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The Japanese and Their Language: How the Japanese Made Their Language and It Made Them

by
Samuel Robert Ramsey

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

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The Japanese and Their Language:
How the Japanese Made Their Language and It Made Them

Samuel Robert Ramsey

University of Maryland

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PREFACE

Travel the length and breadth of Japan, across the more than 6,800 islands in the archipelago, and anywhere you go, from the Tokyo megalopolis to the most remote and isolated village, every person you meet will immediately understand and speak *Nihongo*—Japanese. The accents you hear might vary from place to place. There will be odd and unexplained words and pronunciations peculiar to each of these places. But not one person among the more than 126 million citizens of Japan will have any trouble at all understanding the standard language as it's normally spoken.

Although you could hardly guess it now, there was a time not very long ago when Japanese could not communicate so easily with each other, and in some cases not at all. Go back only a couple of hundred years, say—or maybe not much more than a century and a half or so—and we see in Japan a spread-out, Balkanized country, separated into groups of localized communities almost completely out of touch with each other. Most people living in the islands then had never met, much less talked to each other. In other words, Edo Japan was strikingly different from that hypermodern, interconnected place at the forefront of technological development we're used to seeing today. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan was a backwater, left behind in the changing world events of that formative period.

Western forces besieged the country, just as they did other vulnerable Asian nations in the nineteenth century. But while its neighbors remained internally fragmented, militarily and economically weak, taken advantage of and colonized by outside powers, Japan changed rapidly to become a member of the first world order, an economic and military equal of America, Germany, France, Russia, and Britain. Unlike other non-Western nations, Japan drew its people together and met threats

with strength. No other country in the world was able to accomplish that. How did Japan manage to transform itself in such a short period of time?

One factor in Japan's modernization that isn't usually given enough credit for what happened is the extent to which the country reshaped its language. Without unifying and adapting its language to serve the country's modernization efforts, Japan could never have accomplished what it did. It was essential.

But those changes did not happen by themselves. Nor were they inevitable. The stories of what the Japanese did about their language and what happened as a result are what we want to take a look at here.

INTRODUCTION

One day in the early 2000s, Eiko Miura stopped by my office and showed me an article about names the Japanese use for their language. Like a number of other East Asian colleagues in those days, Miura *sensei* knew that I liked to tell interesting stories and recite odd facts to pique the interest of students in my East Asia courses, and she gave me the writeup as another example for me to use. I was grateful for her help.

This particular magazine article stayed in my mind beyond the classroom, though. It began with an account from the nineteenth century about two bumbling young samurai who managed to sneak on board Commodore Matthew Perry's flagship. When American sailors discovered the stowaways, they dragged them out of their hiding place, and the two began struggling to explain themselves. But how? After all, for Japanese back then, who had been isolated from the outside world for centuries, the American visitors might as well have come from the moon. The Japanese had no way of knowing a word of English, and for Americans, Japanese was usually just as exotic. Suddenly, though, an American "who knew Japanese" appeared and resolved the issue. The Americans then turned the two stowaways over to Japanese authorities.

This odd little story comes from the jailhouse journal kept by one of the young samurai after his arrest. But the strangest twist of all is that it was there, in that jailhouse journal, that the name of the Japanese language appeared in print for the very first time. Moreover, our young samurai was using the word to describe what the mysterious American was speaking! At first, I started to dismiss the story as just made up. And yet, young Japanese patriots sneaking on board Perry's flagship as stowaways sounded so plausible and so interesting, I used the anecdote to introduce an article I was then writing about the modernization of the Japanese language. Later, after deciding that the story might be just as interesting

to a non-specialized audience, I wrote another version, and in a slightly altered form it's the one that appears here in introducing the first chapter in this volume.

To this second version of the story, I added a number of eye-catching images. Few people on earth use visual imagery as imaginatively and engagingly as the Japanese do, and for this mid-nineteenth-century period, there has been preserved a rich variety of woodblock prints, sketches and paintings to draw upon, some serious, some humorous or fanciful. Here is one such example showing what a local Edo artist thought Commodore Perry's flagship looked like:

Perry's "Black Ship"

This farcical little tale about stowaways became my entrée into one of the most extraordinary stories of the modern world.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Japan, and Japan alone, among non-Western nations, transformed itself to became a member of the first world order, the economic and military equal of the great Western powers, Britain, Germany, France, Russia, and America. This story of Japan's modernization has been told often enough from a political or economic perspective, but the transformation of Japan's language in that period was also central to the story, more so than is often acknowledged. It was a process vital for Japan's survival as an uncolonized and independent country.

* * *

About a decade into this modernization period—the era known as the Meiji Restoration—Japan was visited by a middle-aged British lady named Isabella Bird. A woman of fairly modest means, Isabella Bird was nevertheless an accomplished writer and an untrained but talented artist. She was adventurous, traveling widely to unexpected and obscure places and, among other surprising accomplishments, she became the first woman to be elected a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

In 1878, the eccentric Miss Bird set off on a new adventure to Japan. After eighteen days at sea, she reported, her ship steamed up the "Gulf of Yedo" and finally reached the "City of Tokio." But Isabella Bird was not interested in this new Eastern Capital of "Tôkiyô" nor "unattractive, unfamiliar Yokohama." Ever the adventurer, Bird was anxious to explore, as she put it, the "unbeaten tracks" of Japan, and she set off right away on horseback up the geographic center of Honshu with an interpreter and a small retinue of bearers. No outsider—much less a Western woman—had ever been anywhere near these areas before! Finally, when the intrepid Miss Bird reached the northernmost point of Honshu, she boarded a boat and crossed over onto the great northern island then called Yezo. Soon to be renamed Hokkaidō, Yezo was at that time a new Japanese colony, populated almost entirely by the indigenous people known as the Ainu. That summer, Bird passed through the Japanese settlements and groups of fur traders clustered at the southern tip of the island, then traveled on, deeper into indigenous areas. There, she spent weeks living in an Ainu village on the eastern coast together with her interpreters of Ainu into Japanese, and Japanese into English, all the while functioning as a surprisingly competent amateur anthropologist, jotting down whatever she observed, drawing sketches, and making notes of it all.

Returning home to England, Bird took her voluminous notes and sketches and, putting them together with the letters she had written to her sister from Japan, created a journal recounting her adventures. She called the volume "Unbeaten Tracks in Japan," and, right away, this 1880 travel diary found an enthusiastic reading public. For generations of students of Japan thereafter (including me), it has served as an iconic source of inspiration and information about earlier Japan. (I have four copies of the book myself!)

Bird records in gritty and stark detail the difficulties she encountered on this trip north from Japan's new capital. Her young interpreter from Yokohama told her he could scarcely believe the people

they encountered were even Japanese. And, in fact, communication in Japan's north was constantly an issue. Her interpreter needed additional interpreters himself at almost every stop along the way! After I read Miss Bird's book, her vivid descriptions lingered with me so much, I picked up the thread from the first chapter and wrote Chapter 2, "A Fragmented Japan," using Miss Bird's account of her travel difficulties to illustrate what Japan was like before the reshaping of its language took place.

* * *

In the nineteenth century, Isabella Bird's adventures in Japan's rural north were unique for that time. Yet, a full century earlier than that Japan had produced its own eccentric travelers, including an Edo-period adventurer named Furukawa Koshōken. Chapter 3, "The Edo Tourist," revisits this man's travels and adventures.

In 1787, Furukawa had made it all the way through Tōhoku north to Ezo, where he visited local communities of traders and native Ainu villages. But even before that trip north, Furukawa had also managed a long trip west, across Honshu, and then south onto the island of Kyushu. There in Kyushu, among many other adventures, Furukawa met with a colony of Korean potters, the descendants of artisans who had been brought to Japan by Hideyoshi in the wake of the devastating wars his armies had fought on the peninsula. Furukawa then headed with great anticipation toward Nagasaki, the expected highlight of his trip to Kyushu. In that southern city he observed—at least from a distance—first Chinese, and then Dutch traders going about their business on the artificial island of Dejima, the only place in all of Japan where non-Japanese were allowed to set foot.

Furukawa kept detailed travel journals describing his adventures, the people he came across, the difficulties in communication he experienced. The old man—he was fifty-eight when he began his journeys—could be annoyingly judgmental about countrified people and especially about immodest rural woman, who, among other vulgar things, freely exposed their breasts. But at times Furukawa could show surprising generosity of temperament. I found it especially ironic that the old misanthrope could write so generously, and even admiringly, about Korean potters, their customs, and their language, while often being acerbic and dismissive of rural Japanese farmers and villagers. Furukawa was a complex man.

The stories Furukawa told about his travels across Japan fascinate us in our modern era, much as do those Isabella Bird told a century later. In both cases, we see a portrait of a land startlingly different from the far more unified, hypermodern nation we're familiar with today.

* * *

It was around the time that I began putting these background essays together that another of my Japanese colleagues, Makiko Inoue, brought me a new book back from Japan called: *The Man Who Created the Japanese Language* (*Nihongo wo tsukutta otoko* 日本語を作った男). The book turned out to be a new biography of Ueda Kazutoshi, the bureaucrat who, more than anyone else, was responsible for creating Japan's educational system and its national language policy. Ueda turns out in fact to have been so important to the modernization of Japanese, I decided right away to write an essay centering on him and his life experiences, and I made that essay into the fourth chapter in this volume. Then I called the chapter "A Passion for a New Idea," because what I found most extraordinary about Ueda was the epiphany he experienced, an almost religious awakening, about the meaning of Japan and the Japanese language. And it was that singular vision that motivated him to set forth on a life-long mission, almost Saint Paul-like in its passion and single-minded focus.

Ueda had been a promising student of literature at Tokyo Imperial University when he was dispatched to Europe in the large wave of students sent by the Meiji government. There, while studying philology at famous universities in Berlin and Leipzig, Ueda had his life-changing vision. All at once, he perceived clearly just what he believed Japan's future should be. There before him he saw the powerful, unified German empire that Bismarck had molded out of numerous, previously independent German principalities, and now, in that all-encompassing, unified German state, national policies that governed the lives of all of its citizens had been put into place. What drew Ueda's attention in particular was the "cleansed" and "purified" national language that had been instituted by the German Language Association. Now, through that orderly Prussian system, Ueda saw just what his own nation could and should become, and he spent the rest of his life working toward that end.

Ueda's nationalistic vision was a decidedly religious one, drawing, as it did, upon Japan's own national myths. When he returned to Japan, he elaborated on what that vision meant for his country, and he wrote eloquently about it. He began:

> The National Language is the bulwark of the Imperial Household.
>
> The National Language is the blood of the Nation.

Then, expanding on those heady lines, he explained:

> Just as blood shows a common birth in the realm of the flesh, language, for the people who speak it, shows a common birth in the realm of the spirit. If we take the Japanese National Language as an example of this, we should speak of Japanese as the spiritual blood of the Japanese people.

Such was the nationalistic vision that Ueda set forth, and, having given up any ambition of an academic career for himself, he spent all the rest of his life seeing to it that this vision of a unified nation shaped the structure of Japan's schools and the lives of its children.

* * *

Ueda Kazutoshi's nationalistic vision soon became wildly successful in Meiji Japan, and I have tried to adumbrate how that happened in Chapter 5, "Unity."

First on Ueda's agenda was the reform of Japanese schools. Under his supervision, the Meiji government instituted compulsory education from the first grade on, and in that standard school system the National Language formed the basis of instruction everywhere, not just in language class but throughout the day for all subject matter taught in the schools. Furthermore, National Language instruction became the guide for how schoolchildren were to conduct themselves, for how individuals were to behave even in their personal lives. It covered social manners, politeness, personal hygiene: Children were to wear only clean clothes; to wash their hands and faces—and to blow their noses. They were told to remove their shoes before entering the classroom; to rise and bow to greet their class *sensei*. On top of these school rules, children were to use newly established standard words even at home—down to the terms they used to address their own mothers and fathers! For reading and writing exercises, subject matter consisted of instructional essays about such subjects as the emperor and the imperial household, Japanese mythological beings, and even the Japanese military.

Meanwhile, as Ueda and his cohorts were laying down this basis for education in the schools,

the Meiji government and its military were embarking on an ambitious expansion of the Japanese empire. As that expansion progressed, each new territory brought a corresponding expansion of the realm of the Japanese National Language, whether that was in Ezo (which then became Hokkaido), the Ryukyus and Okinawa, Korea, or Taiwan. And, as colonial policy in Korea soon revealed, the native languages and dialects of those colonial territories were suppressed and often banned, sometimes brutally.[1]

All of the non-standard language upon which harsh bans were imposed included the full range of non-standard speech as determined by the government. Banned speech included what were considered "dialects" of Japanese (including Okinawan and even Korean)—as well as slang terms and expressions considered vulgar or less than proper. After all, as the "spiritual blood of the Japanese people," the Japanese language needed constantly to be purged of impurities!

* * *

After the Pacific War, though, Ueda's educational system changed.

How could it not have? Japan's civilian and governmental structures were in ruins. Millions of people had died, the country's cities and infrastructure destroyed. The Japanese armed forces were prostrate; many of Japan's senior military leaders committed seppuku, while others were tried and executed. Defeat was total.

But the most dramatic change in Japan was actually something entirely different, something John Dower has, in his famous book, called "embracing defeat." When American GIs arrived on Japanese shores, they fully expected to meet fierce resistance, fanatical Japanese defending sacred soil, or so it was predicted. Fighting to the death with bamboo spears was the image. But no. Instead, wary American troops stepped off landing craft to enthusiastic welcomes, often greeted with garlands of flowers and

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1 One little-known additional fact about Japan's plans regarding its Korea colony is that, following the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923, the Japanese military put forward a secret proposal to move the capital of Japan from Tokyo to Korea, to the Japanese Army's military base just south of Seoul in Yongsan. The rationale for this proposal was that unlike Tokyo, which had just been devastated by the quake, Seoul was quake-free. Moreover, and just as important—or so the military argued—was that the Korean city was located much closer to the center of what was planned to be the extent of the Japanese Empire as the Imperial Army made further, deep incursions into Manchuria and (other) parts of China. Fortunately, more conservative voices in the civilian government overruled the military's proposal. [See Imai Seiichi 1974: 408–409]

song, as if they were liberators, not conquerors. In the end, Allied armed forces experienced not a single instance of guerrilla action in Japan. The difference from the often sullen resistance Allied troops encountered in Germany was striking.

In Chapter 6, "Aftermath of the War," I borrow liberally from John Dower's account in describing the new post-war atmosphere in Japan, especially as it unfolded during the Allied Occupation.

But in this last chapter I also talk about long-lasting and unexpected changes the interactions made in America. For both nations, contacts between the two cultures were beneficial and long-lasting beyond what anyone could have imagined. For young Americans who had undergone training in Japanese language and culture, the benefits were especially sweet. Theirs was a positive development, as true for America as it was for Japan.

THE JAPANESE AND THEIR LANGUAGE

PROLOGUE

Travel the length and breadth of Japan, across the more than 6,800 islands in the archipelago, and anywhere you go, from the Tokyo megalopolis to the most remote and isolated village, every person you meet will immediately understand and speak *Nihongo*—Japanese. The accents you hear might vary from place to place. There will be odd and unexplained words and pronunciations peculiar to each of these places. But not one person among the more than 126 million citizens of Japan will have any trouble at all understanding the standard language as it's normally spoken.

Nowadays, that ease seems to us the most natural thing in the world; after all, Japanese is the language of the nation. But the unity and cohesion found among the Japanese people is not so common in that part of the world. Look at some of Japan's Asian neighbors. More than 700 living languages are spoken in Indonesia. In the Philippines (where, at one time, Spanish was the official language), both Tagalog and English are official languages of the state. But the Filipino people actually speak at least 120 other languages as well, and perhaps as many as 175.

And then there's India. In that country, the linguistic picture is dramatically different from that of Japan. The central-level official languages are Hindi and English, but each Indian state is also free to designate its own official language, and twenty-two have chosen to do so. In addition, still other languages are referred to unofficially in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as "national languages." And, no matter what the government decides about standards, the 1991 census recognized "1,576 rationalized mother tongues" being spoken in India, thirty of which have more than a million native speakers! The situation is bewilderingly chaotic. Could there be a sharper contrast with Japan?

Culturally closer to Japan, in East Asia, there is China, of course. China has a standard language—in the West usually called Mandarin—and in some ways it seems to serve a role similar to that of Japan's national language. Chinese reality, however, is another matter entirely. Since the 1960s,

the PRC government has officially recognized 55 minority peoples among its citizens; and, quite recently, thanks to a freer academic atmosphere, Chinese researchers have even begun to talk publicly about a far larger number of minority languages, at least 120 or so—and probably far more, almost as many as 300 according to one source [https://www.ethnologue.com/country/CN]—discovered to be living within the borders of their country. How well and how soon these non-Han nationalities can be integrated into, or reconciled with, the Mandarin-speaking majority is not altogether clear. Moreover, there is always the nagging problem of language education for Han Chinese who do not speak Mandarin natively, most notably linguistically diverse people such as the Cantonese in Hong Kong and China's southeast. The People's Republic of China continues to struggle with the problem of getting everyone to understand the same language.

On the other hand, obvious parallels to Japan can be found in a place even closer, just next door in fact, in Korea. The Korean parallels with Japanese involve a number of story threads, but these will have to be left as topics for another time. For now, suffice it to say that the consolidation of a practical, working national language in Japan had little or nothing to do with Korea.

* * *

Although you could hardly guess it now, there was a time not very long ago when Japanese could not communicate so easily with each other, and in some cases not at all. Go back only a couple of hundred years, say—or maybe not much more than a century and a half or so—and we see in Japan a spread-out, Balkanized country, separated into groups of localized communities almost completely out of touch with each other. Most people living in the islands then had never met, much less talked to each other. In other words, Edo Japan was strikingly different from that hypermodern, interconnected place at the forefront of technological development we're used to seeing today. In the middle of the 19th century, Japan was a backwater, left behind in the changing world events of the 19th century.

Western forces besieged the country, just as they did other vulnerable Asian nations in the 19th century. But while its neighbors remained internally fragmented, militarily and economically weak, taken advantage of and colonized by outside powers, Japan changed rapidly to become a member of the first world order, an economic and military equal of America, Germany, France, Russia, and Britain. Unlike other non-Western nations, Japan drew its people together and met threats with strength. No

other country in the world was able to accomplish that. How did Japan manage to transform itself in such a short period of time?

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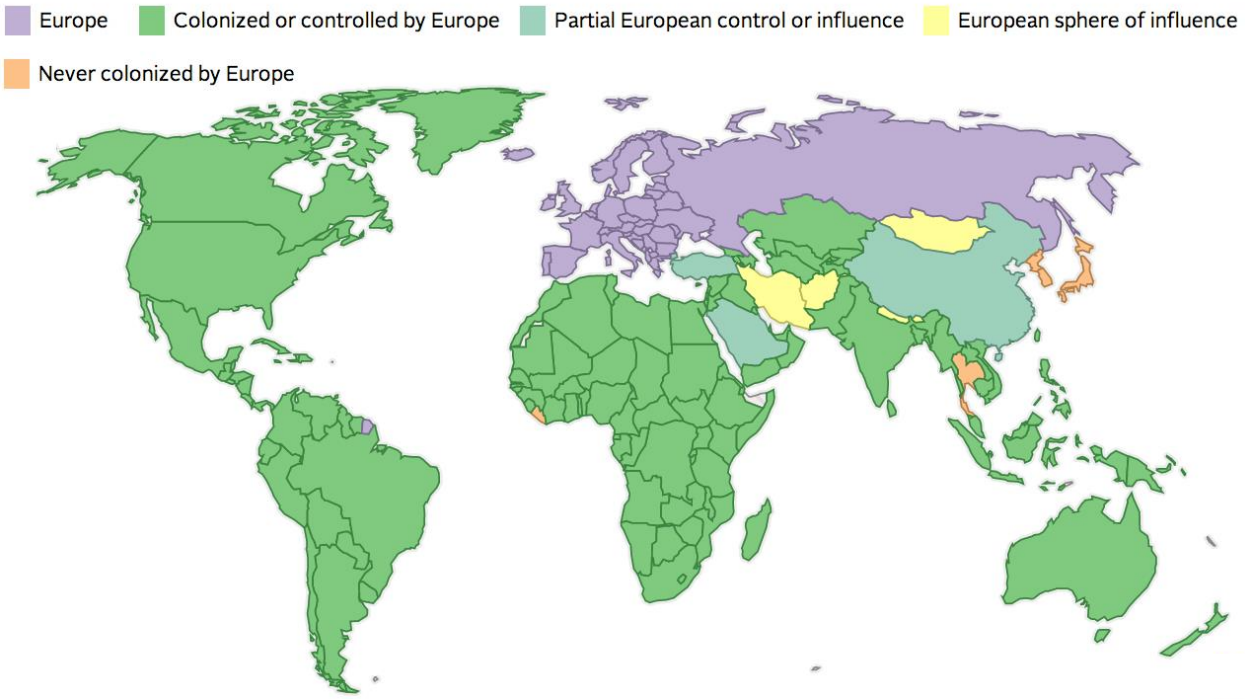
But those changes did not happen by themselves. Nor were they inevitable. The stories of what the Japanese did about their language and what happened as a result are what we want to take a look at in what follows.

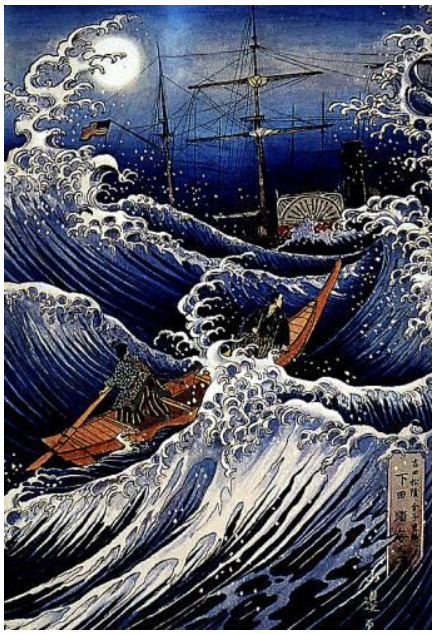


Countries that have been under European control

CHAPTER ONE:
JAPAN NAMES ITS LANGUAGE

'Japanese' makes its appearance

In 1854 the brash young samurai Yoshida Shōin came up with a daring plan. While the American fleet of "black ships" lay at anchor in Edo Bay, he and his friend Kaneko Jūsuke set out in the dead of night to sneak aboard Commodore Matthew Perry's flagship. Once on the ship, they reasoned, they could sail to America as stowaways, where they would learn about Western technology and how to make modern machines and weapons. They could then return home as heroes and use their new knowledge to modernize and arm Japan. Needless to say, the scheme quickly blew up in their faces. They managed to get on Perry's ship all right, but they were discovered almost immediately, turned over to Japanese officials and tossed into an Edo jail.



Yoshida Shōin headed for the Black Ships

This comical little episode would hardly have been noteworthy were it not for what happened next. While languishing in jail, Yoshida decided to spend the time writing a journal describing his experiences, and there, in this jailhouse journal, Yoshida told the story of what had happened that night aboard Perry's ship.

As soon as the ship's sailors found him and Kaneko, he says, he immediately began trying to tell them what they were up to. And then:

> Although I asked for a brush and tried to make signs with my hands, I couldn't communicate at all. It was extremely frustrating. In time someone [named] Williams who knew Japanese [that is, *Nihongo*, or perhaps *Nippongo*] showed up…

This was the first time, at least as far as we know, that anyone had ever used the word 'Japanese'—and the person said to be speaking it was an American. How could that possibly be true?

In writings up until that time, the names the Japanese used for their language were decidedly awkward. Usually they just called it "our country's language" (*wagakuni no kotoba*), "Japan's language" (*Nihon no kotoba*), "Japan's speech" (*Nihon no kuchi*), or some other such descriptive expression. That is to say, there does not appear to have been a concise, general word for the language before the end of Edo. *Nihongo* may be what Japanese call their language today, but back then, at the end of the Edo period, it wasn't.

Yoshida probably didn't make the word up. It seems more likely that some other people back then had already been using *Nihongo* when they were talking and just hadn't bothered to write it down. But there's no way now we can know if that was the case. The only thing we can be sure of at this point is that nobody before Yoshida ever left a record of it.

But what was it about this strange meeting that brought out the word? First, let's not forget that nothing like the encounter had happened before: A young Edo samurai interacts with an American sailor who, wonder of wonders, happens to speak Japanese!

Moreover, it's not insignificant who this young samurai was. Yoshida was intellectually far more important than he might have seemed at the time. He may have been a callow and naïve youth in 1854, but a few years afterwards he would go on to play a decidedly important role in the modernization of

Japan. He established a new kind of school, and his instructional guidance famously became one of the pillars of education for the founders of the Meiji government.

Yoshida Shōin

And then there was this mysterious American named "Williams" (whose name Yoshida wrote phonetically as *uriyamusu*) whom Yoshida met. Who was he and how did he come to know Japanese? Although no other accounts of this strange encounter seem to exist, the man in question could only have been Samuel Wells Williams, the official interpreter of the Perry expedition. This very able man had originally been a China expert specializing in Cantonese, but he had learned enough Japanese willy-nilly to make do, and that had evidently been enough to get the job. After all, few Americans back then knew how to speak any Japanese at all, and Williams was clearly a quick and competent learner. We can see how practical and serviceable his language skills were in the fact that he was then serving an important linguistic role for the expedition by helping to negotiate the Treaty of Kanagawa (although it must be noted that in doing so, he had to make use of both Chinese and Dutch in the process as intermediary languages). Still, extricating Yoshida and his companion from a sticky situation would have been well within his ability to pull off.

A Japanese image of Williams

But regardless how talented these two men may have been, it is truly a strange irony that the first person ever said to be speaking 'Japanese' was not Japanese at all but an American, a New Yorker serving as Perry's interpreter!

A WORD FOR THE OUTSIDE WORLD

Was it coincidence, then, that an American, this "Williams," was the first person said to speak *Nihongo*? If, by chance, the word was first conceived of as an out-group expression, it would not have been purely an accident. In that case Yoshida, a Japanese nationalist if there ever was one, would certainly have used it when confronted by a Westerner speaking his language. With an outsider in the picture, Japanese would naturally become something more than just 'our language'.

However the word arose, though, *Nihongo* happened to be right for the times. With its concise and outward-looking form, this timely new expression fit the needs of a Japan just emerging onto the

world stage. And although Yoshida was the first person we know who used it, *Nihongo* quickly began to appear in all manner of works dealing with the new, modern world. A veritable linguistic floodgate opened. As Japan progressed from the late Edo period into the Meiji, intellectuals began to use the word to bring a more cosmopolitan flavor to their writing, especially so in works dealing with foreign travel or the study of foreign languages. Foreigners speaking Japanese naturally brought the word to mind, and to print. In August of 1866, the nineteen-year-old Mori Arinori (who would become the founder of Japan's modern educational system) was studying abroad at University College London and happened to take a sightseeing trip to Saint Petersburg. Upon his return to Japan he published a popular travel journal describing what he saw in Russia, and, recalling a meeting with a Japanese-speaking Russian on the trip, he wrote:

> This person previously had come to the Russian consulate in Hakodate and was there for more than seven years, and so his ability to communicate in Japanese [*Nihongo*] was quite excellent.

Mori Arinori

The word appears time and time again in writings of any kind related to the Western world. And perhaps because modernization itself was so strongly associated with the West, progressive intellectuals used the word *Nihongo* liberally when writing about anything new and modern. Fukuzawa Yukichi, one

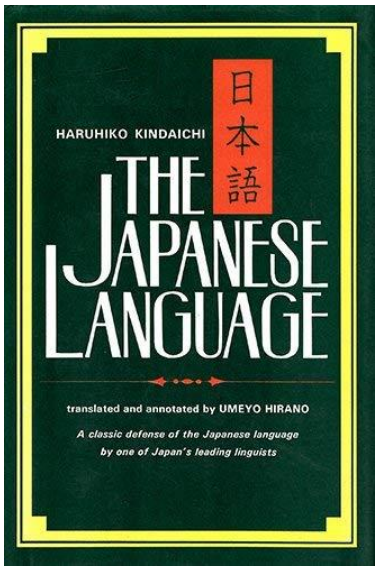
of the most prominent intellectuals of the Meiji period, seems almost to have gone out of his way to use the word whenever he was writing on subjects such as education. For many reformers, a favorite subject was the Japanese writing system, and advocates of Romanization, including Yatabe Ryōkichi and Tanakadate Aikitsu, made constant reference to "*Nihongo*" when discussing the problems they found with the traditional Japanese writing system. And, of course, language scholars trained in Western linguistics, such as Ōtsuki Fumihiko, consistently called the language "*Nihongo*" when writing on Japanese structure and vocabulary. It seems that merely talking about "cultural enlightenment" entailed an almost obligatory use of the word.

INTERLUDE: THE *NIHONGO* CONUNDRUM

There remains one odd and nagging mystery about this Japanese word for 'Japanese', however: How did Yoshida, or any of the other Meiji writers, actually pronounce the word? In other words, how did they say 'Japanese' when they were talking about the language? As surprising as it may seem, this simple question may very well remain a mostly unsolvable conundrum.

The reason is simple. Just as is true today, the Japanese word for 'Japanese' was written with the familiar Chinese characters 日本語, and these graphs give no clue as to how they were supposed to be pronounced.

These days, as everybody knows, that character transcription is almost always read *Nihongo* (unless *furigana* pronunciation guides indicate otherwise). *Nippongo* is the lesser-used and more unusual reading, and in most cases, the sound of it sticks out. It gives off a different feel; it indicates a different attitude. Most of all, it evokes an earlier era of patriotic fervor, war, and empire, and for that reason, 'Japanese' pronounced as *Nippongo* can make not a few Japanese uncomfortable nowadays. *Nihongo*, in contrast, feels unremarkable, normal, familiar, comforting.



The 1978 English translation

But even so there are still puzzles. In 1957 Kindaichi Haruhiko published his famous best seller 'The Japanese Language,' and the title was naturally written only in Chinese characters, as were all the occurrences of the word throughout the book. And so, in discussing the book in those days, most Japanese referred to it as "Nihongo." But in 1978, almost serendipitously, we learned that the name was wrong. Following the twenty-ninth printing of the Japanese edition, the book appeared in an English translation, and there the translator Umeyo Hirano transcribed the original title as *Nippongo*. Kindaichi himself added an author's preface in English that began "*Nippongo* (The Japanese Language)…." Unexplained was why that allomorph was put forward as the book title in such a matter-of-fact way. The pronunciation was surely the author's choice, or at least the one approved by him. Why he chose it is not clear. He didn't say. Whatever the reason, however, the pronunciation chosen was certainly not the one then most commonly in use. But it was the name typical of the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps this pronunciation choice was just a nationalistic holdover from an earlier time.

Back in that earlier time, particularly in the 1930s and 40s, the Japanese government strictly controlled the pronunciation of the word for "the Japanese language," as well as those of all related words having to do with Japan. Not only was the word for 'Japanese' *Nippongo*, but the 'Japanese people' were *Nipponjin*, and 'Japan' itself was *Nippon*. Those pronunciations, which were reinforced by public media and elementary school textbooks as well by patriotic rallying cries, excited emotions different

from those Japanese felt after the war. No question, the word was the quintessential symbol of nationalism.

But how did the Japanese say the word *before* imperial expansion began in the late nineteenth century? That's a much harder question to answer. Certainly, both pronunciations at least existed in the late nineteenth century. We know that was true because there are a few writings where those pronunciations are indicated phonetically. For example, in 1874 the journalist Kanagaki Robun wrote a humorous newspaper feature about a trip he took to the West, and in the article he attached phonetic symbols (*furigana*) to the word to indicate that it should be pronounced *Nippongo*: "We still don't know foreign language, so if you understand a bit here and there, just go ahead and say it in Japanese [*Nippongo*]." Kanagaki wrote in a farcical style reminiscent of late Edo, and he often poked fun at the confusion brought about by the introduction of Western culture, so the pronunciation was probably intended to sound humorous in that context—maybe even to sound like that of an unsophisticated country bumpkin.

And certainly, *Nihongo* was around then as well, as is seen in J. C. Hepburn's Japanese-English dictionary of 1886, where that pronunciation is listed in his new Romanization system. But such guides to pronunciation were few and far between. When we're dealing today with language usage from before the twentieth century, questions about reading Chinese characters can sometimes be almost impossible to answer.

A CONTRASTING WORD MEANT ONLY FOR INSIDERS

Meanwhile, a contrasting, in-group word for 'Japanese'—a word used *only* by Japanese—was also born around this same time. This second word, *Kokugo*, 'the national language,' differed not only in usage, but also in nature and origin. Whereas the word for Japanese we first see used by the young samurai Yoshida Shōin appears to have arisen spontaneously, *Kokugo* was a calculated creation that was taken up and manipulated to serve a political purpose. And the effect of this new word on a modernizing Japan would soon be enormous.

Kokugo was in its essence a word borrowed from the West, of course. That's easy to see. From its meaning, it's immediately obvious that it was calqued on the nineteenth-century European idea of a national language.

But unlike today, Japanese in the nineteenth century took in new words not as ordinary loanwords but rather as loan translations into Classical Chinese, the way Chinese still do (thus in China, for example, 'computer' is rendered, literally, as 'lightning brain'). And so, 'national language' came into Japanese in what was then the normal way by combining the two Chinese elements, *koku-* 'nation' and *-go* 'language', into *kokugo*. What was also noteworthy about the new word, though, is that there was already an ancient word—actually a couple of words—written that same way. As a result, *Kokugo* looked as if it had circulated in East Asia for a thousand years and more, when in fact it was neither old nor Chinese. Yes, the form of the word was certainly Classical Chinese, but there was nothing else Chinese about it. The Japanese just made it look Chinese.

Chinese as Japanese heritage

To outsiders, it might seem ironic that an in-group Japanese word that only they themselves were supposed to use would be made up of Chinese elements and always written in Chinese. ("It feels strange to write the word phonetically in *hiragana*," the scholar Kamei Takashi says.) But the Japanese have never thought of Chinese writing as foreign. On the contrary, they have always considered it to be a central part of their own heritage.

For as long as they had been literate, the Japanese had thought of language mainly as writing, and that principally meant Chinese writing. Of course, there were some (mainly women—at least in the beginning) who had been writing only in Japanese, and with no Chinese characters. But Chinese writing always had primacy of place. It was superior; it was the preferred medium for serious thought, the earmark of education and intellectual achievement. They venerated classical Chinese literature in all its obscurities, while at the same time hardly taking note of what the Chinese had been doing since the classical period.

Pedantry

And then, as fate would have it, on the eve of Japan's turn toward the West, Japanese obsession with ancient Chinese culture and Classical Chinese peaked. It was at that time, in eighteenth-century Edo society, that Chinese writing enjoyed an unusually heightened interest among the literati. Many artists and writers in that period thought Chinese-character words especially smart, the *sine qua non* of

sophistication, and they began to spice up their conversations as well as writings with pedantic words taken from Chinese. Obscure literary Chinese vocabulary spread as fads in these intellectual circles.

There was a great deal of pedantic one-upmanship in the games played by literati back then. According to one oft-repeated tale, a certain scholar of the time decided that the Japanese use of a particular fish character (鮭) to write the word for 'salmon' had to be corrected. The scholar had noted that in the oldest Chinese sources (e.g., the "Classic of the Mountains and Seas" from the fourth century BC), the character had clearly referred to the highly poisonous *fugu* 'pufferfish' or 'blowfish,' and the Japanese use of it to write 'salmon' was an ignorant mistake, he thought. And so, on his own, the scholar began to use the character in its original, "proper" way. As a result of this pedantry, a friend of his ate fish so labeled and died straight away. (See Kamei, et al. 1976: 82.)

The deadly *fugu*, or 'blowfish'

Of course, it might be noted that even modern Chinese also use the character 鮭 to write 'salmon' just as the Japanese do. But, whether the story of poisoning from the Edo period was real or not, what latter-day Chinese were doing at the time would not have been of interest to a Japanese scholar anyway, focused as he would have been on returning to the "correct" original Classical Chinese usage.

Moreover, the pedantry of the Japanese intelligentsia did not end with the eighteenth century. Well into the first half of the nineteenth, Japanese literati spent a great deal of effort on "correcting" native Japanese readings of Chinese characters (*kunyomi*) to their "proper," Chinese-style readings (*onyomi*).

It was against this background that European nationalism and the idea of a national language reached Japan.

Precedents

So when it came time to find a word for 'national language,' the fact that the form "*kokugo*" already existed in Classical Chinese literature was in no way considered a problem. On the contrary, it very much enhanced the stature of the new word. That's because occurrence in an ancient Chinese source gave a word the appearance of a literary allusion, an esthetic feature prized in Japanese culture, especially at that time in Japan's history. By finding the form in Classical Chinese literature, in other words, a Japanese writer could give a new coinage the cachet of ancient tradition. Such touchstones made the brave new world of Western culture and ideas seem more familiar and less unsettling. What did it matter that the words referred to totally different things?

Only a book

The earliest occurrence of *kokugo* in the literature could hardly be confused with 'national language' anyway. The first time a word written with those characters appeared was in the fifth century BC as the name of a book. But that book, whose title is usually translated into English as 'Discourses of the States,' was a collection of stories passed down about various warring states of ancient China and was most certainly not about language or languages.

A copy of the fifth-century BC Chinese classic

KOKUGO USED DISMISSIVELY, AS A SLUR

After that, though, and certainly by the eighth century, another word written with those same two characters appeared, and this time it was a word that did refer to a nation's language. This *kokugo* certainly looked like our nineteenth-century Japanese coinage. The situation becomes confusing. Had, after all, the Chinese been using such a word all along, and the Japanese had just picked up on it for modern usage? The answer is an emphatic no. Sure, it was true that the Han Chinese had, early on, started using those two characters in *kokugo* to designate the language spoken by a nation—but it was just not the language of their own nation. They never used it to refer to Chinese. Rather, they used the word only when talking about local speech in some non-Han state. Not to put too fine a point on it, the term was somewhat dismissive, meaning something like "the local vernacular," the speech used by incompletely civilized people some place out there beyond the pale.

Now, a case could certainly be made that it was precisely this usage that the Japanese first picked up on to give a name to their own language. After all, that's what Japanese was, the local speech of a non-Han land. And in the Edo period, sure enough, Japanese writers referred to their own language the same way the Chinese did. At the time, the standard language (or at least the standard written language—which was the only form of language anyone recognized then anyway!) was Classical Chinese, and within that world view the Japanese language was "a local people's vernacular" even from the point of view of the Japanese. That being the case, a note referring to "*kokugo*" (國語) in a 1714 preface to a Lotus Sutra commentary may look much like present-day usage, but it wasn't. The author, like other Japanese writers of the time, was still talking about "the local speech."

Moreover, this East Asian worldview, in which Classical Chinese was the standard language and Japanese just one of many local vernaculars, was so entrenched it was extended by analogy to what they saw as the same hierarchical relationships in the Western world. Thus, in a 1773 treatise on Dutch medicine, the physician Sugita Genpaku wrote the following explanatory passage:

> Because Latin is the origin of the languages of those various countries, things like the basic terms in medical books are all written in Latin, and, immediately following that, there is a translation into the *kokugo* [i.e., Dutch].

This passage illustrates the Japanese mindset of the time. Since Latin seemed to Sugita to have the same stature in Europe that Classical Chinese did in East Asia, he thought of Dutch vis-à-vis Latin as no more than an informal vernacular used by a local people—in other words, some 'nation's [local] language,' a *kokugo*. This was, after all, what Japanese was vis-à-vis Classical Chinese. It had no official status. Classical Chinese occupied that role.

And so, yes: the word "*Kkokugo*"—or at least a word written with those two characters—was after all unquestionably borrowed from China. Japanese in the Edo period used it in almost all respects the same way the Chinese did. But was that Edo word in any way the same word that is found in Japanese today?

It most emphatically was not. In fact, the word *Kokugo* familiar to us today symbolizes most vividly the difference between Edo Japan and Meiji Japan. Edo Japan was a cultural satellite of ancient China. Meiji Japan oriented itself toward the West.

A SHIFTING WORLDVIEW

We're used to thinking of Japan as a culturally conservative country, and there are certainly many ways in which that image is justified. (Roy Andrew Miller once jokingly described Japan as "the attic of the world.") But in the middle of the nineteenth century, Japan was not at all like that cliché. During that period the Japanese showed a cultural nimbleness not often seen anywhere else. It was a time of fundamental change, so much so in fact, it's hard to exaggerate how much the cultural orientation of the Japanese elite shifted; and it wasn't long after that that new ways of thinking began to affect how people throughout the Japanese islands lived their lives.

Language was without question one of the areas most affected by the changes. Before Perry arrived with his black ships there was no notion of a language unifying the Japanese people. The Edo textual record abounds with stories of people needing interpreters when traveling to other parts of the country, even when the places were not very far away. A standard language? In the early years of the nineteenth century the word *hyōjungo* 'standard language' itself did not even exist, and if anyone had asked about such a thing, he would have been met with blank stares of incomprehension. Moreover, as we've seen, a concise word for the Japanese language does not appear in the record prior to Yoshida's encounter with Williams aboard Perry's flagship.

The Westernization of Japan began. The change in orientation from the East to the West was dramatic, and it was sudden, beginning as it did with Commodore Perry's forced opening of Japanese ports. But even as Japanese intellectuals turned their minds toward the West, their knowledge of the Chinese classics remained wide-ranging and deep. They continued to play games with Chinese characters, just in new forms. Now, the new rule was to gloss an imported Western concept with a word made up of Chinese characters, and, if possible, to embed an obscure allusion to the Chinese classics in the new coinage.

And so it surely was with *Kokugo*.

THE JAPANESE TURN THE TABLES ON CHINA

By the time the Chinese government took note of what the Japanese were doing with their national language policy, Japan had already become a major world power. The Japanese military had crushed Qing forces decisively in the Sino-Japanese war and moved swiftly to expand its new empire, while, at the very same time, Chinese territory continued to be divided up by outside powers and exploited in humiliating ways. The contrast between the two old neighbors was shocking. Japan had modernized, and China had languished.

A print by Nobukazu glorifying the Japanese victory over Qing forces

Suddenly, the Chinese began paying attention to a heretofore largely ignored neighbor. In 1902 Wu Rulun, one of the most famous Chinese scholars of the day, had just been appointed the Superintendent of Education and the new head of the reorganized Peking Imperial University, and in this capacity he went on an inspection tour of Japan. Deeply impressed with the progress of modernization there, he came back advocating the development of a unified national language along similar lines. Wu is said to have popularized the phrase "Unification of the National Language" in China, and thus the importation of the new, Japanese-coined word to China can be attributed to him.

The word Wu was so impressed with was of course *Kokugo*. Its Classical Chinese form felt so familiar and natural to him, he found it easy to accept as native Chinese in spite of the new and unfamiliar meaning it now carried. Wu, of course, instinctively gave the characters their Mandarin Chinese readings (*Guoyu*), and in that simple way the word instantly became fully Chinese. Thus was created a classic example of what Victor Mair has aptly called a “round-trip” word—a word Japanese first modeled on classical Chinese sources, given a new meaning by tailoring it to fit some (usually) Western imported concept, and then sent with its new meaning back to China. In this way, *Kokugo* and words like it transcended national and ethnic boundaries in East Asia—wherever the common written medium was Chinese characters and Classical Chinese.

In the decades since the establishment of the Meiji government, Japan’s new leaders had agreed on what the new national language standards should be and moved forcefully to put them into place. But this was not mere bureaucratic policy-making for the school system. Instead, Japanese leadership approached the issue of building school curricula through nationalism of a peculiarly Japanese kind, with the idea of language as the “spiritual blood” binding the Japanese nation together. The nationalism was mystical, and it made language policy ever so much more effective because teaching and learning and the nurturing of linguistic bonds became direct expressions of patriotism.

Such was the linguistic policy that so impressed Wu Rulun. He envied the results. China needed such singularity of spirit, he thought. And so, in the Chinese educational reform of 1903 he included the wording: “In every country speech is uniform throughout the whole land. Hence it is very easy to harmonize the feelings of the people in the same country....” Wu was a convert to Japanese-style linguistic nationalism.

The term *kokugo* and its Western-based concept, as well as the form and concept of most other

"round-trip words," spread readily to China after Japan had asserted its cultural independence. China's leading role in the area had come to an end, and would not reemerge for another hundred years. The direction in which words flowed was a sign of a profound cultural shift in East Asia.

Then and Now

From that time until this, the Japanese have gone about living their lives with these various different names for their language. The distinguished Japanese scholar Kamei Takashi has described the psychology of the words this way:

> For the Japanese there is a feeling of intimacy in the word *Kokugo*. It, even more than *Nihongo*, has put down roots in our soul. The difference is especially great when the latter is written [or pronounced] not as *Nihongo* but as *Nippongo*; *Nippongo* has a standoffish or distant feel about it. There is a calmness resembling a kind of elegant, quiet simplicity [*sabi*] in the word *Kokugo*.

Somehow, the vehicle of state policy ended up feeling "intimate." *Kokugo* was created as an in-group word, used only by Japanese people among themselves, while *Nihongo* remained the cosmopolitan word for everybody. When the Japanese government made *Kokugo* the centerpiece of what it meant to be Japanese, it also made it the repository and carrier of Japanese identity and tradition.

In very recent years, this in-group out-group dichotomy has become somewhat muted, as a few people, in various organizations and places, are beginning to think of *Kokugo* as too insular and prefer the more general word for the language in all situations. Even so, what happened midway through the first decade of the twenty-first century was surprising.

The idealism of Tokugawa Munemasa

At the end of World War II, leading academics in Japan established the scholarly organization known as "The National Language Society" (*Kokugo gakkai*), and ever since then the society had been a bastion of conservative and nationalistic sentiment about Japan and the Japanese language. For the thousands of devoted members of the society, the name *Kokugo* had been symbolic and sacrosanct. Foreigners

might study and research *Nihongo*, but they, the members of this society, carried out research on the National Language. Meanwhile, however, there were scholars who believed the linguistic study of the Japanese language should be internationalized and integrated more fully into the science of linguistics. The most influential scholar who thought this way was Tokugawa Munemasa.

Tokugawa Munemasa

As his name might suggest, Tokugawa Munemasa was the scion of a branch family of the Tokugawa shogunate, a nobleman (*hakushaku*), so that when talking about him Japanese would sometimes say, "If the world hadn't changed, he would have been shogun." As late as the 1970s, whenever he entered a hall or public venue to speak, many older Japanese would still instinctively rise, stand at attention and wait for him to reach the front or sit down before taking seats themselves! From an early age Tokugawa had been groomed to be an officer in the Imperial Navy, but unfortunately for his military career, the war had ended while he was still a schoolboy. It was then, he told me laughing, that he had started looking around wondering what in the world he could do with his life. Finally, he said, he realized that growing up as he had in the heart of the shogun's old capital, he spoke the most standard Japanese possible. So, after all, why not study Japanese dialects? Laughing, he often joked and made light of his career choice this way, but the truth is, he was actually one of Japan's most respected scholars of linguistics and dialectology in the post-war era. Finishing his studies at the elite Gakushūin University, the "Peers School" established during the Meiji era to educate the children of the nobility and still one of the most prestigious universities in Japan, Tokugawa took up a post as professor of Japanese linguistics, first at Osaka University and later at his alma mater, Gakushūin. But Tokugawa was not only

an academic. He also served his country tirelessly as a promoter of Japanese studies, traveling, especially in his latter years, to many countries worldwide as a kind of informal ambassador for the internationalization of Japanese language and culture. From the beginning, both inside and outside the National Language Society, Tokugawa had advocated changing the name of the society, and he was able to do such advocacy without offending, not only because of his position, but also because of his wit and his humorous and charismatic style—Tokugawa *sensei* was always very much in demand as a speaker! Even so, it was only after his sudden death in 1999 that his idea was finally taken up by the society in a serious way. During his lifetime Tokugawa had been an enormously popular and respected figure, and some of his colleagues have suggested to me that what happened next was meant as a tribute to him.

At last, on February 23, 2003, a formal vote was taken, and 67 percent of the National Language Society membership approved changing the name to "The Society for Japanese Linguistics" (*Nihongo gakkai*). The name change became official on January 1, 2004, and, at the same time, the name of the society's house journal was changed from *Kokugogaku* ('National Language Studies') to *Nihongo no Kenkyū* ('Japanese Language Research'). These kinds of changes may well spread even more broadly in Japanese society sometime in the future, but even if that happens, it is likely to take many years for the use of 'National Language' to fade in the Japanese mind. As long as "*Kokugo*" is the language pillar of the national education system, everyone in the country grows up using the word and living with the context in which it is used.

National languages in the world today

A few nationalities today maintain multiple names for their language. Korea comes first to mind, but in that particular case, the main linguistic duality stems from the fact that the once-unified land is now politically divided into two countries, North and South, each side adhering to a different name—Hangugeo (한국어) in South Korea and Chosun-mal (조선말) in North Korea—based upon a different historical perspective. Moreover, in South Korea at least, use of the term 'National Language' endures. The word was borrowed directly from Japan in the twentieth century and is still very much a robust part of the Korean language today.

But in the lands where Japanese first learned the concept of a national language, there is today not even a hint of such usage. In Germany the language is always and everywhere known as "*Deutsch*,"

and in France it is "*Française*." The French may have conceived of a *langue national*, but who in France would ever think of saying such a thing in an ordinary conversation today?

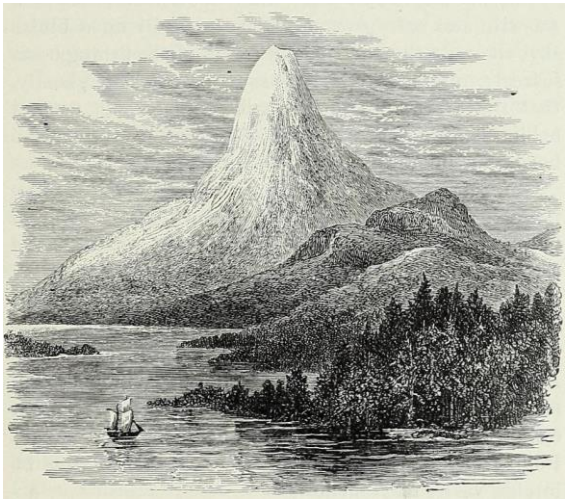
Just how different Japan is from other countries is more often exaggerated than not. But even so, it's undeniably true that Japan makes things distinctly its own even when it has learned them from others.

CHAPTER TWO:
A FRAGMENTED JAPAN

MISS BIRD'S JAPAN ADVENTURE

Isabella Bird looked forward to seeing Mt. Fuji. After eighteen days at sea the ship had finally reached the "City of Tokio," and from there, it had steamed up the Gulf of Yedo along the coast. The day was soft and gray as she strained to get a glimpse of Fuji's peak. Hour after hour she watched the green Japanese coastline and thousands of fishing boats glide by. Finally, after five hours of staring off into the distance, she "heard ecstasies all over the deck, till, accidentally looking heavenwards instead of earthwards," she saw "a huge, truncated cone of pure snow … from which it sweeps upwards in a glorious curve, very wan, against a very pale blue sky, with its base and the intervening country veiled in a pale grey mist. It was a wonderful vision, and shortly, as a vision, vanished." Then she added, "Fuji retired into the mist in which he enfolds his grandeur …" The mountain was nearly fifty miles away when she first saw it.

And right under that rapturous description of Mt. Fuji was her sketch of it.



Miss Bird's sketch of Fujisan in 1878

Why is her image so fanciful? As many of the other images in her book demonstrate, Isabella Bird was a skillful amateur artist, and yet any schoolchild today would draw a much more accurate shape for Fuji. That brief glimpse must have been all she saw before the "vision vanished."

So her book begins.

Miss Bird's readership in the late nineteenth century was much more tolerant of fanciful depictions of real-world places than people would be in our age of instant access to Internet images. In her day, the world still had places to be explored and mapped, and in parts of Africa and central Asia, even *terrae incognitae*. Japan was certainly not like that, but when Isabella Bird arrived in 1878, barely ten years after the Meiji era had begun, most of the country was exotic and almost completely unknown to Westerners. And, as she would soon discover, much of the country was still wild and barely known to—and certainly unvisited by—most Japanese as well.

Off the beaten track

In spite of its reputation for stultifying social rules, Victorian England sometimes produced glorious eccentrics like Isabella Bird. The first woman to become a member of the Royal Geographical Society, Miss Bird had traveled widely throughout the world (always alone) by the time she arrived in Japan. She was almost forty-seven years old and still unmarried.

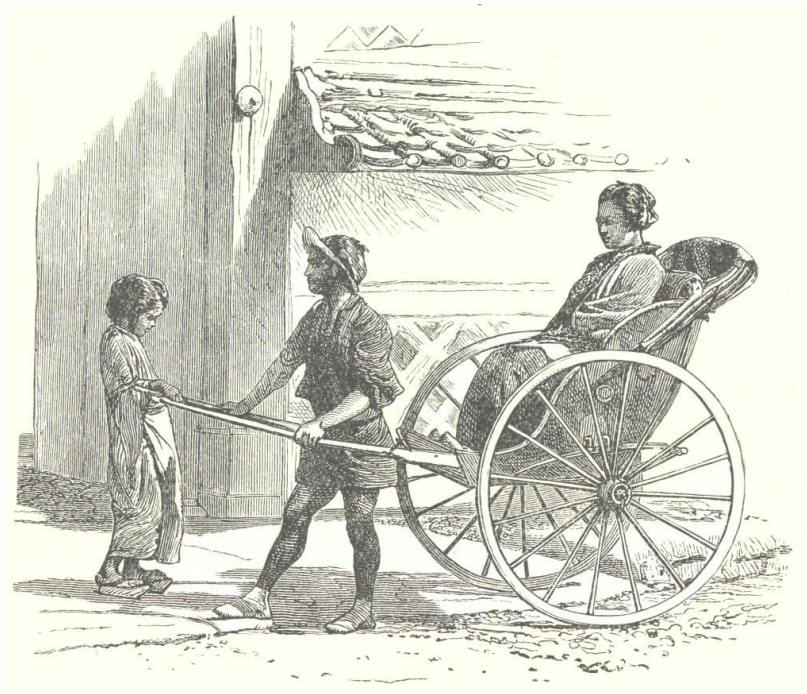
Her ship was not allowed beyond the "Treaty Point" agreed to by the Japanese, and so it made anchor, as she put it, at "unattractive, unfamiliar Yokohama." And then, when she saw the bustling port city closer up, her impression was if anything even gloomier. By the 1870s Yokohama was already filled with Europeans and other internationals, "merchants, missionaries, male and female, fashionably dressed ladies, armed with card cases, Chinese compradores, and Japanese peasant men and women flying along Main Street…" The city had a "dead-alive" look, she said. It had "irregularity without picturesqueness, and the grey sky, grey sea, grey houses, and grey roofs [looked] harmoniously dull." This was not a place for Isabella Bird, and she ended her description of Yokohama by saying, "I long to get away into real Japan." And so, she did.

Her plan was to travel in the interior, and, beginning the very next day, she started to search for a servant interpreter and a pony. After two weeks and a brief sojourn in the new Eastern Capital, "Tôkiyô," she was interviewing in earnest. At first, things did not go well. Most applicants, even those who had

worked for Westerners, could not produce intelligible English, and those who could were either dandies or Japanese experienced only in working for foreigners expecting to travel with a large retinue. And not one had ever been beyond "the Tokaido, the Nakasendo, Kiyôto, or Nikko"—that is, the beaten tracks of tourists. In the end, she picked "a creature" without any recommendations at all. He was only eighteen, and only 4 feet 10 inches in height, but though "bandy-legged," he was "well-proportioned and strong looking." She thought him "the most stupid-looking Japanese she'd ever seen," but she quickly realized he was resourceful and clever, and she hired him right away. His name was Ito.

On the tenth of June, Miss Bird set off with Ito on her journey. She had put together two painted wicker boxes containing: a folding chair "since in a Japanese house there was nothing but the floor to sit on"; a canvas stretcher with light poles so she could get high enough to be secure from fleas; candles; clothing; riding boots; a Japanese hat (which she preferred over the heavy pith helmet Englishmen usually wore); Mr. Brunton's large map of Japan; volumes of the *Transactions of the English Asiatic Society*; and Mr. Satow's Anglo-Japanese dictionary. She also had some rolls of Japanese money and a bag for her passport. Just the bare necessities for a lady traveling in those days!

Her stepping-off point into the Japanese backcountry was to be Nikkô, a town that could be reached in three days by rickshaw. This vehicle, which had been invented in Tokyo in 1869, had quickly become a major mode of transportation, and Miss Bird engaged three of them for the Nikkô leg of her journey. She herself rode in one using her Mexican saddle as a footstool; the second rickshaw (which she called a *kuruma*, since the Japanese word sounded more "euphonious" to her than "the Chinese word *Jin-ri-ki-sha*") carried her luggage, and Ito and his 12 lbs. of belongings got to ride in the third.



Miss Bird's illustration of a *kuruma*

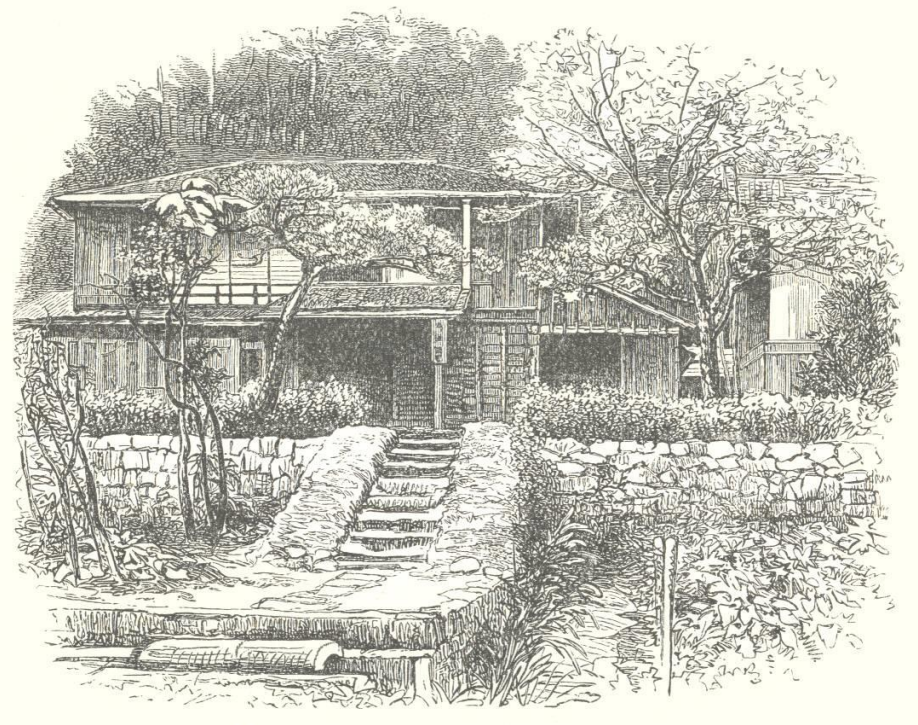
Her journey began. The "coolies" hurried off at a trot, showing their elaborately tattooed backs to Miss Bird as their upper garments flew behind them. Traveling this way, the group soon left the fringes of Tokyo, and the dirt road led them into a jarringly different countryside. Isabella Bird was certainly not narrow-minded, especially for an Englishwoman of her day, and yet in describing what she saw here she wrote, "The houses were mean, poor, shabby, often even squalid, the smells were bad, and the people looked ugly, shabby, and poor, though all were working at something or other." Every few miles the rickshaw drivers stopped at a roadside teahouse for a smoke break, to wash their feet and take a brief rest. Crossing streams, Miss Bird rode on the shoulders of one of the rickshaw drivers. And each night the little procession stopped at an inn. There, trying in vain to sleep on her canvas, Miss Bird was plagued by fleas and mosquitoes, "bad smells," and, perhaps worst of all for an English lady, lack of privacy. She was constantly followed by eyes peeking through cracks and peering through holes in the *shôji*, and interrupted by inn servants drawing the *shôji* aside without warning, and by a host of other interlopers, including a blind man coming in and "offering his services as a shampooer." She was miserable. On this well-traveled road, the beaten path to Nikkô, she had still not entered the unexplored Japan she had imagined, and yet she was already thinking of abandoning her Japan travels altogether.

A Japanese paradise

But then, as her little travel group neared the Nikkô shrines, both the surroundings and her mood improved. The countryside became prettier and prettier, and farming villages were now comfortable and "embowered in wood." As her mood brightened, so did her prose. She wrote: "Great snow-slashed mountains looked over the foothills… the dark blue green of pine and cryptomeria was lighted up by the spring tints of deciduous trees. There were groves of cryptomeria on small hills crowned by Shintô shrines, approached by grand flights of stone stairs. The red gold of the harvest fields contrasted with the fresh green and exquisite leafage of the hemp; rose and white azaleas lighted up the copse-woods … the colossal avenue of cryptomeria overshadowed the way to the sacred shrines of Nikkô, and tremulous sunbeams and shadows flecked the grass." Finally, no longer in despair, she concluded as if with a sigh: "I felt that Japan was beautiful, and that the mud flats of Yedo were only an ugly dream!"

And then there was Nikkô itself: "This is one of the paradises of Japan!" she exclaimed. The magnificence of the broad avenues and the settings of the tombs of the buried shôguns were "probably the grandest things of their kind in the world. … Grand and lonely Nikkô looks, the home of rain and mist." And the tombs themselves, fronted by a *torii* and a grand entrance gate, were "a revelation of a previously undreamed-of beauty, both in form and colour." This was grandeur that would impress even a representative of the British Empire in its glory days. Yet, there was a bit of foreboding here too, since all roads accessible to vehicles ended at Nikkô. As Miss Bird noted, "if you wish to go any farther, you must either walk, ride [on horseback], or be carried." She regretfully parted with her "coolies," and in bidding her goodbye they brought her branches of azaleas.

Before striking out on a much harder part of her journey, though, Miss Bird still had a fortnight to spend at a house nearby owned by a Mr. Kanaya. Recently divorced from his wife, Kanaya rented rooms to foreigners with references in order to supplement his income. His house, Miss Bird said, was a Japanese idyll; "there is nothing within or without which does not please the eye, and … [in contrast with the raucous inns where she had stayed], its silence, musical with the dash of waters and the twitter of birds, is truly refreshing."



Kanaya's house

In the days she spent at Kanaya's house, Isabella Bird experienced the elegance of a traditional Japanese home and garden. She also had time to observe the shrines of Nikkô at leisure, to explore the local village, the school, an exquisite *yadoya* (lodging house), and the homes and lives of families and children, all while under the guidance of Kanaya and his sister.

From here, however, her journey was to be entirely over unbeaten tracks. "Comfort was left behind at Nikkô!" she wrote.

Poverty and misery

Miss Bird and Ito then rented a pair of horses from a transportation company and set out into the interior toward the Sea of Japan. Each mountain farm or hamlet where they changed horses was dark, damp, and dirty. The people living there were afflicted with unsightly skin ailments; and they, their clothing, and their houses were alive with vermin. Dogs quarreled and howled. Rain fell in torrents, and it was difficult to find a dry place anywhere away from drips. Life was unspeakably hard. One night, while trying to escape from the thousands of fleas, Ito came to Miss Bird begging her to leave

immediately. He could not believe there was such a place in Japan, he said, adding that people in Yokohama would not believe him when he told them about it. He was "ashamed for a foreigner to see such a place."

At a tiny village called Kayashima, Miss Bird gave a coughing boy a few drops of Chlorodyne, and he was instantly cured. (Chlorodyne, a nineteenth-century British patent medicine, was made up of laudanum, cannabis, and chloroform—no wonder it worked so well!) The next morning at dawn she found the entire village crowded outside her room pressing in against one another. Fathers and mothers held naked children covered with skin disease, pustules, falling-out hair, or ringworm; daughters were leading nearly blind mothers; men had painful sores; children blinked with eyes infested by flies; and all were clad in dirty rags swarming with vermin. For lack of something better, Miss Bird improvised an ointment of animal fat and sulfur and told them how to apply it. And then, when she and Ito left the village, the village children and many of the adults followed them for a great distance. The skin of many married women she saw in this area, set upon by years of unventilated smoke from cooking fires, had become leathery and prematurely old. One house-master's wife looked to be about fifty, but when Miss Bird asked her how old she was, she replied twenty-two. The British lady was just as horrified to discover that the woman's five-year-old boy was still unweaned.

This trip that Miss Bird took across the spine of Japan carried her over seventeen mountain passes through beautiful mountain vistas, but she was hard put to enjoy the scenery. Roads—trails, really—were virtually impassable even on horseback. Hot rain and poverty-stricken villages added to the misery. Disease was rampant, one of the worst of which was surely malaria, which was endemic. Mosquitoes and fleas were constants. Crowds followed her. Whenever she and Ito approached a town, the first person to spot her would run back to report the sighting, and quickly old and young, clothed and naked, gathered to gawk. None had ever seen a foreigner before.

At last, she reached Niigata. This coastal city of fifty thousand was a Treaty Port, but one without foreign trade and almost no foreigners—except at the Church Mission House, where with great relief Miss Bird stayed for over a week.

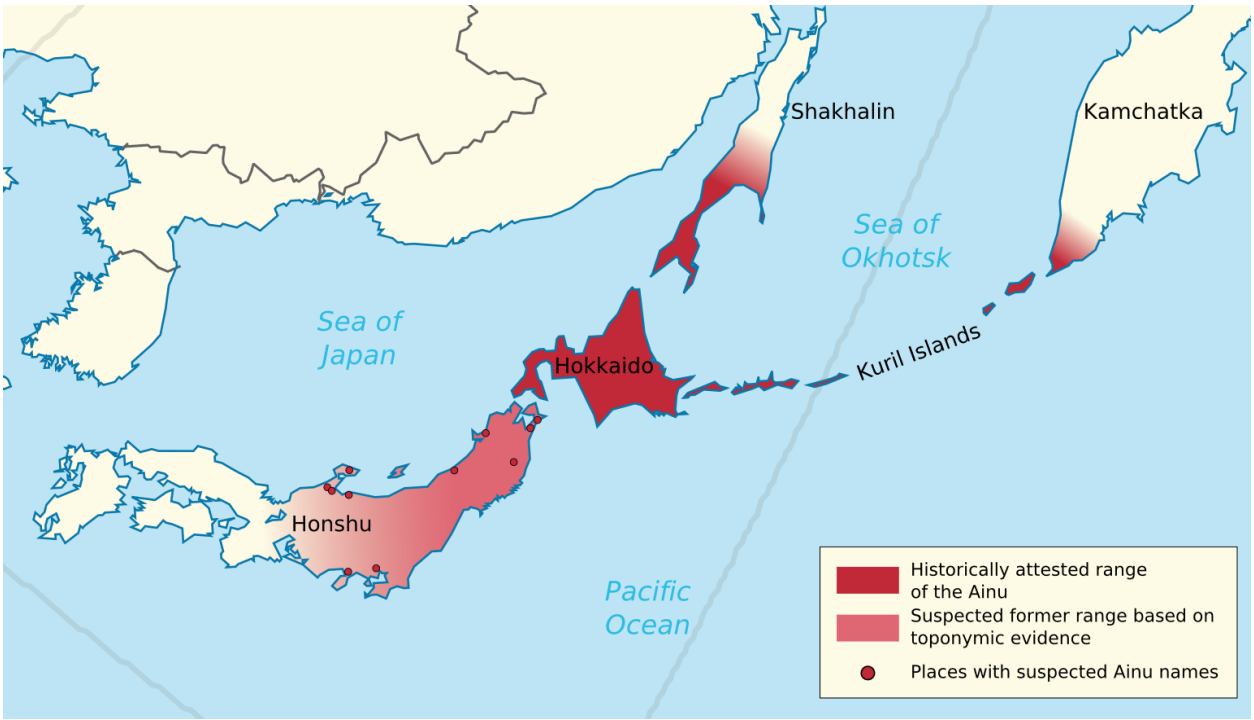
From there she traveled north, at first near the coast along a road passable by rickshaws. But then it was back into "the great central chain of Japanese mountains," where, from time to time, snowy peaks broke the monotony of the "ocean of green." In the villages, almost completely cut off from the

outside world, poverty was again extreme. The travelers entered Yamagata Prefecture. It continued to rain. Miss Bird was suffering from pain in her spine. And most worrisome was that Mr. Brunton's map of Japan failed her; she was entering territory then largely unknown to Western mapmakers.

An ominous incident

It was around this time that an incident took place foreshadowing what lay ahead for Miss Bird. Walking through a Yamagata farming village, she was suddenly set upon by a man there, and when Ito came up, the man assailed him vigorously as well. Why? Though communication was far from perfect, it seems that the man had become aggressive because he had thought Miss Bird was an Ainu.

The Japanese relationship with the Ainu had long been fractious. The earliest Japanese histories contain stories of wars waged against northern tribes they called "Emishi," and though their military forces had succeeded in driving those tribes out of most of the northeast by the ninth century, the Ainu remained for a thousand years, more or less safely ensconced in the lands to the north of Tōhoku, in "Yezo."



Lands originally inhabited by the Ainu people

However, in 1868 expansionist policies of the new Meiji government changed the situation entirely. Tensions were ramped up again, as authorities moved aggressively to annex the Ainu homeland on the northernmost island of Hokkaidō and to develop its vast territories and resources. In the process, Ainu lands there were confiscated for Japanese resettlement and exploitation, and the Ainu themselves were brought under tremendous pressure to assimilate—in effect, to disappear. Later, in 1899, the Japanese government would pass an act declaring that the Ainu were "former aborigines" and that there were now no ethnic minority groups in Japan.

It was in the midst of this ongoing process that Miss Bird would soon find herself. But to get to "Yezo," she first had to traverse the difficult and poorly mapped northeastern part of Honshū itself, the territory still known today as Tōhoku, the 'Northeast.'

An old bias shows up

The journey ever-farther north led Miss Bird through impoverished villages much like those she had already seen. But the new Japanese government had already improved the road leading into the city of Yamagata, and the settlement itself was also showing signs of increased prosperity. It further came as a relief to be able to hire a boat to take her little party down the Omono River to Kubota (soon to be renamed Akita City), the capital of Akita Prefecture. She loved the town there at Kubota, she said, because it was so "completely Japanese and has no air of having seen better days." But otherwise, her travels were difficult, especially so because the horses were "horrible" and riding them only made the excruciating pain in her spine even worse. Wind, incessant rains, and swollen rivers that somehow had to be crossed added to the travel difficulties.

Miss Bird's sketch of an Akita farmhouse

Meanwhile, Ito was also stressed by their travels. He could be irritable and testy, at other times shocked and ashamed. Ever the city boy from Yokohama, Ito found the impoverished people of Tōhoku and their lives barbaric, animal-like even, and he apologized again and again to Miss Bird that she had to see such embarrassingly crude people in his country.

Ito especially looked down on how the people of Tōhoku talked. He found their pronunciation and the words they used annoying, and throughout this trip through the north, he continued to make fun of rural people and their speech. Listening to them wore on his patience and made his mood worse. He treated northern people and their language with contempt and made no effort to conceal his disdain.

To a certain degree, people from the Tokyo area share Ito's attitude even today, as Tokyoites still make fun of Tōhoku speech and the "*zuu-zuu*" sounds they describe it as having. The economic level of the Tōhoku region of Japan was, and still remains, far below that of the capital, and the average Tokyoite looks upon the people there much as the average New Yorker does the people of Appalachia.

From Isabella Bird's account there is little way to judge how much Ito understood of the local speech. Certainly, he was able to communicate; for, unlike Ainu, it was still a variety of Japanese after all. But what we do know is that the government officials who would later be responsible for instituting language standardization policy would devote special attention to correcting what they viewed as the atrocious, non-standard speech heard in Tōhoku. Tōhoku has long remained a problem for the Japanese government.

On to Yezo!

The journey through Akita, and then Aomori Prefecture on the northernmost tip of Honshu, took over two weeks. Incessant rains had swelled rivers to the point where only the bravest of ferry operators were willing to cross them, and at least one was swept away and drowned in the effort. Finally, in the middle of August, Isabella Bird reached Aomori Bay. Her overland journey on Honshu was over.

A ship was leaving for Yezo that night. Little more than a paddleboat, the steamer set sail that evening, and, buffeted by a terrible gale, it took fourteen hours to reach Hakodate Harbor on Yezo—the great northern island now renamed Hokkaidō by the new Meiji government. Waiting on the windy beach until the customs officers arrived, Miss Bird was wet and cold, her baggage and clothing muddy and soaked with seawater, and she was afraid she would be unpresentable at either the British Consulate or the Church Mission House. But she looked forward to the warmth of an English home, where she would be staying for a few days.

Hakodate was a Japanese enclave in alien territory. It was "Japan all over," wrote Isabella Bird, but even if so, it was Japan on the frontier. Its shops sold necessities for settlers, but many also sold, as Yezo novelties for visitors, bear furs, skins, and the like.

From Hakodate, Miss Bird began her trek into "the wilds" following the coastline around "Volcano Bay." Along this coastal road she passed strings of horses returning from the interior loaded with deer hides; packhorses heading into the interior were carrying sake. As she traveled, Japanese houses became fewer and fewer, and with distance from Hakodate, Ainu began to outnumber the newly arrived Japanese settlers.

Ainu "lodges"

Traveling farther around the southern coast of Hokkaidō, Miss Bird reached Biratori. From there, the dominant culture everywhere was that of the Ainu. She did not explore much farther, and certainly not the vast interior of the island. But in going where she did, she certainly achieved her goal of exploring "unbeaten tracks" of Japan—and, in Yezo, even ones beyond Japan. By early September she returned to Hakodate, and from there, by ship, to Yedo.

Isabella Bird was an enthusiastic amateur anthropologist. True, she referred to the Ainu as "savages" or "complete savages," a "harmless people without the instinct of progress"; and, after discussing "scientific" measurements of their brain sizes, she blurted out, "Yet with all this the Ainos are a stupid people!" But with these remarks she was simply reflecting how even professionals talked and wrote in those days. Today, in a less paternalistic age we may read these lines and cringe, but if we are able to look beyond the biases of our own time, we find an empathetic, independent, and intelligent observer. Isabella Bird did not write without observational information, and she withheld judgment about Ainu culture until she reached Biratori, an Ainu village sufficiently beyond the heavy influence of Japan to be independent. And it was here that she wrote in detail about Ainu life and culture.

Ito, on the other hand, had nothing but contempt for the natives. When Miss Bird asked him to be kind and courteous to the people who would be hosting them, he replied indignantly, "Treat Ainos politely! They're just dogs, not men." The Japanese settlers in the mixed villages of southern Hokkaidō shared his contempt.

This attitude towards a subjugated people was typical of the late nineteenth century wherever states and empires were expanding. As Isabella Bird noted when discussing abuses by the Meiji Development Office, "[the office] treats [the Ainu] far more humanely and equitably than the U.S. Government, for instance, treats the North American Indians." Miss Bird, who had famously spent months traveling throughout the Rocky Mountains in 1873, knew something of what she was talking about.

"Ainos of Yezo"

Isabella Bird's writings reveal much about the Ainu just as the Japanese were moving to incorporate Hokkaidō into the homeland. The Ainu were in retreat and fearful. Yet when Miss Bird visited, they still maintained a proud and fully independent culture unlike that of any other people, as they had done for thousands of years on the island of Hokkaidō and beyond. Their language was related to no other. Soon they were destined for assimilation, but what Miss Bird recorded was a snapshot of their world before that happened.

The language they spoke demonstrated the degree to which the Ainu were unassimilated. In 1878, the local people everywhere in Hokkaidō spoke Ainu, and often only Ainu. Few understood any Japanese, spoken or written. And by the time Miss Bird and Ito reached Biratori in their travels around

southern Hokkaidō, they found that only the headman and four others in the entire village spoke any Japanese at all. From that point on, communication had to pass through three languages, since Ito required an interpreter to talk with the local people for Miss Bird.

Contrast that situation with today, when the native language of every inhabitant of Hokkaidō is Japanese, and the Ainu language is virtually extinct, preserved only with deliberate effort by a few Ainu nationalists and preservationists. In scarcely more than a hundred years, the linguistic map of Hokkaidō has completely changed.

But in the early Meiji period, there was still no standard, common language in Japan. People from the capital had difficulty communicating in Hokkaidō and Tōhoku, and, to various degrees, elsewhere as well. Japan was then a linguistically divided and diverse country.

CHAPTER THREE:
THE EDO TOURIST

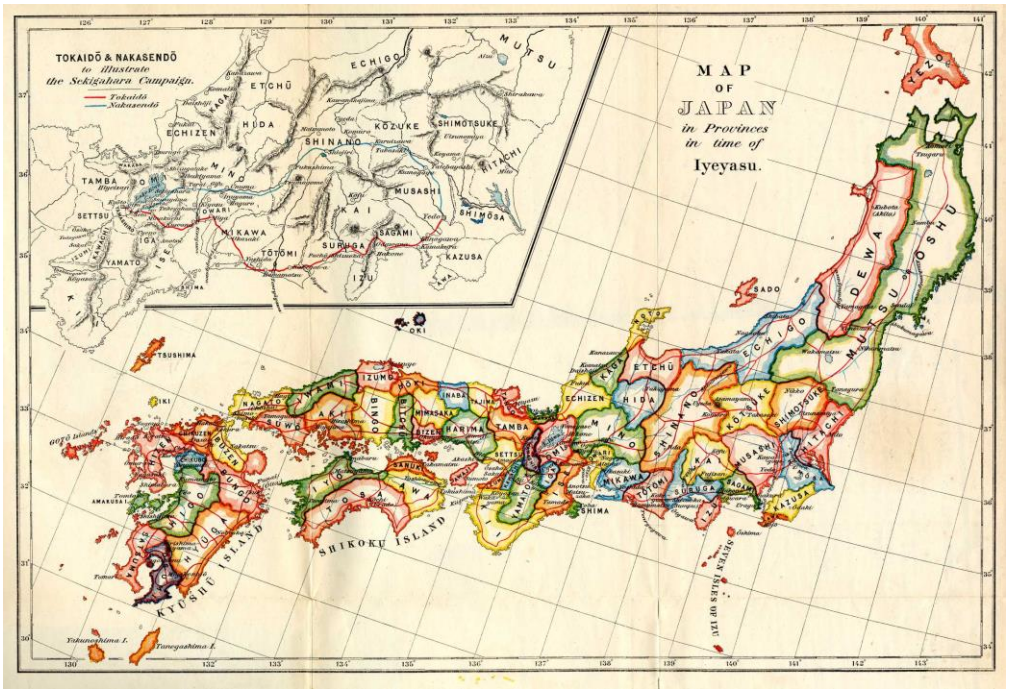
Much like Isabella Bird, Furukawa Koshōken was an avid tourist. He, too, traveled "unbeaten tracks" to seldom seen places, and he too kept travel journals that later became popular books. What's more, he also visited many of the same places Miss Bird did—except that he was there one hundred years earlier. And in doing so, not only did he go north to see the Ainu, he also went south to Kyushu to take a look at the Dutch traders and a colony of Korean potters.

Furukawa was not a Japanese Isabella Bird, of course; for one thing, he couldn't set foot outside Japan. But had the Tokugawa shogunate permitted it, he might have been among the first persons in Edo Japan to go abroad. He was certainly curious enough, and clever and resourceful enough, to travel to far-flung and distant places, and after some years of travel to various places in Japan, he was able to finagle sponsorship from the shogun himself for further exploratory trips to out-of-the-way places along the archipelago. The journals he wrote about these travels later proved especially popular with the reading public, and, through his descriptions of Tohoku and Ezo in particular, he became one of the best-known travelers of the era.

Furukawa Koshōken

Furukawa represented something new in Japan: the ordinary tourist. Before his time, the only Japanese on the road very much were priests and an assortment of believers on religious pilgrimages—or government agents on official business. But then, suddenly, in the Edo period, we start seeing other kinds of people traveling around on sightseeing trips, a development that at first seems oddly inconsistent with all else we know about the period. After all, the Tokugawa bureaucracy had rules regulating and restricting the lives of ordinary people even to the smallest detail. The most famous of such rules was that no one was ever allowed to leave Japan, and that stricture was absolute. Any poor fisherman who happened to be swept out to sea in a storm and land on some foreign shore would never be allowed to return home again.

But travel even within Japan itself was by no means simple. Furukawa and travelers like him had to negotiate a bewildering network of travel rules that were complex and often arbitrary. He had to get a passport. He had to have permits and paperwork to be checked at each domain border as well as at numerous checkpoints along the major highways, sometimes perfunctorily, but at other times carefully or even arbitrarily, often at the whim of local officials. How was it that Furukawa or anybody else would choose to travel under such unpleasant and tense conditions?



Murdoch's map (from 1903) of provinces in the Edo period

One simple answer is money and connections. An upper-class male traveler with resources was seldom harassed, especially if his papers included a letter from some important official, and Furukawa always made sure to have that. But more important still was the new environment for travel, something that had changed the situation dramatically for would-be tourists. In contrast with the frightening and constant state of internecine warfare that preceded the Tokugawa shogunate, Japan had become a peaceful place. Travel was at last safe. The old imperial highway system had been improved, and all along these routes were lodges and teahouses, as well as porters and horses that could be hired. And so, anybody in Furukawa's time with money and friends could be a free-spirited tourist worried only about what to see next and what poem to write when he got there. Checkpoints were pesky inconveniences but certainly manageable for someone as resourceful and connected as Furukawa.

In his autobiography Furukawa tells us that he had been a rebellious teenager, adding that he spent a lot of time with children beneath his station in life. Though he was born into a family of herbal doctors and was supposed to study medicine, he had other dreams. He had a literary flair, something that shows up vividly in the pen name he chose for himself, "Koshōken," or 'house of the old pine' (古松軒). The sobriquet was intended to be a poetic reminder of an old pine tree in his family's garden: for the rest of his life he used that name, and it was what he was always known by.

As he tells it, Koshōken was a late bloomer. And this seems to have been true: after all, he didn't become known for his travels until he was well into his sixties. (No wonder likenesses of him always show him as an old man, as in the image shown.) He didn't start off with any particular advantages of money or rank, or with easy access to travel. But he did prepare for serious travel by studying geography and mapmaking, in Edo, with the man reputed to be the founder of the field in Japan. Beyond that professional skill, Koshōken worked on developing general, encyclopedic knowledge in a variety of fields—as did not a few other Edo-period travelers.

Koshōken's first lengthy trip—at least the first one we know about—was to Kyushu in 1783, which he later described in his travel journal, *Various Records of a Journey to the West* (*Saiyū zakki*). He was already fifty-eight years old by that time, which is telling. For most of his life he had longed to travel, but he was already an old man before he did anything about it.

Heading west

In March of that year Koshōken set out from his home in Bitchū Province, near what is now Okayama, heading west, making notes about each domain he passed through. He had put together an itinerary of well-known scenic sites to see along the way, and in this respect he was very much like most tourists now as well as then. So, quite naturally, one of the first sites he chose to visit was the ethereally beautiful Itsukushima shrine on the island of Miyajima, still a high point on tours of western Japan today. In mid-April, a good month and a half after he had started his journey, Koshōken boarded the boat to the island. Before him stretched the Inland Sea, and, as the boat slowly navigated its way across the strait to Miyajima, he admired the natural beauty of the setting. Once on the island, he began taking in details of what he saw there: the famous "floating" *torii* gate rising out of the sea in front of the shrine, the vermilion colors of the many buildings of the shrine itself, the local temples found on the island. He wrote an account of the shrine's history, treasures, and legends.

A present-day view of the Itsukushima shrine at high tide

The time it had taken Koshōken to get this far—a month and a half to cover less than two hundred kilometers on relatively good roads—underscores just how different the Edo-period world was from ours; nowadays, it takes at most two hours to get to Itsukushima from Okayama—including the time for the ferry ride! But Koshōken was also different from most Japanese travelers before him as well. He was an especially clear-eyed observer, well ahead of his time, and a humanist skeptical of received

wisdom, religion, and superstition. He could also be downright curmudgeonly in his commentary. Near the beginning of his journey he had stopped by a temple and reacted with scorn at what he saw there: "I do not know how it was in the past but nowadays when the entire nation from corner to corner is Buddhist, there are people who, without having entered the priesthood, pretend to be monks, make themselves comfortable and live off the people. Is this not despicable?"

Koshōken was certainly no religious mystic.

And, while enraptured by the beauty of the Itsukushima shrine and the island, he did not suspend his disdain for superstition. A bit west of the main shrine was a clay room used as a steam bath, and it especially caught his attention because it was touted as a cure for illness. In the room, four or five bundles of pine needles were burned to elevate the temperature, and then taken outside after the sick had entered. People with some kind of infirmity or illness were instructed to sit inside and sweat as long as they could stand the heat before running outside to cool off. Of course, Koshōken's description makes the bath sound not too different from a modern sauna, and treatment there was no doubt similarly satisfying. But Koshōken found ridiculous the idea that it cured illness: it worked, he was told, for colic, chills, headaches, and palsy, as well as for lower back pain. In his travel journal he drew a sketch of the bath and noted sarcastically, "There are indeed many ways to cure the sick in this world!"

Ever the rationalist, Koshōken also treated Itsukushima's romantic legends with skepticism. But at the same time, he maintained respect for how they preserved older traditions. He described an ancient festival (still performed at Itsukushima) in which people spend a great deal of cash decorating a boat that shrine priests and shrine maidens row out to various shrines along the Inland Sea: "On their way, … they prepare three large rice balls, place them on a tray that they then float out into the sea. When the crows from Mt. Misen fly hither to pick them up, they take that to mean that the deities have granted their wishes, and they joyfully jump up and down on the boat…" Here was Koshōken's comment:

> Wherever there are many birds, and they see food, they come to eat it. To say that this is mysterious and to spend much money on something like that is laughable and stupid. Even so, one can respect it as an old custom. Considering that near the capital many old customs have vanished, this [superstitious tradition] may in fact be preferable to the garish festivals of modern times.

Meiji-period woodblock print of the shrine

Koshōken's comments about local dialects and customs were equally biting. Even before he had reached Itsukushima, he began criticizing the characteristics of local villages, noting that the language they used was markedly different from his own and of course inferior to it. By the time he reached Kyūshū, he found the dialect difficult to understand at all.

South to Satsuma

In May of 1783, Koshōken crossed the Kanmon Straits over to the island of Kyushu and headed south. The village life he observed in the northeastern part of the island was already noticeably different again, in many ways still recognizably Japan but in other ways oddly unfamiliar:

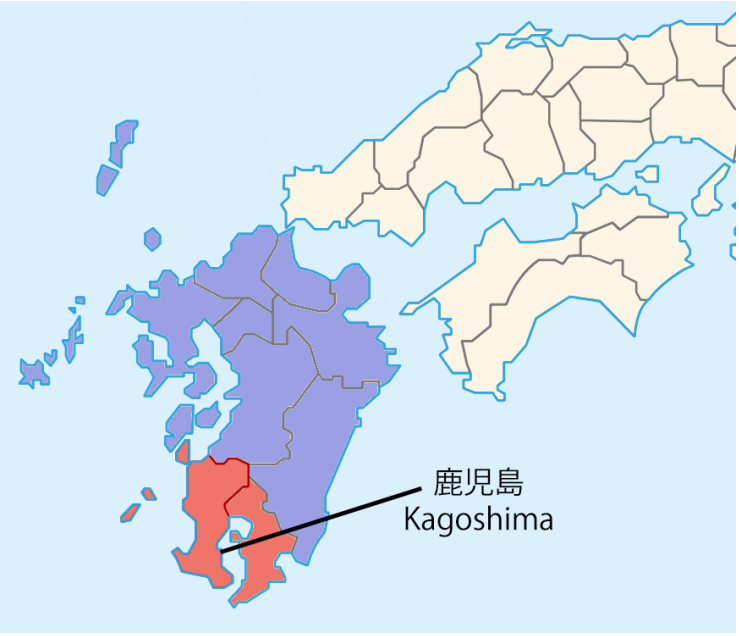
> In Bungo Province the customs are uncouth and bad. Ever since I entered this province, I have not seen a single farmhouse that I thought was decent. … There are no persimmons, no mandarin oranges, no kumquats, and no citrons. The character of the people and their language is quite inferior to the Chūgoku region [the westernmost part of Honshū]. When they go into the mountains, they go barefoot and go directly into their houses without even washing their feet when they return. They do not eat rice; millet is their chief staple. …

And then he quipped, "The merchants who travel [here and to other provinces a little farther south in Kyushu] often joke with each other in the inns, saying: 'Let's go back to Japan!' and have a good laugh."

But Koshōken also noticed striking differences between the castle towns and the countryside around them. While the customs and language of the castle towns were relatively "decent" (at least from the perspective of his own Bitchū homeland), those of the country farms and villages around them were definitely not. The people in those rural areas spoke differently and acted differently.

Farther down the eastern side of the island, in Hyūga, the level of what Koshōken considered barbarity increased. For one thing, he noted that in the summer everybody went naked. Only the grown women wore a dyed cotton loincloth. "Boys and girls go naked.... When I first saw such people, perhaps because I was not used to it, I was shocked. The women feel absolutely no shame in being naked."

Satsuma, situated on the boot-shaped peninsulas in the southwestern corner of Kyūshū, was at the time a powerful, virtually autonomous domain that took maximal advantage of its extreme distance from Edo and the Shogun's armies. Partly as a result of that semi-independence, it was also one of the richest and most powerful domains, controlling, and exacting tribute from, many of the Ryūkyū islands to its south.



Satsuma domain and the city of Kagoshima

The domain was extremely strict in the enforcement of its laws. Border officials inspected everything that came their way, and they placed unusually tight restrictions on travel by all outsiders—except Buddhist monks. When Koshōken arrived at the Satsuma border, he found that the officials were less strict with itinerant monks, so he disguised himself as one and got through with much less trouble. Traveling around in this remote corner of Japan, he was judgmental as always: "The women here are very low-class. They talk in a high-pitched voice, and you can't really understand anything they're saying." What he liked about Satsuma—just about the only thing—was the famous sweet potatoes (which are even today called "Satsuma potatoes" everywhere in Japan).

Koreans

A little west of Kagoshima, Koshōken came across a village of ethnic Koreans. They were the descendants of potters Hideyoshi had brought to Japan after the wars he had waged on the Korean peninsula at the end of the sixteenth century. Koshōken had heard about the Koreans and very much looked forward to seeing those exotic people and observing all the strange things about them. Over the decades they had increased in number, so that there were now 1,500 living in the village.

> ...If you look at them closely, you can see they are tall and have slender faces and a distinguished look. Ever since they came here, they have been prohibited from intermarrying with the Japanese. Although they shave their heads, they do not shave their heads in moon-shaped Japanese fashion. Even though they have lived in Japan for five to seven generations and have assimilated eighty or ninety percent, they are not allowed to shave their hair in the Japanese fashion despite repeated petitions to the lord of Satsuma. To this day, there is an official interpreter who receives a two-person pay. As a tradition, they dance a Korean dance in front of the lord whenever he passes the village on his way to or from service in Edo. ...There are five leading families. These families have preserved their traditional Korean dress, and they wear this dress when the lord comes. They make a living by producing pottery called *Satsuma-yaki*, many examples of which are sold in other provinces.... To this day, they mix Korean with

> Japanese, using the word *aba* for 'mother' and *muma* for 'father.'[2] There were many other words I could not understand.

In this passage, the often-judgmental Koshōken showed more respect towards ethnic Koreans than he did towards the rural Japanese he met in Kyūshū.

Heading north from Satsuma along the western coast into Higo, he continued his rant about women on the road going naked, "a custom one must consider uncivilized." Still, he found the Higo dialect "better" than that of Satsuma, even though he said there were many words he had never heard before.

As he made his way around Kyūshū, Koshōken continued to write about customs good and bad and new and old, commenting acerbically about anything that smacked of superstition. He also observed with a keen eye all he could learn about geography and the natural world, about agriculture, disease, law, and governance—all things that would serve him well later, when his journal finally happened to reach the eyes of the Shogun. But for now, his notes were personal things. He was describing the observations of a journey taken for his own personal enjoyment. It just happened that he was interested in almost everything.

Koshōken passed through Kumamoto ("ugly!") and headed towards Nagasaki, a famously exotic place for Edo Japanese. He was excited by the prospect. At last, he was about to reach this window at least partially open to the outside world. Those visitors from outside Japan, the Dutch, were of course confined to the tiny, artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki Bay. This island compound was strictly off limits to ordinary Japanese, but Koshōken hoped at least to see the foreigners from a distance and meet with people who interacted with them on a regular basis.

NAGASAKI SIGHTS

Koshōken had been on the road four months, finally reaching Nagasaki on July seventeenth. He met with an interpreter, one of the few Japanese allowed on Dejima regularly. Even before leaving home,

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2 To anyone who knows Korean, it appears that Koshōken must have gotten these words mixed up: in modern Korean, *appa* (아빠) means 'dad' and *eomma* (엄마) means 'mom'!

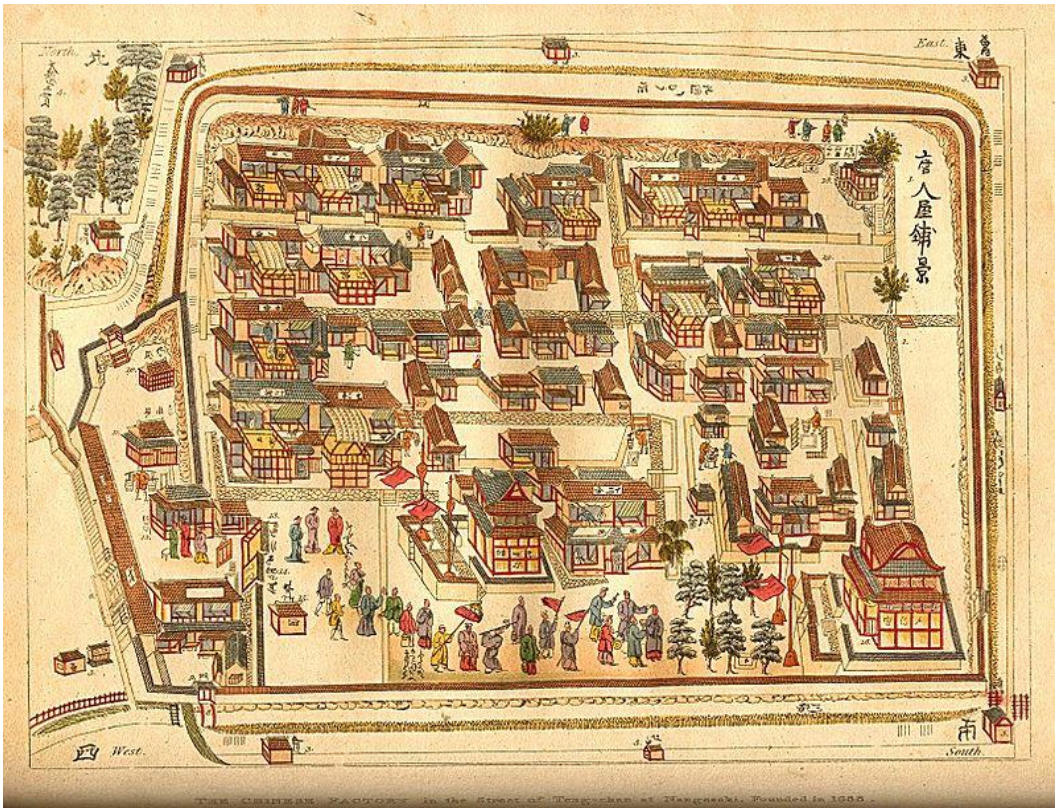
Koshōken had read much about the Dutch, their technological prowess, and the awesome power of their cannons. The interpreter substantiated what Koshōken had heard, confirming that Dutch powder and cannon were both vastly superior to anything the Japanese had.

Before going to observe the Dutch, however, Koshōken first described what he could find out about Nagasaki's Chinatown. This "Chinatown," if it can be called that, consisted of a walled compound near Dejima where traders from China were confined. As he had been with the Koreans, Koshōken was respectful and generous toward these outsiders:

> Whoever I saw there [in Chinatown] looked more elegant than the Japanese. The Chinese shave their foreheads, leaving a round area of unshaven top hair, plait the hair in three strands, which are allowed to fall to the back. On top of this, they wear a kerchief around their heads like a hat....

Continuing on about Nagasaki's Chinese merchants, he turned to the thriving business of prostitution in this Chinatown:

> The pleasure girls licensed to serve in Chinatown sit down on a bench in front of the gate and wait until the guard inside the gate gives them the signal to enter. And then when they enter, it is usual practice for the guards to check their dress by passing their hands slightly over their kimono—an unnecessary ritual, it seemed to me. ...When five to seven girls walk by in all their beauty, lower-ranking Chinese officials come outdoors all at once, left and right, and shout flattering remarks at them. The girls either laugh or speak gibberish (*chinpun, chinpun*) back at them.



The Chinese compound in Nagasaki (唐人屋敷)

From there Koshōken took a brief look at twelve Chinese junks moored in the harbor, and then went up as close as he could to Dejima itself to get a glimpse of the Dutch headquarters and the foreign traders working there. He noticed that local Japanese who lived near the compound knew some Dutch, and six or seven out of ten Dutchmen as well as their black servants knew some Japanese. He added that the women who play with their children on the bridge to Dejima shout at the foreigners "I love you" in Dutch.

After seeing some of the Dutchmen, he described their physical appearance:

> The Dutch have white skin. Their eyes and noses differ much from the Japanese and Chinese. Their eyebrows, too, are reddish and many of their features lack elegance. They shave their hair and wear black wigs. The garments they wear are made of the best fabric. ... Their black servants (*kuronbō*) are small and slender, their hair color black and their noses flat.

He wrote in even greater detail about the Japanese prostitutes who served the Dutch:

> Every day, twenty-five girls are licensed to serve the Dutch and twenty-five serve the Chinese. It causes quite a stir when fifty pleasure girls, each accompanied by a servant, proceed to their destination. The lower officials at the gate inspect the girls' dress when they enter and leave the gate. … But, since they do this every day, they have simplified the procedures and just pass their hands gently over their kimonos. The girls strongly dislike serving the Dutch because they think it gives them a bad reputation, but the officials force them. The girls who serve the Dutch are selected from among the most beautiful in Maruyama. Of course, this was because when the Dutch like them, they give them expensive presents. However, when the appointed girl has a good customer in Maruyama, she pays to send a substitute to the Dutchmen's place. If a girl behaves badly at the Dutch headquarters, they strip off her dress and smear black ink all over her naked body and chase her out of the gate. … Reluctant to return all the way to Maruyama naked, the girl runs into the nearest house to borrow something to wear and returns home at night.

Dutchmen with courtesans in Nagasaki

Before he left Nagasaki, Koshōken visited and consulted with Yoshio Kōsaku, a famous physician and scholar of "Dutch Studies," who was also the chief Dutch translator. Kōsaku told him that the Dutch were deeply compassionate, and that, when they left Japan, they continued to cry for twenty or even fifty days. He said further that, when the Dutch left, they gave something they had treasured most as a memento. Kōsaku's grand Western-style house was filled with Dutch things.

On August 2, 1783, five months after he had begun this journey to the southwest, Koshōken set sail from Nagasaki. He then went sightseeing around by ship for a time, and when he finally arrived in Shimonoseki on September second, he closed his diary. From there he took a boat and returned home.

Koshōken makes his mark

Koshōken hadn't intended that his Kyushu travel diary be published, but copies did get passed around. Eventually the diary caught the eye of some important people who helped build up the reputation of the old curmudgeon. When one influential geographer saw and read the diary, he was in fact so impressed with Koshōken's observations and descriptions of Kyushu that he recommended him to the shogunate. As a result, the Shogun's government invited Koshōken to be part of an inspection tour of Tohoku and Ezo scheduled to take place in 1787. That trip would become the stage for his second famous journal, *Tōyū zakki*.

Koshōken had traveled alone to Kyushu, but now, heading north this time instead, he became part of an official party of 107, a group that included high-ranking samurai inspectors and their retinues. Being part of such a group was definitely a good thing. Not only was Koshōken a few years older than before (he was sixty-two years old by this time), but, even for the most vigorous and able-bodied travelers, trips north were far more uncertain and hazardous than trips south. Being included in an inspection team sponsored by the Shogun was unquestionably a better circumstance to be in. Even so, remaining true to his acerbic nature, Koshōken spoke his mind about the expedition. In a note in his diary he criticized it openly, declaring that the members of the tour were undersupplied and underpaid!

Modern Japan rail map of the Tohoku region

THE NORTH AS AN UNKNOWN LAND

Koshōken had had a taste of the exotic in Kyushu. He had met "Koreans" (two centuries removed from Korea, but still…); he had glimpsed Chinese in Nagasaki's Chinatown; he had seen, at least from a distance, Dutch traders and their black slaves residing on Dejima. Most of all, he had experienced for himself how varied, and sometimes incomprehensible, the local speech and local customs of Kyushu were. But despite such differences, and despite jokes merchants from other domains made about wanting to "return to Japan," Kyushu was still clearly part of Japan.

The Northeast—Tohoku—was another matter entirely. Yes, in most senses it was of course Japanese. Most of the Northeast had been settled by people from farther south centuries earlier, and the

territory had been parceled out as domains by the Tokugawa shogunate. But much of the land remained wild and challenging. Large stretches were still unpopulated. The living conditions, the terrain, the vegetation, and of course the weather, were totally alien for visitors from central Japan.

It was the closest Edo travelers could ever come to visiting the outside world (except for Ezo—Hokkaido—which Koshōken would soon visit as well). When he and his party reached the desolate Shimokita Peninsula at the northernmost end of Tohoku, Koshōken wrote of passing through "an interminable plain," imagining that "were this China, tigers might inhabit just such a place!" For these travelers, Tohoku was very much the frontier—as it would still remain a century later when Isabella Bird ventured there.

Moreover, travel through Tohoku was particularly difficult and dangerous. Never go to this place by sea, other travelers had warned; the sea could be menacing even along northern beaches. During a storm one day, with waves of the Pacific pounding the rocks and boulders and drenching their clothes, Koshōken wrote about their misery; many of the timid in his party were speechless, he said. Movement in the mountains was harder still. For many mountain passes there were no roads, or only terrifyingly makeshift ones. Cold and snow were constant enemies for anyone traveling in winter. People from the south were also not used to coping with vast open spaces and grasslands, or any other such places beyond human settlements; such travel made them feel disoriented and uneasy, even lost. Bears were a threat. When the shogunal party reached Akita, they even heard many reports of people being attacked and carried off by packs of wolves.

Isabella Bird may have had horrible difficulties in her travels north, but by the time she reached Tohoku, she at least didn't have to worry much about bears or wolves. By the Meiji period, a few things at least had improved for the traveler!

Landscape and grinding poverty

For both travelers, though, two things about Tohoku particularly stood out. One was the spectacular landscape. When first catching sight of the safflower fields of Yamagata in bloom, Koshōken wrote, "It was as if the whole world had been dyed scarlet." He gasped at the beauty of a waterfall in Aomori, so unknown to outsiders it did not even have a name. And when his party reached Matsushima Bay, he was moved to write that "on seeing the pine-covered islands scattered on the surface of the sea we were

struck dumb, having no words with which to frame poems." Miss Bird's prose would later exude much the same kind of excitement on discovering the natural world of this region.

Modern photo of Matsushima

But both were equally cognizant of the misery and abject poverty of the people living in Tohoku. The state of villages found in this northern region was appalling, and Koshōken constantly used the phrase *hanahada ashiki* 'extremely bad' whenever writing about local living conditions. Even castle towns he described as miserable and poverty-stricken. And he was particularly harsh when talking about local women, who, he said, never combed their hair and did "not even look human." Local people were often afraid of visitors from the south, running and hiding as soon as outsiders showed up, "as though they had met a mad dog." According to local superstition, Koshōken noted, travelers from the south brought bad luck and bad weather.

Famine, more frequent and far worse than had been reported, was the most serious cause of

misery in Tohoku. Travelers from the south encountered people dying for lack of food; they frequently even came across corpses and piles of whitened bones with weeds growing through them, all left on the side of the road. Another visitor from the south reported meeting a beggar who claimed to have eaten horsemeat and human flesh, adding that ears and noses were particularly tasty. The human condition in Tohoku was grim.

The inspection tour gets underway

On May 6, 1787, the Shogun's inspection party set out north from the Edo capital. The journey was to take six months. On his previous trip south to Kyushu, Koshōken had set the schedule and pace according to his whims. But now such matters were under the control of the three samurai inspectors and their large retinues of servants and assistants. Moreover, the Lord of Sendai was accompanying them, as he was returning to his home province, and this imperious aristocrat showed little respect toward any of his fellow travelers. In such a procession Koshōken was reduced to following along in the train, observing and listening.

And that he did surpassingly well.

He wrote about almost everything. He reported on weather, terrain, vegetation and wildlife, and geography, especially rivers and how they were crossed; he noted journey minutiae, such as the details and relative strictness of inspections at border crossings; and some of his censorious comments about local officials had long-lasting repercussions in Edo. But what his diary is particularly prized for today are his observations about people: their local customs and habits, their stories and legends, their living conditions, and—most especially—their speech.

Language problems

Scarcely had the Shogun's party left Edo than Koshōken began noting how increasingly difficult it was to understand the local dialects. Problems with language were to be a constant theme for him on this journey. Oftentimes Koshōken's observations reflected little more than his disdain for people he considered inferior and language he thought sub-standard. But he was also a clear-eyed rationalist with no patience for beliefs or hearsay, or anything else he considered a departure from fact, and when he says he could not understand a word of the local language, it has the ring of truth.

Fairly early in the journey, when the party had only reached Aizu in what is now western Fukushima and stayed the night at an inn, Koshōken complained first about the food and then about the people there and their language:

> We found ourselves deep in the mountains and both the people and their dialect were extremely vulgar. There were no ocean fish to be found, only freshwater river fish that I had never seen before. People here had never heard of a carp or an eel. Salt is scarce.... The food is exceedingly poor; all people eat is mountain yam and tofu. The flavor of the miso and soy sauce is painfully bitter. People in my party complained that should this go on for ten or twenty more days, they'd be in serious trouble....
>
> Half of what the local people said to us was incomprehensible, and half of what we said to them they couldn't understand, either. In inn after inn, all anyone can do is laugh a lot. Whatever you do, things are difficult. If you ask the people at the inn to give you *chazuke*, green tea poured over rice, they'll bring out *yuzuke*, hot water poured over rice. In each and every inn you have to go into the kitchen and see to matters yourself.

At this, one of Koshōken's companions laughed and said, "When I tell this to my friends back home in Edo, who's going to believe it?"

Communication problems continued and worsened the farther north the inspection party went. Koshōken, who was clearly fascinated by local speech wherever he went, sprinkled his journal liberally with anecdotes about unfamiliar words and expressions. North of Fukushima, in towns now in Yamagata prefecture, he noted that everybody always added the sounds *ata* (which was surely a variant form of the existential verb!) at the end of their sentences, as in *Gojunkensama otsuki ata* 'the inspectors have arrived,' or *kaeri ata* 'they are leaving.' Continuing on farther north to another town, he writes that:

> In the local speech, they add *mousu* ('to say, do') to all they say. When they see a snake devouring a frog, they say, *hebi ga kouru wo gunnomi moushita*. For 'father' they say *gamo*; for 'mother' *aba*; for 'elder brother' *sena*; for a woman's makeup *sasaosu*—these are all unfamiliar but interesting words to us.

Such notes as these may have been little more than impressionistic musings by a non-specialist. But Koshōken, who was born and bred in what is now Okayama, does show in this way that Tohoku varieties of the language were very distant from what he spoke in central Japan.

Heading still farther north, in what is now Akita, Koshōken was totally flummoxed. His specialty was geography, but when he asked about local famous places, mountains, and rivers, none of the local people could answer. Koshōken could simply not understand the language. When you ask them something, "they laugh showing they don't understand you, and so everybody ends up laughing."

Later, on his return trip through the territory of the Nanbu Clan in modern Morioka, Koshōken found that the inspection party now needed not just interpreters, but two layers of interpreters when interacting with the local people. He explained:

> What is said by both men and women is gibberish; if it's ten that's meant, you can't make out whether they're saying two or three.
>
> We shogunate inspectors are each granted from the landowner not only a guide, but also two or three fellows familiar with everything in the area around the castle town. These people accompany us at all times. In the area of Nanbu, where it's especially difficult to communicate, we were given two such fellows from the castle town of Morioka to translate. In this place, the fact that the translations they came up with could not be interpreted caused everybody to laugh.

Nanbu Shrine in Morioka, where the ancestors of the Nanbu clan are enshrined

For anyone in Japan today, these stories Koshōken told about needing interpreters in Tohoku seem so strange. Yes, people who've grown up in Tohoku still have distinctive accents. Sophisticates from Tokyo often make jokes about the countrified accents heard up north in those mountains, just as people in Washington joke about the twang they hear in Tennessee. But who from Tokyo these days would ever imagine needing translators on a trip to Tohoku? Something like that just couldn't happen now. As was said in the prologue, everybody in Japan understands the standard language today.

More than anything, Koshōken's diary makes real for us just how different the language situation was a couple of hundred years ago.

Reflections and comparisons

Ever since embarking on this journey north, Koshōken had been thinking back on his time in Kyushu. As he reflected on the complaints he had made then about people and places in those southwestern areas, he recalled that he had thought those "were the poorest provinces." But now, he says, he was discovering that circumstances here in Tohoku were ever so much worse. He continued to despair about the food and the language. But whether or not the dishes served in the inns were to Koshōken's taste, the availability of food and supplies more generally were truly critical problems in Tohoku. No wonder Koshōken's party found the bodies of people who had starved to death lying on the side of the road! In Kyushu, people had eaten barley and wheat instead of rice. In the area that is now Fukushima there was rice but almost nothing else, Koshōken tells us. In these mountains, he said, people produced "nothing" but wax and lacquer.

Uncivilized women again

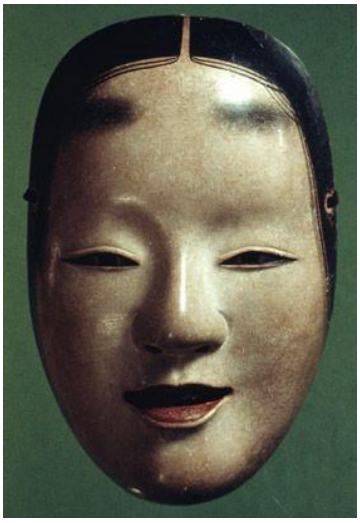
Koshōken's observations on language and economic problems were doubtless legitimate. Not so much his remarks about women. The old misogynist raged about how "low" and "ugly" women in these northern areas were, even compared to women in Kyushu (which he'd also complained bitterly about). All these diary entries about women seem like comical interludes to most people today:

Village women in Tohoku have shrill voices, he groused, and they are dark-skinned; they leave their eyebrows unshaven until they are forty, and they don't blacken their teeth. They wear short blue

sleeves and towels around their heads as if they were hats. With their short trousers, unshaved eyebrows, and messy hair, the women in this mountainous region look ugly.

> When I was traveling in Kyushu and saw such low-class women in Hyuga and Osumi provinces, I doubted that such women existed anywhere else in Japan, but these women are just as low.

Koshōken was like this in his pronouncements about how peasant women in these remote mountains should look, what was beautiful and what wasn't. And certainly in the heartland of Japan it had long been customary for women to pluck out their natural eyebrows and paint new ones high on the forehead, and to blacken the teeth so that no white would show when the women opened their mouths. For many centuries, these distortions of women's natural features were standards of propriety and beauty in Japan. But by the Edo period, only married women still practiced them. Surely Koshōken had at least seen unmarried women without "pulled eyebrows" and blackened teeth before. Nevertheless, the unpleasant appearance of village women with bushy eyebrows was a frequent subject of his journals. In most matters, his observations have an unvarnished precision, but in talking about some aspects of local village life, unbiased reporting seems to have escaped him.

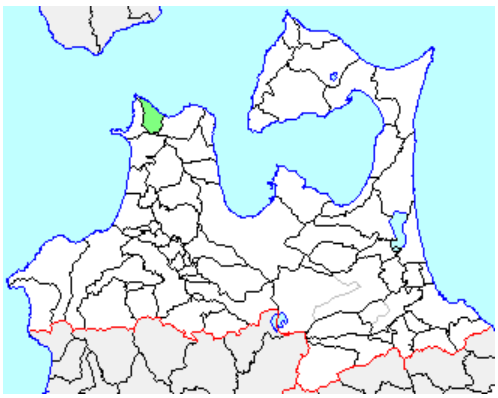


Nō mask showing the Japanese feminine ideal of 'pulled eyebrows' and blackened teeth

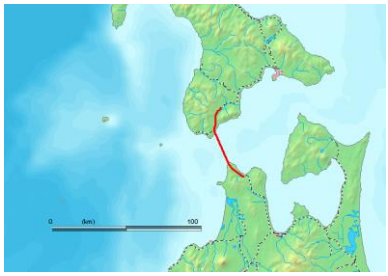
Curiously, though, Koshōken didn't apply such standards to non-Japanese. In Kyushu, he had been relatively gracious and respectful describing "Koreans" and Chinese (who looked "more elegant than the Japanese"); and now, going to Ezo, the same would be true of his descriptions of Ainu.

Leaving Honshu and off to Ezo

By August, Koshōken's party had reached the port of Minmaya on the northern tip of the Tsugaru Peninsula, land's end on the island of Honshu. The timing was considered good for crossing the strait to Ezo. August, after all, was the hottest time of the year, and the local daimyo had prepared a hundred boats for the inspection party. The boat crews offered sake to the boat spirits, sang songs, and recited prayers to the gods for safe passage, all to the beat of a drum. But just as would be the fate one hundred years later for Isabella Bird, a fierce storm began to blow, and the crossing was delayed. Even the next day, when the boats were finally able to cross, the seas were not smooth. Each of the daimyo's boats had a large supply of buckets for the seasick, and the inspection party needed them.



Minmaya, on the tip of the Tsugaru Peninsula, Koshōken's departure point



The modern Seikan railway tunnel under the Tsugaru Strait (completed in 1988)

But at last, when the boats reached the other side of the strait and docked at Matsumae, a large crowd of local officials and other people were lined up on the shore waiting for them. It was quite a spectacle, Koshōken said—like a thousand Buddhas standing there. The sight jarred Koshōken and his fellow travelers. In sharp contrast with the many impoverished and ragged people they had seen over the past few months, these people were well dressed and prosperous looking.

Straightaway, the inspectors were ushered to houses in the Japanese settlement, and these structures were as grand as residences of government officials in Edo. The situation was completely different from what the inspectors had been told.

> It had been said that in Matsumae people thatched their roofs with *kombu* kelp and that it was an exceedingly bad place. We also thought that because it was outside Japan, the people and their language would be very inferior. We did not imagine finding such a good town and were stunned.

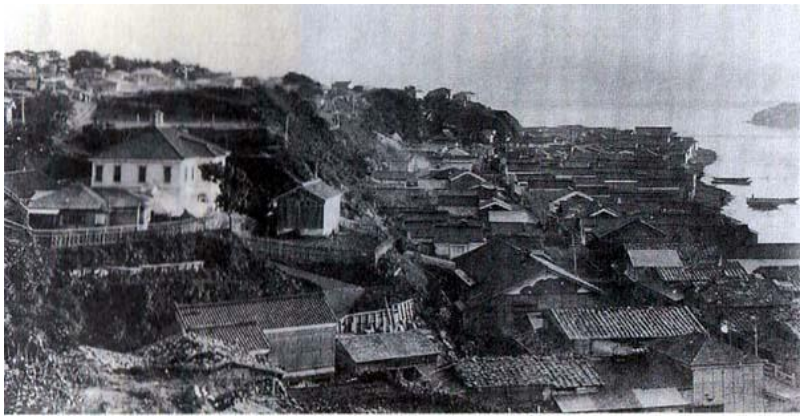
What might not have been stated openly, though, was that the shogunate in Edo had become anxious about Russia and the possibility that Russians might be looking to take over Ezo. As might be imagined, this huge island on the southeastern fringe of the Russian empire could be a tempting target for colonization, and Japanese government concern over the matter might help explain why the Japanese outpost in Matsumae was so well funded and prosperous. Japan needed to give support to its own colony first!

In addition, most of the people Koshōken saw in Matsumae and environs were recent migrants from central Japan anyway, which meant that the language they spoke would have been one he was familiar with. For Koshōken, it must have been a welcome relief from the language struggles of the past few months of travel in Tohoku.

After a few days in Matsumae, the inspectors' party set out for Esashi. Although Esashi was only about sixty km or so up the western coast, the Lord of Matsumae sent guards with rifles along with them to protect them from bears.

Matsumae may have been the Edo-period administrative center of the Japanese colony on Ezo, but the herring fishing town of Esashi was definitely its economic center. "Even Edo is not as busy as

Esashi in May" was a popular saying of the day. The name Esashi itself came from an Ainu word meaning '*kombu*, edible kelp,' but the town was completely Japanese by this time. Koshōken writes that the settlement had some 1,600 houses, "all rich." (Many of Esashi's sumptuous homes along the shoreline are still well preserved and a draw for tourists today.) In fact, there were no poor houses at all, he added; all manner of shops had been established in the town selling anything wanted or needed, and there seemed to be no shortages of any kind. What's more, all the people Koshōken met living in Esashi were urbane, and they spoke good Japanese.



A nineteenth-century photo of Esashi

It was in this prosperous place that Koshōken met with a group of Ainu. No Ainu were allowed to live in Esashi (though some did stay there during herring fishing season), but this group was brought in especially to meet with the shogun's inspectors. And so, fourteen of these aboriginal people presented themselves to the inspectors, with men and women coming in separately, all in a line holding hands. They walked sideways into the courtyard with their heads low.

> The men sat down on a straw mat, folded their arms on their upper legs and sat without bowing. The Ainu women sat down together on the sand with one leg bent upward. Their hair resembled that of a bear.

With his usual detailed writing style, Koshōken described the Ainu and whatever he saw or learned about them. His journal entries range from such things as women's dress, hairstyles, face and eye color (which was—and is—often blue or green[3]), to explanations of Ainu customs, music, dances, and religion. Koshōken watched displays of Ainu archery skills and then described their weapons; he watched performances on Ainu musical instruments. And while he was writing these entries in his journal, he was also making accompanying sketches of Ainu implements, tools, and weapons.

It's remarkable how laudatory Koshōken was in these descriptions. In fact, he almost never wrote anything deliberately critical of the Ainu. Of course, Koshōken was more than a little guilty of naiveté and unconscious condescension—just as Isabella Bird would be some one hundred years later when she described the Ainu. Both of these travelers to Ezo seem to have fallen somewhat under the spell of the "noble savage" myth, Koshōken far more so than Miss Bird. In fact, Koshōken even took to comparing the Ainu people to the legendary Japan of old: "The age of the gods in Japan must have been like this when there were no kings.... Since the Ainu are a valiant people like our Emperor Jinmu, they will soon become a country and catch up with us and become equal to the Chinese."

Such extravagant comparisons came to him because he saw in the Ainu a simplicity and sincerity that impressed him deeply:

> The Ezo are an honest people. They do not lie and never accept anything without giving something in return; moreover, they never give anything without receiving something. An Ainu without status is an unworthy man who dabbles and does not know how to fish, like the Japanese who cheats and steals and squanders his money on pleasure girls.

However, there was one thing distinctly unpleasant about these people that even Koshōken couldn't overlook. The Ainu gave off a powerful body odor that the Japanese found almost unbearable and impossible to ignore. The Ainu were well aware of how much their smell offended the Japanese, and as a result, they always tried to maintain a healthy distance from Koshōken. Even so, Koshōken had fallen so much under the spell of the Ainu as a noble people he dismissed the unpleasantness as not

[3] Not only can Ainu eyes be blue or green, they are also often without the epicanthal fold characterizing most Asian eyes.

being terribly significant; the offensive smell was simply the result of eating meat, which we Japanese do not do, he said.

Koshōken wrote in detail about Ainu trade; Ainu funerals; Ainu family structure and marital customs, polygamy, and adultery. He even wrote a little about the Ainu language, which "sounded like gibberish," and tried transcribing some Ainu words with the katakana syllabary. He noted, though, that "Ainu pronunciation differs from Japanese, and they don't understand you if you pronounce the words according to Japanese sounds." He added that when Ainu listened to Japanese talk, they found the language funny and laughed loudly about it. (The same was certainly true of how Ainu sounded to the Japanese.)

Koshōken and his companions only spent a couple of weeks in Ezo, and they never ventured very far from the Japanese outposts in Matsumae and Esashi. In other words, Koshōken saw less of this vast territory that would become Hokkaido than even Isabella Bird would. Most of Ezo in those days was still well outside the ken of the Japanese.

Return to the home island

The Lord of Matsumae held a farewell party for the inspectors, and when the group left Ezo, he again provided a hundred boats to see them off. This time, the crossing to Minmaya was smooth. It was still August when they reached the main island.

Almost immediately, Koshōken expressed shock all over again at the contrast between a rich and prosperous Ezo and a desperately poor Tohoku. For him, the difference was appalling.

As the party made its way south again, Koshōken returned to many of the earlier themes of his journal: unsightly women with disheveled hair; the incomprehensible language spoken by Tohoku peasants; and, of course, the poor quality of the food in Tohoku. "We could not get enough of those foods we liked best: boiled miso and *chazuke*." As a result, the inspectors ate only fried rice. They were looking forward to the food to be served at the party to be held for them in Morioka.

> But when we saw the dishes that evening, there was fried tofu and two mudfish. We could not believe it. One can only expect strange things in strange places.

By the time the party reached the Sendai domain, it was already early September, and the leaves were beginning to change. Koshōken noted the beauty of a famous place there about which so much poetry had been written. With a certain amount of relief, he also remarked on the great improvement in the language he heard around him. From here on, the party moved from familiar place to familiar place known so well from Japanese history and verse. They were almost home.

Home at last

On October eighteenth, the party reached Senjū, and Koshōken closed his diary, expressing his joy:

> Our families and friends came out from Edo to greet us with congratulations on our safe return from this long voyage. Early in the morning the palanquins of the three inspectors moved off, and we reached Edo at eleven in the morning. I returned to my dwelling, and this work came to an end.
>
> Although I am in my sixties, I am still vigorous. I have traveled many hundreds of miles in the northeast in the company of the inspectors, my nerves chilled by steep-sided mountains, my eyes amazed by the turbulent billows of mighty oceans, my travel fatigue dispelled by noble vistas. Now, seeing my humble abode, I drenched my sleeve.

Koshōken's career was not quite finished, though. There were a few other things still to come. Following his journey north, the daimyo who had long served as his benefactor recommended him for a significant task, overseeing a survey of Musashi Province, the area in and around Edo. After he had completed that important survey, Koshōken returned to his home in Bitchū Province and entered the service of the Okada clan. There, at long last, the old commoner was granted the rank of samurai, along with the small stipend associated with it.

Koshōken remained in Bitchū Province for the rest of his life. Though he had never intended that his journals be published, they eventually were, and it is because of those informal descriptions of what he saw on his travels that he is known in Japan. Through them, readers see in a concrete way how much Japan and the Japanese language not so very long ago varied by region.

CHAPTER FOUR:
A PASSION FOR A NEW IDEA

It's no secret that quality is an obsession in Japan, and that Japanese consumers are unusually particular about what they buy. If a certain product has a reputation in Japan as being the best, other products can almost be unsellable. This search for the best remains strong even when competing products are significantly cheaper. Take coffee, for example. For decades, Japan dominated the market for Jamaican Blue Mountain, because that particular coffee had an almost mythical reputation as the world's finest, and for a long time Japanese bought virtually nothing else. As late as the 1990s, Japanese traders took in more than ninety percent of the Blue Mountain crop, while in the rest of the world the beans were extremely hard to come by. In the U.S., Jamaican Blue Mountain could then be found only in a small number of gourmet shops, where it sold for up to forty dollars a pound.

This Japanese obsession with quality and with reputation for quality—and for selecting and making the very best as well—is widespread throughout the society. For consumer products it runs the gamut, from food and drink to records to automobiles. Japanese whiskies, most of which are made in the Scottish style, regularly win international awards, often scoring higher than the best of the best from Scotland. And when it comes to food, Tokyo has 226 Michelin-starred restaurants, making it, as CNN has reported, "light-years ahead of its nearest rival, Paris, which has a mere 94." In fact, *Saveur* magazine recently named Tokyo the "world's best food city." And it seems to be undeniably true: the quality and variety of dining choices in Tokyo extend from all types of European cuisines to Chinese to Korean to, of course, all conceivable variants and exotica of Japanese fare. (Not to mention the fact that Tokyo has countless small eating-places that are tucked away in hidden, sometimes completely unmarked, places known only to insiders, and which many Japanese food cognoscenti quietly say are vastly superior to anything Michelin or *Saveur* knows about.)

Hobbies and leisure are no different. While many Japanese have long been fans of American and British pop music, back in the 1970s few of them bought the original vinyl recordings because those

disks were considered imperfect, often hissing, skipping, and popping as they were played; instead, Japanese manufacturers remastered the records locally to far higher control standards and in that way satisfied the discerning Japanese consumer market. In spite of the far higher prices the records went for, these made-in-Japan copies sold briskly.

Japan hasn't always been so quality conscious, though—or so it is often said. Many older Americans can still remember the reputation Japan had in the 1950s and early 1960s for making cheap, shoddy trinkets. That reputation (but also lingering racism and the resentment that Americans still felt toward their former enemy) gave rise to, among other things, the urban legend that Japan renamed a town 'Usa' so that it could legitimately stamp its exports 'Made in USA'. That particular myth, of course, was long ago debunked as laughable and silly.

Considerably more serious and lasting has been the widespread notion that the rise of Japanese quality after the war—the so-called "Japanese Quality Revolution"—was mainly brought about by the contributions of outsiders such as Edward Deming, an American engineer. Deming was working under General MacArthur in 1950 as a consultant to the Japanese government when he is said to have brought to Japan modern principles of quality control. But that idea, too, is in large part a myth. The rise of Japanese industry from the ashes of the war, while admittedly owing much to the country's assimilation of newer Western ideas and influence, was more than anything a reemergence of age-old attention to meticulous workmanship, and of the Japanese demand for it.

Meiji leaders discover Germany

Before the early 1930s, sixty to eighty percent of all Japanese studying abroad went to universities in one country: Germany. For a good half century, Germany represented the standard of educational quality in Japan. It provided the models Japan most wanted to emulate and learn from. It was the superior product.

How did Germany gain that reputation for the best education?

In 1873, as the Iwakura Mission was nearing the end of its tour of Europe, Otto von Bismarck invited some of its leaders to a dinner party, and during dinner, he made the case for why Germany should be Japan's model. Bismarck's words struck like a bolt of lightning: here was the chancellor of a young and vital Imperial Reich describing how he had molded a disparate collection of states into an orderly, unified nation—and not only that: it was a nation with a unified, patriotic folk loyal to its

monarch, the Kaiser. That model was exactly the kind of state the Japanese so desperately wanted, a strong, patriotic people united under the Meiji emperor.

Bismarck went on: a social Darwinist, he believed that statecraft was, in essence, a battle for survival, with the strong overwhelming the weak, and so he emphasized that it was absolutely essential to have a strong military, with the productive capacity to support it. That worldview also resonated with the Japanese.

It was a sly ploy by Bismarck, intended to win over the new Meiji government. And sure enough, as Bismarck knew they would, the Japanese saw right away the parallels, not only between the German Reich and what Japan aspired to, but also between what he described as Germany's condition before unification and what Japan faced now. How had they not seen those parallels before? Bismarck excited them as no one else had. From the glowing reports they later submitted, we can see that these envoys left Germany with deep and lasting impressions of the country, and dreams of what Japan might learn from studying its institutions.

The new Meiji government had sent the Iwakura Mission on a diplomatic voyage to renegotiate the unequal treaties that the United States and Europe had forced on Japan. But it was also formed as a fact-finding mission charged with making a comprehensive study of the modern industrial, political, military, and educational systems they found in those countries. There's little reason to think that Germany had loomed especially large in Japanese expectations at first. In fact, the delegation spent most of its time abroad in Britain, which the Japanese had been planning to study most closely. But, following their dinner and meeting with Bismarck, the Japanese perspective on Europe and the world changed. All at once Germany became the focus of attention.

Leaders of the Iwakura Mission in London in 1872

The privileged of Japan continued to be entranced by, and imitative of, British aristocratic culture; some, especially those from the Japanese upper classes, attended Cambridge or Oxford—or, alternatively, Harvard. But many among the most talented chose German institutions instead.

In the first few years of the Meiji era, the Japanese government had sent more students to the United States or to England or, in some cases, to France. But after the Iwakura Mission returned home, the focus changed significantly. Germany became the preferred destination for the majority. From around 1873 on, the number of Japanese students in Germany rapidly increased, as more and more serious students chose to go to German colleges and universities or government institutions, or their home institutions sent them there.

THE STUDENT FLOOD

All sorts of ambitious and promising young men soon boarded ships bound for European ports, with Germany their ultimate destination. (A few young women went abroad, too, though they usually ended up in England or France.) Some were students, some were young military officers, some were rising

young bureaucrats. Although the subjects they chose to study spanned a wide spectrum, there were a few fields that were in particularly high demand.

Military science was a clear choice. The Japanese had seen how thoroughly the Prussians under Bismarck had trounced the French in the Franco-Prussian War, and they flocked to Germany to learn infantry tactics and the use of modern weapons of war.

And then there was government and statecraft. That field was almost as vital for building Japan as the military. And so, even though Itō Hirobumi (a key member of the Iwakura Mission and future prime minister), had himself studied in London, he made sure Japan's governmental structure was based on Prusso-German institutions. As a result, the Meiji Constitution was obviously and deliberately crafted on the German model.

German science inspired awe. Medicine in particular was so popular as a field of study the Japanese language became filled with medical loanwords from German, something that remains true to this very day. The words for, e.g., adrenaline, allergy, aspirin, (hospital) bed, blood (in medical usage), vector, virus, typhus, energy, genome, plaster cast, bandages, urine, herpes, hysteria, hormone, impotence, syphilis, caffeine, capsule, tooth decay, medical records, (medical) patient, stomach (in medical usage), nicotine, neurosis, masturbation, surgery, pulse, x-ray, rheumatism, Petri dish, vaccine, iodine, and probe were all taken from German, not English. As young men, many Meiji intellectuals chose to study medicine, and that coterie included Mori Ōgai. Though he later became one of the most famous and revered of Japanese novelists, Ōgai had originally trained in Germany to be a doctor.

The rise in the importance of language

But perhaps no German science in the nineteenth century was more dazzling than philology—that was what the scientific study of language was usually called back then. Yes, it was true that it was an Englishman, Sir William Jones, who had started the intellectual excitement over language science. But nowhere did the study of language take firmer root than in the halls of learning in Bismarck's Germany.

Jones hadn't been the first to notice the resemblance of Sanskrit to Greek and Latin. But when he said that all three appeared to have "sprung from some common source, which perhaps no longer exists," he captured imaginations all over Europe. That very suggestion came as a shock. How could it be that Sanskrit, the symbol of Indian civilization and that most exotic of languages, shared an origin

with the classical languages of Europe? If such a thing was true, well then, what further secrets about humankind could the study and comparison of languages reveal? And sure enough, the more closely philologists looked, the more knowledge about those languages and language in general they uncovered. Word spread quickly, and "Indo-European" became a concept central to European civilization. Minds opened. People awakened to a broader world.

But there was also a darker strain in the study of language in Germany. Some of that strain was homegrown. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, German writers and thinkers had turned to a very Germanic form of Romanticism, a nativism centered on German folk tales and myths and Gothic stories of the German forest. The Brothers Grimm collected those stories; Goethe wrote about a supernatural being from German folklore in his famous, but grim and terrifying poem, "*Der Erlkönig*"; Heine loved Rhineland folklore. This literary trend toward the imagined and supernatural represented a romantic, emotional turning away from rationalism and science, if only as a diversion. With all its florid stories of gnomes, nature, and dark forests, there's a bit of the macabre in German Romanticism.

Even so, German Romanticism had a significant and long-lasting effect beyond literary diversion, and that was on the growth of nationalism. Nationalism was the Zeitgeist. National character, national literature and, most certainly, the language of *das Volk* rose to a higher level of awareness in German-speaking lands. In fact, the great Prussian polymath himself, Wilhelm von Humboldt, played up this connection between national languages and national character. The national language reflected the essence of the people who spoke it, he said.

But Germans didn't originate this idea of a national language. That concept was the brainchild of the French Revolution. At the time, France was a motley, diverse place where less than a quarter of the country's people—centered around Paris—spoke French as their native language, and only about half could speak any French at all. And even those who spoke what passed for French mostly had accents that the educated thought were horrid, low-class, and ignorant. That was the chaotic situation confronted by the radicals of the Revolution, whose obsession was to eliminate all social differences in France. And so, reasoning that prejudices caused by differences in speech made equality before the law impossible, they decided to introduce the idea of a *langue national*, a uniform language for all the people of France.

In other words, France's radical leaders decided to eliminate minority languages and dialects in order to give the country's ethnic and social minorities equal rights. For us today, that first call for a uniform standard language sounds exactly backward, nonsensical, and even downright cruel. Instead of looking to make bilingual and multilingual policy concessions to help minorities, French revolutionaries were determined to do exactly the opposite. You help people by forcing them to conform.

Bismarck in 1873

No one took this stratagem more to heart than Bismarck. The Iron Chancellor may have hated socialism with a passion, but this particular socialist idea was very much to his liking. In the 1860s, through a series of wars, Bismarck had unified the various small German-speaking states into a new German Empire led by Prussia, and to knit them all together he needed a source of common pride. A national language for all of Germany was the key. Humboldt had said, "The concept of a nation must be founded upon language," and Bismarck, for one, was convinced it was true.

"The man who created Japanese"

In 1868, the boy who would one day be called "the man who made Japanese" was one year old. He had been born in Edo, but now, in keeping with the new age, his city had just been renamed the "Eastern Capital"—Tōkyō.

A lot was about to change for just about everybody. Imperial rule had at last been restored after 265 years of rule by the Tokugawa Shogunate, and on September 12, in the old capital of Kyoto, young Prince Mutsuhito was crowned emperor of what was to be called the Meiji era. Two short months later, Emperor and government moved to that Eastern Capital, Tokyo.

A young Ueda Kazutoshi

Ueda Kazutoshi was one of those who would make the most of this new Japan. He began as a child of some privilege. As the son of a retainer to the daimyo of the Owari Domain, he was born on the domain's estate in what is now the fashionable Shinjuku Ward of Tokyo. He grew up speaking the upper-class variety of Tokyo Japanese.

Early on, Ueda showed great promise as a student, and he quickly moved up to preparatory training for Tokyo Imperial University. He had a literary bent, and when he entered the university, he had dreams of becoming a novelist. But all at once his plans changed. As a student in the Japanese Literature Department, he began attending lectures on linguistics given by the British philologist Basil Hall Chamberlain, and while listening to those lectures, he suddenly realized that, unlike what he and most others had always assumed about spoken Japanese, that language did have structure, wonderfully complex and clearly defined structure. It was a moment of revelation, and he resolved then and there to become a linguist dedicated to the study of his native language.

With that life's goal in mind, he entered graduate school to specialize in language didactics. All the while, he continued to move in literary circles. He taught English; he also translated German, publishing a Japanese version of a German folk tale.

The Japanese intellectual community took notice of Ueda and recognized the special nature of his talents. His status as a young scholar was in fact such that, in 1890, the president of Tokyo University summoned him and ordered him to go to Europe to study linguistics. His explicit mission while there was to examine Western models and determine how best to adapt the Japanese language to the modern age, and to create a standard grammar for the nation.

Ueda's German experience shapes his life

So it was off to Germany, to the great centers of learning in Berlin and Leipzig. There, he attended the lectures of the greatest philologists and comparative linguists of the day. In Berlin, he was guided by the linguist and sinologist Georg von der Gabelentz, and in Leipzig he had the good fortune to be under the tutelage of the "Young Grammarians" (*Junggrammatiker*), a coterie that included, among others, Karl Brugmann and Eduard Sievers. In other words, Ueda had access to the finest linguistic education to be found in the nineteenth century, and he applied himself to it with diligence. He even attended lectures on Sanskrit in order to understand the inner workings of Indo-European better.

Without question, Ueda learned the principles and practices of this new science of linguistics through his German experience. But, while living and learning in Bismarck's Germany, he was also drawn to other matters even more powerfully. All around him in the new German Reich he observed how the state managed and regulated language. Bismarck had instituted a national language policy, and through this policy his government had molded the German language into a powerful organizing force.

Bismarck had mandated that the chosen standard language be taught in all the nation's schools, and instruction was to be entirely in German. It was compulsory. Some subjects had until then been taught with much usage of French or Latin, but no longer. At the same time, the German Language Association had embarked on a policy of "cleansing" the language of foreign influences and "purifying" it, so that no foreign word—meaning mainly French or Latin—would be used if the same thing could be said "in good German." The national language, the language of Goethe and Schiller, became increasingly a source of pride. It unified the nation.

These German developments thrilled and energized Ueda more than anything else he had heard or learned. He imagined what potential such policies might have if implemented in Japan.

Returning home

Ueda could have been a scholar. When he got back home from Europe, he was appointed right away to a chaired professorship at Tokyo Imperial University. He was still only twenty-seven years old, with a lifetime in academia ahead of him. At that point, he could have retreated into some ivory tower on the Tokyo University campus and applied what he had learned from the Young Grammarians to explore the linguistic riches of the Japanese language.

But he did not. Instead, Ueda embarked on a career of political and governmental activism, something he saw as a more urgent mission. Even before he had left Japan for Europe, he had been an unabashed patriot, but, having returned from that overseas experience, he had Germany-inspired ideas in mind for reshaping the Japanese language, and a passion for getting them put into practice. He was now in a position to do that. As a Tokyo Imperial University professor, he concurrently held a key position in the Ministry of Education. But that was by no means his only government job—in fact he became involved in the affairs of virtually every Japanese institution that dealt with language and/or education. He was an extremely skillful and creative bureaucrat.

Passion becomes policy

Under his supervision, *Kokugo*, the National Language, became a new school subject—in fact, in the new Meiji educational system it became the center of the curriculum. *Kokugo* instruction was compulsory nationwide; no local language or dialect usage was permitted; and Ueda was the principal initiator of all of these policies.

Moreover, Ueda's language nationalism mirrored Bismarck's in yet another way as well. Just as the German Language Association had worked to purge German of too much French and Latin, Ueda campaigned against the high status occupied by Classical Chinese in Japan, as well as against the growing prestige of Western languages. In 1895, like most of his Japanese compatriots, Ueda exulted in the dramatic victory of Japan over China in the Sino-Japanese War.

Japanese portrayal of Chinese surrender

At last! The Japanese Empire had taken its place among the great imperial powers of the world! Ueda reasoned, and he saw in that victory over the more numerous forces of imperial China evidence that the Japanese, unlike Chinese or Koreans, had a "strong sense of nationhood and a common national character." Furthermore, from that singularly nationalistic perspective, Ueda extended the chain of reasoning to what he believed to be the root source of Japan's unparalleled strength: the language the Japanese shared.

Ueda became a *Kokugo* propagandist.

But his harangues weren't political. That would have been crass and superficial. No, what Ueda was all about was something more than mere nationalist ideology, something that, for him, was even more fundamental. For in Ueda's heart of hearts he believed there was something profound and mystical about what it meant to be Japanese. And that mystical something found its clearest expression in the shared national language of the people.

Ueda put forth that idea most forcefully in his two-volume book of essays, *Kokugo no tame* ('For the Sake of the National Language'). The opening lines of that work are breathtaking:

The National Language is the bulwark of the Imperial Household.

The National Language is the blood of the Nation.

He explained:

> Just as blood shows a common birth in the realm of the flesh, language, for the people who speak it, shows a common birth in the realm of the spirit. If we take the Japanese National Language as an example of this, we should speak of Japanese as the spiritual blood of the Japanese people.

It was heady stuff. In poetic, elegant essays, Ueda continued to assure the Japanese people that their language had an innate, metaphysical meaning almost beyond the power of men to comprehend. He was certainly no ordinary bureaucrat!

And he was no ordinary linguist. Yes, he did engage in linguistic discussions with his colleagues, but his role with them was principally as an enabler of research and publication by others. It was he who engineered the creation of the National Language Research Council, the first Japanese organization to underwrite language planning and research, and the sheer number of projects undertaken under its auspices was astonishing. When sending Ueda to Europe, the president of Tokyo Imperial University had given him the mission of creating a standard grammar of the Japanese spoken language. Ueda did not accomplish that task himself (his colleague Ōtsuki Fumihiko did). But he did help ensure that the grammar project received support. The government also published a supplement for the grammar, a dialect survey handbook, and sixteen other works, thanks—at least in great part—to Ueda's advocacy and management skill. Ueda Kazutoshi was a wonderfully gifted and respected organization man, but his heart was simply not in conducting basic language research, the kind of work he had been groomed to do by the finest linguistic minds in Germany.

Instead, in those youthful years spent in Germany, Ueda had learned something about the nature of language he thought of as far more important. He had had an epiphany about his country and his language—an experience not unlike a religious awakening—and he spent the rest of his working life trying to see that vision realized.

More than anyone else, Ueda Kazutoshi was responsible for shaping perceptions about the Japanese national language, *Kokugo*, that held sway in Imperial Japan, and for how it was presented and taught in the national school system up until the end of the Pacific War. *The Man Who Created Japanese*

is the title of a recent book about Ueda, and if any one person ever earned such a reputation, it was Ueda. In the first half of the twentieth century, *Kokugo* policy was his.

Ueda Kazutoshi

CHAPTER FIVE:
UNITY

JAPANESE EXCEPTIONALISM

Ever since the end of World War II, Christian missionaries have bemoaned their lack of success in winning converts to the faith in Japan. Despite drawing great numbers of starry-eyed young missionaries to its shores, Japan remains one of the most secular nations in the world. Less than one percent of the population claims to be Christian. Compare this situation with that of South Korea just next door, where a third of the country's citizens are now Christians, and actively so. Even in Communist China, the number of Christians is growing. To missionaries, the Japanese people seem frustratingly impervious to indoctrination. Why?

JAPANESE AND THE JEWS

In 1971 an odd little book proposed an answer, and it quickly became a runaway best seller. This thin volume, self-published by the author, bore the title *Japanese and the Jews*. By the time it appeared in an English translation the following year, it had already sold a million copies.

The book's basic idea was simple: just as being a Jew was inextricably linked to a religion, so too was being Japanese. That Japanese religion, the author said, was *Nihonkyō*, or "Japan-ism," which was "as much a religion as Judaism, Christianity, or Islam." The author, a mysterious figure named "Isaiah Ben-Dasan," claimed to be a Jew who had grown up in Japan, and thus, he said, he knew both cultures well. But no matter how desperately Japanese journalists searched for this Isaiah Ben-Dasan, they couldn't find the man anywhere. Finally, years later, a Japanese Christian named Yamamoto Shichihei, who actually knew little about Judaism or much of anything else, confessed to writing the book. There was no Isaiah Ben-Dasan.

Japan-ism as a religion like Judaism was a pretty half-baked idea. *Japanese and the Jews* was filled

with howlers. It constantly confused Christianity with Judaism, and it made much of a lot of hoary Jewish stereotypes (the Jews were good "handlers of money," Yamamoto wrote, and they were "nomads"). No matter. The Japanese public seemed thrilled with the idea of being like the Jews of Asia, and *Nihonkyō*, "Japan-ism," became a pop culture icon in the 1970s. It seems to have satisfied a deep-rooted need to believe once more in Japanese exceptionalism.

If being Japanese was a religion, well, then, *naruhodo*, everything just made sense. Like Jews, Japanese were a chosen people, secular and religious at the same time, and, like Jews, innocent victims of the events of World War II. Besides, there was this ineffable uniqueness you could feel, after all, just by living in this culture and by speaking this language that you shared with all the Japanese people and with no one else. And so, Japan-ism took its place amongst other post-war notions of peculiarity regarding Japanese culture, mentality, language, and lots more.

Post-war Japanese pop culture has been filled with lots of froth and fads. *Japanese and the Jews* was just one. After the end of the war, there was an outburst of ideas among the Japanese about who they were, where they came from, and how they fit in with the rest of the world. In general, these intellectual and popular trends have swung back and forth from Westernization to nativism, or to a blend in the middle that the Japanese have, from time to time, called "Japanese spirit and Western technique." But an enduring thread that has run through almost all of them is exceptionalism: What is it, after all, that makes the Japanese people who they are and unique, different from all other nations?

All matters taken care of

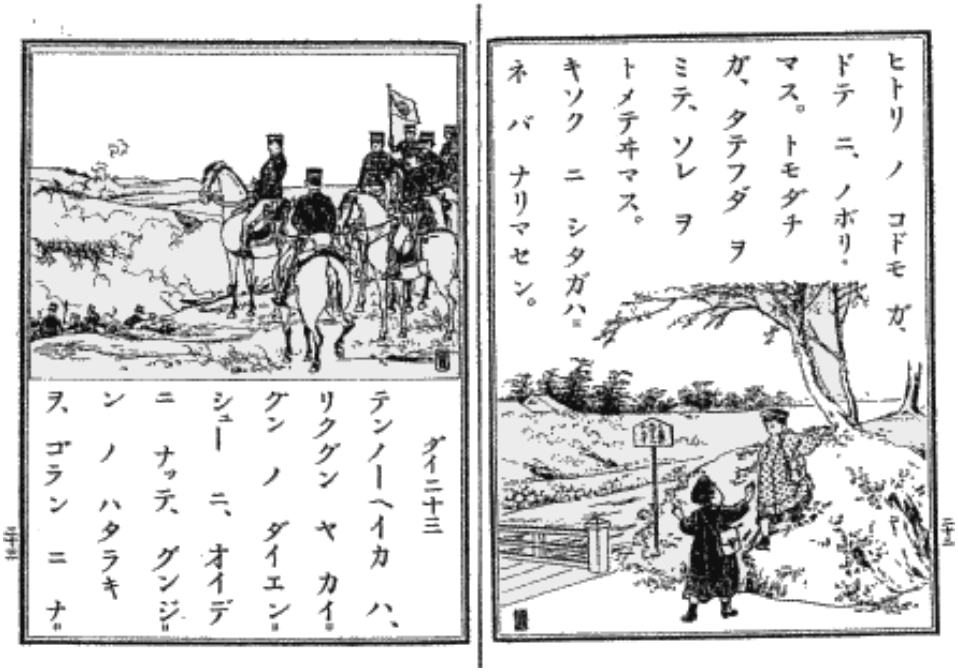
In the Meiji period, the government took care of such questions. The orthodoxy established by Ueda Kazutoshi and his bureaucratic followers was taught in the national schools, starting in *Kokugo* classes.

A Meiji period National School

By the late nineteenth century, Japan had instituted compulsory public school education, and *Kokugo* instruction was one of the focal points of the system. From the first grade on, textbooks in *Kokugo* classes provided children with lessons on Japanese life, culture, esthetics, and much more. They provided detailed instructions for the children's personal lives, including such subjects as manners, politeness, and personal hygiene. Children were told to come to school in clean clothes; to wash their hands and faces beforehand; to blow their noses; to remove their shoes before entering the classroom; to rise and bow to greet their class *sensei*. They were told what to do and what to say at home, too. Children were instructed to address their parents respectfully as *o-kaasan* 'Mother' and *o-toosan* 'Father,' instead of with various "vulgar" dialect words for 'Mom' and 'Dad.'

Many of the essays in language primers were startlingly beautiful, poetic even, and often about nature. In one 1885 textbook, first-grade children read: *Takaki yama. Hikuki tani.... naku mushi. Mafu tefu* ... "The high mountains. The low valleys.... The crying insects. The dancing butterflies." How very different from the reading lessons in American primers: "See Dick run. See Mary jump. See them play"! The American textbook might help a child learn to read, but a Japanese textbook was more ambitious; it was intended to give much more to the child—and, inevitably, to the nation.

Allusions to the emperor and his wise benevolence were woven into many of the narratives. Less subtle were the quasi-religious themes related to Shinto and nativist ideology and the Japanese people's "imperial ancestors from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu through the unbroken line of historical emperors." In addition—and especially after the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars—military themes found their way into national school textbooks.



Pages from a 1905 second-grade textbook

Kokugo beyond Japan

Japan had its own version of Manifest Destiny, too. As the Japanese empire grew, so did the national school system. Just as they were in the Japanese homeland, *Kokugo* classes became a linchpin of public education in the colonies as well.

Taiwan is usually thought of as Imperial Japan's first colony, but that's not true. Instead, Ezo—the island of Hokkaido—was the first place the Meiji government colonized. When Koshōken and other Edo-period travelers made their way to the island, it was beyond the territory where Japanese lived; and even when Isabella Bird visited Ezo in 1878, she, too, described the island that way. Hokkaido was still

very much the homeland of the Ainu in those days, not of the Japanese. Only a few years later, in 1899, the Japanese government passed an act declaring that the Ainu were "former aborigines," and that there were now "no ethnic minority groups" in Japan. People with Ainu ancestry may have still been living in their homeland, but their language and traditional way of life were under relentless pressure, and in many cases already well on their way to extinction. The fact that Hokkaido is considered one of the Japanese home islands today only shows how successful the colonization was. But truth be told, Hokkaido was Japanized even later than California was Americanized.

The Ryukyu Islands were next. This archipelago immediately to the south of the home islands was an obvious place to expand, just as Hokkaido in the north had been. One difference, though, was that these southern islands were already organized into a state, a royal kingdom with its capital located in Okinawa.

The Ryukyu Kingdom had long had a contentious relationship with Japan, but it had flourished nevertheless, maintaining its own distinctive traditions and culture for centuries. Throughout the Edo period the kingdom had sent tribute to China just as most other East Asian countries did, but, at the same time, its kings pledged their unfailing loyalty to the powerful Japanese domain of Satsuma in Kyushu. This divided allegiance underscored just how small and weak the state was, conspicuously ripe for the picking by more powerful neighbors. And, sure enough, in 1879 Japan began negotiations with China's imperial government by sending a proposal to split the chain of islands in two, with China getting the southernmost islands. China's counterproposal was to split the archipelago into three parts, allowing the Ryukyu Kingdom to continue to exist on the main island in the middle. That's where negotiations between China and Japan stopped. China, in that frightening era of unequal treaties, had a host of other foreign policy concerns, and besides, the rulers of the Qing Empire undoubtedly thought that this pesky little country off their coast should have been sending tribute to Peking rather than trying to negotiate as an equal with the Emperor's representatives. So, with China out of the picture, Japan simply took the initiative and moved in unilaterally, taking over the entire chain of islands for itself. That same year, 1879, the Meiji government formally annexed the islands and renamed them Okinawa Prefecture, which became, and remains today, the southernmost political division of the country.

As for Taiwan, Japan took control of the island after the end of the Sino-Japanese War and ruled it as a colony for the next fifty years.

And then there's the woeful saga of Korean colonization. Japan's designs on its ancient neighbor went back centuries, and that was in fact one of the principal reasons Japan went to war with China in the first place—it's certainly significant, after all, that much of the Sino-Japanese War was fought on the Korean Peninsula. After Japan won that war, though, Russian influence proved to be a further impediment to Japanese plans, and it was only after Japan defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War that it gained complete control of its neighbor. Japan then annexed Korea outright in 1910. After that takeover, Korea remained a Japanese colony for the next thirty-five years.

In all these colonies (and in any and all other places the Japanese controlled), the Meiji government installed its tried-and-true educational system. Its basic philosophical tenets included the elevation of the Emperor and loyalty to him, civics, patriotism, and, more implicitly, the superiority of citizens born of Japanese blood. Everybody had to internalize these concepts and more—and *Kokugo* class was one of the main places where this indoctrination in Japanese ideology and morality took place. You didn't just learn to read and write in those classes!

A *Kokugo* class in the Korean colony

SPIRITUAL BLOOD

There was still something missing in this instruction, though, something basic at the heart of being Japanese.

From the beginning, Meiji ideologues such as Ueda Kazutoshi wanted a "clean" National Language that everybody in the Empire knew and used. But what people were speaking was not at all what they had in mind. Sure, schoolkids were by now reading and writing more or less passable *Kokugo*. But even after decades of *Kokugo* instruction, what people were actually speaking was entirely different. People in Taiwan kept on speaking Taiwanese; Koreans continued to speak Korean. Such a situation in the colonies shouldn't have surprised anyone. But even in the home islands what people spoke was a mosaic of widely differing dialects and local forms of speech—in other words, the language barriers that had so irritated and frustrated Koshōken back in the Edo period were for the most part still there!

The truth is, in the early part of the Meiji period the way people talked had largely escaped attention. Almost everybody in the school system had focused almost exclusively on writing, and the attitude toward how people were speaking was fuzzy at best. Even in the classroom what was spoken often differed from what was being written. If the paternalistic people drafting policy thought at all about such matters, they probably just assumed that the schoolbook language would be absorbed into speech automatically by some kind of linguistic osmosis. But linguistic integration wasn't so simple. No matter what was being taught in school, most people just went about their everyday lives speaking in the old familiar ways.

At some point, though, all that rich, bewildering variety in local speech patterns became a matter of concern. There was admittedly a practical need now for people to be able to talk with each other more easily. For one thing, universal military service was bringing young men together from all over the Empire. A rapidly developing economy brought people together in other ways, too.

But there was a spiritual side to this issue, too, and that was really what the ideologues were concerned about. The Japanese language was, after all, as Ueda Kazutoshi put it, the "spiritual blood of the Japanese people." And so, government authorities decided to cleanse this spiritual blood by purging it of impurities.

Words such as *kuso* 'shit' were perhaps understandably thought to sully the National Language, but so were common colloquialisms such as *baka* 'stupid fool' and *yatsu* 'guy.' Thus, all such words were to be shunned.

Prudery vs. spiritualism

It might be imagined that this Japanese ban on vulgar words was like Victorian prudery. After all, in America and England back then it was improper even to say "leg" in mixed company, so tables had "limbs." Chicken legs became "drumsticks"; thighs were "dark meat"; breasts were "white meat." A woman's private parts (already a euphemism!) became a "fruitful vine" that flowered every month and bore fruit in nine. Ladies and gentlemen didn't use those tabooed words in polite company.

But Meiji authorities weren't prudes, at least when it came to language. Their rulings and decisions weren't meant to avoid social embarrassment. While Victorians were perfectly all right with using toilet words privately, at least when they weren't in mixed company, Japanese decision makers banned such words because they meant for the words not to be used anywhere, in any situation. They were out to purify the language itself as something passed down through their imperial ancestors from the gods. The Victorians may have revered English, but if so, it was a pretty secular kind of reverence. They certainly didn't think of their language as something passed down in an unbroken line from the gods themselves!

Declaring war on dialects

Around the third decade of the Meiji era, slogans urging action began to appear on placards and signs in public places:

Hōgen kyōsei 'Rectify dialects'

Hōgen bokumetsu 'Exterminate dialects'

Slogans such as these were part of the campaign the government had just launched to eradicate all regional variety in the Japanese language.

The reasoning was simple. All citizens of the Empire were now required to speak "only one Japanese language," and in order to reach that goal, government ideologues were moving as quickly as possible to get rid of anything that smacked of dialect. All dialect forms, words, expressions, and

pronunciations—everything non-standard—were considered vulgar and unclean, just like those colloquialisms that also offended their high-minded sensibilities.

The policy was breathtakingly fascistic. It passed down diktats in a completely uncompromising way. Still, to be fair to Japanese language planners, this notion of an ideal, uniform language was not something they had dreamed up on their own. It was actually an old idea—and very much Western. Japanese students in France and Germany in the late nineteenth century had assiduously studied Western institutions and intellectual trends of all kinds, and many of the future language planners for Japan were taken by what they read and saw in those European countries.

One idea that had particularly captured their imagination was that of a uniform *langue nationale*. It was a concept that originally went back to the French Revolution. In those tumultuous days in France, social radicals had imagined that leveling language differences would help them achieve their ultimate goal of creating a class-free society, where everyone had absolute equality before the law. Since differences in speech naturally triggered people's prejudices and brought about inequity, anything in a person's speech that revealed his or her class or regional origins had to be eliminated.

In other words, if you want to have equal rights, everybody has to give up being different. The Meiji Japanese would have no problem applying that principle in their growing empire. But many of those people being strong-armed into change hated it. Koreans certainly didn't want to be Japanese, nor did many Taiwanese or some Okinawans, either. Very early on, most Ainu did give up their language and much more, but they may also have been wondering when they were going to get some of those promised equal rights (as, incidentally, so did a lot of American Indian tribes who had to speak only English in reservation schools)!

Significantly, though, by the time those Meiji students reached Europe, there was less focus on equal rights anyway, and increasingly more on the idea of a *langue nationale* as the emblem of nationhood and nationalist sentiment. In German universities in particular, there was more and more talk in those days about "purifying" and "preserving the beauty of" a national language, and nothing could have resonated more with young Japanese nationalists. It fit what their language was coming to mean for them. The Japanese were even more energized about purifying language than the Prussians. Reports from later European observers expressed amazement at how intolerant the Japanese had become toward dialects.

First, some housecleaning at home

It goes without saying that the government needed to consolidate new colonies better into the Empire. But before it got around to that job, it first had to do a lot of work cleaning up language in the home islands. All eyes fell first on Tohoku. Government policies were being instituted nationwide, but the Northeast, where Edo travelers had had so much trouble communicating, was famously problematic (still very much so in the new era as well), and that's where the government put in a lot of special effort at correcting things.

Just as was done elsewhere in the country, Tohoku authorities set up bases in the schools. But they also put in place special study institutes (*kōshūkai*) where they were felt to be needed. One well-documented example of such an institute was one established in 1900 in Yamagata Prefecture, just to the northwest of Fukushima; it was set up specifically to fix the "*zūzū*" pronunciations heard there. The local forms of Japanese heard in these northern parts of Honshu were (and still are) called "*zūzū* dialects" because the people in those areas pronounced both the vowel /i/ and the vowel /u/ of the standard language the same way. And so, for example, *nasi* 'pear' and *nasu* 'eggplant' sounded exactly the same, with the vowel in the second syllable in both words being reduced to a sound something like [ɨ]. That meant that no matter whether you asked for eggplants or pears at the local market, you'd get whichever one was then in season. Similarly, *susi* ('sushi'), *susu* ('soot'), and *sisi* ('lion') were all homonyms. People from Tokyo laughed at how uneducated and countrified that *zūzū* vowel sounded. So, to show how important fixing Tohoku was, Izawa Shūji, the man who had edited the first National Language textbook, was put in overall charge of the operation from about 1908 on.

The institute had everybody jumping through hoops. It put in place all kinds of teaching procedures. Schools held conversation practice sessions in each grade level, as well as pronunciation exercises for all the children gathered together for coordinated practice. Adults got involved, too, and not just teachers. Parents were mobilized for special discussion sessions, where they were given instructions on how to teach and correct their children's pronunciations.

School calisthenics in the 1930s

These pronunciation practices were intended to be just like school calisthenics, those coordinated exercises Japanese schools have long held in schoolyards before classes begin in the morning. In fact, the pronunciation practices were even called "mouth calisthenics" (*kuchi no taisō*).

Here's how the sessions worked: Each morning, right after the daily physical exercise session, children were required to spend an extra fifteen minutes doing those so-called "mouth calisthenics." Chanting in loud voices, they first went through all the syllables of the syllabary: *a, i, u, e, o; ka, ki, ku, ke, ko*..., and then, after the students were good and warmed up, they started reciting individual words—presumably some of those troublesome words with *zūzū* vowels. The whole business was repeated again right after lunch, when the children were gathered together for another fifteen minutes of pronunciation practice.

In the end, all the fun and games didn't produce much in the way of results—or at least not much of what the activities had been intended for. After World War II, by which time language policies had changed dramatically, the National Language Research Institute conducted a detailed follow-up study and determined that all of those exercises and energetic efforts to change people's speech had left almost no trace at all on pronunciations. Those "*zūzū* sounds" were very much still there!

But something else *did* change: attitudes became more serious.

Punishments

Perhaps officials were just becoming frustrated. Or maybe people running the local schools just wanted to show how dedicated they were to the new policies. However punishment methods were chosen, though, regional schools started cracking down harshly on non-standard speech. A favorite was the infamous *hōgen fuda*, 'dialect tag.'

This "dialect tag" was a record of wrongdoing. Every time a pupil was overheard using a non-standard form—be it a word, expression, or sound—his name was written down on one of these tags, and then, in many cases, he had to wear it around his neck or have it stuck on his back. The tags were like demerits, and the accumulation of too many of them would lead to increasingly harsher punishment, even expulsion from school. After about 1905, this system was adopted in various schools nationwide.

Standard language policy had all along been authoritarian, but now, authoritarianism reached new levels. Harshness was becoming cruelty.

Yes, dialect tags, along with various other punishments and public humiliation, certainly did what they were supposed to do. They stemmed the tide of local languages being used in school. But really, humiliation and punishment also did much more: they stopped kids from speaking much at all. Seeing what happened to anyone making a mistake, rural schoolchildren began to suffer from what post-war Japanese linguists call the "dialect complex." Kids were frozen into inaction. After all, it was better to remain silent than to let something "vulgar" slip out and be punished!

But what about Okinawa?

Hokkaido had become Japanese much the same way California became American, through migration. The Ainu hadn't posed much of a problem. Japanese settlers from central Honshu flooded into the sparsely populated island and overwhelmed the indigenous people by sheer numbers. It didn't take long to make Hokkaido part of Japan.

But what about Okinawa? Expanding Japan the same way would have been harder in the Ryukyus. There wasn't enough land or empty space available in that archipelago for mass migrations, so

the only way to make the islands Japanese was to turn Okinawans and other people already living there into Japanese. And that's what the Meiji government was determined to do.

The people living in Okinawa and the other Ryukyuan islands were not Japanese. And they definitely didn't speak Japanese. In fact, many different languages were spoken in the Ryukyus. The fifty-five islands and islets in the archipelago had been nominally part of the Ryukyu Kingdom, but the peoples and their cultures were in no way uniform or unified. How many languages were there? Linguists don't agree. But there were (and are) at least six, and they were not mutually intelligible, either with Japanese or with each other. Consider these simple expressions used for 'thank you' and 'welcome':

Language	'Thank you'	'Welcome'
Standard Japanese	**Arigatō**	**Yōkoso**
Amami	Arigatesama ryoota Arigassama ryoota	Imoorii
Kunigami (Okinoerabu)	Mihediro	Ugamiyabura Menshori
Okinawan	Nifeedeebiru	Mensooree
Miyako	Tandigaatandi	Nmyaachi
Yaeyama	Miifaiyuu Fukoorasaan	Ooritoori
Yonaguni	Fugarasa	Wari

Even today, there is far more linguistic diversity in that long chain of islands than in all the rest of Japan put together.

LINGUISTIC FUDGING

Nevertheless, the Meiji government consistently referred to Okinawan and all the other mutually incompatible forms of speech in the Ryukyus as "Japanese dialects" and never as different languages.

And the usage stuck. “Dialects of Japanese” is what they’re still called today by almost everyone except linguists.

Now, it’s true that these languages—Okinawan and the rest—are not completely independent languages unrelated to Japanese. In fact, an ancestral language estimated to have been spoken around two thousand years ago gave rise to all of them plus Japanese. In fact, the Ryukyuan languages are the only languages that have, to date, been definitively proved to be related to Japanese! This language family, consisting of the varieties of Japanese spoken in the main islands of Japan plus the Ryukyuan languages spoken in the Ryukyus, has been given the name “Japonic” by historical linguists.

But was this highly technical, genetic relationship linking all the Japonic languages in the Japanese archipelago the reason the Japanese government called them “Japanese dialects”? Hardly. Japanese officials were almost certainly not even aware there was such a thing! Instead, calling all those Ryukyuan languages “Japanese dialects” was simply a part of the government’s assimilation policy. “Dialect” was nothing more than a vague cover term for anything spoken besides the standard.

The upshot is that the government treated the Ryukyuan languages just like dialects in the home islands—except that the problems were understandably harder to overcome.

Schools readied their “dialect” punishment boards.

A dialect tag used in Okinawa

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Japanese authorities—including a famous linguist—even began referring to Korean as a "Japanese dialect." It sounded like a cruel joke, but it was no such thing. It was, rather, an internally consistent extension of the same standard-language policy the government had already been pursuing in the Ryukyus.

But for their part, Koreans considered that usage such a degrading insult to them and their language, that they have still not forgotten it, nor, to this day, forgiven the Japanese for referring to their language that way.

Kokugo policy had become the tool of naked, unadulterated imperialism.

CHAPTER SIX:
AFTERMATH OF THE WAR

In his thoroughly entertaining book *Embracing Defeat*, John Dower describes the sudden turnaround of the Japanese after the war. The change was completely unexpected, not anticipated by anyone really, including—perhaps most especially—American GIs arriving on Japan's shores.

As these first American troops arriving in Japan disembarked from their landing crafts, they must have looked anxiously toward the looming shoreline, hearts pounding. For there, in the distance, they could see groups of Japanese standing on the beach, waiting. It was a tense moment. But then, the Japanese on those beaches quickly turned out to be not the fierce, fanatical hordes the Americans had imagined would confront them there—or really, anyone else trying to force them back! Rather, those American soldiers stepping onto Japanese soil were more often welcomed as guests than treated as invaders—on occasion, groups of women and children even came out to greet them with flowers and serenade them with songs!

What the Americans encountered at that moment, as well as in the Occupation Period that followed, was completely unlike what just about everyone among the Allies had predicted. Here is how Dower describes the scene:

> It would be difficult to find another cross-cultural moment more intense, unpredictable, ambiguous, confusing, and *electric* than this one. The Americans arrived anticipating, many of them, a traumatic confrontation with fanatical emperor worshippers. They were accosted instead by women who called "yoo hoo" to the first troops landing on the beaches in full battle gear, and men who bowed and asked what it was the conquerors wished. They found themselves seduced (far more than they realized) by polite manners as well as by elegant presents and entertainments. Most of all, they encountered a populace sick of war, contemptuous of the militarists who had led them to disaster, and

> all but overwhelmed by the difficulties of their present circumstances in a ruined land. More than anything else, it turned out, the losers wished both to forget the past and to transcend it. (Dower, pp. 23–24)

It was the beginning of a new era for Japan, and for America as well.

The changing American image of Japan

In 1945 Americans despised the Japanese. For Americans, the treachery the "Japs" had shown in the attack on Pearl Harbor was not something any people with honor would ever undertake, and so, in that moment in 1941, the Japanese had shown themselves, at least to American minds, to be something less than human, something more like vermin that needed to be exterminated. And so, with that mindset, most of the American public heartily approved of the mass killing of civilians in the A-bomb attacks and the carpet-bombing of Tokyo and other cities. (Curtis LeMay, the general who devised that diabolical form of air attack, called the policy giving up swatting at flies and going after "the manure pile.") Americans cheered on the slaughter; they exulted in it. It was a blind and unremitting emotion, this hatred of Japanese.

Now, however, even before 1946 had really begun, those emotions had faded, almost as if they had been part of a bad dream. For Americans, worried about Soviet aggression and obsessing over commies, hatred of Japan largely receded from consciousness. Japan (along with West Germany) had quickly become the main bulwarks against Communist aggression and needed to be rapidly integrated into the "free" Western world. And yet, at least as important as international politics and world affairs were surely the stories and descriptions veterans brought home with them from Japan after being stationed there. First-person eyewitness accounts told to families and friends must, in the end, have changed more American minds about Japan and the Japanese people than anything official military or government sources could have offered up.

In that strange, upside-down era, American servicemen, and especially American government and contract workers with U.S. dollars, were able to live in lavish conditions in impoverished Japan, and that remained true from 1945 through the Occupation Period (1945–1952) and well into the 1960s. These outsiders often lived in elegant houses, sometimes even aristocratic estates rented to them by cash-

strapped members of the upper class. And though some exclusive places continued to be discreetly kept off limits to non-Japanese, Americans and other Westerners certainly had access to all manner of merchandise and food and drink too pricey for ordinary Japanese. Seeing where the money was, entrepreneurs rushed to market new and flashy products for this arriving class of nouveau riche.

At a meeting of the country's business conglomerates, the so-called *zaibatsu*, one of the leaders rose and took the floor, then said, *in English*, "Our friends are coming." And so they did. Japanese entrepreneurs switched from servicing the war economy and ramped up production of a myriad variety of consumer goods intended for GI tastes, including cigarettes such as "Rose," "Salon," and "Gion" brands, local liquors and brews, and all sorts of cheap knickknacks. Makers of lenses for military use quickly retooled and set about producing a "Baby Pearl" camera for GI use. Finely crafted Nikon I cameras reached the civilian market in 1948, and soon enough those and other serious cameras, including Canon, Pentax, Minolta, and Konica, began to be stocked in post exchanges (PXs) as well.

By November 1945, Japanese entrepreneurs had already created "Greetings from Tokyo" Christmas cards and ramped up production to the tune of 5.5 million. It was ingenious. Instead of the usual themes of American Christmas cards, the secular Japanese instead chose for these seasonal greetings clichéd winter scenes from *ukiyoe* woodblock prints showing temples and shrines with graceful geisha standing under parasols in the snow. The images of traditional Japan were idealized, of course, and they were nothing at all like the blackened and bombed-out Tokyo as it was then. But, as can be imagined, the cards sold extraordinarily well. What better way to sell to GIs than to market idealized and exotic images of the place where they were stationed? No wonder the folks back home started to think differently about Japan. Why, it was as if their sons were stationed in some exotic vacation spot instead of in enemy territory devastated by war!

And of course, there were the women, always the women. Poverty and desperation anywhere in any country drive some desperate women, and girls too, into prostitution. But hundreds of thousands of U.S. servicemen were arriving on Japan's shores, and they needed to be accommodated—as the Japanese military, with its history of using "comfort women" to service its own troops, knew all too well. Thus, on August 18 concerned government officials sent out secret messages to regional police officials urging them to prepare "comfort facilities" for the soon-to-be-arriving army. Tokyo police officials followed up by meeting with "entrepreneurs" and promising to support the initiative with funding. The

idea was that patriotic professionals could be employed as a buffer, a kind of relief valve, to protect the chastity of "the young women of Japan" from the brutish Americans. The problem was, professional prostitutes didn't want to do the job. Wartime propaganda had convinced them that American soldiers were demons, monsters rumored to have enormous sex organs that could cause a girl serious bodily harm.

And so, the entrepreneurs they had enlisted for the project set out to recruit ordinary women to "comfort" the occupation force. Ads for females between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five were placed in downtown Tokyo promising to provide housing, clothing, and food, things in desperately short supply in 1945. The majority of the disheveled women in patched and worn clothing who showed up in response to the ad, some even barefoot, had no idea what they were going to be asked to do, and as soon as they realized what was going on, many left. But a significant number stayed, claiming they were sacrificing their bodies for the patriotic good of the nation. So, on August 28, just as the first of the occupation forces were arriving, 1,360 young women were administered a formal oath of office in the plaza in front of the Imperial Palace, where they pledged themselves to "the defense of the national polity."

It was grotesque. Here were a bunch of poor and naïve young women turning tricks for the first time, and doing so at the behest of the Japanese government—for supposedly patriotic reasons!

As soon as word got out, there were plenty of takers, of course. Hundreds of GIs showed up the first day. A trick only cost about a dollar, after all! There were no facilities, or beds, or even partitions for privacy, but all that didn't seem to matter much. It's estimated that each of these women serviced between fifteen and sixty GIs a day—no wonder one nineteen-year-old committed suicide, and many others broke down or ran away!

It's hard to believe that the Japanese government actually sponsored something so disgusting and degrading (until we remember that the military wing of that same government had carried on during the war the now infamous "comfort women" program, often using, sometimes by kidnapping, far younger non-Japanese girls, for the duration of the Pacific War). Thankfully, this post-war program only lasted a few months (by which time, however, ninety percent of the women had contracted an STD).

Endō Takeo's cartoon of a Japanese woman fraternizing with a burly GI while a disabled veteran looks on (Dower 135)

The ending of the government program didn't spell an end to prostitution, of course. The sex business simply passed into private hands. These figures of the new "water trade" became symbols of a new cultural era, that of the often romanticized *panpan* girls, the streetwalkers of post-war Japan. These women were at once thought of as independent spirits liberated from repressed sexuality, and at the same time tragic and exploited.

The age was transient; the explosive rise of Japanese prosperity in the 1950s brought an end to this crazy, topsy-turvy pecking order. But in those early postwar years, the image of Japan itself changed for Americans.

And it happened almost overnight. Where once they had seen a fanatical, demonic threat, GIs now saw a compliant, exotic woman. Japan had become peaceful and friendly, erotic and seductive. Adding to this impression, post-war Japanese society served up images that reinforced their erotic fantasies. Plenty of soft porn and "picture-frame nude shows" titillated young men from a prudish America, where, at the time, women's breasts were almost never displayed openly.

Americans in those years all too often lorded it over their former enemies. Something akin to victor's justice was perhaps at work here; many GIs treated Japanese, men as well as women, as if these people were there only to serve them.

But there was also something more insidious in these interpersonal relationships than just the question of who won and who lost the war. GIs may have no longer harbored hatred or resentment toward the Japanese—many even genuinely liked them. But what the Americans did not give up so easily was their racism.

The hierarchies of race and privilege were apparent in virtually every interaction between victors and vanquished. These GIs pulled in jinrikisha by yesterday's battlefield foe posed for a U.S. Army photographer in front of the imperial palace. (Dower, p. 210)

Racism was pervasive in those days, and completely out in the open—as can be seen in the photograph. But this racial bias was even more obvious when we compare America's policy in Japan to its policies in West Germany, where the local people were "white." White American soldiers in Germany were freely allowed to marry German women after 1946, whereas in Japan, the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) banned interracial marriages, and the ban continued to be U.S. policy in Japan well after the end of the Occupation.

Much was made of that discriminatory policy in the 1957 Hollywood blockbuster *Sayonara*, a movie that starred Marlon Brando as an ace fighter pilot who falls in love with a famous Japanese dancer, played by Miiko Taka. Meanwhile, an enlisted man under Brando's command also falls in love with a Japanese woman, but he marries her, thus defying SCAP's rules. The melodrama then turns into a tearjerker when the two, forced apart by the U.S. military and feeling hopeless, commit double suicide. (Both of those actors, Red Buttons and Miyoshi Umeki, won Academy Awards for their performances, Umeki being the first Asian ever to win an Oscar.) Of course, this being Hollywood and the 1950s, *Sayonara* has a happily-ever-after, *deus-ex-machina* ending when Brando's character is told by his commanding officer "laws are now being passed to allow interracial marriages in the United States." Hearing this, the Brando-character fighter pilot immediately seeks out his love at the theater in Kobe and pleads with her to become his wife. The film ends with Brando smiling and telling the U.S. military "Sayonara!"

A movie poster for *Sayonara*

Without question, *Sayonara* and other romantic books and movies of the day helped change American minds about Japan. They contributed to a growing racial tolerance in America (at least for "Orientals"). On the other hand, they also reinforced that exotic and sexualized "geisha girl" image that most GIs came home with. This development was a bitter-sweet irony for a country that had long considered itself a masculine nation. In the Edo period, nationalists had argued that even Japanese women embodied the masculine nature of the nation. Now, Westerners, and especially Americans, saw Japan as essentially feminine.

UNDERSTANDING JAPAN

Alongside such superficial and demeaning contacts with Japan, however, there was yet another type of type of interaction that took place during the American Occupation. And this particular Japan experience was one that in the end mattered more, and was much sweeter for both countries.

After Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government began investing heavily in training young Americans in Japanese language and culture. Until that time, Japanese language had only been taught at a tiny number of elite universities, and even within those ivied walls, most of the training remained little more than esoteric translation exercises. Now, however, all that changed. Suddenly, U.S. military intelligence had a critical need for people knowledgeable about Japan, and when a call was sent out, thousands of patriotic young men signed up to be trained in Japanese. The government put in place a number of intensive training centers and brought in bilingual Japanese Americans to be the core faculty for the centers. At these training centers, what was to be taught was not some abstruse academic exercise, but rather the language and culture as it was actually written and spoken—and lived. It was a happy investment for America. But in those early years few anticipated what the programs would eventually produce.

One of those early volunteers was an eighteen-year-old boy from the Flatbush section of Brooklyn named Donald Keene. Keene had had his interest in Japan piqued a couple of years earlier when he was in high school. He explained:

> I grew interested in the Orient and one day I bought a translation of the Japanese story "Tale of Genji" in the Hotel Astor bookstore in Times Square, only because it was so

cheap — two volumes for 49 cents. And that's how I got hooked on Japanese literature. [2011 NY Times City Room blog]

Keene entered Columbia College as a precocious sixteen-year-old, and right away he was drawn to classes about Japan. One day, as he was stepping off the Staten Island ferry, he saw a newspaper headline "Japs Attack U.S." Though still an underclassman at Columbia, he applied for the Navy's new Japanese language school, was accepted, graduated, and became an intelligence officer. His first post was in Hawaii. Many decades later, he described to me what had happened to him there.

> My job on the naval base was to read captured Japanese military documents, but, as a very junior officer, I also had the extra duty of censoring the mail GIs were sending home. Those GI letters I had to read were filled with the most mundane things: 'I miss you; the chow is awful'—those kinds of things. I was so bored. But then one day, while I was working on translating some Japanese military documents, I stumbled onto a storeroom on the post that was filled with random bundles of handwritten papers. When I looked closer, I saw that the papers were all written in difficult flowing script that I couldn't read. When I asked my superiors about them, I was told that they were the papers found on battlefields that nobody on the base could read. Well, I made up my mind right then and there that I was going to read them, and so whenever I could, I went back to that storeroom and worked at deciphering the papers.
>
> I figured out fairly quickly that the papers were diaries and letters taken off the bodies of dead Japanese soldiers—some were even blood-stained. But it took me a long time to grasp what they were saying. Although they were often written as diaries, they were not so much descriptions of daily occurrences as they were intimate reflections on the meaning of life and beauty and existence. The poetry of such writings by ordinary Japanese soldiers moved me to tears.
>
> It was an important moment for me. Remember, all this time I was also reading the letters GIs were writing home, and it was the contrast between the boring superficiality of those letters and the moving poetry of what their Japanese counterparts

had written that made me realize how much I loved the beauty of Japanese culture. I knew then that that was what I was going to study for the rest of my life.

As soon as the war was over, Keene returned to his studies at Columbia. But in 1953, with a scholarship in hand, he finally made it to Kyoto, where he lived full-on Japanese in a traditional (unheated) Japanese house, eating only *washoku* 'Japanese-style food,' sitting in the Japanese *seiza*-style formal seating posture on a tatami mat, typing out the manuscripts for his soon-to-be-famous anthologies of Japanese literature.

Keene did not stay on in Japan during the immediate post-war period, but many of his compatriots did, and most of these young Americans who had studied Japanese fell under the spell of Japan's allure just as Keene had. Edward Seidensticker, who would later be Keene's colleague in Japanese literature at Columbia, was one well-known example. Seidensticker was stationed with the Navy at the Sasebo naval base, and it was there, he later reported, that he developed "a deep appreciation of Japan and the Japanese people" that would become the foundation of his life's work.

Samuel Martin was yet another young man whose life was shaped by his stay in Japan during the Occupation. By nature a rationalist, Martin turned his Japan experience toward a career in linguistic science instead of a more literary field. He was a close observer of Japanese language and culture, and from very early on (he was two years younger than Keene) he began writing extensively about the Japanese language. His prose was less expansive than Keene's—it "hugged the ground," as one of his colleagues put it—but it was surpassingly clear and precise and fluent—and subtly witty. Almost immediately following his Japan experience, and in spite of his very young age, Martin won widespread recognition for his linguistic studies, not only of Japanese but also of Korean and other languages, as well as for his analyses of linguistic structure more generally.

A very private person, Martin was usually reluctant to talk about personal matters, but as he grew older, he sometimes revealed glimpses of those early years in Japan. One evening, in a Japanese restaurant in Honolulu, the two of us were having a casual conversation about something he was working on when he suddenly brought up his admiration for the Japanese people, and why he found Japan more attractive than so many other places he'd seen. "After the war, all the people I saw in Japan were shockingly poor," he said. "No one had anything. Still, even in those hard days the Japanese had a

natural dignity and a self-respect about them that I couldn't help but admire. Their clothing may have been threadbare and patched, but it was always kept neat and clean." Fastidious himself, that trait was particularly important to Martin.

After the War, young Americans such as these—Keene, Seidensticker, Martin, and numerous other former intelligence officers—became the West's experts on Japan. Under their leadership, the United States became the acknowledged world center for study and writing on Japan. That War Generation remained the best the Western world had for a very long time.

Profound change—yet cultural continuity

For their part, the Japanese response to the American occupation was varied—"kaleidoscopic," Dower calls it—sometimes ebullient and enthusiastic, sometimes cooperative and friendly, sometimes sullen and aloof, and all manner of reactions in between those extremes. The important thing, of course, was that no matter how sullen some Japanese might have been, not one of them ever engaged in violent or hostile acts, or guerrilla movements of any kind.

It was outside the norm. In West Germany an exhausted populace grudgingly accepted the Allied occupation, but there remained some incipient guerrilla activities. Not so in Japan. At first, Occupation authorities in Japan had fretted that entrenched social hierarchies and customs, *junpū bizoku*, would present unbreachable barriers to the kinds of reforms they had in mind. But they needn't have worried. The Japanese public openly embraced Western cultural trends and, perhaps especially, American fads.

But perhaps the most astonishing development during this era was the effusive Japanese embrace of their new supreme commander, General Douglas MacArthur. The Japanese public at all levels of society venerated this preening and pompous American general with an enthusiasm and deference bordering on worship. In fact, one older gentleman actually did just that, reporting in a letter to a Japanese newspaper that he was now praying before MacArthur's picture each morning and evening, just as he had done earlier before the Emperor's portrait. MacArthur received countless gifts and tributes; artists painted his portrait; poets wrote verses in his honor; people confessed their sins to him as if he were a priest. It was as if he had become the father of the country; in fact, women even wrote him letters with an implied "I-want-to-have-your-baby" message.

MacArthur poses with the Emperor for a photograph

A sly joke made the rounds in those days:

> Question: 「マッカーサー元帥はなぜ日本のへそなのか？」
> Answer: 「チンの上にあるからだ」

> Question: 'Why is it that General MacArthur is Japan's navel?'
> Answer: 'Because he's over the *Chin*.'

The joke hinged on a pun between *Chin* (朕) 'a reverential term of respect used only for the Emperor' and the vulgar word *chin* (チン) 'cock, prick.'

The complete lack of overt acts of resistance astonished, and then delighted, those first Americans troops in Japan. Most so-called American experts had been wrong about what to expect, too; they had been caught off guard almost as much as soldiers on the ground. A cadre of trained administrators stood ready to set up a military government for Japan, but the Occupation authorities—in particular, General Douglas MacArthur himself—decided that such outside administrators were not needed in Japan, and, instead, sent many of this cadre of trained young Americans to Korea to govern that newly liberated Japanese colony.[4]

In Japan, however, up and down the governmental structure, local bureaucracy was left in place. SCAP and MacArthur had decided—with relief—that the Japanese bureaucracy so constituted could be trusted to cooperate fully with the goals of the occupation forces and, at the same time, to run the country efficiently without undermining those goals. But to this already large and complex Japanese bureaucracy, SCAP added an additional bureaucratic structure aimed at examining and censoring everything published, or to be published, or shown in theaters, or heard on the radio, or even spoken on the phone, in Japan. And "everything" meant everything, up to and including even local PTA flyers!

Virtually all of the six thousand or so employees poring over these myriad and voluminous documents and materials were English-competent Japanese nationals. Yet, there seems never to have been any question of divided loyalty. SCAP authorities were on the lookout for a resurgence of imperial and/or anti-democratic nationalism, but SCAP's Japanese employees never gave a hint of being anything but in line with the goals of the American authorities. Their dedication was astonishing. Where else in the history of conquest and occupation can another development like this one be found?

Copies of almost all the documents examined, and censored, by the Occupation authorities can still be found today in the Gordon W. Prange Collection at the University of Maryland. This unique

4. When the American forces arrived on Korea's shores, crowds spontaneously rushed out to welcome them as liberators. But, unlike what had just happened on Japanese shores, nervous American troops mistook the welcoming Koreans for rabid Japanese attackers and began firing into the crowds, slaughtering dozens and quickly turning joyful celebration into a new tragedy. It was a sad and cruel irony. What Koreans had seen as liberation, at long last, from oppressive Japanese colonial rule immediately turned into the beginning of a new era of conflict, mayhem, and division on the Korean peninsula.

collection is the most comprehensive archive in the world of Japanese print publications issued during the early years of the Occupation of Japan, 1945–1949.

The Sweet Taste of Freedom

The years and decades that have passed since the end of the Second World War have brought Americans to a more nuanced understanding of their country's conduct in that war. Now, far more than was ever the case in the 1940s and 1950s, Americans have come to grips with the unspeakable horrors of the atomic bombings, and, yes, many even acknowledge that those acts were indeed war crimes. And even though there remain stubbornly nationalistic holdouts, most Americans today shudder at the indiscriminate firebombing of Japanese cities that incinerated uncounted millions.

But the Americans of that generation—the generation now known to us as "The Greatest Generation"—also brought with them to Japan an unshakeable belief in American-style democracy. These men—and women—sincerely imagined they could transform Japan for the better from a "feudalistic," Emperor-worshipping and backward fascist society into a modern and forward-looking democracy. That goal may have been in so many ways naïve, and not a little condescending, but in the mid-twentieth century most Americans, and especially those American reformers, truly believed in the magic of America's democratic ideals.

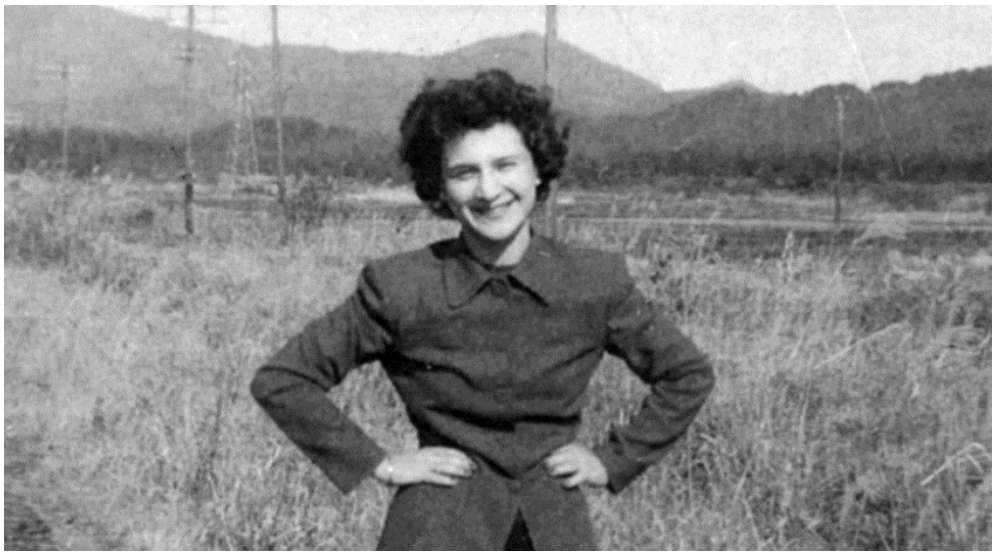
In this mission, though, MacArthur lost no time in showing why he was called "Japan's navel." He was above the Emperor in every respect. He lost patience with Japanese political factions and mandated that Japanese nationals would not be involved in the task of drafting their own constitution; instead, he gave the assignment to a committee of Americans on his staff. It was they who produced the famous "Peace Constitution" that is the foundation of Japan's democracy to this very day. MacArthur may have dictated that the committee he created draft the constitution, but he did not interfere in their production of the work. The task was left entirely up to the members of his committee, and what they produced was representative of the ideals they held about democracy. They were young and sincere and dedicated to the task at hand. They had no particular political or ethnic agenda; racial biases otherwise seen throughout the Occupation period do not obviously mar their draft of the constitution. As the members of the committee later put it, they did their work in a "humanistic" spirit.

Still. This entire exercise was cultural imperialism, of course—how could it not be? The

governmental structure they spelled out may have been a British-style parliament, but it was shot through and through with American ideas about democratic government. MacArthur lorded it over Japanese petitioners, and he summarily dismissed all their efforts toward warding off the writing of a new document by submitting instead their own revisions to the old Meiji Constitution. On one occasion, a B-29 flew directly overhead just as their proposals were being rejected. It was like a reminder of just who had won the war, and MacArthur later beamed with glee when he was reminiscing about the coincidence!

Nevertheless, in spite of long odds against the process working out well for Japan, it did. The Japanese translation of the draft may have diluted some of the import intended by the American authors, but there was much there that was revolutionary for the better. In particular, the section on rights and duties of the people turned out to be "one of the most liberal guarantees of human rights in the world," and it is still that today. Moreover, thanks in large part to the only woman on the committee, the twenty-two-year-old Beate Sirota, it also set forth "the essential equality of the sexes," a guarantee that is not explicitly found in the U.S. Constitution.

The new constitution enshrined into law a freedom of act and thought that ordinary Japanese had not known before.



Beate Sirota in Japan

Where Did We Japanese Come From?

In the early twentieth century, Japanese "origins" were those described in the *Kojiki*. These legends found in Japan's oldest book had been made into state dogma around the beginning of the Meiji period. Until that time, "Shinto" had been little more than a loose collection of local animistic beliefs in *kami*, supernatural spirits occupying natural objects. But now, imperial Japan had constructed a formal ideology out of native folk traditions associated with Shinto and stated, flat out, that it was Japan's true "history." The government claimed that the *Kojiki* origin story was not a religious belief, but a statement of "historical fact." Discussion closed.

This "State Shinto" (as it came to be called by MacArthur and his staff) was marked by emperor worship and ramped-up patriotic activities, with shrines being used for state rituals, such as honoring war dead.

A by-product of this state ideology was a loss of support for archaeology or linguistics—or any other field of study that might be seen to blaspheme the official story of Japan's origins and past history. Early in the twentieth century the Waseda University historian Tsuda Sōkichi proved conclusively that the eight emperors listed after the supposed founder of the state, Jinmu Tennō, were completely imaginary, having been invented to fill in some of the gaps in the records. But when Japan turned ever more sharply to the right in the 1930s, this historical interpretation was considered blasphemy and banned. In May 1942, after a hearing and trial, Tsuda was convicted and sentenced to jail for "insulting the dignity of the Imperial family." His books had already been banned for over two years. Early Japanese history had become an immutable story of ancient gods and emperors in "a single line for myriad generations" (万世一系).Military domination of government during the latter years of the Pacific War became ever more oppressive, fascistic, and doctrinaire.

Fresh Air

It's little wonder, then, that when the war was at last over, intellectuals and writers, and especially academics, felt they could finally breathe. Exhausted and struggling to survive, yes. But Japan's educated class nevertheless found the means surprisingly quickly to get together in often shabby *kissaten* tea rooms, listen to classical Western music, and air their ideas with friends and colleagues about anything

and everything under the sun. It followed naturally that there was a lot of talk—and later many publications—about who they, the Japanese people, were and where they had come from. The *Kojiki* tales and the Sun Goddess could finally be returned to the realm of legend and tradition, and serious scholarship about origins and history was renewed.

They Could Read English Again, Too

All at once, lots of Japanese wanted to learn English—now. They began to spend plenty of giddy and silly energy doing just that. One of the most popular daily radio programs right after the war was カム カム英語 ('Come Come English') with its goofy English-language theme song:

> Come, come everybody—
> How do you do, and how are you?
> Won't you have some candy?
> One and two and three, four, five.
> Let's all sing a happy song—
> Singing tra la la.

It's hard for us to imagine grown men and women singing along happily with—or at least listening to—such a sappy song. But it had easy-to-learn English words, and ordinary Japanese were starved for such things. Only a few months earlier these same people, for the most part loyal and patriotic Japanese *kokumin*, had been consumed by all-out war against an implacable enemy; now, it seemed they couldn't get enough of that enemy's pop culture. It was exhilarating!

In the 1940s, in tightening its iron grip on language and society, the Japanese imperial government had completely banned the study of English. Now, although those constraints were gone without a trace, the xenophobic laws had nevertheless left young Japanese ill-prepared to face a new English-centered world. But they were curious and excited about that new world. Their enthusiasm overflowed. The rush was on.

Now, from our perspective today, it appears these two avowed enemies overnight set aside their years-long bitterness, but that greatly oversimplifies the transformation. The situation was far more

multifaceted and complex than some have described it. The Japanese did not suddenly, in August 1945, completely cast off militarism and become a uniformly democratic people and nation. Yet, the outcome was unquestionably a positive one.

The Universality of Standard Japanese[5]

Government policy toward nonstandard language has changed since the end of World War II. No longer are dialects a social evil to be rooted out and banned. Instead, there is a positive nostalgia for these colorful reminders of the past, just as there is for other aspects of regional Japanese culture. Today there are dialect speech contests. Dialect souvenirs and gift items are hawked to tourists throughout Japan, the kitsch for sale including such things as dialect towels, dialect picture postcards, and even dialect key cases. The government, through the National Language Research Institute, has poured generous sums of money into a study of Japan's regional variety, producing, among other things, a detailed dialect atlas for the whole country. Oral histories produced by the "purest" dialect speakers have been preserved on tape and put into archives. The old unbending policy of forced standardization has long since become a distasteful symbol of an earlier, more autocratic era.

Yet, the fact is that much of the regional variation in the Japanese language had already disappeared. (It is perhaps easier to become nostalgic for that which no longer threatens.) Moreover, the standard language continues to spread today, now more rapidly than ever before. As mentioned earlier, this spread, as well as the demise of dialects, has not been primarily due to *Kokugo* education. Nor has radio, nor the ubiquitous television, nor even online media, had the standardizing effect usually imagined. Japanese researchers tell us that there are other, more important factors that have raised the ability of the average Japanese citizen to speak the standard language.

The most potent stimulus for learning, we are told, is the creation of situations where communication is only possible through the standard language. The experience of the military was in this sense very important to young men from the provinces. But the turmoil of the war years brought Japanese together in a variety of other ways. After the Pacific War, the rapid change in Japanese society accelerated the mixing process. As the country continued to industrialize, young men and women left the sealed world of the village to work elsewhere, invariably coming into close contact with people from

5 This section is adapted from Ramsey 2004, pp. 102–104.

other parts of the country. Even housewives in the cities, who in earlier times had been confined to the neighborhood around their own households, began leaving to go to the workplace.

The most important migrants in this regard have been the *dekasegi*, seasonal workers who return from metropolitan areas to their home villages during the offseason. *Dekasegi* increased dramatically in number in the latter decades of the twentieth century: millions of such workers from other parts of the country were to be found in the Tokyo–Yokohama area. When they returned to their villages, they brought with them not only money but also the culture and language of the capital.

There is almost certainly not a single Japanese citizen alive today who does not understand standard Japanese as it is normally spoken. In 1958, the dialect researcher Shibata Takeshi reported that, of the more than one thousand people he had interviewed over the length and breadth of Japan during the preceding twenty years, only one had not been able to understand an interview conducted in standard Japanese (Shibata 1958: 142). That one person was a woman over eighty years old he had met in 1949 in the village of Mitsune on Hachijōjima, an island located approximately 112 miles off the southeastern coast of Honshū. For her, Shibata says, he had required an interpreter to conduct an interview. Understanding does not mean speaking, of course. Shibata hastened to add that, at least in 1958, there were still many people who did not speak standard Japanese. The same may well be true today. Still, what had happened was, and is, a remarkable achievement. In scarcely more than eighty years after the beginning of the Meiji era, Japan had become a nation in which virtually every man, woman, and child was able to understand the standard language as it was normally spoken.

Tradition, Old and New

It's a mistake to think that cultural traditions are necessarily old. At Christmas time, we Americans tend to forget that our image of jolly old Saint Nick was largely shaped by the cartoon art of Thomas Nast in the nineteenth century and then by Coca-Cola's advertising in the twentieth. But we are not alone. The same is true in other cultures. What's thought of as *the* traditional French bread—the baguette—was introduced into Paris in the middle of the nineteenth century as an imitation of a Viennese-style loaf; until that time the staple of the city had been a round sourdough boule, a fact most Parisians today have forgotten. (Like Americans, some now even think of sourdough as something from San Francisco!)

Young Koreans believe that their martial arts tradition is at least a thousand years old, when in

fact (as their grandparents may remember) Taekwondo as practiced today is an offshoot of karate that was Koreanized in the 1950s. And for their part, the Japanese had taken karate earlier in the century from the Okinawans, who, in turn, had adapted an even earlier martial art form imported from China—just as Mr. Miyagi of *The Karate Kid* said! And in fact, the Japanese word *karate* itself originally meant 'China hand'—*not* 'empty hand' as is commonly believed today! Japanese practitioners made the name change (唐手 > 空手) in the early 1930s. As Robert Smith has noted, the content of tradition is constantly being "revised, renewed, and renegotiated" (Smith 1989: 716).

As the language scholar Kamei Takashi has testified, "the word *Kokugo* has put down roots in the soul" of the Japanese people. *Kokugo*, the National Language, has long since become an intimate part of Japanese cultural tradition.

But What About Reading and Writing?

At the beginning of the modernization period in the mid-nineteenth century, the architects of the new Japanese educational system put emphasis first and foremost on improving students' ability to read and write. In building the new curriculum, these men had at best only a hazy awareness of the difference between writing and speaking, and, for the most part, they blithely assumed that students' ability to speak the prescribed standard language correctly would follow naturally from any gains brought about in their ability to read and write *Kokugo*.

Nevertheless, no matter how naïve most of these bureaucrats may have been about the nature of language, they were all acutely aware of the fact that the Japanese writing system brought impediments to their goals by its very nature. Everyone knew that the system was extremely difficult and time-consuming to learn, and attention fell squarely on the infamously complex problems created by the use of *kanji*.

Kanji, the Chinese characters used in Japan to write many native words as well as words of Chinese origin presented formidable difficulties for the Japanese schoolchild. Much the same was true for unschooled adults as well. Not only were there thousands of these complex symbols that students needed to learn, many of the characters had to be read in various, often arbitrary-seeming different ways, depending on the context in which they were used. With such convoluted use of Chinese characters,

the Japanese writing system had become more complex than the Chinese writing system itself—and almost certainly the most complex writing system used anywhere in the modern world. What to do?

To their credit, government policy makers carried on discussions of a wide range of ideas aimed at addressing these writing problems. And from the beginning, one idea aired prominently was to abandon the Japanese writing system altogether and just replace it with a new system. That bold suggestion was most famously put forward in 1872 by the statesman Mori Arinori, who was at the time serving as the first Japanese ambassador to the United States. In a letter to the distinguished Yale linguist William Dwight Whitney, Mori first explained some of the pedagogical difficulties of Japanese writing. He then wrote:

"The only course to be taken, to secure the desired end, is to start anew, by first turning the spoken language into a properly written form, based on a pure phonetic principle. It is contemplated that Roman letters should be adopted." (See Unger 1996:14.)

Other reformers were more cautious. Agreeing that getting rid of *kanji* was a good idea—but rather than replacing the entire Japanese writing system with Roman letters, they argued, wouldn't it be far easier, and better, just to replace the kanji with the phonological *kana* symbols instead?

"*Kana*" are syllabic symbols used to write the sounds of Japanese. There are two main kinds, *hiragana* and *katakana*. *Hiragana* are the smooth and simple symbols that carry today's Japanese sentence; they record inflectional endings, grammatical markers, and any words or word stems not represented by *kanji*. *Katakana* are angular and squarish symbols that are used today like italics in Western writing.

These systems for representing Japanese sounds are ancient. Both were in use by the ninth century. And both came from simplifications of Chinese characters. *Hiragana* (originally called just "*kana*") arose in the Kyoto court as a form of simplified, cursive writing used for informal correspondence and literary writing—especially by women. *Katakan*a, on the other hand, came from parts of Chinese characters used by Buddhist monks to annotate Chinese texts so that they could be read by Japanese.

Of course, there were many conservative government planners who were adamantly opposed to either idea, or to any such dramatic changes. Still, even many of those hardline *kanji* advocates at least agreed that the number used in the classroom should probably be limited.

The result of these discussions was that, first, in 1900, reformers updated the stock of *kana* syllabic symbols. It was the easiest and most logical change to make. Spellings then in use dated from as far back as the tenth century, and that meant that many were so archaic they no longer had transparent correspondences to the language that people spoke.

Then, in 1922, an authorized government language committee drew up a list of around two thousand "commonly used" characters approved for daily use. Although the committee did not actually ban characters not on the list, the promulgation of such a list did at least represent a move toward simplifying the open-ended nature of the enormous stock of *kanji* characters then in use. In this way, the pre-war government set the stage for what was soon to happen to Chinese characters in Japan after the war.

The ultranationalism that emerged in the 1930s, however, brought an end to—or at least a pause in—any talk of change. Yet, even in those extreme circumstances, the practical demands of waging war forced the Japanese military to make pragmatic changes in how the language they were using was written. Ordinary soldiers and workers had had to deal with too many difficult *kanji* and archaic spellings to function efficiently, and that had led to serious mistakes and accidents, both on the battlefield and in munitions factories.

SCAP Takes Charge

As soon as the war was over, Occupation authorities moved in quickly to address the issue of script reform, and in March 1946 the Supreme Command for the Allied Powers (SCAP) brought an American Education Delegation to Japan for that purpose. Composed of American specialists in a range of fields, the delegation lost no time in issuing its report. The recommendation was simple: Japanese should be Romanized-—written with Roman letters.

That of course did not happen. But now, looking back at what ultimately did transpire, the question becomes: was such a revolutionary change ever seriously entertained? The answer is, at least for some members of the SCAP team, yes, it most certainly was! Abraham Halpern of the SCAP Education Division, for one, arranged for an experiment to be conducted in some Japanese schools to test the effectiveness of instruction in. And though in the end the results of that experiment were not

altogether clear, the experiment seems simply to have been largely forgotten, or perhaps we could say ignored, as education policies were being finalized.

And so, rather than Romanizing Japanese right away, the government focused instead on gradually eliminating *kanji* and leaving the question of how Japanese would ultimately be written unaddressed. Thus, in short order, a list of 1850 characters called the *tōyō kanji* (当用漢字) was drawn up. Those were the characters intended to be used in government documents—at least for the time being. In English, the name of that list is usually translated as 'List of Commonly Used Kanji,' but the literal meaning was not that at all; it was, rather, the 'List of Chinese characters used for the time being'—which, after all, is what those characters were allegedly intended to be: an expedient used (only) for the time being, as Japan moved to eliminate all *kanji* from its writing system!

Yet, for all that many of the Americans involved may have believed that *kanji* were on their way out, that most certainly did not happen. In fact, the number of characters on the *kanji* list was actually increased by several hundred. Then, in 1981, the Ministry of Education gave the list a new name, *jōyō kanji*, (常用漢字) or 'Commonly Used *Kanji*,' indicating far more clearly than before that the listed symbols—and *kanji* more generally—were intended to have a permanent status in the country. And that they do. To this day. In fact, some wags have even quipped, only half-jokingly, that long after Chinese characters have been forgotten in China, they will still be used in Japan.

There are some observers, both in Japan and in the West, who believe that SCAP pressed the 1946 reforms on a powerless new government, and that the continued use of Chinese characters in Japan ultimately represented the natural Japanese preference for preserving them. From this point of view, the Japanese succeeded in overcoming foreign imposition of an alien system. Perhaps.

But the Americans involved in the Japanese education projects played at least an equally important role in what happened. The education experts that SCAP brought in for the script reform project came from a variety of backgrounds, and from the beginning, these decision makers displayed much the same differences of opinion as were seen among Japanese policy makers. In fact, some of the "old Japan hands," were as opposed to script reform as the most conservative Japanese (See Unger 1996: 62). It was these conservative Americans who ultimately suppressed results from the Romanization experiments in Japanese schools, Unger says.

THE ATTIC OF THE WORLD

Once, at an informal talk, the linguist Roy Andrew Miller joked that "Japan is the attic of world." By nature, he said, smiling, the Japanese save every little thing and preserve it somewhere.

People in East Asia, and East Asianists alike, often engage in such idle chatter about what's called, in Japanese, *kokuminsei* 'the characteristics of a nation.' That's when they talk about such clichés as "Koreans are the Irish of the Orient, while Japanese are like the English." Or "Chinese love the color red, but Japanese like delicate and graceful colors."

The notion that the Japanese are savers—that it's their *kokuminsei*—may be just another such superficial cliché. But when it comes to preserving and continuing to use *kanji*, there can be little doubt about that alignment. *Kanji* are safely ensconced in the Japanese writing system and culture, at least for now and even for the foreseeable future. Adopting Romanized Japanese as the primary writing system for Japanese is an idea that was once seriously considered, but it never really had a chance.

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