkou Ichiu*⁴”

The Emperor was a God, his face was not to be looked at. Everyone had to kneel on the floor or the ground with his/her face down. His voice was said to be the sound of a beautiful bell, which no ordinary people had even ever heard. All of his words had to be conveyed in writing. All the boys were taught that our mission was to go to the war fronts and die honourably for the Emperor.

I, too, was thoroughly brainwashed as a military boy who firmly believed in this teaching. Many young men of my village, more or less a decade older than me, were sent out to the war fronts from a Shinto shrine with cheerful shouts of their neighbours. Of course, so many of them could not return home.

I do not have sufficient knowledge of Shintoism and am not qualified to discuss it. I was born into a family which for generations had belonged to the Pure-land Sect of Buddhism. However, like everyone else born into this land at that era, I accepted Shintoism as a matter of nature and respected the eight

³ An ancient term referring to the people speaking the native Japanese language.

⁴ A WWII slogan meaning “all eight corners of the world under one roof” which was used to justify the Japanese invasions of China and Southeast Asia.

million gods that are supposed to reside in all beings and matters in nature.

Shintoism is pantheistic and probably was born out of the ancient people's reverence for the surrounding nature, arising from their earnest wish for abundant blessings of food from the seas and mountains. Along with the dissemination of rice cultivation, this reverence of the nature permeated throughout the islands. It has probably taken millennia to have today's form.

The Shinto shrine style - the gods' passage, the shrine itself, the grove of the village shrine, and the gate – were probably accepted and developed by our ancestors from pre-historic times. It is a uniquely Japanese animistic faith that is deeply rooted in our history and climate.

Shinto is just one animism, the countless traditional religions deeply rooted in diverse regions and peoples on this globe in ancient times. Shinto is a polytheism that originally encompassed everything surrounding us and was initially tolerant of all with the spirit of harmony at its nucleus. I learned later in adulthood that it shares many aspects with other animistic beliefs held, for example, by American Indians.

In fact, I recall the great surprise I felt when I visited the Ancient Historical Museum in Malaysia over 50 years ago. The clothing of the Malaysians when they had begun rice cultivation was very similar to what Japanese Shinto priests

wore. Rice cultivation is considered to have spread to the hot and humid Southeast Asian region from China around 3000 BC. This was much before the world's major religions were born and it is not unreasonable to assume that animism similar to Shintoism had prevailed along with rice cultivation in the region.

Syncretism of Shintoism and Buddhism

Buddhism came to Japan in the late 6th century A.D., and the Imperial Household also became its believers. Buddhism deepened its syncretism with Shintoism since the Nara Era⁵ and became deeply rooted throughout the nation. At one point Buddhism even attained the position of the state religion in Japan (in the 8th-11th centuries) but then it by no means excluded Shintoism.

Both co-existed without mutually excluding each other. Later on in the 16th century, other foreign religions, including Christianity, were conveyed to Japan, and Shinto's relationship with them was no different from that to Buddhism.

My home villagers and people living in the surrounding were typically syncretistic. Villagers for generations have revered and protected both the Buddhist temple and Shinto shrine that stood side by side. They prayed in the shrine for abundant harvests and paid homages to their ancestors in the

⁵ 710-792 ad. when the capital of Japan was located in Nara during which Buddhism thrived.

Buddhist temple. The temple and the shrine were the center of our village events and ceremonies for weddings and funerals. Moreover, these temples and shrines were the best playgrounds for us children, and the place where we learned group living and social disciplines. This, regrettably, is no longer so today.

Shintoism suddenly became the state religion with the Meiji Restoration. The position of the state religion was given to Shintoism because it was uniquely Japanese rather than more international Buddhism. This abrupt change began the plight of Buddhism, as it became the subject of discriminations and expulsions.

Officially instigated anti-Buddhism campaigns became very active, temples and shrines were officially separated and even suppression and expulsion of Buddhism were rampant during the Meiji Era. It is said that about half of the Buddhist temples ceased to exist throughout Japan due to violent destructions of Buddha statues and Buddhist items, led mainly by Shinto priests and nationalist scholars.

Shintoism itself changed dramatically. It acquired a monotheistic trait (of the only God being the Emperor), and the spirit of tolerance and harmony that had been its character for millennia was gradually lost. The intention of the Meiji leaders who gave this superior status to Shintoism was to place the Emperor at the apex of the national system in the belief and reverence of people's minds. In other words, they aimed at both

the restoration of the Imperial rule and the unification of people under the Shinto ideology, which the Imperial Household were devoted to.

It is conceivable that they wanted to uplift the national spirit with Shintoism just as they thought the Western powers that pried open Japan had been backed by the strong Christian principles. They understood the effect of spirituality on the human mind, but in a grossly wrong direction.

I nevertheless believe that during the time Japan walked on the path to that catastrophic war, Shinto caused far more terrible effects than initially intended by the Meiji leaders. In other words, Shinto had played a central role of instigating the exclusive nationalism and patriotism that were eventually to engulf the entire Japan. Of course, that was not the crime of Shintoism but that of those who used it for their objective.

Religion is deeply related to the heart and mind of the people and their way of living. I do not deny the nuanced and positive effects various religions have had historically in both the West and East. The greatest lesson out of the Japanese saga is that politics must not use religion to attain their objectives and religion must stand firm to never be used by politics.

As the third cause of that horrendous war, I must point out how people were estranged from the political system of the Imperial Sovereignty.

Estrangement of People

People Estranged from Politics

As stated earlier, in February 1889, the Legislative Law and the House of Representative Election Law were announced along with the Meiji Constitution. The first Imperial Diet general election was held in July 1890. Although the voting rate was very high at 93.9%, those who had the voting rights were very small, accounting for only 1.1 percent of the population.

Only males over 25 years of age who paid direct national taxes of 15 yen annually were given the voting right. Those qualified to run had to be over 30 years of age and paid the same amount of taxes. That was a prohibitive amount for most people, since back then the yen was very strong (rice, the basic staple of the people, for instance, cost only about 0.1 yen per a gallon or four liters). Whereas the Japanese population had already reached 40 million by then, only 450,000 had voting rights in the first general elections. They were richly landed farmers or upper class city dwellers.

The electoral law was revised several times until the end of WWII. By 1925, the condition of tax payment was done away with and all of the male populations was given the right to vote. Still, the ratio of actual voters to the total population stood only at 20.8 percent.

Furthermore, in the same year, the domestic security maintenance law was implemented through the Imperial Ordinance. This triggered further suppression of the freedom of speech. The illegal Communist Party was harshly repressed, and special higher police offices (specializing in controlling political thoughts and expressions) were severely watching people throughout the country. At the same time, corruption became rampant among politicians, enormously eroding the peoples' faith in the political class.

On the other hand, the military had gained vast power with the Siberian intervention and the military advancement into the Shandong Peninsular of China. Despite the realization of male universal suffrage, any effort to reflect the public will in national politics was meaningless.

Concerning this point, Tanzan Ishibashi⁶ lamented in 1919 about the country that was heading further to isolation from the international community. "Those who made Japan such a despicable country were indeed the privileged class of elder statesmen, military clique, bureaucrats and plutocrats (*zaibatsu*). People, in fact, do not engage in politics. I have no doubt that had the governing of the state been given to the people, the

⁶ 1883-1973. a pre-war liberal and pacifist journalist who entered politics after WWII. After having held the portfolio of Minister of Finance and Minister of International Trade & Industry, became the Prime Minister in 1956 but due to illness resigned after only two months.

national status of Japan would have been several folds or several dozen folds higher than today.”

As the fourth cause of that Fifty-year War, I must point out the low educational level of the population at large.

Lagging Education

Some experts point out that the force behind the successful Japanese modernization after the Meiji Restoration was the high educational level during the Edo Era. As I examine this issue carefully, however, I must disagree with this argument.

It is true that some 300 *Daimyos* (feudal lords) set up public schools and made efforts on educating their samurai class children. And in large cities like today’s Tokyo and Osaka there were a number of high-level private educational institutions. In addition, most of the temples set up educational cabins for the neighbourhood children. It was thus rather normal that a large proportion of the people were able to read, write and calculate with an abacus during the Edo era.

But when it came to the modern education of the post-Meiji Restoration, Japan’s education level was not high. The Ministry of Education was established in 1871 and the compulsory education system was set up the following year. The Ministry implemented in 1875 a census on pupil attendance,

which was 35.19 percent of children that year. It is estimated that the first year of compulsory education saw less than 30 percent of children attending elementary schools. Moreover, the duration of the compulsory education was only 3-4 years until 1907 when it was prolonged to 6 years. In addition, classroom time was limited to a minimum of 16 weeks per year.

Pre-WWII School Attendance in Japan (%)

Year	Grade school attendance	Middle school boys	Middle school girls	High school boys	High school girls
1875	35.19	1.3	0.0	0.7	0.0
1880	41.06	1.8	0.1	0.6	0.0
1885	49.62	1.4	0.6	0.7	0.0
1890	48.93	1.2	0.2	0.8	0.0
1895	61.24	2.1	0.2	0.7	0.0
1900	81.48	5.2	1.6	1.0	0.0
1905	95.62	6.9	1.7	1.7	0.1
1910	98.14	22.8	9.0	1.8	0.1
1915	98.47	27.2	12.6	1.9	0.1
1920	99.03	32.6	17.2	3.0	0.2
1925	99.43	39.6	24.9	4.7	0.3
1930	99.51	42.9	29.2	5.3	0.6
1935	99.59	45.6	33.6	5.4	0.6
1940	99.64	46.0	51.5	6.5	0.8

The main reasons for the paucity of pupils were the scarcity of teachers plus the fact that the temple cabins of the Edo Era had been turned into the Meiji elementary schools

without much change in substance. Of course, the school attendance rate of children in the Edo Era was lower than the initial Meiji Era when the government placed great emphasis on schooling.

The corresponding ratio in the Edo Era must not have exceeded 30 percent. And that was the national average, including big metropolis like Edo and Osaka, where education prevailed much more than in rural areas, whose population naturally overwhelmed cities in those years. The population distribution probably was more or less similar in the early Meiji period. What the above table tells us is that most of the youths who fought in the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japan wars had not even received 3-4 years of primary education.

My grand-mother illustrated the state of most people born in 1886 – she did not attend elementary school and could not read or write. To the extent I knew, there were very few in my grand-parents' generation who had graduated from an elementary school.

According to a Ministry of Education data, it was only in 1905, when the compulsory education was extended to six years, that the attendance ratio exceeded 90 percent. It means that my parents' generation (father was born in 1906 and mother 1909) was the first generation that would graduate from an elementary school. My elementary school was established in 1908 as a six-year school through a merger of three 4-year

elementary schools. Both of my parents, incidentally, had graduated from the same elementary school that I later attended.

The Ministry of Education data show that the middle-level education attendance had not reached 10 percent until the end of the Meiji era, reaching 50 percent only around the end of WWII. Of course, it was higher in urban cities and lower in rural areas, and this explains my childhood memory of not knowing any middle-school students. As for the higher level education, attendance was frighteningly low, only single digit numbers until the end of the war. It shows that higher education until then was targeted mostly for those who intended to become bureaucrats and military leaders.

The Imperial Rescript on Education, decreed in 1890, became the basic foundation of school education, and it stressed two points: loyalty to the Emperor and patriotism. In 1893 the government decided to use state texts books at all schools. These pronouncements gradually strengthened the state control of education. They undoubtedly became the basis to instigate the ultra-nationalistic social trends that led to the military dictatorship of Japan.

In addition to the above four main causes, I must discuss how ignorant of the world these Meiji leaders were. Their ignorance permeated all of the problems I mentioned so far, and this stark fact, the island mentality, was the fifth cause of the 50-year war.

The Island Mentality – Leaders Ignorant of the Real World

The statesmen and leaders who attained the Meiji Restoration were born and grew up during the Edo Era, when Japan was totally closed to the outside world. So, they were naturally ignorant of the world outside the Japanese archipelagos. Both the leaders and people during the Edo era had an island mentality, what is described in an ancient Chinese proverb -- “frogs in a well.”

I wonder to what extent they themselves were aware of their own ignorance. By the time Japan entered the era of the Fifty-year War, the answer must be “very little.” It leads me to conclude that this, then, was the greatest reason why Japan could not avoid WWII. One example was a civil war only 10 years after the Meiji Restoration. Rather than making unified efforts towards the enormous tasks of modernization, they resorted to a useless civil war. Takamori Saigo⁷, who had been one of the most meritorious leaders of the Meiji Restoration and a very popular figure well into today, was forced to terminate his life in

⁷ Saigo Takamori (1828-1877) A lower acheron samurai from today's Kagoshima, who played one of the most prominent roles in the Meiji Restoration, but tragically forced to lead a civil war against the new government only 10 years later. Is one of the most popular historical figures in Japan.

the civil war.

Saigo had insisted on a peaceful mission to Korea to avoid any war, but his argument was grossly twisted by other leaders, who falsely accused him of advocating the invasion of Korea. They dismissed him. These treacherous leaders quickly instigated the Sino-Japanese war, which Saigo had adamantly objected to. What an utter inconsistency. Had we left the Korean issue to Qing China, as argued by Saigo, Japan could have concentrated on the modernization of the nation and the path to that Fifty-year War might have been avoided. I truly regret the loss of Saigo at this pivotal period of the Meiji era. The fact that these leaders had no ear to listen to wise views only indicate that they were merely “frogs in a well.”

There existed, however, outstanding opinions at that time, which warned about the dubious future course of Japan. I would just like to introduce two historical figures, one Chinese – Dr. Sun Yat-sen - and another Japanese - Kaishu Katsu.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen

Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925), the first president and founding father of the Republic of China, devoted his life from the latter 19th to the early 20th century for the national independence of China and for the establishment of a state based on his “Three Principles of the People.” He is considered as the national father of present China. In his frequent trips to the West and most of

Asia, he visited Japan several times. He lived some years here to gather comrades to propel the Chinese revolution he envisioned.

In November 1924, Sun Yat-sen delivered a famous lecture at a girls' high school in Kobe, which became his "will to the Japanese people." Entitled "Great Asianism" the lecture deeply impressed some 2000 audience and much larger subsequent readers of its printed version. At the end of the speech, he asked the Japanese, "Whether you Japanese want to become an agent of the Western militarism or the fortress of the righteous Eastern rule, it is up to your prudent choice."

During the Meiji era, many students came here from Qing China to study. It was at the end of the Qing Dynasty and it is estimated that over 10,000 Chinese students studied in Japan. The Qing Dynasty was built in Northeast China of today by the Manchu tribe, and took over the Chinese continent during the mid-17th century by toppling the Ming Dynasty. Towards the end of its rule, the enfeebled Qing Dynasty became the subject of various demands by the Western powers.

Numerous concessions had been made to the West, including land and privileges. It became a semi-colony of the West. Most of the students who came to Japan were Han Chinese, who were burning with revolutionary fever and joined the movement to topple the Manchurian Qing Dynasty after their return to China.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen was one of them, who became famous

here after he set up in Japan one of his revolutionary movement bases in 1904. Could it be that the Meiji Japan -- dashing toward modernization after having toppled the feudal Edo government, opened up to the outside world and established the centrally controlled governing system -- had attractive elements in the eyes of these young Chinese revolutionaries?

Dr. Sun Yat-sen said in Kobe, “Japan of over 30 years ago had been a semi-colony of Europe... but it became the first independent state in Asia by scrapping all the unequal treaties.” By “over 30 years ago,” he meant before the Sino-Japanese war. The utmost mission for these revolutionary Chinese was to eradicate the semi-colonial condition their country had been subjugated under. Did Japan, that had attained this mission, progressing towards “enlightened civilization,” appear as a model for them to emulate?

Because the audience was Japanese, Sun Yat-sen avoided any criticism of Japan in the speech. But in 1917, he stated in *Sun Yat-sen in the Guangzhou Headquarters* “Every one of Japan’s China policy in the past 20years failed. Japan has always taken a diplomatic policy that impedes both China’s development and the progress of the Orient. First was the Sino-Japanese war, then, the China aid policy after our revolution. All the policies they undertook were myopic and they betrayed the expectations of the Chinese. It is because of this that our Chinese revolution failed.”

In his letter to Tsuyoshi Inukai⁸ in 1923, he stated “Four hundred million Chinese and many Asian nations regarded Japan of the Russo-Japanese War time as the saviour of Asia. However, Japan had neither a great aspiration nor noble plans. It only emulated the invasion policy of Europe. It even dared to merge Korea. It is truly regrettable that Japan lost the confidence of the people throughout Asia.”⁹

The concluding remark of Sun Yat-sen’s Kobe speech expressed the worries over Japan’s future held by the then Chinese students in Japan. Of course, I need not even mention what course Japan took thereafter.

Kaishu Katsu

Kaishu Katsu (1853-1899) was an official of the Edo Shogunate government who endeavoured on the smooth transfer of administration from the Tokugawa Shogunate to the Meiji government. He was one of the very few who also played an important role in the new Meiji government as the Minister of Navy and a Privy Councillor, but decided to retire at a relatively young age.

⁸ 1855-1932. a pre-war Prime Minister of Japan, who was assassinated on May 15, 1932 by young army officers? He assisted Sun yat-sen during his refuge in Japan.

⁹ From “Sun Yat-sen and Asia, Kyuko Publisher, 1993, pp.53-56

In 1897, immediately after the Sino-Japanese War, Katsu wrote *Hikawa Seiwa* (Hikawa Clean Narratives), a very well-known essay collection in which he repeatedly warned the Japanese who were so feverish over the victory in the wars and began to look down on the Chinese. Below are some excerpts from the book.

“China is a great power. Chinese are great people. China indeed is a great power. No short-tempered Japanese can match the long perspective the Chinese have... We managed to win the last war, but if I think about the strengths and weaknesses of the two nations, I worry about our future.”

“The grand scale of the Chinese people. The Chinese are so grand scale in their thinking. Although Japan noisily celebrated the victory of the war, the Chinese remain cool weather their emperors change or whether they lose a war. If the Japanese become arrogant for winning the war, we would face a terrible difficulty. Even if we win a war with swords and guns, if we lose an economic war, the country collapses. I don’t think we can even match the Chinese in any economic war. This makes me quite worried.”

“Recognize China!! It was obvious from the beginning that pressuring China would prove to be Japan’s disadvantage. Some advocate that China, maltreated by Germany, Russia and others, will collapse soon or later, but that would never happen. They think of their Jiao Zhou Bay or other

bays no more than I would pay attention to the pile of fallen leaves in my tiny garden...Even if Germany occupied Jinzhou Bay, unlike the Japanese, the Chinese don't riot. They'll probably let it drag on until the Germans pay compensations. Whether it is Shanghai, Singapore or Hong Kong, these are all in the hands of the Chinese. Even if Germans make a little noise, that won't bother them at all."

Katsu's broad perspective, his grand scale and the accuracy of his observations are worth praise. The course Japan took thereafter proved exactly as he had warned and worried.

Except for people like Katsu, most of the leaders of the Meiji Government were indeed "frogs in a well." Their myopic and narrow mindedness, however, paint a dramatic contrast with the Japanese of the early 7th to mid-9th century. These earlier Japanese had a very positive attitude to accept, learn from and emulate the far more advanced civilization of the Chinese continent.

Japanese Missions to Sui and Tung China – Learning from the History of Exchanges

During the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and Tung Dynasty (618-907), the Japanese Imperial Household sent three state missions to Sui and 12 state missions to Tung. While initial missions were rather small scale, around 100 people each, the missions in the latter half of the Tung era were large, numbering over 500 people in

four ships per mission. The last one, which was sent in 838 had 651 people. Students and monks were included in these missions. They brought back to Japan ideas about more advanced political systems and international cultures, contributing enormously to the progress of ancient Japan.

When I served as the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had two opportunities to visit Xi'an (the capital of Tung, then called Chang'an). The Xi'an officials astonished me with their explanations that during the Tung era, there always had been more than 300 Japanese living and studying there. As the census records of the time have remained, they were not wrong. The students tended to stay there for many years and there were other Japanese people who visited there outside of the official missions.

Three hundred Japanese constantly staying and studying in Tung China is an astonishing number, if I put it into today's perspective. The Japanese population during the Nara Era (710-794) was about 4.5 million, early Heian about 5.5 million and during the late Heian period around 6.8 million. That means one out of 10,000-12,000 Japanese went to China to study. This is similar in proportion to the Meiji populations that received higher education.

Tung China was a great Asian empire that had unified and dominated the vast areas of today's China. It actively exchanged cultures, peoples and ideas with West Asia and was

extremely prosperous by the world standard of the time. Chung'an was an international city and bureaucrats were chosen from both Chinese and foreigners. Among the Japanese students, some were hired and promoted to the level of a ministerial level, such as Nakamaro Abe (698-770), and lived their life in China.

Japan, on the other hand, was a culturally inferior country in those centuries, not even having its own writing. The students and monks who joined the official missions studied and acquired the system, philosophy and culture of Tung China, and brought all these back to Japan, contributing enormously to the progress of Japan after the 7th century. These exchange students were treasured by the imperial court and disseminated the Chinese characters, governing system, technology, religion, philosophies and more. The knowledge of Chinese poetry became essential for the nobles and bureaucrats of the time. All the documents of the court were written in Chinese, though original phonetic Japanese writing was soon devised.

I should think the gap between Japan and the Western world at the time of the Meiji Restoration was similar to what existed between Japan and Tung China. There is no way the Meiji leaders could not have known these ancient missions to China. If so, they could have opted to send a similar ratio of students to the Western world and let them study the cultures, technology, the political system based on democracy. As the population grew from 30 million to 50 million during the Meiji

era, they could have sent 3000 to 5000 students to the West to thoroughly study the Western system. The cost of sending students abroad would have been far smaller than the amount Japan spent on military and wars.

Isolation from the International Community

As we look through the years from the Sino-Japanese War/Russo-Japanese War until the defeat in WWII, a notable feature stands out. That is how Japan fell ever more deeply into isolation from the international community.

The one major incident that marked the beginning of this isolation was the cancellation in 1921 of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The United Kingdom (UK) had gradually changed its position on Japan's merger with Korea. The UK initially more or less ignored our aggression as an ally (because mainly of its shared fear of the Russian expansion), which Dr. Sun Yat-sen accused as the "horribly reckless attempt." The UK government, however, began after WWI to take the same position with the U.S. and the Republic of China concerning Japan's deteriorating relations with them over Manchukuo.

Manchukuo was originally established by the Manchurians who had returned to their home land after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. The Republic of China that had toppled the Qing Dynasty initially had no intention of chasing them out of their ancestral land, and the international community

seemed to want to recognize this new state by the Manchurians.

However, alarms rose internationally over Japan that was increasingly intervening in the affairs of the Manchukuo from their leased Kwantung territory. With increasingly independent actions by its military, Japan proceeded on the path towards the second Sino-Japanese war of the 1930s.

There were Japanese, however, who were alarmed by the path that increasingly isolated Japan was taking. I would just like to introduce here the view of Tanzan Ishibashi, whom I revered in my youth.

Tanzan Ishibashi

Tanzan Ishibashi (1884-1973) was a son of a Buddhist priest, and as such grew up quite familiar with the Buddhist philosophy. He learned from his middle school teacher, who had studied under William Clark¹⁰, the concept of the American democracy. Later, he studied philosophy at Waseda University. He entered journalism in 1911 and actively wrote articles and editorials critical of the government's external policy. In 1946 he entered politics.

He was very critical of the Greater Japan policy -- which was to expand Japanese territories and spheres of

¹⁰ William Smith Clark (1826-1886) an American agricultural educator, the first President of the Sapporo Agricultural College. Famous in Japan for his motto "Boys Be Ambitious."

influence outside the Japanese archipelagos. That policy was loudly advocated by the pre-war governments. He argued that such a policy had neither economic nor military values but would only harm Japan diplomatically. He tacitly argued for the smaller Japan ideology, and advocated repeatedly to “give up Korea, Taiwan and Sakhalin. Stop intervening in China and Siberia.”

Underlining his “smaller Japan policy” was his strong conviction that taking over other nations’ territories would only destabilize international relations and cause conflicts. He knew that would prove to be also very harmful economically. He believed, instead, that the government should focus on ensuring the well-being of the people by fostering industries and expanding trade.

Ishibashi cautioned the hawkish attitude at the outbreak of WWI in 1914. After the fall of Qingtao, he argued that Japan must never take over Qingtao from Germans. When Japan made the 21-Article Demand on the Chinese government¹¹, including the takeover of the German rights in China, he expressed adamant opposition. He considered those demands would make Japan more deeply involved in China and further enhance its imperialism, all resulting ultimately in gross disadvantages for

¹¹ In 1915 (still during WWI), Japan made 21 demands on China for post-war compensation, including the concession of Qingtao that had been a German colony.

the nation.

He reprimanded the government for “the bizarre calculation of demanding China to borrow money for the compensation, when Japan could hardly improve domestic infrastructure because of the inability to borrow.” He concluded that the Sino-Japanese negotiations on the 21- Article Demand was fundamentally a great disaster.

Neither did he hesitate to unfold his moral arguments. Referring to how Japan was isolated and criticized in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, despite the fact that Japan was on the victorious side, he considered it due solely to Japan’s lack of national moral stance. He was lucidly against dispatching soldiers to Siberia, too, arguing “Show clearly both domestically and abroad that we will not send soldiers to Siberia.”

“By no means do I wish to criticize my own country. But in all honesty, no other country lacks the sense of fairness like Japan. No other country is so poor in the spirit of freedom and equality. Japan is such a bureaucratic, militaristic and non-democratic country. We are far inferior, at least compared to the UK, US, France or Italy in this regard. It is laughably mistaken to even consider to join the Five Great Powers. With this mistake, we were harshly criticized from all sides. That’s why we are in such a state of misery,” he lamented.

Ishibashi continued. “But this is not the fault of the Japanese people. The ones who made Japan such a despicable

state are the privileged class of elderly statesmen, military, bureaucracy and the business conglomerates. People are not actually involved with politics. If only Japanese politics were handed to the people, undoubtedly the country's moral status should become several folds or scores higher. The traits of the Japanese people have long been fair and non-greedy.”

Ishibashi was consistent in his stance towards China. “In view of the unparalleled history of friendly relations between Japan and China for over 15 hundred years, its permanent continuation will be beneficial and advantageous for both countries and peoples.” He also repeatedly warned the Japanese on the precarious relations with the United States. His consistent stance was to avoid confrontations by all means, because the two countries were tied in strong economic interests through trade. He pointed out that the deterioration in the Sino-Japanese relations was so dangerous and would lead to the worst scenario of confrontations with the United States.

Very unfortunately, Ishibashi's outstanding and prophetic view was considered so heretic by the political class of the day. It is truly regrettable that he could not change the political course that pushed Japan into the second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific War. The government could not and would not pay any attention to these dissenting but correct views.

Japan became increasingly involved in the war against China and left the League of Nations. The outcome for the nation,

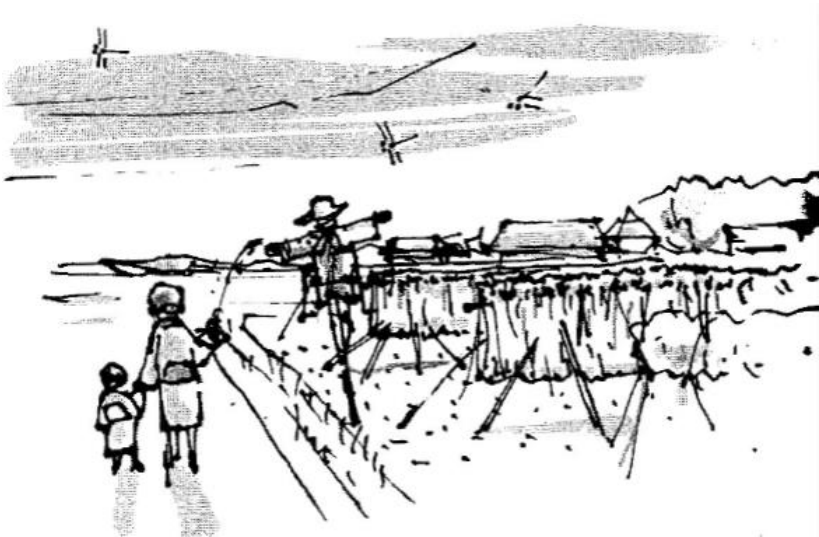
then, was evil Japan-Germany-Italy Axis and disastrous WWII.



*Atom bombs had to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki
to end that egregious war.*

Chapter 4

Historical Lessons to Convey to Future Generations



The greatest difference between the era leading to WWII and the post-war era is that many of the causes of that horrific war have been forgotten.

The Great Imperial Constitution disappeared and imperialistic militarism collapsed in 1945 with Japan's defeat. A new constitution was promulgated and the sovereignty of the country was handed to its people. A new religious institutional law came into effect and Shintoism returned to its ancient pantheistic form and no longer was the "state religion."

Education was freed from the yoke of imperial education rescript, and the post-war educational level was impressively upgraded. The education system was reformed to 6 years of elementary schooling, 3 years of junior high schooling, 3 years of senior high schooling and 4 years of university education. Nine years of primary and junior high school education became compulsory. Attendance rates rose to almost 100% in compulsory education, 97% senior high school education and 68.5% beyond (universities, junior colleges, and professional schools) by 2013. Soon, more than three-fourths of Japanese youth will be getting education beyond high school.

These dramatic changes are irreversible now. No matter how circumstances might change in the future, at least, they could not be reverted to the situation of the pre-war years. The Japanese people became principal players in national sovereignty ideals and have politically matured to the level of

changing governments through their voting rights. Political parties, too, have matured in their relationships with voters through the changes in governments.

The Japanese economy, which attained the status of an economic power despite its total destruction in 1945, is now squarely facing the globalization trend of the world. Japanese corporations have been competitive in many sectors and have attained strong positions in the world. Information is instantly conveyed through the mesmerising progress in information technology. Both the government and people can no longer maintain its isolated Japanese island mentality (“frogs in a well” in the ancient Chinese saying), as it is no longer possible to even think that resource-poor Japan could be internationally isolated.

In the foreword, I listed the following five points that I would like to pass on to future generations as lessons we learned from our experiences in the era that led to the disastrous WWII.

- We must never ever engage again in such an egregious war.
- The four principles of pacifism, democracy, basic human rights, and international cooperation along with the sovereignty of the people must never be threatened.
- Both the government and the people must not isolate ourselves inside the Japanese culture.
- Public policies must place a top priority on the stability, improvement, and fulfilment of civic life.

- The state must respect human life and-religions should cast light on the inner heart of the people.

I specifically repeat these points for the following reason. Although all the causes of that egregious war were legally, politically, and economically removed, I fear that lingering negative impressions of Japan remain both in the management of the state and social affairs as well as in the people's heart. This casts a shadow on the future of Japan, particularly in our international relations.

Because my generation experienced almost over-night drastic changes in political, social, and educational spheres of the country, many of us still cannot completely trust the state power. I still cannot forget the bewilderment I felt as an 11-year boy when loyalty to the Emperor and patriotism were abandoned overnight for democracy.

I do hope and pray that Japan and its society will continue to remain affluent, peaceful, and fair for many more decades, if not for centuries. The ones who must assume the tasks to make this possible are the generations following us. That is all the more reason I hope this monologue of an octogenarian can be useful, even if slightly, to younger people. I am confining here my message to three points that are internationally relevant: (1) do away with lingering negative impressions of Japanese nationalism, (2) be aware of our isolated island mentality and (3)

always have an appreciating heart for other nations.

Lingering Negative Images of Japan

Lingering negative images of Japan can be seen in many sectors of our society. I am concerned about the problems related to the revising the post-war constitution, which have become so pervasive today.

I do think it unavoidable to consider some revision of the current constitution because of the vast geopolitical changes made outside of Japan over time. However, I am concerned that in the on-going debate over our constitutional revision, we often hear arguments that threaten the basic principles of the current constitution – the sovereignty of the people, democracy, pacifism, basic human rights, and international cooperation.

I pointed out that the principal catalyst that led Japan down the path to WWII defects in the Meiji Constitution. This point must be tacitly kept for deep self-reflection in the minds of the Japanese people; and the lingering negative images of Japan must be erased. I would just like to pick one prominent example of this.

The Yasukuni Controversy¹- Expanded Joint Enshrinement

The most representative case of the lingering negative image of Japan is the Yasukuni Shrine controversy. The differences in historical evaluations of the war are the principle cause of controversy illustrated by this case, which divides public opinions in a complex way.

Yasukuni Shrine had a unique status, even within Shintoism during the eight decades between the Meiji Restoration and the end of World War II. Yasukuni was placed under the military management and played a central role within state Shintoism. After the war, it reopened as an ordinary private sector religious institution. Today governmental instruction or supervision is not allowed to affect religious activities.

Formerly, the “spirits” that could be enshrined in Yasukuni were limited to soldiers who perished on battlefields they were sent to by order of the state. Post-war Yasukuni hierarchy took advantage of the postwar law, which forbids state intervention into religious institution affairs, and decided in to set its own standard for joint enshrinement. This led in 1978 to the enshrinement of the class-A war criminals, who were leaders

¹ A Shinto Shrine founded by [Emperor Meiji](#) in 1869 to commemorate those who died in service of the [Empire of Japan](#). The shrine lists the names, origins, birthdates, and places of death of nearly 2.5 million men, women and children... Among those are 1,068 convicted [war criminals](#), 14 of whom are Class-A, leading to [the Yasukuni controversies](#). (Visits by conservative political leaders inviting criticisms from China, Korea, the US, and other countries).

during the war and who were sentenced in the International Military Tribunals for the Far East² Because of this joint enshrinement, worshipping at Yasukuni meant also worshipping the class-A war criminals to many critics. This is the controversy.

It first became an international issue on August 15, 1985, when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone visited Yasukuni Shrine, in an official capacity, to worship on the anniversary of the end of WWII, This caused uproars and harsh protests in China, followed by other Asian countries. The successive post-war prime ministers, who preceded Nakasone, had also visited the shrine, but in their private capacity. As worshipping is within the freedom of individual faith, their private acts were not much politicized. It is important to specifically note here, however, that the Imperial Household has not visited Yasukuni Shrine since 1989 when it became a public knowledge that the “class-A war criminals” had been co-enshrined there.

Mr. Nakasone’s worship at Yasukuni was the first official visit by a Japanese Prime Minister, and criticism first arose domestically. All the opposition parties and main media

² The **International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE)**, also known as the **Tokyo Trials** or the **Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal**, was a military trial convened on April 29, 1946, to try the leaders of the Empire of Japan for "Class A" crimes, which were reserved for those who participated in a joint conspiracy to start and wage war. Twenty-eight Japanese military and political leaders were charged with waging aggressive war acts and with responsibility for conventional war crimes.

criticized his worship in line with his policy to increase the defence expenditure to over 1% of GNP. (Keeping the military expenditure within 1% of GDP had been the unwritten national consensus.) His action was also censured as breaking the principle of separating politics and religion.

Mr. Nakasone had stated immediately before his Yasukuni visit, “It is only natural that there is a place where people can express their appreciation to those who fell for the country. Otherwise, who would give us his life to the country?” Those who were suspicious argued that his Yasukuni visit had the objective of reviving militarism.

The intensity of Chinese criticisms and protests were beyond the anticipation of the Japanese. They charged that the official worship at Yasukuni was negating the spirit of the Sino-Japanese Friendship Treaty, glorifying past Japanese militarism, and blurring the definition of invasion wars. Questioning the responsibility of Japanese leaders for the war as well as their historical perception, the Chinese were gravely concerned about the revival of militarism in Japan.

The basic Chinese criticism of Japan has remained consistent. Underlining this persistence is the strong anti-Japanese sentiments attributable to the disastrous tragedies that China and its people suffered during the wars. Each time Japanese government leaders visit the Yasukuni Shrine, official protests are vocally made not only in China but also in Korea.

The Yasukuni controversy has long been an official agenda topic in bilateral discussions. Furthermore, not only official visits, but private appearances by government leaders have come to be regarded problematic and insulting to them.

We must pay serious attention to the fact that the core issue of the Yasukuni controversy is indeed the enshrinement of class-A war criminals at the site. While the verdicts of the Tokyo War Tribunal have been controversial for their validity under international law, the tribunal was held by the victors of the war, including the United States, United Kingdom, Russia, and China. Although only China among these countries vocally criticizes the official Japanese visits to Yasukuni, the United States, United Kingdom and other victors in WWII also express their dissatisfaction to official visits to Yasukuni by our government leaders.

Since Mr. Nakasone's official first visits to Yasukuni, each time an official visit is made, Sino-Japanese and Korean-Japanese political relations experience a turmoil. This has negatively affected economic, cultural, and human exchanges between Japan and our neighbours. Combined with the territorial disputes over Senkaku Island with China or Takeshima with Korea, the hard stances of China and Korea have worsened. In the case of China, its rising status as an economic power has given more weight to its voice internationally.

I am concerned that if this is left unattended, the problem might even affect security issues in the entire East Asian region. As this is an international problem, we must quickly find a solution that can gain understanding from the international community. It is a problem that is directly hitting the fundamental basis of how our nation ought to be.

I believe a rationale solution is possible. We need to separate the enshrinement of the class-A war criminals from Yasukuni Shrine. This will enhance the status of others enshrined there and hopefully can be supported by many people. Those chosen for enshrinement at Yasukuni -- during the period of its extraordinary state institution status within Shinto – used to be sanctified by the Emperor. The procedure on whom to sanctify was very strict.

First, the military checked the situation of how the deceased died in a military function and screened whether individual cases met the enshrinement standard of Yasukuni Shrine. If a case was judged to clear the standard, his name was added to the proposed list for enshrinement and was reported to the throne. After imperial sanctioning, an invocation ceremony of the deceased was solemnly held at the invocation garden of the shrine with the participation of the bereaved families.

The enshrinement standard specified that those qualified were the soldiers who fought on battlefields by state order or those who died from injuries and illnesses caused in

battles. Even the military leaders of the Meiji Era -- who were revered as military gods, such as Maresuke Nogi³ or Heihachiro Togo⁴ -- were not enshrined at Yasukuni because they did not die in a war.

If the enshrinement of the class-A war criminals are removed to another site, the international community led by China may not censure Japan so vocally, even if the government leaders go to Yasukuni Shrine to worship. That would also make it possible for the Emperor to visit the shrine. I believe this separation has to be done for the souls of the deceased, who died so meaninglessly on battlefields for the sake of the country.

The problem is how this removal can be realized. The joint enshrinement of war criminals was a religious activity unilaterally handled by Yasukuni Shrine leaders with its independent enshrinement standard. The question is whether the state could interfere with such a religious activity arguing that it

³ Nogi Maresuke (1849–1912), was a general in the Imperial Japanese Army and a governor of Taiwan. He was one of the commanders during the 1894 capture of Port Arthur from China and a prominent figure in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. As commander of the forces, he was a national hero in Imperial Japan as a model of feudal loyalty and self-sacrifice, ultimately to the point of suicide when Meiji Emperor died.

⁴ **Tōgō Heihachirō**, (1848–1934), was an admiral in the Imperial Japanese Navy and one of Japan's greatest naval heroes. As Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet during the Russo-Japanese War he confined the Russian Pacific Fleet to Port Arthur before winning a decisive victory over a relieving fleet at Tsushima. Tōgō was termed by Western journalists as "the Nelson of the East".

is very harmful to our national interest and threatens the peace and security of our country.

I believe it is possible, since Japan is a country governed by law. Yasukuni Shrine is under the Religious Institution Law of Japan. Since the law regulates all the religious institutions, however, revising the law will be extremely complicated. Enacting an extraordinary policy measure should make it possible.

As a reference, I can point to the extraordinary regulations imposed on the Aum Shinrikyo, a religious cult that attacked the Tokyo subway with sarin gas causing so many deaths and injuries in 1995. After this domestic terrorism attack, the government first considered invoking the Subversive Activities Prevention Law.

However, because of many deficiencies of that law vis-a-vis the Aum case, and due to the anticipation of powerful domestic opposition to its use, the government decided to enact a law on regulating groups committing indiscriminate mass murders. The Aum Shinrikyo was designated as such a group, and close observations and regulations were applied thereafter to the organization. This special measure enabled the state to take various actions quite similar to the punishments under the Subversive Activities Prevention Law.

The political world has diverse political stances and philosophy. I believe, however, that it is time the Parliament as

the highest institution of national power should move to tackle this lingering negative image of Japan by enacting a law to separate the Class-A war criminals from Yasukuni.

The Island Mentality Deeply Ingrained in Japanese DNA

The island mentality or the concept of “frogs in a well” accredited to the Japanese people was formed over the long history of our nation and it is deeply ingrained in Japanese DNA. It cannot be overcome in just a few decades. It is like a bad habit of human nature, including my own; efforts to correct such bad habits have been almost always unsuccessful.

The Problem of Historical Perceptions

A good example of differing perceptions is the persistent problem we have with China and Korea. Japan left severe scars on the people and countries during the "Fifty-year War." What was so tragic was that the victims were people who had nothing to do with the causes of the war. The perception of these events is the heart of the problem.

We must honestly and bravely face the harsh historical fact that we were the invaders and they were the victims. We must also recognize the human tendency that invaders may

forget tragedies after wars but victims never forget and continue to talk for generations about atrocities. This is also true with all the Southeast Asian countries where our military boots landed. While the Southeast Asians are not so vocal now, we must understand that their inner feelings about the war are similar to those of the Chinese and Koreans.

This is something I learned over a decade of work assisting students from Asian countries; when I served as a volunteer - during my student days at the University of Tokyo and later on as my career - I helped them with their studies and living in Japan. It was possible to form many wonderful and warm friendships with youths from Asian countries including China and Korea. Most of these friendships lasted for decades. Through this experience, I came to understand that the scars left in their hearts by the war were very deep.

Many Japanese argue that Japan paid enormous war reparations to Korea and other Southeast Asian countries after the war to make up for our deeds. As China so tolerantly declined Japanese war reparations, we later extended huge overseas development assistance to the country. But it is wrong and short-sighted to assume that these monetary reparations and compensations healed their scarred hearts.

I was 11 years old when WWII ended. Like most Japanese people today, I had nothing to do with the offensive acts of that war. As an individual, I am not responsible for that

war at all. Of course, our children, grandchildren, and generations to come are not at all responsible for this historic war. However, that egregious war was a part of our national history, and we must not forget that Japanese people will always have to shoulder that history.

The Japanese nation must constantly be aware that we have the responsibility to pledge to the world that we would never, but never, repeat such a gross inhumanity. I only hope that our fostering and deepening genuine friendship with our neighbours, and our genuine and sincere understanding of their inner feelings, may heal someday the deep scars left in their hearts.

Historical Lesson – Parliamentary Resolution

Our predecessors have repeatedly extended apologies for actions we took in the war. So has our government. Our Diet (parliament) enacted the following resolution in June 1995 (though belatedly) on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war.

The resolution stated sincere condolences to all the victims of World War II throughout the world. It expressed deep regrets, recognizing the pain perpetrated on other nations, particularly in Asia, through our colonial domination and invasion acts. The resolution stated “We must humbly learn historical lessons and sincerely build a peaceful international

community, transcending the difference in historical perspective about the war. This House of Representatives expresses our determination to open up the future of human cohabitation under the ideal of perpetual peace upheld in the Constitution of Japan, hand in hand with other nations of the world.”

It was quite significant that the resolution was made “transcending the difference in historical perspective about the war.” I earnestly hope that the younger generations and ensuing generations will “endeavour to learn humbly from lessons of history and build a peaceful international community.” It is so regrettable that some right-wingers protest this noble resolution.

Abolishing the Death Penalty

Another good example of the “frogs in a well” mind-set is the issue of the death penalty. Since this is a very important issue, which I have fought all my life to abolish, allow me to make my case.

Death penalty abolition has become a mainstream international trend. Of some 200 countries existing in the world today, 140 have either abolished or suspended death penalty. Only 21 countries executed death sentences in 2012. Among the 34 member states of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, a group of advanced countries), only the United States, Japan and South Korea still have not abolished the death penalty system. Korea, however, suspended it almost

two decades ago, and with the unlikelihood of its resumption, the country is considered by the international community as having abolished the system. As for the United States, with its federal system, 18 out of 50 states have abolished death penalty and many governors of states still having the system refuse to execute. This trend is expected to strengthen.

Among the OECD countries, only Japan has neither abolished nor suspended death penalty. The government has not even deliberated the issue. Moreover, the law stipulating the death penalty was implemented in the early Meiji era, and has been consistently maintained into the post-war decades. The method of execution is still the same -- hanging as in the early Meiji era.

The European Union (EU) makes the abolition of the death penalty as a condition for the EU membership. Turkey, an Islamic state, abolished the death penalty in order to join the EU (although it still has not been admitted). This is a well-known story internationally. Most of the countries that make Islam the state religion also impose death sentences. The fact that Turkey, majority being Muslim, abolished it indicates how important the issue of abolishing the death penalty has become.

The United Nations (UN), in a proactive move, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947. The UN adopted the so-called Death Penalty Abolition Treaty in 1989, which 76 countries have since ratified, but not Japan. Each year

since 1997, the UN has passed a resolution to abolish the death penalty in the UN Human Rights Commission. Moreover, the UN General Assembly adopted in 2007, and almost annually thereafter, a resolution demanding countries still maintaining the death penalty system to abandon it. Although Japan continues to be advised annually by the UN Human Rights Rules Commission and other commissions to abolish our system, we continue to ignore their advice because these resolutions and recommendations are not binding.

The grounds on which the UN and the international community seeks to abolish the death penalty derives from the “every person has a right to his life” position stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The following points are expressed in every resolution by the countries supporting the abolition of the death penalty:

- The death penalty is an inhuman punishment depriving the punished of irreplaceable life.
- Court trials and judgements always have a risk of erred decision.
- Evidence that the death penalty may act as a deterrent is questionable.
- The death penalty is self-contradictory for any state whose primary duty is to preserve life and assets of its people but death penalty means the state killing its citizens.

All of the countries that abolished death penalty introduced a lifetime imprisonment system (without parole) as the toughest form of punishment. I doubt that many Japanese are aware of this international trend.

The death penalty is a matter of human rights. The Japanese governmental organization that is engaged with human right protection is the Human Rights Protection Commission working under the Human Rights Protection Bureau of the Ministry of Justice. It is not “autonomous from the government” which is an international standard today. The Commission has little authority and is rarely invited to international conferences of the UN Human Rights Commission.

In contrast, South Korea has State Human Rights Commission that is independent of the government. This official Korean group has considerable authority and is very actively engaged internationally.

Japan cannot ever be described to “share same values on human rights” within the international community because of this situation. We must be aware that the international community looks at Japan's isolationist behaviour on this issue in bewilderment in this 21st century, and we must be conscious of how this issue makes us isolated.

Showing Our Grateful Heart to the International Community

Most Japanese remember so well how the world extended their warm support to us in the aftermath of the mega earthquakes and murderous tsunami in March of 2011. Almost all of us are deeply grateful to the kind and generous help from abroad.

On the other hand, the survivors of the catastrophe in Northeast also impressed the world with their serene and orderly attitude despite the enormous tragedy and loss they had undergone. Their serenity, mutual help and self-disciplines were conveyed abroad and helped upgrade the Japanese reputation.

This behaviour of the catastrophe-hit North easterner Japanese may have changed foreigners' perceptions of our nation. They indeed helped upgrade the Japanese reputation. Some of foreigners may now understand what Tanzan Ishibashi meant decades ago, "The real nature of the Japanese people has been to be fair and not self-centred."

Japan relies on the external world for our affluent life, importing over 90% of our energy and 70% of the food we consume. These are paid by incomes earned from our exports of goods and services. As such, our life is maintained through interdependence with other countries and peoples on this planet. We must not forget to be thankful for this arrangement, and not just for the external assistance to the 2011 earthquake and

tsunami catastrophe. We must strive to show always our appreciation to the world. Overseas development assistance (ODA) should be regarded as such an expression rather than with the arrogant air of “We are helping the poor.”

In this connection, I would like to introduce a beautiful episode that we Japanese must never forget. It was the historical speech made by President Chiang Kai-shek of the Chinese Nationalist Party that represented China internationally at the end of WWII. I am referring to this episode, because, very unfortunately, few Japanese are aware of it.

Chiang Kai-shek’s Tolerance

Towards the very end of WWII, President Chiang Kai-shek had the information that Japan was going to accept the Potsdam Declaration. On the day before the Japanese surrender, he advised Field Marshall Yasuji Okamura, the head of the Japanese military operations in China, to surrender. The Chinese President stayed in his office all day drafting a speech to be broadcast the next day. The most memorable points of this outstanding speech are:

- Our anti-Japanese war ended in victory today. Have pride in the highest virtue in the Chinese tradition - Remember not to do evil deeds against others and do good to all the people.
- If we encounter violence with violence and their wrong

sense of superiority with insults, hatred creates hatred and our fights will never cease.

- Meet the hatred with virtues.

He ordered the Chinese people to let the Japanese military forces, which had been warring for a decade inside China, to return home without harm. His order was solemnly obeyed. Over one million Japanese soldiers and over half a million Japanese civilians in China were able to return home in an orderly manner. Although the Japanese military forces were disarmed, astonishingly they were allowed to carry weapons for self-defence and for protecting the Japanese civilians returning home. This tolerant measure paints a sharp contrast with the Soviet Union. The Soviets captured and sent over 600,000 Japanese soldiers to Siberia and engaged them in forced labour. China did not pursue war criminals as was done in Southeast Asia.

I learned this shortly after the end of the war. China, as reflected in my child's mind, was a great country. It is probable that many Japanese shared my sense of admiration, and those who came home safely must have been deeply grateful to the Chinese. Remarkably, the Chinese people raised thousands of Japanese orphans left in China. I often wonder whether we Japanese could have shown similar love of humanity, if the situation had been reversed.

When Japan restored independence from the occupation forces through the San Francisco Treaty in 1952, President Chiang again astonishingly decided to forego the right to demand war reparations from Japan. If he had not foregone the right, Japan would have been burdened with enormous reparation payments, which would have slowed our post-war recovery and reconstruction. My appreciation of him is only enhanced with the passage of time.

President Chiang was a Christian but his thinking and action derive from the spirit of the Chinese civilization dating back for millennia to the teachings of Confucius, Mencius, and other ancient sages. We Japanese have also studied them and learned a lot from them. “Don’t do to others what you do not wish done to yourself.” It is the universal moral/ethical standard called the “Golden Rule” commonly found in all the world’s great religions and philosophy. We should always remain true to this ethical teaching.

A shrine was built in my hometown about three decades ago to celebrate President Chiang Kai-shek by donations of those who respected his virtue. A memorial service is held there annually on the anniversary of his death.

Young People: Travel Abroad!!

I would encourage young people to travel, study, and live abroad whenever possible. One always makes new discoveries and meet

people whom he/she can never even hope to meet at home. More importantly, travel expands one's horizon and enriches his/her mind.

When I was young, Japan was so poor and foreign exchanges were naturally very scarce. All the miniscule foreign exchanges were assigned for the importation of machines and raw materials. This made travelling or studying abroad impossible for us, other than a handful of geniuses who were smart enough to win Fulbright Scholarships or other assistance programs.

The first time I travelled abroad was in 1963, when I turned 30. The Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship (AOTS)⁵ was sending its first mission to survey some 500 students and trainees who had studied in Japan and returned home. I had been involved with the group – even living with them in the Asian Cultural Center - since my student days. I was very keen to find out with my own eyes how they were faring back home. The objective was to use our findings to improve our future assistance programs.

It was a 50-day trip, visiting Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand Burma (Myanmar today), East Pakistan (Bangladesh today), India, West Pakistan (Pakistan

⁵ 《 Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship 》 An organization established in 1959 to give industrial and technical training to foreign youths. It was renamed The Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships (still called AOTS in short) in 2012.

today), Ceylon (Sri Lanka today), Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Okinawa (which was still under the US occupation and treated as a foreign country).

I felt the mission was a great success. We visited most of the job sites of the returned trainees and had very cordial and useful meetings with them. My proposal to create an alumni association in each country was enthusiastically endorsed and the Asian Cultural Center Alumni Association was launched in many countries.

What struck me most during this survey mission was the widespread poverty in Southeast Asia. While countries attained independence after WWII, even after nearly two decades, they still could not see any path towards autonomous development. Japan by then was more or less recovered from the war destruction. For me, though, the poverty I witnessed seemed quite similar to the poverty of my home village during and immediately after the war.

At the same time, both the former trainees and young children everywhere exhibited impressive vitality, despite their poverty. It reminded me of the Japanese shortly after the war, when we were filled with hopes for a better tomorrow under democracy, even though we barely had any daily necessities.

I was convinced that, just like us, they would rise out of this poverty, as long as motivated youths like my friends would make the utmost of efforts, and that they would walk on the path

of stable autonomous development. We were confident that our cooperation projects would certainly be beneficial and useful someday, not only for them but also for the future of our country. Asia has grown enormously since and people are confident, looking towards an even better future.

Later on, I became a lawyer and then in my 50's I entered national politics. I placed a priority on and exerted all my efforts towards the promotion of overseas development assistance. Throughout these decades, I have been so fortunate to travel both officially and privately to over 100 countries on five continents of the world. Even though the places I visited are still very limited parts of the world, I have acquired an immense amount of knowledge from these trips and missions. There have been so many encounters and discoveries, and my perspective has widened enormously.

The most important discovery was that there are thousands of peoples, ethnicities, and tribes, each having its own long history and unique culture. These peoples exchanged and intermingled with others for millennia, sometimes tragically washed away by the rise and fall of states. I was able to understand that today's global community was formed through these exchanges and interactions just as a textile is woven with layers of vertical and horizontal threads. Travelling has taught me so much about the world and, in turn and more importantly, about ourselves.

In this age of the internet, today's youths may think it's not necessary to go abroad, since any information from anywhere on this globe is instantly available digitally. While I agree with the importance of such a readily available information system, I am still convinced from my own experiences that "seeing is believing." Having personal contacts with other people, and feeling them with our own senses are so much more important for genuine human understanding. That is why I so strongly recommend that young people travel abroad.



*An American soldier giving water to a little girl in Okinawa after
the fiercest ground battles on the islands*



Heart-to-Heart was the central message of the Fukuda Doctrine delivered by the late Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, my mentor, pledging to the ASEAN nations and beyond that Japan would never again become a militaristic.



Epilogue

As I look back over eight decades of my long life, it sometimes feels as though it has passed almost at the speed of an arrow, despite so many dramatic changes that I experienced. In August 1945, the thoroughly brainwashed 11 year-old military boy became a baseball boy almost overnight. During my university years and for a decade after graduation, I assisted foreign students. I took up a law practice in my mid-thirties, entered national politics in my early fifties, retired from the political life after a quarter of a century, and now I am back to practicing law.

Japan, too, was changed beyond anyone's imagination during my lifetime. The horrendous war years, the devastating defeat and utter poverty of the 1940s, years of determined and concentrated efforts on reconstruction in the 1950s, high-economic growth and an era full of dreams in the 1960s and '70s, the unbelievable greed and wealth of the financial bubble and material-oriented phase in the 1980s, the bubble collapse and the ensuing two decades of stagnation. Entering the globalized

economy in the 21st century, Japan has faced horrendous natural disasters and now faces the uncertain future with an aging society and diminishing population.

The world's change was even more enormous: post-war reconstructions to independence from colonial powers in many parts of the world and the five decades of the cold-war that defined the world but ended in the last decade of the 20th century. Now the new century is marked with the age of terrorism and increasingly divisive societies marked by hateful rhetorics.

In retrospect, I am deeply grateful for all the blessings bestowed upon me in my life – just to name a few, a strong and healthy body and mind that can cope with dramatic changes, my devoted and loving family, and the countless number of kind and good-willed friends and supporters. The remaining time of my life will likely pass at the speed of light. This realization makes me wish that I could live the remainder of my life in sincere and deep gratitude, in such a way that I will not regret at the end.

Clearly, one of the most important things left for me was to leave a message to the future generations about the lessons I learned from the egregious wars Japan fought in the last century. That was what I attempted with this booklet

This book was first published in Japanese by Bungei Shunju Publishing House in 2014. It was meant to be a monologue of an octogenarian, who had experienced World War

II as a country boy, and who later developed a strong view about that war. When the book was printed in Japanese, many of my friends advised me to have it translated into English so that readers abroad could understand why such horrible wars had to take place in Asia during the first half of the 20th century. According to them, a Japanese pacifist's perspective on the subject is so scarce in English. I could not, however, make up my mind on what seemed to be an enormous undertaking.

Last year, I was hospitalized for the first time in my long life. It was not due to an illness, but an accident. I slipped off a stairway of a golf course on a day after a heavy rain in May. As a rib, nose, jaws, and cheekbones were broken or cracked, I was tied to a hospital bed for a month. (In a totally helpless and dependent situation, I became aware for the first time how fragile and helpless human being can be.)

I clearly remembered a dream I had in an unconscious period during my hospitalization. I was crossing *Sanzu no kawa*, (the River of the Three Hells in Buddhism, similar to River Styx in Greek mythology), or crossing the river that separates the living from the dead. I saw the smiling faces of thousands of those who had passed away, welcoming me. I thought I knew where I was!!

I regained consciousness and, miraculously, there was no damage to my head and brain. It became possible to use the

bed-confined time to look back and contemplate on my life. I somehow came to understand that I had been spared from death as I still had a duty to fulfil: to complete my message to the future generations and to repay all the peoples and societies, which have given me all that I have. So, I agreed to have the book translated into English, primarily for uploading it, along with the Japanese version, on my website <http://www.asanuma-law.jp/> My good friend of decades, Keiko Atsumi, volunteered to undertake the enormous task of editing and translating the book for foreign consumption, with advices from several other kind friends.

There are too many names – thousands of people – that I must mention to express my appreciation. In order to avoid the inevitable but gross mistake of missing some names, I have decided to thank everyone categorically. I would like to express my deepest and most sincere gratitude to the Universe, to my home town and its wonderful people, to my ancestors, all my great mentors and friends, and above all to my family members.

As I observe alarmingly the increasingly divisive world, the great message of the Golden Rule keeps coming back to my heart and mind: “Don’t do to others what you do not wish done to yourself.”

May peace prevail in the world.

January 2018, Seiken Sugiura

Photo and Sketch Accreditation

Front cover: A woodblock print of Mt. Fuji seen from a sea by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849)

Back cover: A woodblock print of Okazaki by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Now a ferro-concrete bridge remains in the same place.

Sketches: By Koji Honda

Photos: Page 1: History of WWII Air Attacks, Standards Co., Ltd., 2017

Page 14: History of WWII Air Attacks, Standards Co.,Ltd., 2017

Page 15: from the Sugiura Family album

Page 42: by Don O'Donnell

Page 65: From The Pacific War Kawade Shobo, 2015

Page 102: History of WWII Air Attacks, Standards Co.,Ltd.2017

Page 129: From The Pacific War, Kawade Shobo, 2015

Page 132: From www.Heart-to-Heart-World.Org

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