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THE GOOD EMPIRE:
JAPAN'S NEW ORDER AT HOME AND ABROAD

STEPHEN E. PELZ

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PREFATORY NOTE

The Area Studies Programs within the International Programs Office of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst initiated in 1976 a series of Occasional Papers to provide an outlet for both informal and formal scholarly works of a general interest to the University community. In 1978 the first numbers in this series devoted to issues and themes related to Asia were introduced under the sponsorship of the Asian Studies Committee at the University. The initial three papers deal with topics in Japan, China and Laos. In future papers topics will be presented which encompass the major regions of Asia; East Asia (China, Japan, Korea); South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka); and Southeast Asia (Burma; Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam). Comments on the individual papers and the entire series are welcome and encouraged.

Professor Stephen E. Pelz is Associate Professor of History at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has worked in Japanese diplomatic and military archives and has published a book titled Race to Pearl Harbor: The Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II (Harvard, 1974) for which he was named co-winner of the Bernath prize of the Society for the History of American Foreign Relations.

In this paper Professor Pelz reviews the historical literature on Japanese imperialism in the 1930s and argues that a new consensus has developed: Japan adopted imperialism as a defense against western pressure. He then proceeds to revise this view by exploring the motives of four men who pushed Japan down the road to empire at critical moments, and he concludes that Japan's imperial impulse came from within Japan itself. Japanese military leaders believed that it was their duty to use modern weapons and new planning methods to create an empire which would embody and expand traditional oriental values and social arrangements, and he argues that their combined idealism and militarism made them particularly dangerous to world order. Japanese imperialism, then, was a special variant in the history of imperial expansion.
THE GOOD EMPIRE: JAPAN'S NEW ORDER AT HOME AND ABROAD

He who cares neither about his life, nor about his fame, nor about rank or money—such a man is hard to deal with... Yet it is only such a man who will undergo every hardship with his companions in order to carry out great work for the country.

Saigō Takamori

Saigō Takamori, one of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration, hated the new era which he had helped to create, for modernization required the end of the samurai and the rise of businessmen. To save his class and to preserve the unique Japanese virtues which the warriors embodied, he demanded that the new government give them the main role in Japan's rise to international dignity and power; in 1873 he proposed to lead the conquest of Korea, and when his colleagues in the government rejected his plan, he led a suicidal rebellion. By the end of the century, he had become a national hero, whose personal sacrifice inspired Japan's soldiers in their successful Korean and Chinese adventures. During the first years of Meiji, however, international success seemed far less certain; consequently, Ōkubo Toshimichi and the other realistic leaders had suffered from constant tension.

They were confident that their country was spiritually strong—that Japan was a good society—but at the same time they feared that Japan was militarily vulnerable to the western powers whose ships cruised along their shores. By the 1930's, the reverse was true. The western warships were gone, and many Japanese leaders had forgotten their fears of military weakness. Between 1931 and 1938, Japan broke with the Wilsonian international order of the twenties and set out to build a great empire.
But at the same time, many of Japan's leaders began to doubt their country's spiritual strength and social stability. Admirals Katô Kanji and Suetsugu Nobumasa, General Koiso Kuniaki, and Lieutenant General Ishiwara Kanji all feared that westernization would undermine the traditional beliefs which they valued most. They met the challenge to Japan's national tradition by trying to restore order at home, build a good empire in Asia, and synthesize the best elements of eastern and western culture.

The Problem of Japanese Imperialism

Japanese foreign policy during the thirties has puzzled many scholars in the past, and sad to say, may continue to do so even after this article appears. Much of the work done on the subject since World War II has dealt with the conditions which made expansion possible: the political strength of the Japanese military and the weakness of their domestic opponents; assassinations by the radical right; the fragmented decision-making process; the West's economic troubles, its military weakness, its diplomatic confusions, and the rise of European totalitarian regimes and Chinese nationalism. Three schools of interpreters have gone beyond these boundary conditions to examine the underlying motives of the Japanese leaders themselves: the conspiracy advocates, the Maruyama school, and the revisionists.

The conspiracy thesis has attracted both the prosecutors at the Tokyo war crimes trial and orthodox Marxist historians, a rather strange set of bedfellows. Both of these groups imply that an over-riding selfishness drove the Japanese armies across Asia. The prosecutors at the Tokyo trial argued that the Japanese leaders, like the Nazis, were criminal representatives of an evil society who decided to expand their
arbitrary power not only in Japan, but throughout the world. The Marxist writers added that this selfishness was inevitable, since Japan's leaders were driven by the class dilemmas of modern capitalism.

In spite of occasional reincarnations, the conspiracy thesis has faded from favor among more recent writers, probably because it is so unsatisfying as an explanation of human action. Many writers have pointed out that Japan's leaders were neither criminal nor self-seeking; in fact, they served their governments at considerable personal risk, and unlike Hitler, they yielded their posts when their policies failed. Far from acting as agents of Japanese industry, they despised self-seeking capitalists and hoped to restore prosperity to Japan and Asia in spite of zaibatsu leaders. As time has passed, then, Japan's leaders have come to seem more complicated than the villains in a grade B movie.

Maruyama Masao, a political scientist at Tokyo University, has given a more complex explanation of the motives of Japan's imperialists. He argues that they were nationalists who had a strong sense of mission, but a weak sense of self. Like most Japanese in the thirties, Maruyama implies, Japan's military and civilian leaders lacked the strength of character to stand up for democracy at home or to resist the actions of the young officers and radical nationalists. Because they were oppressed by Japan's hierarchical society, Maruyama says, they transferred tyranny abroad. Since they were raised to regard loyalty as the central core of value and to regard themselves as the Emperor's most loyal servants, they believed that they could do no wrong. Consequently, their efforts to reform foreign peoples merely reproduced the autocratic forms of Japanese domestic relations across Asia. In the end, Japan's leaders lost control of
policy, became the "robots" of the radical right, and clanked onward to destruction. In Maruyama's eyes then, they were not really selfish, but rather members of a bumbling generation who were driven by the evil nature of their society.

In contrast to these rather dark visions, Akira Iriye and James B. Crowley have proposed a clearly revisionist interpretation. While Iriye does not deny that Japan's leaders misread the changing international scene, he stresses external factors as the cause of Japan's shift from international cooperation to aggression. The Japanese military correctly concluded that the Washington treaties had failed to provide a framework for peaceful economic expansion and stable relations with China and Russia. Consequently, Japan's leaders believed that they had to impose a new order in Asia, but found, once again, that the western powers were blocking their way. Thus, Iriye concludes that the reasons for Japan's expansion lie not only in "the pathology of the Japanese mind," but also in the "inherent contradictions and irrationalities of the modern world." Though the military took the wrong road, Iriye implies that Japan absolutely had to do something to tame the chaotic international scene.

James B. Crowley goes much further than Iriye in arguing for the rationality of Japan's leaders. These men, he says, were seeking the traditional goals of the Meiji genro: national security, economic progress, and equality with the leading western nations. In order to achieve security, the Japanese had to assume a hegemonial position in East Asia; an Asian bloc of economic and military allies would give them the ability to fight a long war of attrition against America or Russia. And even if war did not come, Japan would be able to compete successfully with the
other closed economic systems by controlling large markets. Crowley argues that these rational military leaders were able to control policy until the fall of 1937, when civilians like Konoye, Hirota, and Hiranuma took over the direction of the China incident and expanded it into a holy war, thereby breaching the reasonable strategic limits which the military had set. Revision has come full circle: for most of the thirties, Crowley implies, Japan's leaders were typical members of a foreign policy elite which seeks security for its country in competition with the elites of other lands. This rational portrait of Japanese imperialism has led to a basic re-evaluation of American responsibility for the outbreak of the Pacific war. James MacGregor Burns voices the new consensus when he refers to the Japanese-American war as a miscalculated conflict. Since the Japanese were only seeking a limited Asian sphere and were not trying to conquer the world, they were no threat to American security, and they only went to war with the United States reluctantly after the Americans cut off their oil in July 1941.

At first glance, Japan's position in the world during the early thirties does indeed seem insecure, and the fears of Japan's leaders seem justified. Economically, tariff barriers were rising. Militarily, Russia was recovering from the effects of the revolution, while the Anglo-Saxon powers were insisting on maintaining their combined naval predominance. Diplomatically, the growing nationalist and communist movements in China vied with each other in campaigning against Japan's special interests on the continent. An over-riding concern for security seems rational enough given these circumstances.

Yet a closer look yields a sharply contrasting picture. Economically,
Japan was one of the first countries to recover from the depression, and her foreign trade expanded in spite of tariff walls. Militarily, the Japanese were more secure in the early thirties than they had been at any time previously; in fact, Japan had the most balanced military force in the world. Russia had a larger army, but no navy to speak of, while America and Britain had larger navies, but minuscule standing armies. Given the isolated geographic position of Japan's home islands, the military could point to no clear and present military threat to the homeland. Diplomatically, the thirties were even kinder to Japan than the twenties. The rise of fascist regimes in Italy and Germany increasingly pinned England and Russia in Europe, while the depression hardened the hearts of America's isolationists in Congress against military spending and foreign entanglements. Left alone in Northeast Asia, Japan's leaders should have had no difficulty protecting their continental possessions and home islands from the weak and isolated Chinese or the preoccupied Russians. And, in fact, Japan's leaders saw more opportunity than danger in the international chaos of the thirties.

At first glance Crowley also seems correct when he argues that the responsible officials in Tokyo controlled Japanese foreign policy in a rational fashion, at least until 1937. The government did set Japan's foreign policy goals in a series of cabinet papers between 1933 and 1936. But Mark Peattie has shown that Japanese colonels in the field could sometimes have a decisive effect on the policy itself. And even the style of Japanese decision-making introduced fundamental irrationalities into Japanese foreign policy. Consider the way in which Japan's leaders made their decisions in the thirties. Each of the major interest groups
appealed to the Imperial court functionaries and to Prince Saionji Kimmochi, the surviving genro, to adopt their programs. The imperial advisors would then foster negotiations among the competing groups in order to arrive at a consensus; when such a consensus appeared, the Emperor would ratify it as national policy. The easiest way to arrive at a consensus was to adopt all of the basic goals of the most powerful groups, in spite of the fact that the Empire might lack the means to achieve them simultaneously.

The balance of forces in this bargaining process increasingly tilted toward the more radical military elements as the decade progressed. The Army and Navy provoked foreign crises, used the media which they controlled to demand harsh measures, and appealed to their many supporters throughout the country; meanwhile, the political parties saw their power wane throughout the decade, although they were able to block some of the more radical proposals of the military by foot dragging in Parliament. With commanders in the field acting semi-independently, and with this confused process of decision going on in Tokyo, Japan's ambitions naturally outstripped its reach. Another factor helped to insure that Japan would follow an aggressive course in world affairs: the activities of the angry men of the early Showa period. By exploring the backgrounds and activities of four of these determined advocates of expansion, we can gain a clearer understanding of the motives which drove Japanese leaders to seek a new empire.

Men of Tradition and Character

In order to understand what inspired Katō, Suetsugu, Koiso, and
Ishiwara to advocate expansion abroad and reform at home, we must consider their early years, because for them the youth was father to the man in a special way. All of them were born between 1870 and 1889; therefore, between 1890 and 1920 they witnessed almost unbroken economic and imperial progress. With the exception of Ishiwara, all of them fought with the victorious forces during the Russo-Japanese war. To them, therefore, expansion and modernization marched shoulder to shoulder.

The four boys also shared a common social background. With the exception of Suetsugu, their fathers or grandfathers were samurai. As a result, they received a special moral training which shaped both their careers and Japan's policies in later years. As Robert Bellah has pointed out, the values which they learned at home grew into a national ideology by the thirties when appeals for national sacrifice drew a strong response from the country at large. In 1937 the Ministry of Education summed up this official doctrine in the famous Fundamentals of National Polity: western individualism led to the deadends of capitalism, anarchism, and socialism, while the Imperial Way of loyalty and filial piety produced harmony and peace.

At the heart of this central Japanese value system lay the concept of on, the duty to repay benevolence received from one's parents, from one's immediate master, and most important, from heaven, as represented by the Emperor. The samurai's duty was twofold: If his master's realm was threatened, he would die in its defence, thereby achieving salvation; if placed in a position of power, he would serve as an example to the rest of the state's citizens by working hard, living frugally and by treating his inferiors with benevolence, while insisting on righteous action.
by those above. In the Meiji years, the Emperor became the ultimate focus of the citizens' feelings of loyalty; for the good soldier and faithful citizen, then, the proper goal of all action was to help expand the Emperor's benevolence by insuring the progress of the state. Each member of the nation would work hard, live frugally, and contribute what he could to building a better Japan. If all sincerely did their duty, none would become too wealthy, and all classes would live in harmony. 12 Such, then, was the ideal which crystallized while our protagonists were growing up.

As young officers, our protagonists drank in this ethic at home, on the drill field, and at school. Their fathers lived lives of service, first as han officials and then as government bureaucrats or officers in the Meiji military and police forces. At the lower military schools, the boys received an education which consisted mostly of rigorous spiritual toughening and technical military training. The path to adulthood was not always smooth and straight; Ishiwara Kanji was suspended twice for kicking his sabre instructor "in the vitals," a grievous rebellion against his superior. 13

In spite of occasional revolts, this moral training struck deep roots. Throughout his career, Katō Kanji repeatedly stressed the need for the soldiers to have a firm set of traditional beliefs, no matter how much modern knowledge they might possess. For Katō, the virtue of mutual loyalty lay at the base of all Japanese values, for it united superior and inferior in bonds of benevolence and mutual affection. Such loyalty was the core of bushidō, the warrior code which Katō recommended as a cure for the distractions of the modern era. If the good Japanese followed
the true way, he would aid the weak, revere justice, and prize honor, all in a spirit of self-sacrifice. The First World War was a sign from Heaven, Kato said, that the materialistic culture of the west had reached a moral impasse and that Japan was the true, spiritual nation which had a duty to extend its healing national ethic. Ishiwara agreed. In his overview of war history he wrote, "... should we not drill into ourselves... a profound belief in the kokutai [national essence] which must be the driving force of that spirit by which a soldier, like a god, sacrifices himself sincerely for his lord's country?"14

Naturally throughout their lives, all of these men acted the part of the loyal samurai. But their conception of their role blended two conflicting models of samurai behavior: the loyal retainer [kashin] and the man of determination [shishi]. For most of their careers, they worked within the system and rose steadily through the new military bureaucracies. They were all good students who were selected early in their careers for the General Staffs of their respective services, and all became military intellectuals associated with the War Colleges. Often they advanced under the patronage of a famous superior; for example, Admiral Togo Heihachirō was as instrumental in Kato's career as Kato was in Suetsugu's progress. Loyal service had real, as well as spiritual rewards.

But at critical periods in their careers and at major turning points in the history of Japan's foreign relations, these men broke out of normal channels and demanded that the nation change direction. And they acted not as robots of the radical right or young officers, but on their own and in spite of possible damage to their futures. A good man was selfless; he shunned all desire for wealth and recognition, while
serving his Emperor and nation. But what was his duty when things were not going well? Then he had to revolt on behalf of the right policies, even though he might fail, for his action would shame his superiors into doing the right thing. Those who actually did revolt were few, but they could be sure of an honored place in Japan's historical memory, for they had exhibited makoto—sincere self-denial, purity, and unplanned, headlong action for the good of others. If such men failed, they might still have the comforting thought that their superiors would eventually adopt the policies for which they had sacrificed. Often, however, they could hope to induce their superiors to reflect and adopt their policies immediately; in such cases, a promotion for the offender might result. Vigorous advocacy, then, had both rewards and dangers; some of our protagonists went on to promotions while others went into political exile.

Take as an example Admiral Katô Kanji. In 1930 Katô was Chief of the Navy General Staff. During the naval disarmament crisis of 1930, he turned his back on political preferment to follow a course of rugged independence. Katô feared that the politicians in London were bargaining away Japan's existing margin of naval security and more important, its hopes for further greatness. Through his aide, Suetsugu, he declared publicly that the Chief of the Naval General Staff was directly responsible to the Emperor for determining how much naval construction Japan needed. The politicians, Suetsugu said, were tampering with this right of supreme command. When Katô finally found himself outmaneuvered by Prime Minister Hamaguchi, he resigned in protest. Katô's official career had ended, and Suetsugu's rise halted temporarily.

Koiso Kuniaki and Ishiwara Kanji also acted with determination when
they thought the nation was endangered. In 1930 Major General Koiso, the Chief of the Military Affairs Bureau of the War Ministry, involved himself with the March plotters, who hoped to establish a military government by coup d'état. In the mid-thirties Koiso's political activities earned him a temporary exile from the seats of power, and Ishiwara was one of the leaders of the Kwantung Army during its independent action in Manchuria in 1931. In the mid-thirties he continued to intervene in politics and stand against the mainstream in foreign policy matters, until finally he too was exiled from Tokyo. When these men saw their country going wrong, they would act occasionally without regard to personal consequences. And in fact, they saw many dangers both abroad and at home.

The Warring States

Katō, Suetsugu, Koiso, and Ishiwara all believed that competition rather than cooperation was the underlying law of international relations, and they naturally concluded that the Washington system was both unrealistic and immoral. Advocates of disarmament ignored the fact that nations lived or died by the sword and that the nation which did not expand would soon be outstripped. And it seemed clear to these men that the paeans to peace sung by western politicians merely served to cover the harsh reality of capitalist exploitation in Asia.

From 1918 on, many influential figures in Japan distrusted the Versailles and Washington systems. Men like Tokutomi Soho, Konoye Fumimaro, and Matsuoka Yōsuke declared that the new Wilsonian order was merely a device to preserve the old imperialistic order, and Admiral Katō agreed. As a military expert at the Washington conference, Katō fought
so hard against establishing a 6/10 ratio between Japan and America that the politicians had to take the question out of the hands of the naval specialists' committee. In the mid-twenties, Kato used the occasion of a formal lecture to the Emperor on military affairs to explain his hatred of the naval treaties. Kato explained that the west was using the disarmament system to secure "capitalistic and imperialistic" domination of the Orient. In the early nineteenth century, he said, England and America had replaced Spain and Portugal as leaders in the eternal quest for empire in the Pacific. Japan, however, had entered the struggle late and had failed to resist America's advance from Hawaii and Guam right up to the Philippines which lay on Japan's very doorstep. Then America and Britain had tied Japan's hands by freezing battleship competition and by fixing the territorial status quo. Yet war would eventually be inevitable, Kato concluded, since the urge to predominate was basic to human nature. 

Suetsugu agreed. In the mid-thirties he publicly explained that international politics resembled the warring states period in Japanese history--the years of feudal warfare before the reunification of the country under the Tokugawa. It was only natural, he said, that all nations sought their own interests at the expense of others and that war resulted. Military power was the key to life or death for a nation: "Win and you take the world; lose and your nation dies. There is no way around it." As victors in the most recent war, Suetsugu said, it was natural that America, England, and France were trying to preserve their gains, while Germany, Italy, and Russia were reviving as rivals. Japan would be foolish to ignore the facts of international life.

Suetsugu also believed that the status quo powers had also extended
their oppression to Asia. Since the Chinese did not have the qualities needed to stand up together as a nation, Suetsugu said, the western powers were threatening to divide the continent up among themselves, just as they had done to the rest of Asia. The white powers were preserving peace at the expense of the colored nations and not through a just balance of interests and power; consequently, it was Japan's duty as the only colored nation remaining free to establish justice and lasting peace. Koiso and Ishiwara agreed. In 1940 Koiso argued that the French had retarded the economic progress of Indo-China by monopolizing trade and investment there while discriminating against Japan. In 1930 Ishiwara declared that Japan's ultimate mission was to destroy "the pressure of the white race which is inhibiting our heaven sent mission....of saving the Chinese people."19

To Katô and Suetsugu their first duty was clear: they had to pull down the prison walls of naval disarmament and liberate Japan's progressive conquering spirit. Just as the Meiji leaders had resisted the expansion of the west by modernizing and taking foreign colonies, the men of Showa would help their eastern brothers survive and prosper. Though Katô had been cast down from the seats of power in the naval bureaucracy, he and Suetsugu maneuvered relentlessly to rid their service of disarmament advocates. By threatening to unleash the young officers and right-wing assassins, they managed to sweep their opponents out in 1933 and replace them with their own followers, men like Osumi Mineo, Nagano Osami, and Shimada Shigetarô. Between 1934 and 1937 these men led Japan out of the disarmament system, accepted the Army's plans for expansion in China, planned an advance against the west's colonies in South East Asia,
and launched a spiralling naval race with England and America. The foregoing argument seems to lead back to an older picture of Japanese imperialism in which Japan's military masters plunged across Asia in a burst of emotional anti-western Emperor worship. But Katō and Suetsugu not only were traditionalists, but also modernizers who sought to make Japan the most modern military power in the world. From 1890 to 1920 both men went to the west a number of times to bring back the latest in military technology and strategic thought. In 1897 Katō was a member of the crew which went to England to take charge of the new battleship, Fuji, which the British had built for Japan. And in 1919 he led a mission to survey the technical developments made by Germany. Suetsugu also went in person to study the destroyer and submarine tactics which western Admirals had developed during the World War. This reliance on the west for military ideas and technology must have proved galling for the proud officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

By the mid-thirties, however, Japan was shaking off its dependence on western military leadership and asserting its independence. After 1920 Japan's naval builders stopped relying on western engineering and between 1928 and 1934 Katō's disciples in the navy developed weapons which they believed would make Japan secure in the western Pacific against America. New midget and heavy submarines, better bombers and torpedoes, and most important, a new super-battleship design made them confident that Japan could advance to the south successfully. Should America interfere, Katō and Suetsugu had elaborated a strategy which they expected to yield a Japanese victory. Given the great distance which the American fleet would have to travel from Hawaii to the Philippines, Japanese light forces
would have time to wear the American forces down by repeated submarine and air attacks. Finally, the Japanese main fleet could pick its time to close with the weakened Americans and use its superior battleship strength to decide the issue.²¹ To Katō and Suetsugu, then, it seemed that Japan was prepared materially as well as morally to build a benevolent empire.

In spite of their professionalism, however, there is an undertow of tension running through their statements: anger at the politicians who agreed to end Japan's territorial growth; hostility against the white races' domination in Asia; and rage at the selfish economic practices of private enterprise. They urged Japan to get back to basics: a faith in Japan's national tradition and a return to the realism of the past. Most important, they asked their fellow citizens to remember that the god of war was a permanent, though uninvited, guest at the international banquet. But these latter day samurai worried not only about the dangers of the international scene, but also about the internal troubles of their homeland.

A Disordered Realm

To these men, society seemed increasingly out of joint in the twenties and thirties. Instead of an harmonious realm in which each citizen remained in his station and loyally served the whole nation, new men had risen up to vie for individual profit and private power; economic growth had given the capitalists and their errand boys, the party politicians, real political influence. And in traditional eyes, of course, public power used for private purposes was immoral.
The traditional Japanese ethic dictated not only proper political behavior, but also a special economic role for both government and the citizen. In the Tokugawa han all Japanese, whether their station was high or low, were supposed to pull together for the common good. Hard work would repay their debts both to their parents and to the Emperor. For its part the government would encourage the virtues of selfless diligence, harmonious cooperation, and thrift. The samurai officials would also be frugal with their tax money and invest it wisely to increase production and, therefore, add to the wealth of the whole realm. Since most men were not strong enough in character to follow the government's rules willingly, of course, the han officials would step in to discourage wasteful consumption; to the traditional man, reform meant cutting governmental luxury and confiscating the estates of overfed merchants. The citizens of the good realm, then, would strive to be miniature samurai—selfless, diligent, frugal, obedient, and cooperative.

But as the twentieth century progressed, Japan was far from being a harmonious realm. In 1910 the Army leaders intervened directly at home to rebuild social order. Generals Tanaka Giichi and Ugaki Kazushige helped to build the Imperial Military Reserve Association, which had 14,000 branches enrolling three million members by 1936; auxiliaries for women and youth brought the total membership to approximately twelve million. The Army encouraged members of these groups to cultivate a spirit of loyalty to village, Army, nation, and Emperor, in order to prepare for local and national emergencies. With the onset of the depression, disorder mounted. In September 1935, Suetsugu declared that Japan faced an emergency. The foundation of the nation, the farmers, were rapidly growing poorer, and many common laborers were unemployed. Japan's growing
population was struggling to exist on a static economic base. But the emergency was not only economic—it was also spiritual. Gaps between the classes were widening, he warned, and communist agitation was growing. The solution for Japan's troubles, he said, lay in external economic expansion for which strong military backing was essential; the economic and colonial walls raised by the imperial powers would not fall before anything else. Yet the government was ignoring the plight of its people. The politicians spent their time struggling for power while the merchants were merely seeking to "pile up wealth without interference." Suetsugu warned that in the eighteenth century, the Dutch government had followed the advice of their merchants, disarmed, and inevitably declined, while their English counterparts had listened to the Admirals, built a great navy, and won a prosperous empire. 

The lesson was clear: the government would have to rein in the merchants and cast out the politicians. In 1938 Suetsugu was a member of the first Konoye cabinet which was trying to introduce strict economic controls and prepare Japan for a long struggle to build an empire. He was outraged when Ikeda Seihin, the representative of the economic community in the government, urged invoking Article Six of the mobilization law in order to control the wages and movements of the workers while neglecting to mention the need for any controls on dividends. Both in the cabinet and in public, Suetsugu demanded that the government strictly limit private profits and also levy forced loans on private capitalists. But Suetsugu and the economic planners did not win; and in 1940, Koiso was still calling for an "end to the dealings of free competition" and full national management of the economy. In the eyes of these men,
Both Ishiwara and Koiso were impressed by Germany's defeat in World War I. German strategy had been good, and the Germans had used their interior lines well to concentrate their forces where they were needed. But in the end, the inferior generals and weapons of the allies had won the victory—simply by grinding the Germans down. Attrition was the rule in modern war, Ishiwara and Koiso reasoned, and a great power had to be self-sufficient both in war material and in financial resources. Ishiwara believed that Japan might have lost the Russo-Japanese war, if the Tsar's generals had understood the realities of the attrition strategy. Koiso was so impressed by the changing nature of warfare in 1917 that he began to plan for a war of attrition despite his relatively junior status on the General Staff. Using his position as head of the topographical section, he calculated Japan's resource reserves and then matched them against expected levels of consumption at full mobilization. He then surveyed the continental sources from which gaps in Japanese production might be filled. In the end he wrote a grab bag mobilization plan which covered a wide variety of Asian resources and included prescribing proper economic relationships, especially the restoration of "harmony between labor and capital." By March 1930, Koiso was so concerned about the lack of planning that he backed a coup in which his fellow officers hoped to establish a military government. But Koiso had risked his career for naught—the plot failed. 26

Ishiwara shared Koiso's longing to plan for a war of attrition. By the late twenties, Ishiwara's studies of war history convinced him that Japan would have to expand and that it would have to adopt Napoleon's
strategy of making each conquered land supply the fuel for further campaigns. In 1931, when he was on the General Staff of the Kwantung army in Manchuria, he took up the standard which had slipped from Koiso's hand. With the depression bearing down hard on Japan at home, with Chinese pressure on Manchuria rising abroad, and with the party politicians and capitalists under attack, Colonel Ishiwara and his fellow officers coldly planned, set off, and expanded the invasion of Manchuria. If modern economic planning could not begin at home, then it would start abroad.

After a hard fight in Tokyo, the Kwantung Army won the right to rule Manchoukuo, and Ishiwara started to plan the new nation's economic development. And the new Manchoukuo was a model of complete military control of a national economy. Japanese officers worked at all levels of the new state administration, and Japanese managers participated in hundreds of new joint ventures throughout the country. And all of these officers and bureaucrats danced to the tune played by the central administration of the Kwantung army. But Koiso, then Chief of Staff in the Kwantung army, and Ishiwara tried to see that the zaibatsu did not exploit Manchoukuo for private gain. Economic planning would ease the way for the two nations and the military, but not for the merchants.

Between 1933 and 1937 Ishiwara, Koiso, and others in the Army pressed the Japanese government to extend full economic planning from Manchoukuo to the entire Japanese empire and to acquire the resources which Japan still lacked. Their sense of urgency increased when Stalin reacted to Japan's advance in Manchuria and to the rise of Hitler by starting a large scale rearmament program. Though Koiso went into eclipse after 1933, Ishiwara became the leading figure in the search for an integrated
Imperial economy; in 1935 he became head of the strategy section of the General Staff in Tokyo, and in 1936 he became chief of a new War Direction section of the General Staff. As a result of his research in these positions, he soon decided that Japan's economic base was still too narrow and that Japan would have to gain access to the coal and iron of north China and the cotton and foodstuffs of south China. Consequently, he urged his superiors to adopt a policy of gradual penetration in China, and the Army leaders followed his advice by setting up new puppet regimes in the north.28

At the same time, Ishiwara and economic planners from the South Manchurian Railroad Company were studying Russia's five year plans, in order to write a similar one which would integrate Japan's economy with that of Manchoukuo. By the spring of 1936 he had prepared a "Five Year Plan for Leading Industries" which covered many spheres of the new Imperial government and economy. Ishiwara wanted the national government to abolish the political parties and establish a military dictatorship.29

He proposed that the government control the capital markets, nationalize key industries such as electric power, automobiles, heavy machinery, and shipbuilding, and force the industrialists to hit targets set by the government. After a year of infighting, Ishiwara and the planners were able to have the Army present a curtailed version of their five year plan to the Cabinet in late May 1937.30 But the military and the leaders of the Konoye cabinet could not persuade the Diet to accept national mobilization until April 1938, and by then the Japanese government was enmeshed in the China incident. Consequently, to Ishiwara's dismay, the government had to de-emphasize investment for developing greater industrial
capacity in favor of increasing immediate production in existing industry.

By 1937 Ishiwara's power was waning. In 1931 and in 1935 he had helped to launch Japan on the parallel paths of continental expansion and economic planning, and in 1936-37 he again risked his career by facing against the mainstream. As Chinese resistance grew after the Sian incident in 1936, as Russian production blossomed into weapons in the Far East, and as the western powers threatened a full scale naval race, Ishiwara began to doubt the wisdom of further immediate expansion. Ever the activist, in 1936 he resisted the Navy's plans for large scale building and an advance to the south, and in 1937 he fought against the Army's invasion of central China. It would take five years, he warned, to create the strength Japan needed for a long war with Russia, and another five years to prepare for a war against the western powers. But he protested in vain and soon found himself exiled. 31

The East Asian League and The New Order

Ishiwara's careful preparation of a modern economic base to support a large empire might lead one to conclude that he was a coolly rational leader. But there was another, more emotional side to Ishiwara, for he too was hoping to recreate a good moral order in Japan and Asia. Throughout his career Ishiwara tried not only to lay the economic foundation for the Japanese empire, but also to overcome the tension between his traditional beliefs and his role as a modernizer. Like Kato, Suetsugu, and Koiso, Ishiwara believed that Japan was duty-bound to defend and expand eastern spiritual values against western imperialism.

But Ishiwara's version of eastern ethics had a special, millenial
twist. At the late age of thirty he converted to the Nichiren sect of Buddhism, and made up for his tardy entrance by typically vigorous preaching; in 1927 he converted a number of people with his powerful sermons. The followers of Nichiren comprised the smallest of the four major Buddhist sects in prewar Japan, but due to the special nature of their beliefs, they were among the more active religious groups in Japan. Basically, the followers of Nichiren believed that faithful repetition of a chant praising the Lotus Sutra would bring them salvation, but the pull of the doctrine on Ishiwara was far stronger than this simple formula for redemption.

The teachings of Nichiren appealed both of Ishiwara's sense of duty as a soldier and to his pride as a Japanese, for they provided him with a great mission on behalf of eastern ethics. It was Ishiwara's task as a believer to emulate the Bodhisattva of Superb Action, just as Nichiren himself had done. According to the scriptures, Nichiren had found medieval Japan shrouded in the darkness of false Buddhist and Shinto beliefs, and he had dedicated his whole life to combating error. The master had predicted that an age of even greater darkness would follow his persecution and death, but that a group of latter day saints would one day revive the faith. They would then convert Japan, reconcile the Emperor and his people, and unify the beliefs of Asia and the world. Ishiwara saw no need to separate his religious beliefs from his work as a military thinker; in one of his first studies he wrote, "Nichiren said, 'In order to accomplish the unification of religions... which is the fundamental condition for complete world peace, it will first be necessary for a single, epochal war to occur in this transient world.'"
For Ishiwara, the tragic slaughter of the First World War proved that mankind was entering the final days of darkness which Nichiren had predicted, and he expected that a great conflict between Japan and America, the final representatives of eastern and western values, was "not far distant." During this destructive war, Ishiwara said, Nichiren had predicted that a good King would rise up, become a Buddha, unify Asia, and spread the law through the world. "None other than the Emperor of Greater Japan," he wrote, "will occupy the position of this wise King in the future world war." Despite the Buddhist framework, then, Ishiwara's beliefs echo Japan's traditional morality. The Japanese Emperor was the source of all virtue, and it was the duty of his loyal servants to spread his light:

By our inevitable victory [in the struggle] for the unification of eastern and western culture which is coming in the Pacific, we must promote in the world the great ideals which our nation has held since its founding, and our first and foremost task lies in carrying out this heaven-decreed work. In short, we are going to be victorious in the afore-mentioned world war simply because our heaven sent task is to save the people of the world [by acting] sincerely, without taking into account questions of our own profit or livelihood.33

For Ishiwara, Japanese expansion was a moral duty.

Naturally, Ishiwara's outlook shaped his vision of the proper structure for the good empire. Japan would establish an East Asian League comprised of Manchoukuo, China, Southeast Asia, and Australia. As a first step, he said, the military should unify the homeland by aiding
the political parties which supported the League. After their domestic
success, Japan's new leaders would then organize and streamline economic
production in both the conquered areas and the homeland, thereby achieving "great progress for our industries and a great reform for China."
All peoples in the League would look to the sage Emperor for spiritual
guidance, while his servants in the Japanese military would bring the
material benefits of the modern world to them. By saving Asia in this
world, Ishiwara said, the Japanese would save themselves in the next.
Ishiwara was serious about helping Asia: in the new Manchoukuo,
he said, "Japanese and Chinese should stand in a position of complete
equality." And Manchoukuo--in large part Ishiwara's creation--would
serve as a model for the rest of the League, since it was founded on good
eastern principles: follow Heaven's way and bring peace to the people;
Harmony among the Five Races; Kingly Way--Earthly Paradise; International
Harmony, etc. The Kings of the Asian nations would rule as Pu Yi, the
King of Manchoukuo, did; they would be the loyal vassals of the true
Emperor in Japan. This utopian vision appealed to Suetsugu as well. In
October 1934, he endorsed the idea of an East Asian League. "What," he
asked, "is the mission of our Japan? It is to accomplish the unification
of eastern and western culture and bring peace based on justice to the
world. This is our ultimate goal." But it would be hard to create a
peaceful world "in one jump," he said, and, therefore, Japan would first
have to bring harmony to the Orient and develop Asia's resources. It
is clear, then, that these men were not merely careful economic planners
nor cold eyed military strategists, but also latter day samurai driven by
the desire to restore selflessness and harmony to Japan and Asia.
At the end of 1937, as fighting spread across central China, Suetsugu had a chance to strike a decisive blow for the East Asian League. In December, the cabinet of Prince Konoye Fumimaro faced a fateful decision: the Army's General Staff officers wanted to negotiate an end to the fighting in China, in order to dodge the difficult task of invading southern China while maintaining a solid defense against the Russians in the north; Konoye, the field armies, and supporters of the East Asian League wanted to press on, destroy Chiang's government, and replace it with a federation of puppet regimes modeled on Manchoukuo. In order to counteract the counsels of the General Staff, Konoye brought Suetsugu into the government as Home Minister, and he expanded the Inner Cabinet to include him in the foreign policy debates.

After his appointment, Suetsugu announced publicly that the moment had come to bring perpetual peace to East Asia. It might be necessary, he said, to expel white people from East Asia, in order to liberate the colored races and secure for them the benefits of equality with the white races. In the inner cabinet, Suetsugu sought to widen the war, make a complete break with Chiang and secure the recognition of the puppet regimes which the field armies were organizing in China. In the end Suetsugu's bright vision of the East Asian League blinded Japan's leaders to the reservations raised by the General Staff. On January 11, 1938 the Japanese government demanded that China join the coprosperey sphere, and five days later Konoye broke relations with Chiang. 37

After ten months of hard campaigning by Japan's armies in China, Konoye announced that the Kuomintang had been reduced to a local regime and that the time had come to establish a New Order in East Asia. The
new system would be an integrated confederation of East Asian regimes, each cooperating to improve the economic and political well-being of the bloc as a whole. No longer would China suffer from western imperialist exploitation; instead peace, harmony, and progress would reign as each nation looked to Japan for political guidance along the Kingly way, and economic direction along the path to modernization. Ishiwara's dream was taking shape.

But before the enthusiasts of the Asian League could complete their task abroad, they first had to install the new order at home. Throughout the thirties, Kato, Suetsugu, Ishiwara, and Koiso had been calling for national unity, harmony, and reform, but much to their chagrin, the politicians continued to squabble and the merchants doggedly resisted full mobilization even after the outbreak of the China incident. By 1940 the international crisis in Europe and the drive for internal harmony in Japan reached a linked crescendo. In August 1940, Koiso Kuniaki joined a chorus of voices declaring that the time had come to exploit the opportunity presented by the rise of the Axis powers in Europe. At home, Koiso said, all classes should unite in sinking their "individual desires," and the new Konoye cabinet should dissolve the political parties and undertake fundamental reform of the government and educational systems.

Within three months Konoye had absorbed the political parties into the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (with Suetsugu as Vice President) and full economic mobilization began; Konoye had finally produced the controlled economy and harmonious political order for which Suetsugu, Ishiwara and Koiso longed. In addition, as Koiso wished, Japan strengthened its connection with the Axis powers and expanded the title
of the New Order in East Asia to "The Greater Asian Coprosperity Sphere."
But Koiso knew that this enlarged Asian League would have to include the
western colonies in Southeast Asia if it were to be truly self-sufficient.
And in the summer of 1940, the Konoye cabinet hesitated before risking
war with the west. Once again it took an inside activist to harden the
hearts of Japan's leaders for the fateful decision.

The Southern Advance

Just as he had risen to the challenge in 1930, Koiso was ready again
ten years later. Koiso believed that the war in Europe provided an
"epochal chance" for Japan to acquire the resources necessary to make
self-sufficiency possible. The surveys which he had begun in 1917 would
have real meaning if Japan advanced south and acquired the oil, rubber,
and tin of South East Asia. Therefore, as Colonial Minister under Hira-
numa and Yonai in 1939 and 1940, Koiso acted as a partisan of both the
Axis alliance and the southern advance. While still in the Yonai cab-
inet, Koiso embarrassed the government by publicly denouncing Dutch oppres-
sion in the East Indies.

In late July, the leaders of the new cabinet, Prime Minister Konoye
and Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yōsuke, considered sending Koiso as chief
negotiator on a mission to the Dutch East Indies in order to secure in-
creased oil shipments peacefully. But Koiso continued his campaign for
a full southern advance by military means. In a remarkable series of
memos he called for the expansion of the East Asian League not only to
the East Indies but through the whole western Pacific; Japan, he said,
should plan:
the formation of an East Asian Economic League which would include not merely Japan, Manchuria, and China, but also French Indo-China, Thailand, Malaya, Burma, and the Dutch East Indies; in the future we should also absorb North Sakhalin, the Maritime provinces [of Russia], the Philippines, and Oceania; finally, we should extend the boundaries of the economic sphere to the 90th...and 180th longitudes [Australia, New Zealand, the Gilberts, Midway, and the Aleutians].

Koiso concluded that the basic policy of the League lay in "uniting and synthesizing the entire economic strength of the various parts of Asia, establishing an independent Asian economy, and coping [thereby] with America and Europe."

Yet Koiso did not believe that Japan's goals were purely selfish. By moving into Southeast Asia, Japan would liberate the oppressed colonial peoples in the western colonies. On the political front, Koiso said, Japan would substitute the Japanese Emperor for the Dutch Queen and the British King, but allow the natives to choose a ruler to mediate between their provincial governments and Tokyo. And gradually the natives would move closer to complete self-rule. In the interim, the Japanese Army would provide for internal order and self-defense, but the officers would be careful to respect local customs. On the economic front, Japan would set up a common market, establish bureaus of experts to plan development, and eventually integrate the economies of the colonies and the homeland. Eventually the East Asian bloc would be able to negotiate on the basis of equality with the western empires.
Koiso insisted that Japan start south immediately. If he were sent to the Dutch East Indies, he said, he wanted a fleet and an expeditionary force along to back him up. He would demand that the Dutch station Japanese troops in the colony and integrate their economy into the economic league. And Suetsugu publicly supported Koiso's call for an early advance to the south. "Today," he said, "is the world's warring states period," and in these dangerous days Japan had to acquire oil to ensure the security of the coprosperity sphere. But Koiso had once again sacrificed his immediate advancement to his vision. The General Staffs of both services insisted that a southern advance should only be undertaken after careful planning and full mobilization of Japan's economic and military might. Koiso withdrew Koiso as his candidate for the mission.

Yet in fact Koiso and Suetsugu had won. By the spring of 1941, both the rearmament programs adopted in 1936 and the economic planning which started in 1938 had provided Japan with a tempting, though temporary advantage over the western powers. In spite of the China incident, the Japanese Navy had built the midget and long range submarines, the light surface forces, the aircraft, and the super-battleships which it needed to carry out Suetsugu's attrition and ambush strategy. And the Cabinet Planning Board had ordered the stockpiling of key resources and had designated foreign material sources to provide for a war of attrition. With the Russians tied down by Hitler's invading armies, Japan was ready to move against the British, the Dutch, and--if necessary--the Americans. The long search for a good, harmonious, and secure empire, begun in the offices and studies of Katō, Suetsugu, Koiso, and Ishiwar, ended when
Japan's planes struck at the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, and at Hawaii. By 1942 the East Asian League was a reality.

Conclusion

Koiso, Ishiura, Katō, and Suetsugu were typical of the men who made Japanese foreign policy during the thirties. They were not sword-swinging fanatics, nor selfish tools of the capitalists, nor indeed farsighted military bureaucrats, but rather latter day models of the modernizing Meiji samurai. For the most part they worked within the system, but occasionally their consciences called them to take a public stand. When they did, they were remarkably successful: Katō and Suetsugu helped to force Japan out of the disarmament treaties and into a full advance in China and South East Asia; Koiso and Ishiura succeeded in having successive governments adopt an aggressive continental policy, economic planning, and the ideal of an East Asian League.

The constancy and tenacity of these men is striking. They worked hard to see that Japan had the most modern methods, strategies, and weaponry, even though they had to bring them in from the west. They believed that military and economic modernization would help Japan build a new order in East Asia based on the virtues which made Japan great: each citizen of the League would work diligently for the common good; each ruler would loyally follow the example set by the Emperor; mankind's debt to heaven would be repaid. The Emperor would show the way to peace and order in Asia and the world, just as he had done for Japan in the Meiji era. For the nation, western technology would help eastern ethics reign in Asia; for Katō, Koiso, Ishiura, and Suetsugu, the good empire would
bind up the eastern and western halves of their hearts. Their dream ended badly, of course, for they had fatally misjudged both the likelihood of their own military success and the receptivity of their future subjects to the East Asian League, but their failure does not give us a license to misunderstand what drove them, nor to underestimate the seriousness of their purposes and the danger they posed to international stability.
Footnotes

1. An earlier version of this paper appeared as "Risō no teikoku: shinchitsujo kensetsu e no nihon gunjin no yume, 1928-1940" (The Good Empire: The Japanese Military's Dream of Constructing a New Order) in Kindai nihon no taigai taido (Recent Japanese Attitudes toward the Outside World), edited by Satō Seizaburo and Roger Dingman (Tokyo, 1974), pp. 155-86; I wish to acknowledge support from the Social Science Research Council of the United States and the Asiatic Society of Japan, which made it possible for me to prepare the paper and to attend a conference on "Japan and World Order" in Tokyo in June 1973; I also wish to acknowledge the critiques supplied by the editors of the volume and by the other participants in the conference; the Saigo quotation is on p. 244 of Ivan Morris' The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan (New York 1975); for good treatments of the background to Japanese Imperialism, see Richard Storry, The Double Patriots: A Study of Japanese Nationalism (Boston 1957); Robert J.C. Butow, Tojo and the Coming of the War (Princeton, N.J., 1961); Herbert Feis, The Road to Pearl Harbor (Princeton, N.J., 1950); and F.C. Jones, Japan's New Order in East Asia, 1937-45 (London 1954).

2. For a recent discussion of the various interpretations of Japanese imperialism, see James William Morley ed., Dilemmas of Growth in Modern Japan, Studies in the Modernization of Japan, Vol. VI (Princeton, N.J. 1971), pp. 10-27; Morley points to the need for reassessing the motives of Japan's leaders; the most recent reincarnation of the conspiracy thesis is in David Bergamini, Japan's Imperial Conspiracy (New York 1971); Bergamini does not understand how the Japanese government worked, and he consistently misinterprets the sources which he cites.


6. James B. Crowley, Japan's Quest for Autonomy: National Security and Foreign Policy, 1930-1938 (Princeton 1966), pp. xvi-xvii, 380, 394; Gordon Mark Berger argues that the desire of Japan's leaders to establish a new order at home fluctuated with the shifts in Japanese fortunes during the China war; when things were going badly in China, Prince Konoye became interested in mobilizing the nation for a long
struggle by establishing the new order and when things were going well, he lost interest; see "Recent Japan in Historical Revisionism—Changing Historiographical Perspectives on Early Showa Politics: 'The Second Approach'" in Journal of Asian Studies, XXXIV, 2 (February 1975), 473-84; I believe that the drive for a new order was much stronger than Berger characterizes it; for examples of the revisionist consensus on American-Japanese relations and the miscalculated war, see James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Soldier of Freedom (New York, 1970); Bruce M. Russett, No Clear and Present Danger: A Skeptical View of the United States Entry into World War II (New York, 1972); Richard H. Minear, Victors' Justice: The Tokyo War Crimes Trial (Princeton, 1971), Chap. V; for a dissenting view, see Stephen E. Pelz, Race to Pearl Harbor: The Failure of the Second London Naval Conference and the Onset of World War II (Cambridge, 1974).


8. For Ishiwara's role in the Manchurian incident, see Mark R. Peattie, Ishiwara Kanji and Japan's Confrontation with the West (Princeton, 1975), 132-33 n. 94, 137-39; for the political process in Japan, see David Anson Titus, Palace and Politics in Prewar Japan (New York, 1974).


10. For biographical data, see Nihon kindai shiryō kenkyukai, ed., Nihon riku kaigun no seido, soshiki, jinji (Tokyo, 1971).


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32. Shimada Toshihiko and Inaba Masao, ed., *Gendai shi shiryo*, VII, xli-xlili; Nihon kokusai seiji gakkai, ed., *Taiheiyo sensō e no michi*, VIII, pp. 74-75; Tsunoda Ryusaku, *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 219-31; another right wing figure who was a devotee of Nichiren beliefs was Kita Ikki; see George M. Wilson, *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki* (Cambridge, 1969).


38. Suetsugu paid right wing thugs to try to cow party leaders into joining the new order at home; see Berger, *Parties Out of Power*, 190-91, 193-96, 206-7.
