

## From “International” to “Global”: Diplomatic Reflections on Modern Japan beyond a West European World

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Audiences across the globe tuned in to their TVs on Friday, July 27, 2012 anticipating a dramatic spectacle. With the bar set high in Beijing in 2008, the pressure was on for host, London, and creator, celebrated British director Danny Boyle, to dazzle with the opening ceremony of the 30th Olympic Games. In numbers of viewers, the extravaganza was a rousing success—with an average audience of 22.3 million, the celebration joined the ranks of the twenty most watched television programs in British history.<sup>1</sup> The 40.7 American observers topped American ratings for the opening of the 1996 summer games in Atlanta.<sup>2</sup> And according to the International Olympic Committee’s marketing director, just under 900 million people worldwide tuned in to London at some point on the 27th, very close to the billion some-odd viewers for Beijing.<sup>3</sup>

At a time when intellectual life is moving precipitously away from West-European-centric visions of the world, it is, perhaps, fitting, though deeply ironic, that Britain’s masters of entertainment accentuated to the world the long-term mainstream vision of modern world history originally hatched in their own back yard. Boyle and his producers offered a triumphal vision of smokestacks rising from idyllic greens, yielding to a pluralistic society of naturalized immigrants, women’s rights and internationalism (in the forging of the five golden rings of the Olympics).<sup>4</sup> Presented for the benefit of 900 million prime time viewers worldwide was, in other words, a captivating reiteration of the orthodox history of political and industrial revolution.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Farey-Jones. “London 2012 Opening Ceremony Peaks at 26.9m Viewers.” *Brand Republic News*, August 6, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press. “London 2012 Opening Ceremony Audience Hit 900 Million Predicts IOC.” *The Independent*, August 7, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> For a brief but useful description, see “Left-Right London.” *The Friday Times*, August 10, 2012.

## Toward a “Global History” of Japan

This vignette accentuates the degree to which the long-term mainstream narrative of the modern world remains alive and well, even in the realm of popular culture. But we live in a global world. Intellectual life in the twenty-first century should no longer be defined by the national narrative of one or two West European states. In pondering the future of intellectual life and, more specifically, of Japanese studies, one wonders about the persistent West European-centrism of current scholarship. Copenhagen is a fitting venue for such speculation. For Nordic scholars have struggled like others outside of Britain and France to deal with the West European-centrism of the last hundred and fifty years.

Historians have, for some time now, debated how best to transform our discipline for the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> And diplomatic historians have grappled even longer with the question of how to make our discipline relevant for a new age. Diplomatic history, after all, traditionally pays close attention to States and Great Men, which have, for some time now, been considered passé. Over the last two decades, however, diplomatic historians have transformed their discipline. Labeled “international history,” the field now focuses less on States than on transnational processes; less on Great Men than on the activities of a variety of citizens, public and private in an assortment of issues of national and transnational, significance—war, rebellion, migration, famine, health, etc.<sup>6</sup>

This paper suggests ways in which the new international history may help us rethink Japanese studies for the twenty-first century. In particular, we may learn much from the efforts of international historians to think beyond the State. The point is not to abandon our interest in Japan. It is, rather, to try as much as possible to view developments within Japan as related to larger global processes. It is to replace the image of a unique Japan for one that helps highlight the complexities of the world in which we live.

Our dependence on West European paradigms has long sustained a vision of Japanese “uniqueness.” The following analysis attempts to demonstrate how overcoming this West-European-centrism may help change the way we view a particular era of Japanese history, the interwar period. The focus lies less on trans-border phenomena themselves than upon developments within Japan that echo larger global processes. This is less a transnational history than a global one, one that highlights the importance of individual states even as it confirms important synergies across national borders.

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<sup>5</sup> See, in particular, Akira Iriye. “The Internationalization of History.” *American Historical Review* 94:1 (February 1989), pp. 1–10.

<sup>6</sup> For a brief but useful explication of the “new international history,” see Akira Iriye. “Transnational History.” *Contemporary European History* 13:2 (May 2004), pp. 211–22.

## Interwar Japan through a West European Lens

The interwar years are a critical era of transition, intimately tied to the greatest disaster of the twentieth century. Although an age of peace, the close connection between these years and the Second World War makes them particularly vulnerable to distortions of historical memory. Great calamities such as war, indeed, have a powerful affect upon how history is written. It is the Second World War, for example, that has ensured the continued longevity of West European-centrism to the present. Britain and the United States, after all, triumphed, and obtained with military victory the right to determine how we view modern history.

From the perspective of Britain and the United States, World War II was a battle between liberal internationalism and fascism/totalitarianism. There is, of course, much debate about the degree to which the principal enemies of the U.S. and Britain—Germany and Japan—were actually “fascist” or “totalitarian.”<sup>7</sup> At the very least, however, given the persistence of the victors’ paradigm of “liberalism vs. fascism,” the orthodox narrative of the twentieth century continues to view both early twentieth century Germany and Japan as aberrant polities, whose “detour” from liberal, democratic norms was the principal cause of the Second World War.

Historians of modern Japan have long noted important political changes in Japan following the First World War—bourgeois party rule, a vibrant national labor movement, women and minority rights, proletarian parties, etc.<sup>8</sup> But these glimpses of political liberalization have invariably been accompanied by tales of structural weaknesses in Japanese democracy.<sup>9</sup> This tale of failure derives from the idea that Japan did not follow a “proper” pattern of political and economic development as established particularly in Britain: 1) Japan did not experience economic and political revolution until the late nineteenth century; 2) these revolutions proceeded from above, not as grass-roots political movements, and; 3) as a consequence, inordinate power devolved to the monarchy and its military-bureaucratic allies. Reforms of the 1920s, according to this scenario, rested upon flimsy foundations and were destined to founder—and lead to war.

The difficulty with this narrative is two-fold. First, it allows for little historical contingency, characterizing war as the inevitable consequence of a “peculiar” path to modernity. Second, it rests upon the notion that political and economic revolution as followed in varying degrees by Britain, France and the United States constitutes a “standard” development model.

If we broaden our vision just slightly, however, we understand that the exception lies not with the Japanese experience, but with the rarified model presented at the opening ceremony of

<sup>7</sup> For a useful recent summary of the debate on Japanese fascism, see Janis Mimura. *Planning for Empire: Reform Bureaucrats and the Japanese Wartime State*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, pp. 4–5.

<sup>8</sup> See the classic study of the interwar years, Bernard S. Silberman and H.D. Harootunian, eds. *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> The latest iteration of this in English is the notion of Japanese “imperial democracy.” According to Andrew Gordon, the juxtaposition of empire and democracy in Japan marked an inherent contradiction and, eventually, “Japanese leaders chose emperor and empire over democracy.” Andrew Gordon. *A Modern History of Japan*, 2nd edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 180.

the London Olympics. Yes, political revolution visited Britain, France and the United States as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But such dramatic transformation occurred much later in most of the rest of the world. More importantly, despite revolutionary progress at such an early date, political change remained an ongoing process everywhere. Japan underwent her own revolution in the latter nineteenth century at the very moment that dramatic change again swept Europe. The mass uprisings of 1848 carried the lessons of the French Revolution one step further, compelling even “mature” Western liberal states to tinker with a new type of state concept—the “nation-state,” to deal with the widespread disruptions of the industrial revolution.<sup>10</sup> In this context, change in all states, including Japan, contributed to the general political advance of the world. American Secretary of State James G. Blaine described Japan’s constitution of 1890 as an improvement over European and American models and, thus, a “step forward in constitutional law.”<sup>11</sup>

As for economic change, what we know as the “industrial revolution”—the transformation of agriculture, manufacturing, mining, transportation and technology between 1750 and 1850—is very much a British phenomenon. Much of the rest of the world, including Japan, underwent similar changes—and more—during what is commonly identified as the “Second Industrial Revolution” after 1850. Indeed, the United States, like Japan, remained an agricultural country throughout the nineteenth century. Charles Dickens visited the U.S. in the 1840s and complained of grunting pigs on the streets of Manhattan.<sup>12</sup> As late as 1916, a State Department report judged road conditions in the U.S. as “far worse than any other major nation except Russia and China.”<sup>13</sup>

Nor did the peculiar brand of private entrepreneurship and free trade, described by Adam Smith in 1776 as “laissez-faire,” gain any global traction until after the Second World War. In the 1880s, the American institution of higher education, the University of Pennsylvania, required that economics professors not subscribe to the theory of free trade.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one of the founders of modern Japan, Itō Hirobumi accentuated mainstream mercantilist views at this time when he decried the irresponsibility of free trade doctrines espoused in Britain and argued that “Japan should follow the example of the United States and establish a protective tariff to ensure the prosperity of domestic manufactures.”<sup>15</sup>

The opening of the London Olympics made surprisingly little reference to an aspect of nineteenth century British life just as important as economic and political progress—empire. But specialists of world history know that the latter nineteenth century was an age of empires,

<sup>10</sup> See Robert B. Marks. *The Origins of the Modern World*, 2nd edition. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> Kokaze Hidemasa. “The Political Space of Meiji 22 (1889): The Promulgation of the Constitution and the Birth of the Nation.” *Japan Review* 23 (2011), p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Leo Damrosch. *Tocqueville’s Discovery of America*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Earl Swift. *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> James Fallows. “How the World Works.” *The Atlantic Monthly* 272:6 (December 1993), p. 82.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth Pyle. *The Making of Modern Japan*, 2nd edition. New York: Wadsworth, 1995, p. 100.

when any power with a claim to membership in world “civilization” had to demonstrate its worthiness by force of arms and acquisition of territories. Japan’s crash investment in arms and empire in the latter nineteenth century is significant not for its demonstration of Japanese “militarism” and extraordinary appetite for conquest but for revealing the prevailing standards of late nineteenth century national life. Indeed, Foreign Minister Inoue Kaoru famously described Japan’s principal foreign policy goal in 1887 as the attempt “to establish a new, European-style empire on the edge of Asia.”<sup>16</sup>

## World War I Watershed

How might abandoning our ideas of Japanese exceptionalism change the way we view interwar Japanese state and society?<sup>17</sup> If focused on structural weakness, the tale of interwar Japan becomes a story of a slippery slope to war. Without the obsessive concern for conflicts with a West European model, however, Japan in the 1920s becomes less a glimpse of causes of the Manchurian Incident than the departure point for a much larger discussion of the character of twentieth century life. It becomes, in particular, a tale of the enormous global impact of the First World War.

Historians have long debated the degree to which the Great War constituted a watershed in world history. Recent scholarship on Europe has downplayed the notion of a conspicuous departure. Champions of a “long nineteenth century” stress the dramatic effect of prolonged transformation for over a century preceding the war.<sup>18</sup> Specialists of memory have noted the persistence of traditional motifs across the 1918 divide.<sup>19</sup> General studies of the twentieth century continue to suggest the inseparability of World War I and II—a “Second Thirty Years War.”<sup>20</sup> Japan specialists have, likewise, long given short shrift to the 1914–19 years. If the modern Japanese polity is considered structurally unsound,<sup>21</sup> then the First World War serves little but to confirm adverse trends begun decades before the twentieth century.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Marius B. Jansen. “Modernization and Foreign Policy in Meiji Japan.” In Robert E. Ward, ed. *Political Development in Modern Japan*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 175.

<sup>17</sup> For a more sustained exposition, see Frederick R. Dickinson. *World War I and the Triumph of a New Japan, 1919–1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> See C.A. Bayly. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780–1914*. Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2004.

<sup>19</sup> See Jay Winter. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995; and Thomas W. Laquer. “Names, Bodies and the Anxiety of Erasure.” In Theodore R. Schatzki and Wolfgang Natter, eds. *The Social and Political Body*. New York: Guilford Press, 1996, pp. 123–44.

<sup>20</sup> See Anthony Shaw and Ian Westwell, eds. *The World in Conflict, 1914–1945*. London: Routledge, 2000. This perspective has a long history. See also P.M.H. Bell. *The Origins of the Second World War in Europe*. London: Pearson, 1986; Michael Howard. “A Thirty Year’s War? The Two World Wars in Historical Perspective.” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6:3 (1993), pp. 171–84; and Eric Hobsbawm. *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914–1991*. New York: Vintage, 1994, which identifies the First through Second World Wars in Part I as an “age of catastrophe.”

<sup>21</sup> For the classic presentation of this argument, see Rekishigaku Kenkyūkai, ed. *Kindai Nihon no keisei* (Formation of Modern Japan). Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1953. For a related argument in English, see John W. Dower, ed. *Origins of the Modern Japanese State: Selected Writings of E.H. Norman*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.

Viewed from the perspective of Japanese contemporaries, however, the war marked a pivotal departure. Japan declared war in August 1914 and played a critical supporting role for the Entente. It ejected German forces from Qingdao, China and German Micronesia, protected convoys of Australian and New Zealand troops from the Pacific to Aden, hunted German submarines in the Mediterranean, and provided desperately needed shipping, copper, munitions and ¥640 million in loans to its allies.<sup>22</sup>

Japan's war experience, of course, differed markedly from that of the main belligerents. Casualties numbered only slightly more than 2,000,<sup>23</sup> and far from smarting, the Japanese economy boomed. As in Europe, few Japanese subjects in 1914 could fully anticipate the consequences of general hostilities in 1914. But many shared a sense of the monumental importance of European events. As Seiyūkai President Hara Takashi declared on August 4, 1914, the turmoil marked "an unexpectedly large disturbance that threatens to become the largest war since Napoleon I."<sup>24</sup>

The primary import of the "European War" for Japan, however, had less to do with the scale of the conflict than with something more fundamental. As Tokyo Mayor Sakatani Yoshirō observed, the present global standard was the product of 400 years of European and American culture. A general European conflict meant war "in the heart of world civilization, in the heart of world finance, in the heart of world transportation." It was like succumbing to illness in the most precious organs of the heart and lungs.<sup>25</sup>

Long before the full physical effects of the Great War became apparent, in other words, observers in Japan, as well as in Europe, anticipated the most fundamental consequences of a general European conflagration: an epic transformation of international politics and culture. At the very least, such a conflict would mark the end of European centrality in modern civilization. Given the overwhelming importance of European models in the construction of the modern world, a general war threatened profound repercussions across the globe, including

<sup>22</sup> Major K.F. Baldwin, Office of the Chief of Staff, War Department, Military Intelligence Division. "A Brief Account of Japan's Part in the World War" (September 16, 1921), p. 6. Stanley K. Hornbeck papers, Box 255, "War Costs and Contributions" file, The Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace.

<sup>23</sup> According to contemporary American sources, the Imperial Japanese Army suffered 414 dead, 1,441 wounded in the siege of Qingdao. Navy losses numbered 317 killed and 76 wounded. Army figures from Major K.F. Baldwin, Office of the Chief of Staff, War Department, Military intelligence Division, "Memorandum for Colonel Graham," September 16, 1921. Navy figures from U.S. Secretary of the Navy Edwin Denby letter to Secretary of State, September 23, 1921. Both documents in Stanley K. Hornbeck Papers, Box 255, "Japan: War Costs and Contributions" File, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace. Contemporary public sources in Japan pronounced Japanese casualties at Qingdao at 550 dead and 1,500 wounded and made note of 1,500 casualties in Siberia. "Sekai sensō no kessan" (Accounting of the World War). *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, December 28, 1919; reprinted in Nakajima Kenzō, comp. *Shinbun shūroku Taishōshi*. 15 vols. Tokyo: Taishō Shuppan, 1978, vol. 7, p. 449.

<sup>24</sup> Hara Keiichirō, ed. *Hara Takashi nikki* (Diary of Hara Takashi). 6 vols. Tokyo: Fukumura Shuppan, 1981, vol. 4, pp. 25–26 (diary entry for August 4, 1914). For an in-depth look at Japanese reactions to the outbreak of war in Europe, see Frederick R. Dickinson. "The View from Japan: War and Peace in Europe around 1914." In Holger Afflerbach and David Stevenson, eds. *An Improbable War?* New York: Berghahn Books, 2007, pp. 303–319.

<sup>25</sup> Sakatani Yoshirō. "Ōshū sensō to sono keizai kankei" (Economic Aspects of the European War). *Taiyō* 20:11 (September 1, 1914), p. 135.

in Japan. It is no wonder that the British editor of the English-language daily, *Japan Chronicle*, observed that “by the end of July 1914 developments on the other side of the world, perhaps for the first time in Japan’s history, eclipsed more local interests.”<sup>26</sup>

## Age of Reconstruction

In the historiography of modern Europe, the most tangible confirmation of the impact of World War I comes in coverage of the monumental effort at reconstruction following wartime devastation.<sup>27</sup> But the impulse to rebuild was not confined to territories physically leveled by artillery.<sup>28</sup> If the Great War marked the rise of a new definition of civilization, the necessity to retool naturally reached well beyond areas of physical destruction.

At the very moment that European statesmen began devoting massive resources to physical reconstruction, policy-makers in Tokyo began repositioning Japan in the vastly altered circumstances of the postwar world. Returning from an eight-month Euro-American tour in 1919, former Foreign Minister Gotō Shinpei called for a cabinet-level research institution like the then ubiquitous European ministries of reconstruction.<sup>29</sup> The Hara cabinet (1918–21) did not ultimately create the Japanese equivalent of a European ministry of reconstruction. But it did begin a decade of reform that mirrored many of the rebuilding efforts in Europe. As Prime Minister Katō Takaaki declared in May 1925, “The Japanese people...must come together in a grand resolution and effort to build the foundations for a New Japan.”<sup>30</sup>

Japan specialists have long identified the nineteenth century as a striking era of nation building, whereby Japan became the first non-Western realm to transform from a feudal society into a modern state and economic “powerhouse.”<sup>31</sup> The extraordinary scope of Japan’s reconstruction after 1918 may be gleaned from the way Japanese contemporaries understood it to be equivalent to the earlier nation-building project. Many Japanese subjects, in fact, made explicit parallels with the Meiji Restoration. As Hara Takashi remarked in June 1917, “for

<sup>26</sup> A. Morgan Young, *Japan under Taishō Tenno 1912–1926*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928, p. 70.

<sup>27</sup> Reflecting the relative severity of economic dislocations over physical destruction, most scholarship on postwar reconstruction in Europe focuses on economic issues, such as currency stabilization, reparations, restoration of trade and transportation networks, excess capacity, etc. For a useful synopsis of these issues, see Derek Aldcroft, *The European Economy 1914–2000*. New York: Routledge, 2001, chps. 1–3.

<sup>28</sup> Analyses of cultural reconstruction have increasingly highlighted the critical enterprise of rebuilding beyond Europe. They remain, however, generally focused upon societies with a strong physical participation in the war. Ana Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), for example, details the physical and cultural reconstruction of bodies in Europe, the United States and Australia.

<sup>29</sup> Reflecting the new imperial reign of Taishō, Gotō proposed an institution called the State Committee for Taishō Renovation. “Gotō Fumio shi danwa dai ikkai sokkikoku” (First Record of Gotō Fumio’s Reflections). In Naiseishi Kenkyūkai, ed. *Naiseishi kenkyū shiryō* 4 (July 11, 1963), pp. 51–53. Cambridge, MA: Harvard-Yenching Library.

<sup>30</sup> Katō Takaaki. “Meika no sakebi” (Celebrity Appeal). *King* 1:5 (May 1925), p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> See Gordon 2009, p. 93.

the first time in fifty years since the renovation (*ishin*), it is time for national renewal (*kokka sasshin*).”<sup>32</sup>

In echoing their mid-nineteenth century predecessors’ zeal for reform, Japanese policy-makers and opinion-leaders after the First World War pursued a strikingly similar strategy. Just as modern Japan’s founders began their epic transformation by condemning “evil customs” of the past,<sup>33</sup> the campaign to construct a New Japan in the 1920s stood upon a vociferous denunciation of recent history.<sup>34</sup> Tokyo University political scientist Yoshino Sakuzō declared in 1919 that peace had arrived, “with the general awakening of public sentiment from the old aggressive militarism.”<sup>35</sup>

Like its nineteenth century predecessor, the interwar vision of passing darkness was accompanied by clamorous appeals for a new opening to the world. Tokyo University religious scholar Anesaki Masaharu urged his countrymen to abandon “the tendency toward a closed country (*sakokuteki keikō*)” exemplified by weapons, self-sufficiency and economic autonomy and awaken to “the grand spirit of promoting an open country (*kaikoku*)” following world trends.<sup>36</sup>

Historians who have noted the impact of the Great War in Japan have stressed the defensive nature of a Japanese response.<sup>37</sup> But if, like its nineteenth century predecessor, reconstruction in the 1920s began with a thunderous denunciation of the past and clamorous appeals for a new “opening,” it was, most importantly, sustained by a buoyantly hopeful vision for the future. According to the Dawn Society, formed by Yoshino Sakuzō and like-minded intellectuals in 1918, the Great War had been a “war for liberalism, progressivism and democracy (*minponshugi*) against autocracy, conservatism and militarism. With this shining victory and peace, the peoples of the world have hope, for the first time, for a truly civilized way of life.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Hara 1981, vol. 4, p. 291 (Diary entry of June 2, 1917).

<sup>33</sup> This was the terminology of the 1868 Charter Oath. Translation in Wm. Theodore de Bary, ed. *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. 2 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964, vol. 2, p. 137.

<sup>34</sup> In some cases, the architects of a New Japan borrowed wholesale the language of the Meiji Renovation. As the Ministry of Education urged in 1922, the Japanese should “sweep away the evil customs” of the past. Quoted in Sheldon Garon. “Rethinking Modernization and Modernity in Japanese History: A Focus on State-Society Relations.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 53:2 (May 1994), p. 356.

<sup>35</sup> Yoshino Sakuzō. “Teikokushugi yori kokusai minshushugi e” (From Imperialism to International Democracy). *Rokugō zasshi*, June/July 1919; reprinted in Ōta Masao, ed. *Shiryō Taishō demokurashī ronsōshū*. 2 vols. Tokyo: Shinsensha, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 199–200.

<sup>36</sup> Anesaki Masaharu. “Taisen no ketchaku to sengo no shin kyokumen” (Settlement of the Great War and the New Postwar Era); Quoted in Seki Shizuo. *Taishō gaikō* (Taishō Diplomacy). Kyoto: Minerva Shobō, 2001, p. 97.

<sup>37</sup> Japanese generals, we are told, struggled to establish a new scale of preparedness befitting an age of total war. Policy-makers and pundits brooded over how to confront the likely escalation of international economic competition in an era of peace. And following the rejection at the Paris Peace Conference of Japan’s proposed “racial equality” clause in the covenant of the League of Nations, “race became a factor of heightened concern” for Japanese diplomats. See Michael Barnhart. *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987; Suetake Yoshiya. *Taishōki no seiji kōzō* (Political Structure in the Taishō Era). Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998; and Hasegawa Yūichi, ed. *Taishōki Nihon no Amerika ninshiki* (Japanese Perceptions of America in the Taishō Era). Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2001, p. 1, respectively.

<sup>38</sup> In a declaration of December 4, 1918. Quoted in Itō Takashi. *Taishōki kakushinha no seiritsu* (Formation of Reformist Groups in the Taishō Era). Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1978, p. 67.

Japan specialists typically locate the essential spirit of Meiji reform in an 1868 proclamation of the emperor known as the Charter Oath. Likewise, the zeal for change following the Great War was embodied in the Imperial Rescript on the Establishment of Peace of January 1920:<sup>39</sup>

“The course of events has completely changed and remains in the process of transformation. It is time to follow a path of great effort and flexibility. You subjects should pursue this deeply and officials of the land should faithfully follow this by attempting to realize, in accordance with the international situation, a League of Nations peace.”

### Age of Peace

Treatments of the global cultural impact of the Great War generally highlight the emotional trauma of wartime destruction.<sup>40</sup> Studies of the cultural flowering of the 1920s across the globe, by contrast, often speak of a “jazz age” with little direct connection to the war.<sup>41</sup> Spared the emotional trauma of World War I, Japan accentuates the degree to which the principal cultural departure of World War I lay not in a culture of loss but in a new, farther reaching, ethos of peace.

Japan specialists have generally highlighted the interwar years as an era of leisure.<sup>42</sup> But just as historians of the nineteenth century have spoken of a culture of Western fads, fashions and gadgets that accompanied Japan’s dramatic nineteenth century transformation,<sup>43</sup> one might view interwar Japan as something more than a random assortment of reforms or cult of pleasure. Just as the founders of modern Japan were inspired by Commodore Perry and his European counterparts to systematically chase symbols of Western “civilization and enlightenment,” architects of the New Japan responded to the ruin of World War I with a concerted effort to embrace a new culture of peace. As elder statesman Saionji Kinmochi declared in September 1919, it was time for Japan to invest wholeheartedly in the arts, industry and commerce, to become an active contributor to the new global “peace project” (*heiwateki jigyo*).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> “Heiwa kokufuku no Taishō happu” (Taishō Promulgation on the Establishment of Peace). *Ōsaka asahi shinbun*, January 14, 1920; reprinted in Nakajima 1978, vol. 8, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> See Paul Fussell. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975 and Winter 1995.

<sup>41</sup> See Mitchell Newton-Matza, ed. *Jazz Age: People and Perspectives*. Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2009 and Joshua Zeitz. *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern*. New York: Broadway, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> See Miriam Silverberg. *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> The passion for such culture was embodied in the official slogan, “Civilization and Enlightenment” (*bunmei kaika*).

<sup>44</sup> Ritsumeikan Daigaku Saionji Kinmochi den Hensan Iinkai, ed. *Saionji Kinmochi den* (Biography of Saionji Kinmochi). 6 vols. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993, vol. III, p. 323.

Historians typically describe Crown Prince Hirohito's six-month sojourn in Europe in 1921 as part of a new Japanese opening to the world. But the voyage, more specifically, marked the most powerful expression of a new official sponsorship of peace. At every stop along the tour, Hirohito made reference to the most fundamental principal of civilization after the war. At the threshold of Europe, Malta, he acknowledged the tragic losses of war by visiting the graves of 77 Japanese sailors who had died hunting German U-boats in the Mediterranean.<sup>45</sup> In Edinburgh, he told the boy scouts that he hoped Japan would organize a similar group to help maintain "world peace."<sup>46</sup> As he readied to depart France, he named visits to Reims and other World War I battlefields as having left the deepest impression. "How do those who glorify war," he demanded, "view places such as these?"<sup>47</sup> As one official perceptively observed upon the prince's return to Tokyo, the royal had expressed a keen desire for world peace during his tour and had "made no mention of (the Meiji slogan) rich country, strong army."<sup>48</sup>

The preeminent symbol of interwar culture, the Japanese flapper, or "modern girl" (*moga*), was much more than a "militant" defying accepted class, gender and cultural norms.<sup>49</sup> Like the latter nineteenth-century image of samurai shedding their top-knot for a Western-style "close-cropped head" (*zangiri atama*), she represented a complete transformation of national culture. The natural instinct of women, after all, as the Japanese Christian Women's Reform Society's Moriya Azuma explained in 1923, was to preserve peace.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

History as a modern discipline arose in tandem with the rise of the modern nation state. In the latter nineteenth century, as states grappled with rapid industrial growth and social transformation, the invention of a compelling narrative of change became an indispensable tool for national cohesion.<sup>51</sup> As the twentieth century thrust these nation-states into a series of ruinous wars, it is understandable that the historical narrative of a handful of victor nations came to dominate and become the standard by which all other states came to be judged. In

<sup>45</sup> Hatano Sumio et al. eds. *Jijū bukanchō Nara Takeji nikki kaisōroku* (Memoir of Chief Aide de Camp Nara Takeji). 4 vols. Tokyo: Kashiwa Shobō, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 105–106 (diary entry of April 25, 1921).

<sup>46</sup> "Napoleon shiyō no tsukue nite goshomei" (Signing on a Desk Used by Napoleon). *Tōkyō asahi shinbun*, May 23, 1921; reprinted in Nakajima 1978, vol. 9, p. 195.

<sup>47</sup> "Haru no miya iyoiyo Itarī e" (Crown Prince Finally to Italy). *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun*, July 9, 1921; reprinted in Nakajima 1978, vol. 10, p. 239.

<sup>48</sup> "Rikugun no yarikuchi ni hinan takai" (Loud Criticism of Army Methods). *Yomiuri shinbun*, September 6, 1921; reprinted in Nakajima 1978, vol. 9, p. 306.

<sup>49</sup> For this characterization, see Silverberg, "The Modern Girl as Militant." For a similar depiction of the "femme moderne" in interwar France, see Mary Louise Roberts. "Samson and Delilah Revisited: The Politics of Women's Fashion in 1920s France." *The American Historical Review* 98:3 (June 1993), pp. 657–84.

<sup>50</sup> Moriya Azuma. "Kokusai heiwa to fujin" (International Peace and Women). *Kokusai chishiki* III:4 (April 1923), p. 80.

<sup>51</sup> See Christopher L. Hill. *National History and the World of Nations: Capital, State, and the Rhetoric of History in Japan, France, and the United States*. Durham, SC: Duke University Press, 2008.

the twenty-first century, however, at a time when one or two states no longer clearly dominate world politics, economics and/or cultural life, history, and other intellectual disciplines such as Japanese studies, should be separated from the state. The point of Japanese studies in the twenty-first century should not be to stress the uniqueness of Japan. It should, rather, be to highlight ways in which events in Japan can inform us of the general human experience.

An analysis of interwar Japan should reveal more than just the sources of Japan's subsequent road to war. It should, rather, provide clues, more generally, to early twentieth century life. Developments in early twentieth century Japan, in fact, highlight the enormous global significance of the Great War. Despite their country's immense distance from the Western Front, Japanese contemporaries understood as quickly as any European statesmen the most likely outcome of the destruction of Europe: a fundamental interrogation of established notions of “civilization.” Having earlier wholeheartedly appropriated the principal standards of civilization as established in Europe, Japanese statesmen, like their European and American counterparts, embarked upon a monumental enterprise in national reconstruction after 1919. And Japan's active participation in the global reconstruction project after the Paris Peace Conference guaranteed its pivotal place in the new post-Versailles global culture of peace. It was precisely because of this active Japanese participation in a global culture of peace that the Manchurian Incident was such a shocking blow to early twentieth century life.

Once we abandon the West-European-centric vision of interwar Japan, in other words, we lose the slightly titillating notion of a “deficient” Japan. In its place, we obtain the exciting image of a Japan intimately involved in major trends in early twentieth century global life. At this time in the twenty-first century, when Japan's star is fading across the world stage, it is imperative that we jettison the lack-luster image of a “unique” Japan and accentuate to our friends across the globe the degree to which developments in Japan have had and continue to have critical affects and resonances across the globe.