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Preserving Imperial Sovereignty in the Changing Political Order of Prewar Japan

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Abstract

During the nineteenth century, several Western powers began to establish a presence in East Asia through the use of gunboat diplomacy. In 1853, United States Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived on Japanese shores intent on forcing the ruling Tokugawa Shogunate to end its policy of *sakoku* (seclusion) and interact with the West through trade. Angered over the policies of the Tokugawa Shogunate, the *han* (domains) of Chōshū and Satsuma decided to launch the Boshin Civil War by instigating rebellion against the shogun. The military forces of Chōshū and Satsuma eventually captured the imperial capital of Kyoto and the young Prince Mutsuhito in 1867. The following year, Prince Mutsuhito ascended to the imperial throne and took the posthumous title of Emperor Meiji, and announced that imperial rule had returned to the country. The leadership of Chōshū and Satsuma decided to learn from the West and adopted several components of Western civilization in order to strengthen the country by fundamentally transforming its economics, politics, and society. During the 1880s, that leadership was crippled in a debate over constitutionalism, and the role with which the Emperor was to have in the new political order. Those leaders who favored imperial over popular sovereignty eventually prevailed in the debate resulting in the creation of a political structure that preserved imperial sovereignty. In 1890, the Empire of Japan was officially recognized throughout the West when it adopted its own constitution. While great progress had been achieved during the reign of Emperor Meiji, the high-water mark for the development of party politics occurred during the reign of Emperor Taishō. Unlike his predecessor's, the early reign of Emperor Shōwa was marked with acts of political terrorism and international upheavals which threatened to uproot the Meiji political structure. As a result of this, mainstream politicians turned to the Imperial Japanese military and radical bureaucrats to enact reforms that would preserve the political system in the face of such turbulence.

State University of New York
College at Buffalo
Department of History

Preserving Imperial Sovereignty in the Changing Political Order of Prewar Japan

A Thesis in
History

By

Shane Vrabel

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for the degree of

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Introduction

Similar to the experience of many European nation-states during the Interwar period, the Empire of Japan witnessed a brief period of rule under a parliamentary regime. This period of Japanese history is often referred to as “Taishō Democracy,” and is coupled with the rise of political party prime ministers as well as the development of political intellectualism. It was followed by a chaotic and violent Shōwa period, during which Japan became a highly militarized society and joined other Fascist nation-states to fight against the West. Several historians have challenged whether or not it is proper to label the Empire of Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa period.¹ A basic understanding of fascist ideology and its application to Japan from 1931 – 1941 will demonstrate that Japan was indeed fascist.² Further examination of Japanese history from 1868 – 1941 will show that the path that Japan and its political leaders had undertaken prior to the Shōwa period greatly aided the rise of fascism in Japan.

By the time that United States Commodore Matthew C. Perry arrived on Japanese shores in 1853, the Tokugawa shogunate was over 250 years old. It was established in 1603 after its founder Tokugawa Ieyasu had won the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. In 1543, the Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach the Japanese islands, and throughout the seventeenth century, three other European nations joined the Portuguese and made contact with Japan. In order to stem the increasing presence of Westerners on its shores, the Tokugawa shogunate decided to institute a policy of *sakoku*, or seclusion. Having witnessed gunboat diplomacy firsthand during the Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars of 1839 – 42 and 1856 – 60, the Tokugawa shogunate was quick

¹See Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, “Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 39, No. 1 (Nov. 1979): 66 – 76 and George M. Wilson, “A New Look at the Problem of “Japanese Fascism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 10, No. 4 (July 1968): 401 – 412.

²Three tenets will be stressed: (1) ultra-nationalism, (2) a cult of personality, and (3) an aggressive foreign policy.

to end *sakoku* and signed a series of “Unequal Treaties” with several Western powers. Then, at the end of 1867, a triumvirate of *han*, or feudal domains, which included Chōshū, Satsuma, and Tosa, decided to support the young Emperor Meiji (1852 – 1912) over the shogun. The Meiji Revolution was orchestrated and carried out by samurai, who overthrew the centuries old Tokugawa shogunate. The samurai that led the Meiji Revolution then became the leaders of the new regime, and for the next twenty years these samurai ruled Japan as an oligarchy.

During the late 1870s, the Meiji oligarchy was put into a state of shock when two influential oligarchs, Itagaki Taisuke (1837 – 1919) and Saigō Takamori (1828 – 77), left the oligarchy over a variety of issues. Saigō returned to his native province of Satsuma where he led thousands of samurai in what became known as the Satsuma Rebellion. The Meiji oligarchs eventually defeated Saigō in late 1877. Rather than take up arms against the Meiji oligarchs, Itagaki Taisuke decided to create a populist movement. Known as the *Jiyū Minken Undō* (Freedom and People’s Rights Movement), it was the first populist movement in Japan. Supported primarily by *shizoku*, or former samurai, the *Jiyū Minken Undō* vouched for limited suffrage and the need for a national assembly within the new Japanese political system. With the Satsuma Rebellion crushed, and the *Jiyū Minken Undō* too weak to offer any serious opposition, the oligarchs began to implement several important developments that transformed Japan into the first ever non-Western imperial power. The first of the major developments included modernization. Modernization was implemented in order to fundamentally transform Japan’s economics, politics, and society. The second major development involved political infighting between two Meiji oligarchs, Itō Hirobumi (1841 – 1909) and Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838 – 1922). The primary issue between the two oligarchs was over which constitutional model (either British or German) Japan should adopt. The ousting of Ōkuma Shigenobu from office in 1881 ended

the debate over constitutionalism, resulting in the adoption of the German constitutional model. Since Ōkuma Shigenobu was not from either Chōshū or Satsuma, the Meiji oligarchs from those two provinces were able to form a tighter political alliance that became known as the Sat-chō Clique. The third and final major development involved the actual establishment of the new political system.

On 11 February 1889, the Empire of Japan was formally established with the release of the Meiji Constitution. Shortly after the release of the constitution, a new rank – that of *genrō*, or Elder Statesmen – was created in order to reward oligarchs with a position that would enable them to advise as well as oversee the operation of the new state.³ In 1889, there were only two *genrō*: Itō Hirobumi, who was the author of the Meiji Constitution, and Yamagata Aritomo (1838 – 1922), who was the father of the modern Imperial Japanese Army. In time, the number of *genrō* gradually increased. The first prime ministers belonged solely to this small ruling elite. In 1900, Itō Hirobumi decided to broaden and expand his political base and created the *Rikken Seiyūkai* (Constitutional Association of Political Friends).⁴ The creation of the *Seiyūkai* marked a significant break between Itō and the other oligarchs. Since the adoption of the German constitutional model, the oligarchs had been united through a concept known as *chōzen naikaku*, or non-party cabinets (also known as transcendentalism). *Chōzen naikaku* was designed and implemented in order to prevent the appointment of prime ministers who were affiliated with political parties, and to keep the position of prime minister firmly in the hands of the Sat-chō

³Throughout this thesis I interchange between *genrō* and the Sat-chō Clique. The two appellations essentially refer to the same small group of men who were the ruling elite for much of pre-war Japan.

⁴All Japanese political parties will be italicized and introduced with their long names. Shortened versions of those names will be utilized afterwards.

Clique. By creating his own power base, Itō was essentially removing himself from his fellow *genrō* in the Sat-chō Clique.

While significant progress was made during the reign of Meiji, the definitive period for the development of party politics in Japan occurred during the reign of the Taishō emperor (1912 – 1926). On 30 July 1912, Emperor Meiji died, and his successor Taishō (1879 – 1926) became emperor of Japan. Soon after Emperor Taishō succeeded to the Imperial Throne, Katsura Tarō (1848 – 1913) became prime minister for a third time. As a member of the Sat-chō Clique, and a protégé of Yamagata Aritomo, Katsura Tarō had the unequivocal support of the army. Due to this unabashed support, the navy decided to not supply a minister to Katsura's third cabinet, paralyzing the administration. In order to resolve this Taishō political crisis, Prime Minister Katsura decided to take direct action and appealed to Emperor Taishō for assistance. Viewing this as a blatant violation of the Meiji Constitution, the mainstream political parties banded together to form the "Movement to Protect the Constitution." Large scale riots initiated by the movement subsided only when Katsura resigned from office and the *genrō* declared that a new cabinet was in the process of forming. In 1913, Katsura decided to establish the *Rikken Dōshikai* (Constitutional Association of Friends). Like the *Seiyūkai* for Itō, the *Dōshikai* was meant to be a source of political power for Katsura.

The opening of hostilities between the major European powers in 1914 resulted in the First World War, and bound by its 1902 alliance with Great Britain, the Empire of Japan entered on the side of the Allies. During the war, Japan seized all of Germany's territory in East Asia and the Pacific. In 1918, the major world powers met in order to negotiate an end to hostilities and bring about peace. As one of those major powers, Japan was a cosigner of the Treaty of Versailles and became one of the founding members of the League of Nations. In addition to

this, a series of naval limitation treaties were signed between the Empire of Japan, Great Britain and the United States that granted Japan naval superiority in the Pacific, making it a regional power. During the war, the *Dōshikai* had merged with other smaller political parties to form the *Rikken Kenseikai* (Constitutional Party) in 1917. The death of Yamagata Aritomo in 1922 greatly reduced the influence that the genrō had over governmental affairs.⁵ In that same year the *Nihon Kyōsantō* (Japanese Communist Party) had formed.⁶ In 1925, the *Kenseikai* president Katō Kōmei (1860 – 1926) had finally become prime minister and under his administration, Katō expanded suffrage to all males aged over 25 years old. In addition to this piece of liberal legislation, the Katō administration passed a new Peace Preservation Law which seriously hindered the ability of the J.C.P. and other radical Leftists in their ability to expand and grow.

On 25 December 1926, Emperor Taishō died, and on that same day Prince Regent Shōwa succeeded to the Imperial Throne. The practice of appointing political party prime ministers continued during the early years of Emperor Shōwa's reign. In addition to this, the *Kenseikai* had merged yet again with smaller political parties to form the *Rikken Minseitō* (Constitutional Democratic Party) in 1927. Since the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95, nationalism had been growing exponentially in Japan. By the time of Emperor Shōwa's reign, nationalism in Japan had reached its zenith. The establishment of secret ultranationalist societies like the *Kokuryukai* (Black Dragon Society) and the *Sakurakai* (Cherry Blossom Society) helped to further expand nationalist sentiments since most of these societies stressed radical nationalism as a key part of their ideology. At the outset of the 1930s, the Kwantung Army began to disregard the civilian government in Tokyo due to its non-expansionist stance on China. Many of the

⁵Itō Hirobumi had been assassinated in 1909. Katsura Tarō died of natural causes in 1913. Only Matsukata Masayoshi (1835 – 1924) and Prince Saionji remained alive during the Taishō years.

⁶Henceforth known as J.C.P.

officers of the Kwantung Army were in fact members of either the Black Dragon, or Cherry Blossom Society and as such became radical ultranationalists. On 18 September 1931, officers from the Kwantung Army blew up a section of railway in Manchuria and blamed the incident on Chinese bandits. During the next several days, the Kwantung Army invaded Manchuria from its bases in Korea and seized the region from Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of China.

Following this Manchurian Incident was an attack orchestrated by ultranationalists on various economic and political leaders. On 15 May 1932, Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855 – 1932) and several other business and political leaders were targeted for assassination. For political leaders like Prince Saionji Kinmochi (1849 – 1940) and Prince Konoé Fumimaro (1891 – 1945) these attacks (collectively known as the Ketsumeidan Incident) were unsettling since they were a violent attempt to change the very nature of the economic and political order. For several years ultranationalists consistently hounded the leaders of the mainstream political parties and carried out acts of political terrorism. The Ketsumeidan Incident is often seen as the end of “Taishō Democracy”; for after Inukai's assassination, the position of prime minister would never be held by a member of a political party. The last surviving genrō, Prince Saionji Kinmochi, determined that only civilian bureaucrats (non-party affiliated) and military men would qualify to restore discipline and order to the deteriorating state that Japan found itself in during the 1930s.

The greatest act of political terrorism that was carried out by ultranationalists however, occurred on 26 February 1936 and is known as the Two Twenty-six Incident. While initially successful in gaining control of the government district in Tokyo, the rebels were eventually crushed when the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy heeded the call of Emperor Shōwa to put down the coup. Due to the failure of the Two Twenty-six Incident, radical ultranationalists

would never again attempt to alter the economic or political order through violence. On 4 June 1937, Prince Konoe Fumimaro was thrust into a position of greater political power when he was nominated to the position of prime minister by Prince Saionji. Soon after taking office, Prince Konoe led the Empire of Japan into the Second Sino-Japanese War when Chinese and Japanese forces clashed over the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing. At the end of 1937, after weeks of bitter fighting with Guomindang forces, the Imperial Japanese Army took the Chinese capital of Nanjing. Despite having seized the Chinese capital, the Guomindang leadership refused to negotiate with the Japanese, and the Chinese retreated westwards to Chongqing; ensuring that the conflict would continue.

While presiding over the position of prime minister for a second time in 1940, Prince Konoe began seeking out ways which would internally strengthen the Empire of Japan. For Prince Konoe, the answer seemed to lie with Japan's new alliance with Germany, that had been established between the two nations in 1936. Prince Konoe decided to create the *Taisei Yokusankai* (Imperial Rule Assistance Association) on 12 October 1940.⁷ Having observed the strength of fascism in Europe, Prince Konoe sought to model the I.R.A.A. after the fascist parties found in both Germany and Italy. The mainstream political parties, the *Seiyūkai* and *Minseitō*, once the great bastions of opposition to the ruling elite decided to dissolve and merge with the I.R.A.A. in order to show their patriotism and solidarity with the new nationalist organization.

The works utilized for the research aspect of this thesis fall under two distinct categories. The first category belongs to that of books, which are largely secondary works. Three monographs were used extensively and need to be acknowledged: George Akita's *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868 – 1900* and Peter Duus' *Party Rivalry and*

⁷Henceforth known as I.R.A.A.

Political Change in Taishō Japan. In addition to these two is Gordon M. Berger's *Parties Out of Power in Japan, 1931 – 1941*. Each of these monographs offer exceptional insight into the Japanese political system within the period that they cover. The second category belongs to academic journal articles. All of the journal articles used within this thesis concentrate on a particular theme within Japanese history. The majority of the journal articles used deal with the late Taishō and early Shōwa. One such example is Stephen S. Large's "Nationalist Extremism in Early Shōwa Japan: Inoue Nisshō and the 'Blood-Pledge Corps Incident', 1932."

The first monograph to be utilized in this thesis is George Akita's *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868 – 1900*, which examines the creation of the Japanese political system. Akita's primary argument is centered on the idea that the Meiji oligarchs were neither benevolent nor domineering leaders, but a mix between the two. After seizing power in 1868, the oligarchs wanted to hold onto that power and transform Japan into a powerful nation-state that would be able to protect itself from Western imperialism. The Meiji oligarchs were turned into a smaller ruling elite known as the Sat-chō Clique when Ōkuma Shigenobu was ousted from office in 1881. While half of *Foundations of Constitutional Government* is dedicated to the years of 1868 to 1881 and the formation of the Sat-chō Clique, the remainder of the work is devoted to the concept of *chōzen naikaku* or non-party cabinets. For the members of the Sat-chō Clique, *chōzen naikaku* was a policy that was designed and implemented in order to protect their hold on power. Towards the end of *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, Akita demonstrated how the thinking of Itō Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo changed in the early years of the twentieth century after having witnessed obstructionism in the lower House of Representatives by the mainstream political parties towards

their policies. In 1900, Itō decided to create the *Rikken Seiyūkai* as a way to recruit members of the lower House of Representatives and to dominate that political institution.

The next monograph used is Peter Duus' *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taishō Japan* and deals specifically with the development of the mainstream political parties and their ascendancy during the Taishō years (1912 – 1926). Duus' primary argument in *Party Rivalry and Political Change* is that during the Taishō years, Japan and its political leaders came very close to accepting a greater role for political party members in the governance of the country. This was made possible due to the political ambitions of the smaller political parties in the lower House of Representatives, all of whom wanted to challenge the *Seiyūkai*. In 1913, Katsura Tarō, a general of the Imperial Japanese Army and protégé of Yamagata Aritomo, helped create the *Rikken Dōshikai*. While Katsura would die shortly after founding the *Dōshikai*, the *Dōshikai* would continue to play an important role in Japanese politics. In 1916, the *Dōshikai* merged with smaller groups in the Imperial Diet for a second time to form the *Rikken Kenseikai*. The ability of this political party to merge and form a new political party would be crucial for its continued survival. The next significant development that Duus covered in *Party Rivalry and Political Change* is the resurgence of *Seiyūkai* dominance from 1918 – 1921 while under the leadership of Hara Kei (1856 – 1921). Both Akita and Duus attribute the creation of a successful political party to its association with a member of the Sat-chō Clique.

In Chapter 3 of this thesis, two political intellectuals are introduced. The first is Yoshino Sakuzō (1878 – 1933), a widely respected academic who espoused democratic principals in his writing. Two journal articles were used in order to acquire background information and further knowledge on Yoshino. The first journal article used is “The Political Theory and Program of Yoshino Sakuzō,” and was written by Bernard S. Silberman. Throughout the article, Silberman

utilizes several of Yoshino's quotes, and then interprets them. The second journal article to be used is "Envisioning a Liberal Empire in East Asia: Yoshino Sakuzō in Taishō Japan," and was written by Jung-sun N. Han. Unlike Silberman, who concentrated on Yoshino's views on constitutionalism, Han describes Yoshino's views on foreign policy and introduces the reader to several articles that deal specifically with Japanese expansionism. Han concludes his work and stated that because of the importance with which Westerners place on democratic values, Yoshino's views on constitutionalism overshadowed those on foreign policy. The primary source material that was used for Yoshino Sakuzō came from *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, a collection of translated primary source material first published by Columbia University in the 1950s.

The second individual that will be mentioned is Kita Ikki (1883 – 1937), who was an extremely controversial figure in Japanese history due to his radical political views. Three secondary sources were used to acquire knowledge on Kita. The first source was a book titled *Radical Nationalist in Japan: Kita Ikki, 1883 – 1937*, by George M. Wilson. In addition to this book, two journal articles were also used. The first article was written by Wilson and is titled "Kita Ikki's Theory of Revolution." The second article was written by Christopher W. A. Szpilman and is titled "Kita Ikki and the Politics of Coercion." In this article, Szpilman does mention Kita's work as a political radical but largely depicts Kita as a political bully. Primary source material on Kita Ikki came from *Sources of Japanese Tradition*.

The third and final monograph to be used is Gordon M. Berger's *Parties Out of Power in Japan, 1931 – 1941*. Berger's primary goal with *Parties Out of Power* is to show the reader how the collapse of the mainstream political parties, the *Seiyūkai* and *Minseitō* occurred and in addition to this, to show how the I.R.A.A. was formed. Within the first chapter of *Parties Out of*

Power, Berger details the history behind the mainstream political parties and their rise to power. Berger attributes the collapse of “Taishō Democracy” to the *Minseitō* Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi (1870 – 1931), who presided over that position from 1929 – 1931. Political party members would continue to dominate the position of prime minister for an additional two years, until Inukai Tsuyoshi’s assassination in 1932. What followed Inukai’s assassination was a five year period of “National Unity Cabinets” in which the military dominated the administrative aspects of the country. The position of prime minister was returned to civilian hands when Prince Konoe Fumimaro was nominated to that position on 4 June 1937. The remainder of *Parties Out of Power* is devoted to Prince Konoe and his attempt to establish a new political party (the I.R.A.A.) and its operation during the first few years of its existence.

After having undergone an examination of Japanese history from 1868 – 1941, the conclusion will return back to the original purpose of this thesis; and show why the Empire of Japan can and should still be labeled a fascist state. Several key identifiers will be utilized from each of the sources used in order to support the claim that the Empire of Japan was a fascist state. If labeling the Empire of Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa is wrong as some historians suggest, then perhaps it is time to look towards new political appellations for the Empire of Japan during this time period.⁸

⁸See Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, “Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan,” 71.

Chapter 1

The Oligarchic Years (1868 – 1890)

During the summer of 1864, samurai from the *han* (domain) of Chōshū attempted to seize the imperial capital of Kyoto and overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate. The attempted coup d'état failed, and with approval from Emperor Komei, Tokugawa Iemochi first banished and then invaded Chōshū. For the next four years, the Tokugawa Shogunate found itself locked in internecine conflict with the defiant *han*. During the course of this Boshin Civil War, an alliance was eventually brokered between the *han* of Chōshū and Satsuma. Towards the end of 1867, this Sat-chō Alliance launched an invasion north and with their combined military strength seized the imperial capital of Kyoto from the Tokugawa Shogunate. At the outset of 1868, the recently inaugurated Emperor Meiji (1852 – 1912) announced that an *Ishin* or Revolution had taken place and that imperial rule had been restored to Japan. By the summer of 1869, all pockets of Tokugawa resistance had been liquidated and the Boshin Civil War was concluded. In defeating the Tokugawa Shogunate and causing its collapse, the Sat-chō Alliance had removed the sole governing institution of Japan. The majority of the men who took part in the Meiji Revolution were samurai and for the next twenty two years an elite group of these samurai ruled Japan as an oligarchy. In order to strengthen Japan internally, these Meiji oligarchs decided to enact a nationwide modernization program that would fundamentally transform Japan's economics, politics and society.

Following their victory over the Tokugawa Shogunate, the Meiji oligarchs began the process of dismantling the political system that had been set in place by the Tokugawa over two centuries ago. Influential men like Kido Takayoshi (1833 – 77), Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830 – 78) and Saigō Takamori (1828 – 77) helped to stabilize the regime through their leadership

capabilities as they began to make rapid changes.⁹ In order to legitimize their seizure of power, the oligarchs placed Emperor Meiji as the focal point of their regime. In the beginning of 1868, several Meiji oligarchs were appointed as *Sangi* (councilors) and advised the emperor on important matters of state. On 7 April 1868, the oligarchs released the “Charter Oath.” Of all documents released by the oligarchs, none have been so heavily commented on or critiqued by historians as the “Charter Oath.” Its text stated concisely:

By this oath, we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws. 1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion. 2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state. 3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent. 4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of nature. 5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.¹⁰

The message of the “Charter Oath” was clear and twofold. The first three articles were written in such a way as to provide the Japanese people a sense of unity. While the fourth article, perhaps the most important in the “Charter Oath,” paved the way for future reform since it attacked feudal tradition by labeling it as “evil customs of the past.”

On 6 June 1868, the oligarchs released the *Seitaisho* or Constitution of 1868. This document reformed the original government that the oligarchs had established shortly after seizing power from the Tokugawa Shogunate. After restating the “Charter Oath” the text of the *Seitaisho* stated:

⁹Each of these men had played a crucial part during the Boshin Civil War. Kido and Ōkubo were political leaders from Chōshū; while Saigō was a military leader from Satsuma.

¹⁰Cited in William Theodore de Bary, Carol Gluck and Arthur E. Tiedemann, *Sources of Japanese Tradition: 1600 to 2000*, Vol. 2, 2nd Ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 672.

I. All power and authority in the empire shall be vested in a Council of State, and thus grievances of divided government shall be done away with. The power and authority of the Council of State shall be threefold, legislative, executive and judicial. Thus the imbalance of authority among the different branches of government shall be avoided. II. The legislative organ shall not be permitted to perform executive functions. However, on extraordinary occasions the legislative organ may still perform such functions as tours of inspections of cities and the conduct of foreign affairs.¹¹

The main governing institution was called the *Daijō-kan*, or the Council of State, and was to be headed by a grand minister and two vice ministers. In addition to this, departments of state – the number of which changed at various times – were established in order to better manage various aspects of the new Meiji state. Most of the oligarchs who had been appointed as Sangi earlier in the regime retained their posts or were reassigned within the various departments of state.

The next major reform campaign undertaken by the oligarchs was against the *daimyo* (feudal lords) and their samurai retainers. Under the feudal system, the daimyo and samurai had a well-established relationship. Seeking warriors to protect their domains, the daimyo hired samurai by giving them a yearly stipend for their services. Since the “Charter Oath” labeled feudal traditions as “evil customs of the past” it became necessary for the Meiji oligarchs to either reform or destroy such feudal traditions; and the relationship that had been built between the daimyo and samurai was one such feudal tradition that needed to be destroyed. Towards the end of 1868, an Imperial Rescript was written by Kido Takayoshi which proposed to have the daimyo promoted to the rank of *kazoku* (nobility) and the samurai demoted to the rank of *shizoku* (gentry). On 3 September 1868, the *Daijō-kan* moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo, which was then renamed Tokyo.

Consolidation and Transformation

¹¹Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 673.

In order to be able to call upon all of Japan's resources for their modernization program, the oligarchs began to consider the problem that the han posed to their rule. Despite having enacted some social reforms in 1868, the daimyo still retained control over their han. In addition to this, most daimyo had obtained the right to pass on their han to their heirs. At first the oligarchs proposed to keep the daimyo in control of their han as appointed governors. As appointed governors the daimyo would lose the right to pass on their han to their heirs. On 29 August 1871, the oligarchs released an Imperial Rescript which abolished the han: "Profoundly regretting this condition of affairs, We now completely abolish the Clans (han) and convert them into Prefectures (ken), with the object of diligently retrenching expenditure and of arriving at convenience of working, or getting rid of the unreality of names and of abolishing the disease of government proceeding from multiple centers."¹² Upon learning of these developments, one Western observer wrote how the abolition of the feudal han affected the Japanese: "The thunderbolt has fallen! The political earthquake has shaken Japan to its center. Its effects are very visible here in Fukui. Intense excitement reigns in the homes of the samurai of the city today."¹³ By replacing the han with a modern political unit, the oligarchs achieved two goals. The first goal was the final removal of the daimyo as a legitimate class in Japanese society, while the second goal was the centralization of all territories under Tokyo's control.

On 23 December 1871, a small group of Meiji oligarchs led by Prince Iwakura Tomomi (1825 – 83) left Japan in order to make visits to each of the major Western powers. Named after its leader, the Iwakura Mission spent the next two years abroad. The primary objective of the

¹²Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 676.

¹³Cited in Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, M.A.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 348.

mission was to revise the unequal treaties that the major Western powers had imposed on Japan at the end of the Tokugawa period. Its secondary objective was to observe the West and learn as much about it as possible. While in the West, the Japanese were impressed and wrote:

Their trade is prosperous, their technology is superior, and they greatly enjoy the pleasures and comforts of life. When one observes such conditions, one is apt to think that these countries have always been like this, but such is not the case – the wealth and prosperity one sees now in Europe dates to an appreciable degree from the period after 1800. It has taken scarcely forty years to produce such conditions. Those who read this record should reflect upon the lesson to be drawn for Japan.¹⁴

As can be seen from the above quote, the Iwakura Mission had a profound impact on the Meiji oligarchs that went abroad. While the oligarchs were impressed by the wealth and power of the West, the oligarchs were equally impressed with the technological capabilities of the West. By visiting each of the major Western powers, the Iwakura Mission was able to obtain a vast array of information.

In the early 1870s, Yamagata Aritomo (1838 – 1922) rose to prominence and joined the ranks of the oligarchs as a major reformer. Having served as a commander for Chōshū during the Boshin Civil War, Yamagata had extensive military experience and knowledge. By the time that the Iwakura Mission had left for the West, Yamagata had already spent several years in France and Prussia. Having observed the progress of the Prussian armed forces during the Three Wars of German Unification, Yamagata was impressed by their performance and was determined to model the Imperial Japanese Army on the German system. Upon returning to Japan in 1873, Yamagata strongly advocated the need for a modern army. On 10 January 1873, Yamagata convinced the Daijō-kan to pass a Conscription Ordinance which stipulated: “By this innovation the rulers and the ruled will be put on the same basis, the rights of the people will be

¹⁴Cited in James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 174.

equal, and the way will be cleared for the unity of soldier and peasant.”¹⁵ By making the armed forces to recruit from all levels of society (not just from former samurai) the oligarchs had once again passed a piece of legislation that helped bring an end to a deeply rooted piece of feudal tradition.

Towards the middle of the 1870s, the Meiji oligarchs started to encounter sterner resistance towards their attempts at reform. Things came to a head when Itagaki Taisuke (1837 – 1919) and Saigō Takamori left the oligarchy and returned to their native domains of Tosa and Satsuma in early 1874. The two men left the oligarchy over differences of opinion in regards to foreign affairs as well as the recent reforms levied against the former samurai class. The actions undertaken by Itagaki and Saigō clearly suggested that both men had a desire to aid the former samurai class in maintaining some measure of prestige. The oligarchs for their part feared that the actions of these two men would be seen as a catalyst for counter-revolution.

The establishment of liberalism in Japan is often credited to Itagaki Taisuke. After returning to Tosa at the beginning of 1874, Itagaki and his followers created the *Aikoku Kōtō* (Public Patriotic Party). Upon its creation, the association released a memorial which stipulated:

Unable to resist the promptings of our patriotic feelings, we have sought to devise a means of rescuing it from this danger. We find this means to consist in developing public discussion in the empire. The means of developing public discussion is the establishment of a council-chamber chosen by the people. Then a limit will be placed on the power of the officials, and high and low will obtain peace and prosperity.¹⁶

The creation of the *Aikoku Kōtō* helped to establish a much wider political movement that was known as the *Jiyū Minken Undō* (Freedom and Popular Rights Movement). In order to begin developing an ideological foundation for the *Jiyū Minken Undō*, members of the *Aikoku Kōtō*

¹⁵Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 161.

¹⁶Cited in Sources of Japanese Tradition, 723.

began to translate works that dealt with Western political thought. Those works that influenced the thinking as well as writing of the Jiyū Minken Undō included the writings of such individuals as: John Stuart Mill and his works *On Liberty* and *Considerations on Representative Government*. One member of the Jiyū Minken Undō had written that: “We have come together because government is for the people, and inherent rights of life and personal freedom, which are higher than the mountains and deeper than the sea, will endure forever on this earth.”¹⁷ In order to help spread the message that was being dispensed by the Jiyū Minken Undō, two additional associations were created: the *Risshisha* (Self-Help Society) was established in the spring of 1874, and the *Aikokusha* (Society of Patriots).

In order to prevent more former samurai in joining Itagaki and the Jiyū Minken Undō, the oligarchs, in particular Kido Takayoshi, tried to mend relations with Itagaki. In 1875, Kido had the Daijō-kan create the *Genrō-in* (Senate), a institution that was meant to consult the oligarchs on all political matters. On 11 February, 1875, Kido hosted the Osaka Conference and invited Itagaki to discuss the issue of representative government with the other oligarchs. In an earlier memorial, Kido had written that:

In enlightened countries, though there may be a sovereign, still he does not hold saw in an arbitrary fashion. The people of the whole country give expression to their united and harmonious wishes, and the business of the State is arranged accordingly, a department (styled the government) being charged with the execution of their judgements, and officials appointed to transact business. For this reason all who hold office respect the wishes of the whole nation and serve their country under a deep sense of responsibility, so that even in extraordinary crises, they take no arbitrary step contrary to the people’s will.¹⁸

The significance of this conference should not be overlooked, since this was the first real discussion on constitutionalism that was undertaken by the oligarchs. Failing to bring Itagaki

¹⁷Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 189.

¹⁸Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 680.

back into the oligarchy, Kido retired in late 1875. Even without its creator, the Genrō-in continued to act as a consulting institution on all political matters for the oligarchy. It had even drafted a constitution in 1876, but this draft was rejected by Prince Iwakura, since it had lacked preference to imperial sovereignty.

By the outset of 1877, the former samurai class was divided between two camps: Itagaki Taisuke and his Jiyū Minken Undō, and Saigō Takamori. Upon returning to Satsuma, Saigō assumed a position as an administrator and helped establish military academies in the capital of the prefecture, Kagoshima. When the oligarchs attempted to move a weapons cache from Kagoshima, students from one of the military academies that Saigō had helped establish prevented the government officials from carrying out their task. What started as a minor dispute between military students and government officials over the control of weapons being held in a government arsenal erupted into full scale rebellion when the students began to muster more strength to prevent the officials from moving the weapons. By the summer of 1877, Saigō had taken command of this small force and began to rally additional samurai units. After the siege of Kumamoto Castle, Saigō was forced to retreat back to Kagoshima by a new conscript army that was led by Yamagata Aritomo. The oligarchs eventually defeated the force that was led by Saigō on 24 September 1877 and Saigō himself committed ritual suicide upon witnessing the defeat of his forces.

Both Saigō Takamori and Kido Takayoshi died in 1877. Ōkubo Toshimichi was assassinated by former samurai the following year in 1878. The death of these three men allowed for the rise of a new generation of oligarchs. One member of that new generation was Chōshū native Itō Hirobumi (1841 – 1909), another was Hizen native Ōkuma Shigenobu (1838 – 1922). Both men were careerists and had worked in the Daijō-kan throughout the turbulent

1870s. The issue of a national assembly was brought up again in 1879 when all Sangi were ordered to submit their views on constitutionalism. The two most favored constitutional systems at the time followed either the British or Prussian model.¹⁹ The last Sangi to submit his views on constitutionalism was Ōkuma Shigenobu.

When Ōkuma submitted his ideas on constitutionalism, the other oligarchs were shocked to find that Ōkuma's views were radically different from their own. The memorial that Ōkuma had prepared stated:

1. The date for the establishment of a parliament should be promulgated. . . . 2. High officials should be appointed on the basis of the support of the people. . . . In constitutional government, the place where the will of the people can be indicated is indeed the parliament. What do I mean by "will of the people"? It is the will of more than half of the parliamentary representatives. Who commands the will? It is the leader of the political party that has a majority in parliament. . . . 4. With imperial approval, we should establish a constitution. . . . 5. We should elect representatives by the end of 1882 and convoke a parliament at the beginning of 1883.²⁰

In an attempt to defend himself, Ōkuma expanded upon his ideas further and stated that:

"Constitutional government is party government, and the struggles between parties are the struggles of principles. When its principles are supported by more than half of the people, a party wins control of the government. When the opposite is true, it loses control. This is the operation of genuine constitutional government."²¹ As can be seen from his memorial, Ōkuma favored a parliamentary system that allowed the people to have representative government. Most of the oligarchs were conservatives, and viewed the emperor as the only individual with the right

¹⁹The primary distinction between the two political systems was over sovereignty. The British political system had a ceremonial monarch as well as a bicameral parliament. The lower house of parliament was elected by the people and influenced the creation and destruction of cabinets which governed the country. The Prussian political system had a monarch that exercised power and also had a bicameral parliament. The lower house of parliament was elected by the people, but its influence over the rest of the government was minimal.

²⁰Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 730.

²¹Ibid.

to govern. As such, the oligarchs favored a system where imperial sovereignty was indisputable and protected. Upon hearing of Ōkuma's ideas on constitutionalism, Itō went into a rage and attempted to browbeat Ōkuma:

Your memorial calls for selecting the heads of ministries and imperial house-hold officials from political parties. In the final analysis this is equivalent to transferring the imperial prerogatives to the people. Such heretical views should not be held by any subject. I too, in conformity with the Imperial Rescript of 1875, some day hope to see the establishment of a national assembly.²²

As a sign of protest should the oligarchs come to accept Ōkuma's ideas, Itō offered his resignation from all of his posts since Ōkuma's ideas countered the oligarchic principal of imperial sovereignty. In order to keep the pressure on the oligarchs to finish the project and draft a constitution, Itagaki Taisuke decided to create a new organization, the *Kokkai Kisei Dōmei* (League for the Establishment of a National Assembly) in March 1880.

By the outset of 1881, the political infighting between Itō and Ōkuma had extended beyond their different views on constitutionalism. Since the Meiji Revolution of 1868, the island of Hokkaido had received a large investment of capital and people. The Hokkaido Colonization Office was responsible for turning the northern island into an integral part of the other three Japanese islands. Satsuma native Kuroda Kiyotaka (1840 – 1900) was the founder of the Hokkaido Colonization Office and oversaw its expansion since the Meiji Revolution. When Ōkuma released his ideas on constitutionalism in 1879, Itō and the oligarchs worked behind the scenes to get him ousted from office. Despite the fact that large sums of money and people had been invested into the island of Hokkaido, the Hokkaido Colonization Office had failed to make significant progress. Satsuma native Matsukata Masayoshi (1835 – 1924), who was an economic

²²Cited in Akita, George. *Foundations of Constitutional Government in Modern Japan, 1868 – 1900* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 30.

advisor for the oligarchy, proposed to Kuroda that the assets of the Hokkaido Colonization Office should be sold to cover the remaining costs of the office.

Never out of touch with developments within the oligarchy, Ōkuma opposed Matsukata's proposed stratagem for the Hokkaido Colonization Office. Fearing that Ōkuma was attempting to garner public sympathy by opposing the plan to sell the assets of the Hokkaido Colonization Office, Itō decided that the time was right to make his move. Utilizing both Ōkuma's ideas on constitutionalism and his opposition to the proposed Hokkaido sale, Itō organized support amongst the other oligarchs and had Ōkuma ousted from office. Since Ōkuma was from the domain of Hizen, the ousting of Ōkuma from the oligarchy in late 1881 allowed for the creation of a much more centralized alliance between the two domains of Satsuma and Chōshū. Known as the Sat-chō Clique, this new alliance was made up of individuals like Chōshū natives Itō Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo, as well as Satsuma natives Kuroda Kiyotaka, and Matsukata Masayoshi. Following the success of the Kokkai Kisei Dōmei and the boost that it had given to the Jiyū Minken Undō during the crisis of 1881, Itagaki Taisuke decided to create the Jiyūtō (Liberal Party) on 1 October 1881. A year following his ousting from office by Itō and the other oligarchs, Ōkuma Shigenobu decided to create the *Rikken Kaishintō* (Constitutional Progressive Party) on 16 March 1882.²³ In order to prevent the Jiyū Minken Undō from gaining too much momentum, the oligarchs decided to establish the *Rikken Teseitō* (Constitutional Imperial Rule Party) on 18 March 1882.

Sacred and Inviolable

²³The Jiyūtō and Kaishintō are considered to be Japan's first political parties. The Kaishintō is also often seen as an integral part of the Jiyū Minken Undō.

With power firmly in the hands of the Sat-chō Clique, Itō felt confident enough to travel to Europe to study constitutions. Leaving in early 1883, Itō traveled to Germany and Austria; spending most of his time in the capitals of Berlin and Vienna. While in those countries, Itō utilized a trio of German scholars to assist him in understanding constitutionalism. Those men were Rudolph von Gneist, Lorenz von Stein and Herman Roesler. Through the work of these German scholars, Itō came to grasp various concepts related to constitutionalism as well as statecraft and had stated: “Thanks to the famous German scholars von Gneist and von Stein, I have come to understand the essential features of the structure and operation of the state. . . . the most crucial matter of fixing the foundations of our imperial system and of retaining the prerogatives belonging to it, I have already found sufficient substantiation. . . .”²⁴ At the end of 1883, Itō returned to Japan and began to make the necessary preparations towards the drafting and implementation of a constitution.

During the early years of their rule, the oligarchs had the Daijō-kan reform Japanese society to minimize traditional division within the population. On 7 July 1884, Itō had the Daijō-kan pass the *Kazoku* (Peerage Law) which created a new set of ranks and titles (based on German instances) within Japanese society. There were six new ranks and titles which included: Prince, Duke, Marquis, Count, Viscount, and Baron. In addition to these ranks and titles, a House of Peers was established which was to be the upper house of a bicameral Diet once it was created. Many former daimyo and nobility that had lost their old ranks and prestige due to the reforms carried out by the oligarchs after the Meiji Revolution found themselves appointed to

²⁴Cited in Michael Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan: The Yen to Dominate* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 106.

these new ranks and titles by the emperor.²⁵ Itō himself, along with Yamagata Aritomo were promoted to the rank of Marquis.

The next major reform that Itō enacted occurred in December of 1885, and involved the Daijō-kan, the traditional governing institution of the oligarchs. Itō decided to replace the Daijō-kan with a modern cabinet system. Due to the high levels of influence and prestige that Itō had acquired as being one of the first Meiji statesmen, Itō became the first prime minister on 22 December 1885. In 1888, Itō felt prepared enough to begin the drafting of a constitution. Before doing so however, Itō needed to create one more political institution. That institution was the Privy Council. The Privy Council was designed to replace the old oligarchic Genrō-in. Like the Genrō-in, the Privy Council was to consult and deliberate on all political matters. On 30 April 1888, Itō resigned from the position of prime minister and became the head of the Privy Council.

For the next year, Itō would consult and deliberate with the other members of the Privy Council over the draft of the constitution that he was writing. As a proponent of the Prussian political system, Itō favored the protection of imperial sovereignty rather than the expansion of popular sovereignty. When writing the draft of the constitution, Itō relied on the advice of German scholar Herman Roesler. Roesler's advice had greatly influenced Itō who had written that "1. The Japanese Empire shall remain an Imperial Monarchy, so that any form of government, and especially of republican government, can never be made the law of Japan. 2. The Empire of Japan shall be reigned over and governed by the Emperor."²⁶ Later during the drafting process Itō had written that: "Because imperial sovereignty is the cornerstone of our constitution, our system is not based on the European ideas in force in some European countries

²⁵See Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 391 – 92.

²⁶Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 109.

of joint rule of the king and people. This is the fundamental principle of this draft constitution, and it will become evident in every article.”²⁷ As can be seen from this, the primary purpose of the constitution that Itō was writing was to ensure that imperial sovereignty was protected by the constitution.

Itō was clearly determined to preserve a dominant role for the Emperor in the constitution that he was drafting. Itō did, however, incorporate a bicameral legislature in the draft. This bicameral legislature was known as the Imperial Diet, and it consisted of two houses. The upper house was known as the House of Peers (established with the Peerage Law of 1884) and a lower house known as the House of Representatives (to be established a year before the release of the constitution). Towards the middle of 1888, Itō began to discuss his constitution with others in the Privy Council and often found himself defending what he had written. One oligarch had questioned Itō as to the role that the Imperial Diet would play in the grand scheme. Itō responded: “. . .if we want to establish a constitutional government. . .we have to give the right of decision to the Diet. Without the consent of the Diet, budgets or laws cannot be determined. This is the essence of constitutional government.”²⁸ While Itō was certainly no liberal, the incorporation of a bicameral legislature into the draft of his constitution showed that he was more than prepared to make a leap of faith and share power with others outside of the oligarchy. Furthermore, it may be surmised that by incorporating a bicameral legislature into the draft, Itō was in fact appeasing Emperor Meiji, whose own “. . .wishes almost invariably were liberal and

²⁷Cited in Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 394.

²⁸Ibid, 394.

progressive.”²⁹ Itō nevertheless made sure that the powers of the bicameral legislature were severely restricted.

On 11 February 1889, the Empire of Japan was officially established when Emperor Meiji released the Constitution of the Empire of Japan to his subjects.³⁰ Itō Hirobumi and the other oligarchs attended the opening ceremony, in which all were garbed in ceremonial pomp. The final draft of the constitution consisted of seven chapters, each of which had a number of articles attached to it describing the various functions and operations of the new state. The preamble of the Meiji Constitution stated that:

Having, by virtue of the glories of Our Ancestors, ascended the Throne of a lineal succession unbroken for ages eternal; desiring to promote the welfare of, and to give development to the moral and intellectual faculties of Our beloved subjects, the very same that have been favored with the benevolent care and affectionate vigilance of Our Ancestors, and hoping to maintain the prosperity of the State, in concern with Our people and with their support, We hereby promulgate, in pursuance of Our Imperial Rescript [of 1881] a fundamental law of the State, to exhibit the principles, by which We are guided in Our conduct, and to point out to what Our descendants and Our subjects and their descendants are forever to conform.³¹

Uncertainty as to whether or not the experiment would work must have plagued Itō during the final stages of the implementation of the constitution. Being its author and as one of the first Japanese statesmen, Itō would have the privilege of observing and monitoring its operation during its early years. Despite all of this, an examination of the Meiji Constitution shows that after a full year of intense deliberation, Itō had achieved his goals: the preservation of imperial sovereignty and the incorporation of a bicameral legislature. The adoption of a constitution, a

²⁹Cited in Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 65.

³⁰Henceforth known as the Meiji Constitution.

³¹Cited in Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 395.

nation-state's fundamental laws, enabled the West to accept Japan and allow it to enter the modern world.

Chapter 2

The Meiji Constitution and Japanese Imperialism (1890 – 1912)

Soon after releasing the Meiji Constitution a new rank, that of *genrō* or Elder Statesmen, was created in order to reward oligarchs with a new position that would enable them to oversee the operation of the new state. The *genrō* were already members of the ruling Sat-chō Clique, which included men like Itō Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo. In July of 1890, elections were held for the lower House of Representatives of the Imperial Diet, the first democratic elections to be held in an Asiatic state. The *Rikken Jiyūtō* (Constitutional Liberal Party) and the *Rikken Kaishintō* (Constitutional Progressive Party) – the opposition to the ruling Sat-chō Clique – won a majority in the lower House of Representatives. During these early years of constitutional rule, the Sat-chō Clique practiced a concept known as *chōzen naikaku*, or transcendentalism.³² This concept is also referred to as transcendentalism, and was strongly favored by Yamagata Aritomo, since it delayed the nomination of political party members to the position of prime minister. Despite the fact that the opposition political parties had a majority in the lower house and battled the Sat-chō Clique over the budget, the political parties made no headway against the small ruling elite. Part of the reason for this is that the political parties were more concerned with acquiring power over ideological unity. The legacy of the later Meiji years was that continuing internal developments in both the economy and politics eventually led to the solidification of the political system created by Itō Hirobumi and others.

Yamagata Aritomo became Japan's third prime minister on 24 December 1889. During his tenure as prime minister, Yamagata oversaw the operation of the first session of the Imperial Diet. The *Jiyūtō* and *Kaishintō* held a majority in the lower House of Representatives, and the

³²See Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 70.

first item that the two parties attacked was the Sat-chō Clique's proposed budget. Displeased with the Sat-chō Clique's proposed budget, the House Budgetary Committee decided to reduce the budget by 11% by making cuts in government expenditure.³³ Deadlock followed as Yamagata was reluctant to negotiate with hostile political parties. In late February 1891, Matsukata Masayoshi delivered a speech to the lower House of Representatives in which he stated: "Gentlemen, this Diet session is the first attempt at constitutional government in the Orient. Since the success we have with constitutional government is intimately related to the honor of our nation, the government, with your reasonable and steadfast support, hopes to achieve consummate success."³⁴

To bring about a successful conclusion to their first Imperial Diet session, Japanese politicians had one of two options. The first option was compromise, which would have to involve the mainstream political parties as well as the Sat-chō Clique. The second option, which was favored strongly by Yamagata Aritomo, was to dissolve the Imperial Diet. Itō Hirobumi, who was tending to other matters of statecraft, commented angrily:

I said that dissolution is the ultimate measure to be employed when the government finds itself in a dangerous position where it can do nothing else. However, I cannot be sympathetic to any proposal that includes the suggestion for a dissolution, simply because the prime minister, on observing the situation, gets excited and feels that there possibly will be in the future a violation of the constitution or a contravention of laws.³⁵

Since the lower House of Representative's only real power lay within approving of the state's annual budget, it should come to no surprise that the political parties within this institution would exercise all of their power on this single issue. While the *Jiyūtō* and *Kaishintō* were indeed

³³See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 72.

³⁴Ibid, 78.

³⁵Cited in Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 78 – 79.

strong, one major problem that Japanese political parties faced was internal weakness or a lack of unity, which ultimately lead to factionalism. In early 1891, several members of the *Jiyūtō* who were from Tosa, formed a splinter group and approached the Sat-chō Clique with an offer of compromise.³⁶ With this new found support from the Tosa-*Jiyūtō*, the Sat-chō Clique was able to get its budget passed in the lower house, ending the political deadlock.

Matsukata Masayoshi succeeded Yamagata as prime minister on 6 May 1891. After witnessing the obstructionism that occurred in the lower House of Representatives by the *Jiyūtō* and the *Kaishintō*, Yamagata Aritomo proposed a new strategy that would hopefully grant the Sat-chō Clique greater control over the lower House of Representatives. That new strategy was election interference and involved bribery as well as violence.³⁷ Despite having employed this new strategy, the *Jiyūtō* and the *Kaishintō* remained firmly in control of the lower House of Representatives. A budgetary crisis, and an inability to fill two vacant cabinet positions, forced Matsukata to resign from the position of prime minister. Itō Hirobumi succeeded Matsukata as prime minister on 8 August 1892.

The Beginning of Japanese Imperialism

As with the Yamagata and Matsukata cabinets, Itō's second cabinet began with a budget crisis. While Itō was attempting to formulate a compromise, attention was shifting towards foreign affairs. The major foreign policy issue involved treaty revision with the major Western powers. But the Imperial Diet was still as unruly as ever, and refused to compromise with Itō on any policy issue. The opposition within the Imperial Diet forced Itō to consult with Yamagata on the matter. Yamagata stated that:

³⁶See Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 101.

³⁷*Ibid*, 97 – 98.

It is useless for the Government to consult this kind of assembly. No matter how conciliatory the approach may be, the Diet has no desire to listen. If this Diet continues, the dignity of the Government will suffer and the confidence of the people will be shaken. Under these circumstances, I believe there is no other course than to settle unhesitatingly on a policy of dissolution.³⁸

Before Itō could act upon this advice, Itō's cabinet was struck by a motion of no-confidence by the Imperial Diet. This time however, Emperor Meiji decided to utilize his power and refused to approve the motion of no-confidence; this intervention by Emperor Meiji saved Itō's cabinet.

The lower House of Representatives had obstructed Itō long enough and ordered it to be dissolved. It should be noted that this was the first time that the Imperial Diet was dissolved, and it was dissolved by the author of the Meiji Constitution. With the Imperial Diet dissolved, Great Britain and Japan were eventually able to reach an accord, and the Treaty of London was signed on 16 July 1894. This treaty was primarily concerned with removing economic privileges and extraterritoriality that had been given to the British during the early Meiji years. The signing of this new treaty between Great Britain and the Empire of Japan meant that relations between the two powers had finally normalized.

During the summer of 1894, Korea emerged as a topic of concern and interest to the Japanese. A small and independent nation, Korea was a potential threat to both China and Japan due to its geographic location. On 1 June 1894, Chinese troops crossed the Yalu River to support the Korean monarchy against rebels.³⁹ The top Japanese diplomat in Korea advised the Koreans to sign “a treaty under which Korea accepts Japanese protection [and intervention] in Korea's domestic and foreign affairs so as to achieve progress and reform, leading to wealth and

³⁸Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 140.

³⁹Ibid, 142.

strength; for thereby we will on the one hand make Korea a strong bulwark for Japan. . . .”⁴⁰

Hostilities between China and Japan began on 1 August 1894, resulting in the First Sino-Japanese War. On 17 September 1894, Imperial Japanese forces won simultaneous victories in the Yellow Sea and on land near Pyongyang, a major Korean city. By the end of 1894, the Imperial Japanese forces had destroyed most of the Chinese forces that had been arrayed against them.

The victory that had been won by the Imperial Japanese forces was made possible due to the adoption of modern tactics and weapons. The victory was so complete that by the end of 1894, the Chinese sued for peace. Hostilities came to an end on 17 April 1895 when both powers signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki. The treaty was negotiated by Itō, and represented the first step towards Japanese imperialism. The treaty was composed of four articles. The first demand was a Chinese recognition of Korean independence. The second demand involved China ceding the following to the Empire of Japan: the Liaodong Peninsula, the island of Taiwan, and the Pescadores. The third demand involved the opening of four treaty ports which would enable the Japanese to expand influence and trade into mainland China. The fourth and final demand involved a large indemnity.⁴¹ Before the Japanese could fully enjoy the fruits of victory, however, a “Triple Intervention”, which was composed of France, Germany and Russia, pressured Tokyo into returning the Liaodong peninsula to China. Fearful of possible Western retaliation for having gone too far, the Japanese returned the peninsula to Chinese sovereignty.

During the war, the lower House of Representatives and the ruling Sat-chō Clique reached unprecedented levels of cooperation. The *Japan Weekly Mail* commentated that: “The

⁴⁰Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 297.

⁴¹Ibid, 299.

task the House had been asked to achieve in seven days it accomplished in three, a striking contrast to its custom on previous occasions . . . The House has acquitted itself so well, there will be less disposition to assert that the Japanese are unfit for constitutional government.”⁴² One of the major factors that led to smoother operations in the lower House of Representatives was a tentative alliance between Itō’s cabinet and the *Jiyūtō*. In order to avoid obstructionism, Itō was willing to compromise with the political parties during the war and refrained from utilizing *chōzen naikaku* and offered Itagaki Taisuke, the president of the *Jiyūtō*, the position of Home Minister.⁴³ This promise was fulfilled in the summer of 1896. After 1896, two factors changed the relationship between the lower House of Representatives and the ruling Sat-chō Clique. The first one involved the Triple Intervention. The second one involved the political parties; in particular the *Kaishintō* was beginning to change internally. Desiring more power within the lower House of Representatives, the *Kaishintō* decided to merge with other small political groups to form the *Rikken Shimpotō* (Constitutional Progressive Party). Due to its numerically improved stature, the *Shimpotō* began to negotiate for positions within the next cabinet, openly competing with the *Jiyūtō* for positions of power.

Matsukata Masayoshi was given a second chance to be prime minister and accepted the position on 18 September 1896. Following Itō’s example with the *Jiyūtō*, Matsukata decided to refrain from using the policy of transcendentalism and approached the *Shimpotō* leader, Ōkuma Shigenobu with the promise of possible cabinet positions. Before he could complete his cabinet, however, Matsukata was defeated by Yamagata Aritomo. In an attempt to increase the budget

⁴²See Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 117.

⁴³See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 77.

for more military spending, Yamagata proposed an increase to the overall land tax.⁴⁴ This was staunchly opposed by the mainstream political parties, but strongly supported by the ruling Sat-chō Clique. As such, before Matsukata could even complete cabinet negotiations with the *Shimpotō*; Matsukata had to resign from the position of prime minister due to opposition stemming from both the *Shimpotō* and the Sat-chō Clique. Itō subsequently became prime minister for a third time on 12 January 1898, and he immediately attempted to form a combined *Jiyūtō* and *Shimpotō* cabinet. But Itō's attempt to form a coalition between the two mainstream political parties was wrecked by interparty rivalry and a budgetary crisis once the budget failed to get voted on by the lower House of Representatives. Therefore, Itō resigned from the position of prime minister on 30 June 1898. On the same day that Itō resigned from his post as prime minister, Ōkuma and Itagaki met to discuss the formation of the *Rikken Kenseitō* (Constitutional Government Party).

Following the creation of the *Kenseitō*, Itō suggested to Emperor Meiji that Ōkuma and Itagaki form a cabinet. The incorporation of the *Kenseitō* and its leadership into a position of power such as cabinet formation was a great leap of faith by Itō. Upon announcing the decision to form a cabinet based on the *Kenseitō*, the newspaper *Jiji shimpō* commentated that: "His Imperial Majest, by receiving Ōkuma and Itagaki in special audience and commanding them to form a cabinet, has determined that henceforth the cabinet will be formed by whatever party holds a majority in the Diet. It may be safely said, then, that the foundation of the party cabinet system has been established."⁴⁵ This seemed to portend the end of chōzen naikaku as a viable policy. However, as with Itō's attempt to form a coalition between the *Jiyūtō* and the *Shimpotō*,

⁴⁴See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 78.

⁴⁵See Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 135.

the Ōkuma-Itagaki administration was wrecked by interparty rivalry. Before being able to accomplish anything worthwhile, the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet collapsed when the *Kenseitō* divided itself between the former *Jiyūtō* and *Shimpotō* political parties. During the summer of 1898, the split became formal when the *Jiyūtō* took the *Kenseitō* as its name, while the *Shimpotō* renamed itself the *Rikken Kenseihontō* or Original Constitutional Government Party.⁴⁶

Yamagata Aritomo became prime minister for a second time on 8 November 1898 and brought much needed stability to the Japanese political system. As the chief proponent of transcendental cabinets, Yamagata ironically decided that the time was right to end the policy, and struck an alliance with the *Kenseitō* in the fall of 1898. Yamagata's change in thinking towards the political parties was best summed up by Saigō Tsugumichi (1843 – 1902) who stated that:

Under a constitutional system of government nothing can be achieved without the consent of the majority party. Consequently, at times, to bow to the orders of the [majority] party becomes unavoidable. Even though at times their demands are unreasonable, we must accept them. In order to achieve the great aims of the nation we must bear minor irritations. Looking at the larger picture, we must be willing to sacrifice a little inconvenience and advantage.⁴⁷

While the Sat-chō Clique may have recognized the need to incorporate the *Kenseitō* into important administrative duties, Ōkuma Shigenobu had noticed that the: “[Members] of the *Kenseitō* were not taken into the cabinet. However, as compensation, the *Kenseitō* was given control over local administration . . .”⁴⁸ In addition to this, Yamagata had given the *Kenseitō* permission to embark on election reform. Despite this, Yamagata had not completely changed his mind. In order to secure the Sat-chō Clique's power from future incursions made by the

⁴⁶See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 82.

⁴⁷Cited in Akita, *Foundations of Constitutional Government*, 135.

⁴⁸Ibid, 135.

political parties, Yamagata had the House of Representatives pass two pieces of legislation that accomplished the goal of preservation. The first piece of legislation dealt with the army and navy minister positions. Yamagata made it so that only active-duty admirals and generals could serve in their respective positions. The second piece of legislation that was passed was the *Chian Keisatsu-ho*, or Peace Police Law, which greatly increased and strengthened the police forces of the Meiji state.⁴⁹

The main reason why Yamagata had the Imperial Diet pass the Peace Police Law was to protect the position of the Emperor and the state from the radical Left. Towards the end of the oligarchic years, Christian converts had begun to read and then preach Socialist ideology as it was presented to them by the writings of Karl Marx. In 1901, Abe Isoo (1865 – 1949) one of Japan's first widely renowned Socialists, established the *Shakai Minshutō*, or Socialist Democratic Party.⁵⁰ While the *Shakai Minshutō* dissolved itself within a few months of its founding, Socialist thinking had arrived in Japan to compete with the dominant economic theory, capitalism. As such, even before the radical Left could attempt to establish itself, it had to contend with the Peace Police Law, in addition to an already dominant-prevailing economic theory.

While lasting only two years, Yamagata's second tenure as prime minister was a resounding success for all involved. Important strides were made by the Sat-chō Clique in that as a group they seemed to finally accept the political parties as necessary and acceptable partners in administering the country. In addition to this, the prestige and power of the political parties had greatly increased as well as a result of this partnership. Yamagata's alliance with the

⁴⁹See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 84.

⁵⁰See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 376.

Kenseitō did eventually come to an end. On 15 September 1900, Itō established the *Rikken Seiyūkai* (Constitutional Association of Political Friends) and immediately began to contend with the *Kenseitō* for seats in the lower House of Representatives. Following this weakening of the *Kenseitō*, Yamagata resigned from the position of prime minister on 19 October 1900. Before leaving office, Yamagata had been preparing Katsura Taro (1848 – 1913) – who was an old military friend – to be his successor and protégé. With his new found power in the *Seiyūkai* however, Itō became prime minister for a fourth time on 19 October 1900. Despite having formed the *Seiyūkai* and having a majority in the lower House of Representatives, Itō's fourth tenure as prime minister was as short as his third (January – June 1898). Facing a combined budget and leadership crisis, Itō resigned from office on 10 May 1901.⁵¹ On 2 June 1901, Yamagata's protégé Katsura Taro succeeded Itō as prime minister.

The Rise of Japanese Nationalism

Like past prime ministers, Katsura Taro had to contend with an unruly Imperial Diet. Part of the reason for this was due to Katsura's firm belief in transcendental cabinets. Unlike Yamagata, who had learned his lesson after his first tenure as prime minister, Katsura still needed to learn his. Domestic affairs were about to replace foreign affairs as the top priority of the government. In 1902, Katsura conducted negotiations with Great Britain to form an alliance. Ever since the Triple Intervention, tension between Japan and Russia had been steadily increasing. In 1900, Russia joined with the other European powers to divide China into spheres of influence and stake a claim in East Asia. Through its historic expansion in Siberia, Russia claimed all of Outer Mongolia and Manchuria as its sphere of influence. To counter the

⁵¹See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 78 and 85.

influence of the Japanese in Korea, Queen Min and King Kojong of Korea decided to expand diplomatic ties with Russia.⁵² Upon hearing the news of Russian involvement in Korea, a Major General in the Imperial Japanese Army stated:

There is no longer room for discussion. We must fight Russia even if it means defeat. Our struggle for arms expansion has had only one purpose: to fight Russia . . . If we do not fight now, it is evident that Russia, which has been invading the Far East in full force, will soon replenish its strength in Manchuria and advance into Korea. In that case, an agreement between Japan and Russia will come to be only a piece of paper, and Japan will inevitably be shut out of the Continent . . .⁵³

Diplomacy and negotiations between the two countries continued on throughout the fall of 1903, but war fever was clearly building within Japan. Realizing that the Russians would not give up their growing presence in East Asia, the Japanese finally gave up on diplomacy and prepared for war. Following Japan's surprise attacks upon Russian ships in Port Arthur, war was declared between the Empire of Japan and Russia on 6 February 1904.

Honoring its 1902 alliance with Japan, Great Britain blocked Russian sea traffic through the Suez Canal. This gave the Japanese valuable time to acquire military supremacy on land; and from August 1904 – January 1905, the Imperial Japanese Army secured the Liaodong peninsula for a second time by seizing the Russian stronghold of Port Arthur. Japanese troops also landed at Seoul and Pyongyang, securing the Korean peninsula from Russian invasion. On 27 May 1905, the Imperial Japanese Navy destroyed the Russian Baltic Fleet, which had to sail from Europe around the Horn of Africa, in the Battle of the Tsushima Straits granting Japan its second major victory in the war. Despite this, the Russians made negotiations difficult for the Japanese, who in turn decided to utilize U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt as a mediator. On 5

⁵²See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 301 – 302.

⁵³Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 184.

September 1905, Russia and the Empire of Japan signed the Treaty of Portsmouth. It contained three articles which officially turned Japan into a major world power. The first article involved Korea, which was turned into a Japanese protectorate. The second article handed over the Russian lease in the Liaodong peninsula to Japanese control. The third article involved the transfer of Russian interests (railroad and mining rights) in Manchuria to the Japanese.⁵⁴

One of the major developments that occurred during the late Meiji years was the inexorable rise of nationalism. For some time the oligarchs had perpetuated the idea of the *kokutai*, or ‘national polity’. The Imperial Rescript on Education, which was released in 1890, is often regarded as being an expression of this idea. It stipulated: “Our Imperial Ancestors founded our empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly planted virtue; Our subjects, ever united in loyalty and filial piety, have from generation to generation, illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Nation. . . .”⁵⁵ Continuing on, the document then stated: “. . . furthermore, advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the state; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of our imperial throne coeval with heaven and earth.”⁵⁶ By the turn of the twentieth century, ultra-nationalist societies were beginning to form, particularly within the Japanese military, which further helped to establish this growing sense of nationalism. One of the first ultra-nationalist societies to form was the *Kokuryukai*, or the Black Dragon Society.

⁵⁴See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 306.

⁵⁵Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 780.

⁵⁶Ibid.

The Japanese public, who showed a great amount of support for the state and armed forces during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 - 05, felt betrayed by the lack of concessions granted to the Japanese by the Russians in the Treaty of Portsmouth. In addition to ultra-nationalist societies like the Black Dragon Society, the mass media helped to spread the idea that a much larger victory had been achieved during the war among the Japanese public. In their opening memorial, the Black Dragons had also stated that: “in order to check the expansion of the Western Powers in the East, and to promote the development and prosperity of East Asia, it is the urgent duty of Japan to fight Russia and expel her from the East, and then to lay the foundation for a grand continental enterprise taking Manchuria, Mongolia and Siberia as one region.”⁵⁷ As a result of this, some 30,000 people protested in Hibiya Park in Tokyo, and the government was forced to declare martial law.

As with the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95, the Imperial Diet cooperated with the cabinet in power and passed several large budgets which helped prepare the country for war. Prince Saionji Kinmochi (1849 – 1940), who was a member of the imperial family, succeeded Katsura Taro as prime minister once the Hibiya Park Riots had been quelled. Faced with a budget crisis and riots caused by a joint Anarchist-Socialist movement, Prince Saionji decided to resign from office on 14 July 1908. On the same day that Saionji left office, Katsura began his second tenure as prime minister. Despite having lost ground while under Saionji’s first cabinet, the *Seiyūkai* regained a majority in the 1908 general elections.⁵⁸ As a result of this, Katsura needed to compromise in order to have a successful cabinet. Despite having made concessions to the *Seiyūkai*, Katsura’s tenure as prime minister was still difficult. Prince Saionji, who was

⁵⁷Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 172.

⁵⁸See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 98.

president of the *Seiyūkai*, had only offered a limited amount of support, and this was tenuous.⁵⁹ The first major development of Katsura's cabinet occurred in May 1910 and involved yet another joint Anarchist-Socialist attempt on the monarchy. The *Taigyaku Jiken* or High Treason Incident was an attempt by Anarchist-Socialists to assassinate Emperor Meiji. Through the Peace Police Law of 1900, the state was able to arrest anyone suspected to be involved with the incident. The second major development of Katsura's tenure as prime minister involved Korea. Various members of Katsura's cabinet thought that the protectorate of Korea should be ended and Korea should be annexed by Japan. The cabinet eventually passed a resolution on 22 August 1910 which annexed Korea to Japan.

Soon after Katsura's second tenure as prime minister, Emperor Meiji died of natural causes on 30 July 1912. While under Meiji's reign, Japan underwent great changes. It transformed itself from a feudal society into a modern constitutional monarchy. During the early years of the constitutional system, the mainstream political parties and the oligarchs were bitter enemies and consistently fought with one another over the nation's budget. The First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95 showed that the Imperial Diet and the ruling Sat-chō Clique could indeed cooperate during a time of national crisis. In the final analysis, several members of the Sat-chō Clique, in particular Itō Hirobumi, underestimated the power that the political parties had obtained since their founding in the Popular Rights Movement. The ability to cripple the government by not approving of or passing the annual budget was the greatest weapon that the political parties had. As long as the political parties maintained a majority in the lower House of Representatives, they held all the cards in regards to the state's annual budget. Realizing the

⁵⁹See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 98.

power that they held, the political parties gradually began to demand cabinet positions and the ability to pass legislation.

However, one of the greatest weaknesses of the political parties was their inability to maintain a strong unified center. The ability of members to merge, and associate themselves with other parties was relatively easy. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the political parties began to mature and became stable units within the lower House of Representatives. Itō Hirobumi's *Rikken Seiyūkai* is an example of a political party that matured over time. Composed of former *Jiyūtō* members, the *Seiyūkai* would continue well into the twentieth century as a major component of Japanese politics. Despite this growing influence, prime ministers could still refuse the demands of the political parties by utilizing the old policy of *chōzen naikaku*, or nonparty cabinets (transcendentalism). Several prime ministers did so, resulting in short cabinet terms. As such, both sides had to learn how to deal with one another and compromise. In addition to this, the idea of being "Japanese" had come to fruition as a result of the two conflicts that emerged during the final years of Emperor Meiji's reign.

Chapter 3

The Taishō Years (1912 – 1926)

The death of Emperor Meiji on 30 July 1912 ushered in a new period of Japanese politics. Optimism for the newly inaugurated Emperor Taishō gave way to quiet concern as it became known that the new monarch was inept due to mental illness. Concern over Emperor Taishō's condition led the genrō to begin preparing Emperor Meiji's grandson Shōwa for regency (who would assume the title of regent in 1922). One of the most notable themes present in Taishō period politics is the interchange between military and political party prime ministers. Not one military clique or political party held onto the reins of power over an extended period of time. Political intellectualism also flourished during the latter years of the Taishō period, further enriching this period. The political system that Itō Hirobumi had created in the 1880s was not threatened by either the death of Emperor Meiji or the ineptitude of Emperor Taishō; but was in fact strengthened since all involved in Japanese politics continued to function within the parameters of that system as it was instituted by the Meiji Constitution.

Presiding over the position of prime minister at the time of Emperor Meiji's death was Prince Saionji. In 1911, the Imperial Japanese Army wanted to expand and approached Prince Saionji in order to add two more divisions. Prince Saionji saw no reason for the expansion, however, and refused to expand the budget. The army approached Prince Saionji for a second time in 1912, and Prince Saionji refused again. As a result of this, the Minister of the Army resigned in protest to the decision. With the army hostile to him over his refusal over military expansion, Prince Saionji was unable to find a replacement for the position, and unwilling to change his stance on military expansion, Prince Saionji decided to offer his resignation on 21

December 1912. After accepting Prince Saionji's resignation, the genrō began the process of choosing the next prime minister.

The Early Taishō Years

It soon became apparent to the genrō that either Yamagata Aritomo, or Katsura Tarō would have to become the next prime minister.⁶⁰ But neither really wanted the position. For Yamagata, his advanced age was the major contributing factor in his decision to decline the offer for the position. Katsura had just recently acquired great influence at the court and was acting as an imperial adviser for Emperor Taishō. When he finally accepted the position, many in the lower house of the Imperial Diet felt that Katsura had used this influence to acquire the position. As such, the *Seiyūkai* decided to launch a populist campaign against Katsura. Known as the "Movement to Protect the Constitution," this populist movement started in the Imperial Diet but spread to other parts of Japan due to its *Seiyūkai* foundations. In addition to this opposition from the "Movement to Protect the Constitution," Katsura had to contend with the Imperial Japanese Navy. While forming his cabinet, Katsura faced stark opposition from the Imperial Japanese Navy, which refused to supply him with an admiral for the position of Minister of the Navy. The opposition from the Imperial Japanese Navy was a direct result of Katsura being a former general in the Imperial Japanese Army. In an attempt to end the interference that resulted from the navy's opposition, Katsura decided to appeal to Emperor Taishō for assistance and order the Imperial Japanese Navy to supply an admiral by order of an Imperial Rescript.

In order to be able to pass any legislation in the lower house of the Imperial Diet, which had been dominated by the *Seiyūkai* since its founding in 1900, Katsura began to consider the

⁶⁰See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 104.

possibility of forming his own political party. The formation of a political party would not only give Katsura the means to formulate and pass legislation, but also act as a platform from which Katsura could build additional power. On 7 February 1913, Katsura followed in the footsteps of Itō Hirobumi and established his own political party. That political party was known as the *Rikken Dōshikai* (Constitutional Association of Friends) and was predominantly composed of members of the lower house of the Imperial Diet who shared anti-*Seiyūkai* sentiments. The decision to create the *Dōshikai* strained relations not only with the *Seiyūkai*, but also with Yamagata Aritomo, who never completely abandoned the oligarchic concept of transcendentalism. Towards the end of 1913, Admiral Yamamoto Gonnohyōe (1852 – 1933) suggested to Katsura that he should resign from the position of prime minister. Faced with ongoing opposition from the Imperial Japanese Navy, as well as the “Movement to Protect the Constitution,” Katsura decided to resign from the position of prime minister. One possible reason why Katsura decided to resign from the post was a desire to complete the formation of the *Dōshikai*. Katsura had commented: “The genrō until recently seem to have held the center of political power, but they are growing old and falling into decline. . . . The time for the establishment of party cabinets is approaching, and when it comes, it will be impossible to face the political situation to come without a party at one’s command.”⁶¹ Unfortunately, however, before he could finish his designs for the *Dōshikai*, Katsura would die on 10 October 1913.⁶²

Since he had played a role in getting Katsura to resign from the position of prime minister, the genrō decided to nominate Admiral Yamamoto to the position of prime minister,

⁶¹Cited in Peter Duus, *Party Rivalry and Political Change in Taishō Japan* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 39.

⁶²Katsura Tarō was succeeded as president of the *Dōshikai* by Katō Komei (1860 – 1926).

and on 20 February 1913, Admiral Yamamoto decided to accept the offer. In an attempt to gain nominal *Seiyūkai* support, and to put an end to the “Movement to Protect the Constitution,” Admiral Yamamoto agreed to nominate *Seiyūkai* members to his cabinet. A financial scandal involving high-ranking officers of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the German Siemens company resulted in the eventual collapse of the Yamamoto cabinet.⁶³ Once the scandal became public knowledge, Admiral Yamamoto faced intense public pressure and outcry and was forced to resign. On 23 March 1914, Admiral Yamamoto offered his resignation and stepped down from the position of prime minister.

After accepting the resignation of Admiral Yamamoto, the genrō began the process of choosing the next prime minister. Rather than nominate another *Seiyūkai* member as prime minister, and not trusting the position to the untested *Dōshikai* president Katō Komei (1860 – 1926), the genrō decided to nominate Ōkuma Shigenobu to the position for a second time. Ōkuma accepted the nomination on 16 April 1914. In order to gain support in the lower house of the Imperial Diet, Ōkuma Shigenobu appointed Katō Komei to the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, and utilized several other *Dōshikai* members in his cabinet. Ōkuma would join the *Dōshikai* at a later date and become a senior member. On 28 July 1914, the First World War began when the Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war on Serbia and a series of military alliances among the great powers quickly led Europe into total war. In the fall of 1914, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Katō Komei, decided to bring the Empire of Japan into the war on the side of the Allies (as part of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902) and declared war on the German Empire. By 7 November 1914, the Imperial Japanese Army seized the port of Tsingtao and all

⁶³See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 115.

German held territory within the Shandong peninsula. Simultaneously the Imperial Japanese Navy seized the German colony of Micronesia in the Pacific.

With the Western powers preoccupied with the conflict in Europe, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Katō Komei, sought to pressure the Chinese and continue to expand Japanese influence in the region. Through secret consultation, Katō worked together with Black Dragon Society leader Uchida Ryōhei (1873 – 1937) and the two men would eventually drafted the “Twenty-one Demands,” a series of demands with which the Japanese hoped to pressure China into granting them. An early Black Dragon memorial stated:

We should induce the Chinese revolutionists, the Imperialists and other malcontents to create trouble all over China. The whole country will be thrown into disorder and Yuan’s government consequently overthrown. . . . We consider the present to be the most opportune moment. The reason why these men cannot now carry on an active campaign is because they are insufficiently provided with funds. If the Imperial Government can take advantage of this fact to make them a loan and instruct them to rise simultaneously, great commotion and disorder will surely prevail all over China. We can then intervene and easily adjust matters. .

.⁶⁴

By the time that the Imperial Japanese military had seized all of Germany’s colonial possessions in East Asia and the Pacific, the draft for the “Twenty-one Demands” had been complete. After helping draft the “Twenty-one Demands,” Black Dragon leader Uchida lobbied for it to be passed onto the Chinese president Yuan Shikai (1859 – 1916).

While the primary purpose of the “Twenty-one Demands” was to expand Japanese influence in the region, Black Dragon leader Uchida and Katō sought to ensure that the influence that they had established would be long lasting. Upon learning of the “Twenty-one Demands,” the United States ambassador to the region stated that if accepted, the document would: “place the Chinese State in a position of vassalage through exercising a control over important parts of

⁶⁴Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 231 – 32.

its administration and over its industrial and natural resources, actual and prospective.”⁶⁵ The first two articles of the “Twenty-one Demands” dealt with the concessions that the Japanese had recently acquired during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 – 05, and the First World War. Other provisions within the “Twenty-one Demands” greatly infringed upon Chinese sovereignty by granting “Japan joint ownership of the Hanyehping Iron Company and all adjacent iron ore deposits and requiring China not to cede any territory along her entire coastline to any other Power. Group Five would give Japan the right to appoint Japanese political, financial and military advisers to the Chinese government.”⁶⁶ The Chinese Republic was so feeble at the time that its president, Yuan Shikai, considered accepting the “Twenty-one Demands.” Before doing so, however, the Chinese approached the Japanese in hopes of renegotiating the document. The Japanese agreed to do so; and Chinese and Japanese diplomats began the process of negotiating a newly revised document throughout the fall of 1914 and into the spring of 1915. After carefully weighing the newly revised document, Chinese diplomats finally signed it on 25 May 1915. The new document forced the Japanese to return Tsingtao to Chinese sovereignty; while the Chinese granted the Japanese rights of extraterritoriality and land ownership in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia.⁶⁷

Fearing that Katō had gone too far with his “Twenty-one Demands,” the genrō pressured Ōkuma into forcing Katō to resign from the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs. Ōkuma carried out the genrō’s request, but soon found out that nobody was willing to replace Katō. Unable to fill the vacant cabinet position, Ōkuma decided to submit his resignation to the genrō

⁶⁵Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 232.

⁶⁶Ibid, 239.

⁶⁷Ibid, 241.

and opted to leave the position of prime minister on 4 October 1916. The composition of the Imperial Diet throughout this period included several small political parties that sought to challenge the dominance of the *Seiyūkai*. Following the collapse of the Ōkuma cabinet, Katō Komei began working to bring several of these other smaller political parties into a permanent merger with the *Dōshikai*. A deal was eventually struck, and a new political party was created the day after Ōkuma turned in his resignation; this new political party was known as the *Rikken Kenseikai* (Constitutional Party) and began a political campaign in order to challenge the majority that the *Seiyūkai* had maintained in the Imperial Diet since its founding in 1900.

Following Ōkuma's resignation from the position of prime minister, the genrō decided to appoint a former general of the Imperial Japanese Army, Terauchi Masatake (1852 – 1919) to the position of prime minister. After some deliberation, Terauchi finally accepted the nomination on 9 October 1916. Although Prime Minister Terauchi had acquired nominal *Seiyūkai* support for his cabinet, the prime minister faced stern opposition from the *Kenseikai*. This opposition from the *Kenseikai* came about due to Terauchi supporting the *Seiyūkai* over the *Kenseikai* when Terauchi was in the process of forming his cabinet. Towards the end of 1916, the *Kenseikai* passed a motion of no-confidence in Terauchi as prime minister, forcing Terauchi to dissolve the Imperial Diet. General elections were held the following year, 1917, in which neither the *Kenseikai* nor the *Seiyūkai* gained a majority. Then in the fall of 1918, the country was devastated when the price of rice unexpectedly rose dramatically, resulting in riots erupting across the country. Faced with a divided Imperial Diet, and a country that was becoming more unstable due to the nationwide rice riots, Terauchi decided to submit his resignation on 29 September 1918.

In order to avoid upsetting the general populace as well as the mainstream political parties with the appointment of yet another prime minister selected from the military, Prince Saionji decided to nominate Hara Kei (1856 – 1921), who was the president of the *Seiyūkai*.⁶⁸ Hara immediately organized a *Seiyūkai* cabinet and passed an electoral reform law which aided the *Seiyūkai* in regaining a majority in the Imperial Diet. With control of the Imperial Diet assured, Hara passed bills that were based upon *Seiyūkai* policies, the first of which was to pass a large budget for internal development (bridges, port facilities, railways and road construction). The Hara cabinet was able to pass a large budget in part due to the huge surplus that had been generated by the First World War. With the European powers largely concerned with what was transpiring on the continent, the markets in East Asia were left abandoned. As a result of this, Japanese industries hurried to fill the void left by the Europeans, resulting in a boom for the Japanese economy during the war. With the war concluded by the summer of 1919, however, the Europeans regained the economic initiative and returned to their pre-war colonial markets in East Asia. This renewed challenge of European economic competition hit Japan in the latter part of 1920. The Hara cabinet carried out a variety of economic measures and was eventually able to weather the economic crisis.

With the position of prime minister firmly in the hands of the *Seiyūkai* president Hara Kei, Prince Saionji felt confident enough to leave Japan in order to take part in the diplomatic conferences that were being held in Europe to bring an end to the First World War. Traveling with Prince Saionji was the young Prince Konoe Fumimaro (1891 – 1945), whose lineage could be traced to the powerful Fujiwara clan and was educated at Kyoto Imperial University. On 28 June 1919, Japan took part in the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, which officially ended

⁶⁸Yamagata Aritomo had begun to leave all genrō-related activities to Prince Saionji due to a deterioration in age and ill health.

hostilities and brought about world peace. One of the agreements reached at Versailles between the Allies involved Japan sending troops into Eastern Siberia to prevent the Communists from taking over the region, as part of the Allied Intervention during the Russian Civil War. In addition to this, Hara decided to appease the *genrō* by passing a bill which strengthened the Peace Police Law of 1900. After having been in office for over three years, the continuation of the Hara cabinet for a fourth seemed more than likely. However, on 4 November 1921, Hara was assassinated by an ultranationalist. While the assassination of Hara was devastating to the *Seiyūkai*, it also had a profound impact on the development of constitutional government for the remainder of the Taishō period.

The Blossoming of Liberalism

Representing liberalism in Taishō Japan was Yoshino Sakuzō (1878 – 1933). A graduate of the renowned Tokyo Imperial University, Yoshino began work as an advisor / tutor to the Chinese leader Yuan Shikai. Upon returning to Japan, Yoshino obtained a position within his alma mater and began to study law. At the request of Tokyo Imperial University, Yoshino traveled throughout the West in order to study the constitutional systems found in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States. After completing his tour of the West, Yoshino began to write extensively on democracy and foreign affairs. In 1916, Yoshino's seminal work, *Kensei No Hongi o Toite Sono Yūshū No Bi o Seishu No To o Ronzu*, or “On the Meaning of Constitutional Government and the Methods By Which It Can Be Perfected” was published. In this work, Yoshino briefly discusses what constitutional government is to his readers and then develops an idea that is known as *minponshugi* or “government based on the people.”

In order to begin the discussion within his work, Yoshino states that “a constitution must include as an important part of its contents the following three provisions: (1) guarantees of civil

liberties, (2) the principle of the separation of the three branches of government, and (3) a popularly elected legislature.”⁶⁹ Later within the same discussion on constitutions, Yoshino stated that “more than any other factor, [provision for a popularly elected legislature]. . . .is regarded by the public as the most important characteristic of a constitution. . . . Why is the provision so important? Because the popularly elected legislature is the only branch of government in whose composition the people have a direct voice.”⁷⁰ While it is true that the Empire of Japan was created as a constitutional monarchy in 1889, the Meiji Constitution featured very weak democratic processes. This was intentional, since Itō Hirobumi wanted to utilize the constitution as a way to protect imperial sovereignty.

After introducing the reader to Constitutionalism, Yoshino began to discuss the concept of democracy. When discussing democracy Yoshino had to tread carefully, for not only would he face stark criticism from his peers, but possible political repercussions handed down to him from the ruling elite should he advocate anything that compromised the principle of imperial sovereignty. As such, it was necessary for Yoshino to develop his ideas on democracy cautiously and methodically. This resulted in the creation of two new terms: (1) *minponshugi* (people as the basic principle) and (2) *minshushugi* (people’s rule principle). The main reason why Yoshino developed two terms for democracy was due to the issue that it created when it was coupled with the concept of imperial sovereignty. In his article, Yoshino stated that *minshushugi*

⁶⁹Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 839.

⁷⁰*Ibid*, 839.

“is likely to be understood referring to the theory held by the social democratic parties that ‘sovereignty of the nation resides in the people.’”⁷¹ Continuing his article, Yoshino stated that:

So-called *minponshugi* is not concerned with the legal locus of sovereignty, but refers to the principle that the rule of sovereignty should consider the welfare of the people. In other words, it is the political theory that sets the guiding standards on the deployment of state authority; it does not ask whether the sovereignty lies within the king or the people.⁷²

By stating that the main purpose of democracy was the “general welfare of the people,” and not of popular sovereignty, Yoshino avoided the controversial coupling of democracy and imperial sovereignty.

After having introduced the reader to constitutionalism and the concept of *minponshugi*; Yoshino changes the topic of “On the Meaning of Constitutional Government” to that of reform and universal manhood suffrage. In his writing, Yoshino made it clear that he knew political corruption existed within Japan’s limited suffrage system and wrote that: “When legislators manipulate the people, invariably corruption and bad government flourish. Only when the people control their legislators does the operation of constitutional government follow the proper course.”⁷³ One way to combat this form of political corruption was to promote the idea of universal manhood suffrage. Yoshino had written on how limited suffrage was the root cause for political corruption:

If the suffrage is limited, corruption will be rampant. When the suffrage is extended as far as possible, there can be absolutely no distribution of bribes and the like. More over, only when it has become absolutely impossible for candidates to fight one another with money and things of value will they compete by sincerely and frankly presenting their views and personal qualifications to the

⁷¹Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 840.

⁷²Cited in Jung-Sun N. Han, “Envision a Liberal Empire in East Asia: Yoshino Sakuzō in Taishō Japan,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer 2007): 373.

⁷³Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 849.

people. Consequently, the people will have an opportunity of receiving a political education through this means.⁷⁴

Realizing that many within his audience would not have been able to fully comprehend what universal manhood suffrage would entail, or that they simply misunderstood it as a political concept, Yoshino wrote further on the issue: “If we do not dispel this misunderstanding of universal suffrage and instill in the people the deep, heartfelt conviction that constitutional government cannot possibly develop properly unless universal suffrage is adopted, then the prospects for constitutional government are indeed gloomy.”⁷⁵

By extending the right to vote to all males, Yoshino was accomplishing three goals. First, while the concept of constitutional government had been established by the Meiji Constitution, it was still relatively weak as a political institution. By promoting universal suffrage, Yoshino was helping to solidify the concept of constitutional government into the Japanese mindset. Secondly, and as was mentioned above, Yoshino clearly felt that the only way to combat political corruption was to extend the right to vote to a larger electorate. If there was more people involved, politicians would not be able to disperse their funds effectively. The third and final goal was to ensure that a much wider section of the Japanese populace would not only have a political voice by voting, but would also receive a political education, since the newly enfranchised would be partaking in the political process.

While the concept of *minponshugi* may at first seem strange to Westerners (who think of democracy in terms of popular sovereignty), one must remember that the concept of constitutional government was a foreign idea imposed on the Japanese by the Meiji oligarchy.

⁷⁴Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 850.

⁷⁵*Ibid*, 851.

When developing the concept of minponshugi, however, Yoshino was undoubtedly looking to and influenced by Japanese tradition. The most influential tradition that influenced Yoshino was the ideal of filial piety; and this can be seen with Yoshino's usage of the phrase "for the general welfare of the people."⁷⁶ Yoshino was primarily active during the Taishō years, and must have been exceptionally pleased to see universal manhood suffrage passed in 1925 by the *Kenseikai* cabinet of Katō Komei. As can be seen from his writings, Yoshino was firm in the belief that constitutional government was to be the future of Japan. An early death on 18 March 1933 saved Yoshino from having to witness the violent years of Emperor Shōwa's reign and being disappointed in the direction that the Empire of Japan would ultimately take.

The Origins of Japanese Fascism

Before becoming renowned as the infamous right wing ultranationalist of the 1930s, Kita Ikki (1884 – 1937) started out as a Socialist. Kita was introduced to socialism while he was taking courses as a student at Waseda University. Upon hearing of the outbreak of the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Kita travelled to China and worked as a correspondent. After returning to Japan, Kita assisted the renowned Japanese economist Abe Isoo (1865 – 1949) in creating the Social Democratic Party. Following the creation of the Social Democratic Party, the Japanese Communist Party was founded in 1922. In order to stem the outburst of Socialist political activity, the genrō, in conjunction with various cabinets of the Meiji and Taishō periods, continuously strengthened the Peace Police Law of 1900. The constant renovation of this single law made it impossible for Socialists to function as a political movement. Perhaps as a result of the inability to grow, Kita decided to leave the Socialist movement and became an

⁷⁶Since the electorate had voted the government into power, it was the government's responsibility to take care of the electorate.

ultranationalist. By 1925, Kita had joined the *Kokuryukai* (Black Dragon Society) and was an ardent supporter of *kokutai* (or Cardinal Principles of Our “National Polity”). Kita revealed his new political ideology in a book that was known as *Kokka Kaizō Hōan Daikō*, or “An Outline Plan for the Reorganization of Japan,” which was published in 1923.

After abandoning socialism and becoming an ultranationalist in the early 1920s, Kita Ikki began refashioning his own political ideology. One of the cornerstones of Kita’s new ideology was centered on the Emperor and his relationship with the Japanese people. Kita wrote: “In order for the emperor and the entire Japanese people to establish a secure base for the national reorganization, the emperor will, by a show of his imperial prerogative, suspend the constitution for a period of three years, dissolve both houses of the Diet, and place the entire nation under martial law.”⁷⁷ Without hesitation, Kita then goes on to say why such drastic actions need to be undertaken:

The reason why the Diet must be dissolved is that the nobility and the wealthy on whom it depends are incapable of standing with the emperor and the people in the cause of reorganization. The necessity for suspension of the constitution is that the people seek the protection in the codes enacted under it. The reason that martial law must be proclaimed is that it is essential to the freedom of the nation that there be no restraint in suppressing the opposition that will come from these groups.⁷⁸

In addition to the suspension of all democratic institutions with which Kita had a distaste for, Kita was prepared to abolish the Peerage Law of 1884 so that “. . .the spirit of the Meiji Restoration will be clarified by removing the barrier that has come between the emperor and the people.” For Kita, the emperor had a dual role in Japanese society; the first was to act as the sole undisputed ruler of Japan. The second was to act as the chief representative of the people.

⁷⁷Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 961.

⁷⁸Ibid, 962.

The second cornerstone of Kita's new political ideology was concerned with the concept of the kokutai. As mentioned in in chapter 2, the principle of kokutai was originally promoted by the genrō in order to serve as a basis for Japanese nationalism. It was composed of a multitude of Japanese traditions which ranged from the slogan of “revere the emperor, and repel the barbarians” to the Confucian principal of filial piety. While it was written in 1937, *Kokutai No Hongi*, or the “Fundamentals of Our National Polity” was a book written by the Ministry of Education that attempted to clarify the concept of kokutai further:

Loyalty means to revere the emperor as [our] pivot and to follow him implicitly. By implicit obedience is meant casting ourselves aside and serving the emperor intently. To walk this Way of loyalty is the sole Way in which we subjects may “live” and the fountainhead of all energy. . . . In our country, filial piety is a Way of the highest importance. Filial piety originates with one's family as its basis and, in its larger sense, has the nation as its foundation. The direct object of filial piety is one's parents, but in its relationship with the emperor finds a place within loyalty.⁷⁹

As can be seen from this, Kita was strongly influenced by the concept of kokutai when developing his new political ideology. Due to the importance with which Kita stressed the concept of kokutai, one can see how he can be considered the father of Japanese fascism.

The reforms that Kita thus proposed would have virtually destroyed the political system that had been created by the genrō, replacing it with a system based solely on imperial sovereignty. Kita was not kind in his criticism of the genrō, and had even written that: “Modern Japan is a medieval state mixing East and West, joining a decayed trunk to a rotten root. Worms breed in a corpse, and the plump worms oozing from the corpse of the restoration revolution are

⁷⁹Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 969 – 970.

the so-called genrō.”⁸⁰ In his final analysis of political systems, Kita sharply criticized the West for its espousal of constitutionalism: “There is no basis whatsoever for the belief of the democracies that a state governed by representatives voted in by the electorate is superior to a state with a system of government by a particular person. Every nation has its own national spirit and history. . . .”⁸¹ After establishing the basis for his political ideology, Kita realized that he needed to state how one should go about in establishing his ideology as the basis of a new political order. Kita wrote that:

A coup d'état should be regarded as a direct manifestation of the authority of the nation, that is, of the will of society. All the progressive leaders have arisen from popular groups. They arise because of political leaders like Napoleon and Lenin. In the reorganization of Japan there must be a manifestation of the power inherent in a coalition of the people and sovereign.⁸²

With this, it can be seen that Kita had been deeply influenced by not only political revolutions in the past, but by the principle of kokutai. For Kita, the principle of kokutai is what made Japan unique among nations.

After having analyzed Kita's ideology, one can clearly see that Kita was attempting to reconstruct Japanese society in such a way that the Japanese public would have been in complete subservience to the state. This new political system would give the state unrivaled authority and power over its citizenry, a key aspect of fascist ideology. As can be seen from the samples used above, Kita's writing was radical, and because of this, his books were banned. As a result of this

⁸⁰Cited in George M. Wilson, “Kita Ikki's Theory of Revolution,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (November 1966): 95.

⁸¹Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 963.

⁸²Ibid, 962.

ensorship, Kita's works were only known to a few, and he was eventually forgotten.⁸³ Towards the latter years of his life, Kita disassociated himself with politics entirely, and became a devout follower of Nichiren Buddhism. On 19 August 1937, Kita was executed by the Imperial Japanese Army on grounds that he had inspired the Two Twenty-six Incident, a coup d'état that failed to establish a Shōwa Restoration on 2 February 1936.

The Final Taishō Years

The *Seiyūkai* was devastated by the assassination of Hara in 1921. As the third president of the *Seiyūkai*, Hara offered the political party leadership abilities that were equivalent to Itō Hirobumi, who was the first president of the *Seiyūkai*, and Prince Saionji, who was the second president of the *Seiyūkai*. Following the death of Hara, the power of the *Seiyūkai* steadily decreased as it fell under the leadership of Takahashi Korekiyo (1854 – 1936), who had served as Minister of Finance under the Hara cabinet. Takahashi accepted the nomination to the position of prime minister from the genrō on 13 November 1921. Lacking Hara's ability in leadership, the cabinet that Takahashi had organized quickly fell apart as its members began to fight amongst each other over financial policies regarding the economy. Unable to maintain unity within his own administration, Takahashi submitted his resignation to the genrō. Rather than appoint another *Seiyūkai* member as prime minister, and knowing that the *Seiyūkai* was slowly collapsing, the genrō decided to nominate an admiral from the Imperial Japanese Navy as prime minister instead.

On 12 June 1922, Admiral Katō Tomosaburō accepted the nomination to become the next prime minister. When forming his cabinet, Admiral Katō took the unusual step of selecting

⁸³See Christopher W. A. Szpilman, "Kita Ikki and the Politics of Coercion," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (May 2002)485 – 488.

members from the House of Peers. By selecting members from the House of Peers rather than from the House of Representatives, Admiral Katō was clearly trying to distance himself from both the *Kenseikai* and *Seiyūkai*. Before being able to achieve anything worthy of note, Admiral Katō died of natural causes on 24 August 1923. In order to replace Admiral Kato, the genrō decided to draw upon the Imperial Japanese Navy again, and nominated former Prime Minister Yamamoto Gonnohyoe to the position of prime minister once again. In showing their displeasure with the choice of nominating another non-party prime minister, Takahashi Korekiyo, and Katō Komei refused to offer any support to the new cabinet. And just as Admiral Yamamoto was completing the process of organizing his cabinet, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck on 1 September 1923, straining the economy within the region of Tokyo. In an attempt to show some political acumen, Prime Minister Yamamoto attempted to draft a bill which would have passed universal manhood suffrage. This was met by resistance by the *Seiyūkai*, which wanted to use the passage of such a bill as a political tool. Then, on 27 December 1927, an assassination plot against the Prince Regent was foiled. Before any motion of no-confidence could be passed within the Imperial Diet, Admiral Yamamoto offered to submit his resignation.

Still dissatisfied with the behavior and performance of the *Seiyūkai* as the dominant political party, the genrō decided to go forth and nominate another non-party prime minister. Rather than nominate another member of the Imperial Japanese Navy, the genrō reverted back to the stock of personnel that Yamagata Aritomo had built around himself before his death, and decided to nominate Kiyoura Keigo (1850 – 1942) to the position of prime minister. In direct response to Kiyoura's nomination, the *Seiyūkai* and *Kenseikai* agreed to a temporary alliance and launched the Second Protect the Constitutional Movement. Displeased with Takahashi's decision to join the *Kenseikai* in opposition to the Kiyoura cabinet, Takejirō Tokonami (1866 –

1935) and over half of the *Seiyūkai* decided to defect from the party and formed the *Rikken Seiyūhontō* (Seiyū Main Party). Despite this obvious weakening of the *Seiyūkai*, the Second Protect the Constitution Movement remained strong in large part due to the *Kenseikai*. Faced with strong political opposition to his nomination, and an inability to form a cabinet, Kiyoura decided to submit his resignation on 11 June 1924.

Following the collapse of the Ōkuma cabinet and the reorganization of the *Dōshikai* into the *Kenseikai*, Katō Komei, the president of the *Kenseikai* began an unrelenting campaign of hostility against the genrō. Bitter over how the genrō ended the one and only *Dōshikai* cabinet, Katō sharply criticized the genrō and had often stated that: “a small group of men. . . ought not have rights greater than those of other Japanese because they are from Chōshū.”⁸⁴ This campaign eventually culminated into the Second Protect the Constitution Movement and the ousting of Kiyoura from the position of prime minister. Following the splintering of the *Seiyūkai* into two halves, the Kiyoura cabinet called for a general election in which the *Kenseikai* became the dominant political party. Knowing that the country was monitoring political developments due to the Second Protect the Constitution Movement, the genrō decided to nominate Katō Komei as prime minister. Katō accepted the nomination and became prime minister on 11 June 1924.

Immediately following his nomination to the position of prime minister, Katō formed a cabinet that was composed of *Kenseikai* members. In order to avoid any political repercussions that might be handed out to the cabinet by the Second Protect the Constitutional Movement for not having enacted any kind of reforms, the Katō, cabinet with support from the *Seiyūhontō* passed an electoral reform law in 1925. The first part of this law introduced universal suffrage

⁸⁴Cited in Duus, *Party Rivalry and Political Change*, 99.

for all males over 25 years old. The second part addressed the electoral districting that had been undertaken during Hara's *Seiyūkai* administration. While many praised the Katō cabinet for having finally passed universal suffrage, many cursed it for having passed the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 soon afterwards. Like its predecessor the Peace Police Law of 1900, the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 targeted the activities of Anarchists, Communists, and Socialists by restricting their movements with stringent regulations and ensuring harsh penalties for those convicted of such radical activity. Unlike the previous reforms that had been carried out to strengthen the Peace Police Law of 1900, the Katō cabinet probably realized that an upgrade of that law was needed, and the cabinet decided to take the initiative.⁸⁵ Just as with Hara's 1918 – 1921 tenure as Prime Minister, Katō's was the highlight of his political career. These two years of near constant political activity must have been exceptionally tiring to Katō, for the prime minister would die of natural causes on 28 January 1926.

Since 1922, Meiji's grandson Shōwa had been acting as Prince Regent for the sickly Emperor Taishō. On 25 December 1925, Emperor Taishō died of natural causes, resulting in the Prince Regent ascending to the throne and becoming Emperor Shōwa. While the *genrō* did their best to ensure that Emperor Taishō could perform as nominal sovereign by appointing imperial advisors to assist him, the mental health of Emperor Taishō proved to be a challenge. During the Taishō period, the mainstream political parties continued to act as disruptive entities in the lower House of Representatives, and the *genrō* utilized them as they saw fit. Their ability to evolve into new political parties undoubtedly helped to ensure their overall longevity and continued usefulness. The gradual weakening of the influence and power that the *genrō* had held over the political system since its creation also greatly affected Taishō period politics. Having lived

⁸⁵See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 139.

through much of the Meiji period, the genrō were reaching old age, and a natural outcome of reaching old age was death. By 1924, Prince Saionji was the last of the genrō, and he was preparing Prince Konoë and other economic / political leaders for the newly created position of *jūshin*, or Senior Statesmen. For much of the Taishō period the country was relatively stable, as has been seen however, the inauguration of a new monarch is often fraught with instability, and the early Shōwa period was no exception.

Chapter 4

The Ascension of the Military (1926 – 1941)

On 28 January 1926, the *Kenseikai* president and Prime Minister, Katō Komei, died of natural causes. Wakatsuki Reijirō (1866 – 1949), who had been a member of the *Kenseikai* since its founding, succeeded Katō as party president. After becoming the president of the *Kenseikai*, Wakatsuki was then nominated to the position of prime minister by Prince Saionji. Following the death of Emperor Taishō on 25 December 1926, Prince Regent Shōwa ascended to the imperial throne and became Emperor. The continued use of a major political party member as prime minister seemed to portend a bright future for constitutional government in Japan. As will be seen however, an upsurge of ultranationalist activities and societies during the early Shōwa period would greatly effect the future prospects of constitutional government in Japan. In addition to this, Prince Saionji had become the last of the genrō, and he began to lead as well as prepare a new generation of economic and political leaders who would eventually become known as *Jūshin* or Senior Statesmen.

While acting as prime minister, Wakatsuki utilized a tentative alliance between the *Kenseikai* and *Seiyūhonto* in order to control the lower house of the Imperial Diet. In the area of foreign affairs, Prime Minister Wakatsuki attempted to orchestrate a rapprochement with China by abandoning imperialist policy on the continent.⁸⁶ This shift in foreign policy not only angered the military, but also the *Seiyūkai*, which began to support imperialist policies as part of its political ideology. It would be in the area of domestic affairs that the Wakatsuki cabinet would eventually falter, and then collapse. Ever since becoming a part of the Empire of Japan after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95, the island of Formosa (Taiwan) had been treated as a colony by

⁸⁶See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 142.

the Japanese. It was settled by Japan, and what natural resources it had to offer were exploited. In order to finance more development on the island, the Bank of Taiwan had been established shortly after the island had been incorporated into the empire. By 1926, the Bank of Taiwan was experiencing a financial crisis and had to appeal to the Bank of Japan for relief.

The Bank of Japan refused to issue that relief in the form of additional yen to the Bank of Taiwan, which resulted in the closing of several banks on the island. Fearing that a much larger financial crisis would ensue if it did not act promptly, the Wakatsuki cabinet decided to take direct action and passed a bill which forced the Bank of Japan to send relief. The lower House of Representatives was not in session, and when word of what the Wakatsuki cabinet had done spread, outrage ensued. The Privy Council reviewed the situation, and then ordered the Wakatsuki cabinet to abolish the bill and pass a new one through the lower House of Representatives. Its alliance with the *Seiyūhonto* would have allowed the *Kenseikai* to pass any bill in the lower House of Representatives. Despite this, the Wakatsuki cabinet chose to resign instead.⁸⁷ Following the departure of Wakatsuki from the position of prime minister in the spring of 1927, the *Kenseikai* and *Seiyūhonto* decided to merge together and form a new political party. That political party was established on 1 June 1927 and was known as the *Rikken Minseitō* (Constitutional Democratic Party).

Following the collapse of the Wakatsuki cabinet, Prince Saionji decided to nominate a member of the *Seiyūkai* to the position of prime minister. The *Seiyūkai* was severely weakened when several of its members chose to leave the political party to form the *Seiyūhonto*. Prince Saionji obviously hoped that the nomination of a *Seiyūkai* member to the position of prime minister would restore the *Seiyūkai* as a major political force once again. The eventual

⁸⁷See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 144.

nomination was awarded to the *Seiyūkai* president and a former general in the Imperial Japanese Army, Tanaka Giichi (1864 – 1929). Soon after forming his cabinet, Prime Minister Tanaka called for a general election. Those elections were held on 20 February 1928, and neither the *Seiyūkai* nor the *Minseitō* won a majority; it was in fact deadlocked in the lower House of Representatives.

In order to end the financial crisis that had begun under the Wakatsuki cabinet, Prime Minister Tanaka had the Imperial Diet pass an economic relief bill that forced the Bank of Japan to issue a large sum of yen to the Bank of Taiwan. After successfully resolving the financial crisis with the Bank of Taiwan, the Tanaka cabinet continued to concentrate on domestic reforms by passing an amendment for the Peace Preservation Law with a provision that allowed any persons convicted of Anarchist-Socialist activity to be sentenced to death. The second major issue that the Tanaka cabinet dealt with was election reform. The electoral system was modified in such a way by the Tanaka cabinet that the *Seiyūkai* was guaranteed a major victory in the next general election should one be held. However, the first serious blow to land on the Tanaka cabinet was in the area of foreign affairs; since its formation, the Tanaka cabinet had concentrated primarily on domestic affairs, an inability and incompetency when dealing with foreign affairs eventually caused the collapse of the Tanaka cabinet. The Tanaka cabinet sparked outrage when it took part in the conference and signed the Kellogg-Briand Pact. While the pacifist nature of the pact was controversial in its own right, the fact that the cabinet had superseded one of the emperor's imperial prerogatives was the larger issue.⁸⁸ Emperor Shōwa eventually had the Privy Council review the pact. After careful review, the Privy Council decided to ratify the pact with the addition of the phrase “inapplicable in so far as Japan is

⁸⁸See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 287.

concerned.”⁸⁹ This simple phrase would make it possible for Japan to abandon the pact in the future if a situation required the nation to do so.

The Manchurian Incident and the End of Party Prime Ministers

After the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 – 05, the Japanese had won certain economic and political rights from the Russians in Manchuria. In an effort to appease his own outspoken Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mori Kaku (1883 – 1932), as well as the militarists within the Imperial Japanese Army, Prime Minister Tanaka adopted an interventionist policy towards China.⁹⁰ This interventionist policy involved sending troops into China and protecting Japanese citizens stationed across the open port cities along the Chinese coast. In addition to this, the Japanese were primarily concerned with the area of northern China that was known as Manchuria and protecting those economic and political rights that had been obtained from the Russians. Problems began to arise for the Japanese in the region when the Guomindang (Nationalist Party), under General Chiang Kai-shek, began the process of unifying China after launching a campaign that was known as the Northern Expedition in 1926.⁹¹ General Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang quickly defeated the warlords in central China within a year, and declared Nanjing the new Chinese capital. At the beginning of 1928, Guomindang forces began to push northwards towards Beijing and clashed with Manchurian forces under the control of warlord Zhang Zuolin (1875 – 1928).

⁸⁹See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 288.

⁹⁰Ibid, 282.

⁹¹Since the collapse of the Beiyang administration of “Emperor” Yuan Shikai in 1916, China had been divided into a number of regions by various warlords. In 1920, Chinese statesmen Sun Yat-sen (1866 – 1925) established the Guomindang, a new political party which was meant to build mass support for a new regime that would be more effective in governing China.

For some time the Kwantung Army had been influenced by ultranationalist ideology. While led by men such as Colonel Doihara Kenji and Lieutenant Colonel Ishiwara Kanji, the Kwantung Army became a hotbed of ultranationalist ideology. In an effort to gain more influence in Manchuria, the ultranationalists that were within the Kwantung Army decided that it was time to rid themselves of the Manchurian warlord Zhang Zuolin and replace him with his own son, Zhang Xueliang. During the summer of 1928, while on his way back into Manchuria from Beijing, the train that was transporting the elder Zhang was blown up. The assassination of Zhang Zuolin caused quite a commotion in Japan; primarily because it was widely believed that the assassination had been carried out by the Kwantung Army. Upon learning of the assassination of the Manchurian warlord, Prime Minister Tanaka is reported to have yelled out: “What fools! They [the Kwantung Army] behave like children. They have no idea what the parent has to go through.”⁹²

As a former general in the Imperial Japanese Army, much more was expected of Prime Minister Tanaka in regards to maintaining control and discipline over the military. An imperial audience was eventually held in which the Prime Minister and the Emperor met to discuss the incident. In order to regain some composure and favor, Prime Minister Tanaka promised Emperor Shōwa to investigate the incident and punish those officers and men that were believed to be involved in the incident. Within a few days it was revealed during a second audience with Emperor Shōwa that Prime Minister Tanaka had not carried through with his promise. Emperor Shōwa then proceeded to brow beat Tanaka and ended the audience before the Prime Minister could defend himself. Disgraced, embarrassed, and clearly out of favor, Prime Minister Tanaka had no choice but to submit his resignation, which he did on 2 July 1929.

⁹²See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 288.

Knowing that the *Seiyūkai* was in trouble internally and publicly, the jūshin decided to nominate the *Minseitō* president Hamaguchi Osachi to the position of prime minister. Within hours of Tanaka submitting his resignation, Hamaguchi accepted the offer and assembled a cabinet based solely on *Minseitō* members. The primary goal of the Hamaguchi cabinet was to strengthen the overall economy.⁹³ This was achieved by enacting a series of cuts that affected both the civilian and the military. Towards the end of 1929, the *Minseitō* cabinet decided to have Japan return to the gold standard. It was believed that this would further strengthen the economy and make the *yen* equivalent to most of the Western currencies. The collapse of the *Minseitō* cabinet of Prime Minister Hamaguchi Osachi began on 14 November 1930, when Prime Minister Hamaguchi was fatally shot by an ultranationalist who attempted to assassinate the Prime Minister. Due to the severity of the wounds that the Prime Minister received, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Shidehara Kijūrō, acted as Prime Minister for several months. The final nail in the coffin for the Hamaguchi cabinet was the devastating economic effects of the Great Depression, which arrived on Japanese shores in late 1930. On 26 August 1931, Prime Minister Hamaguchi succumbed to his wounds and died. Following the death of Prime Minister Hamaguchi, the jūshin decided to give Wakatsuki Reijirō a second chance at being prime minister. Wakatsuki had been a leading member of the *Minseitō* since its formation in the summer of 1928, and upon accepting the nomination to the position of Prime Minister, Wakatsuki established a cabinet based solely of *Minseitō* members. Despite having achieved a second chance at the position of prime minister, Wakatsuki's second tenure would be as lackluster as his first.

⁹³See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 149.

Following the creation of the Wakatsuki cabinet, the region of Manchuria became of great interest to the ultranationalists within the Kwantung Army. The problem revolved primarily around the young Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang, who now commanded his father's forces. Zhang came under the sway of Chinese nationalism shortly after General Chiang Kai-shek established control over a large swathe of territory in central China and declared Nanjing the new Chinese capital. Colonel Doihara Kenji, Lieutenant Colonel Ishiwara Kanji, and Major-General Itagaki Seishirō began to worry that Zhang would eventually unite Manchuria with the Guomindang regime that was based on Nanjing. In early 1931, Lieutenant Colonel Ishiwara organized a conference that studied the region intensively in order to come up with a possible solution to the "Manchurian Problem." A stream of anti-Japanese activities occurred throughout China during the spring of 1931, angering the ultranationalists so much that after weeks of somber deliberation amongst the members of the conference, it was finally decided that if the situation continued to deteriorate, then an actual invasion would be necessary to secure the region.⁹⁴ September 28, 1931 was established as a tentative date for an invasion.

During the early hours of 18 September 1931, men from a battalion of the Kwantung Army (that was stationed for security in Mukden) sabotaged a section of the South Manchurian Railway by planting explosives and blowing up a small section of rail. The Japanese officers that were present in the region reported the incident as the result of Chinese banditry in the region and took action against the Chinese garrison in Mukden.⁹⁵ Upon learning of the fighting that had taken place in Mukden, Lieutenant Colonel Itagaki Seishirō, who was stationed in the Kwantung Army's headquarters at Port Arthur, ordered reinforcements from the main Kwantung

⁹⁴See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 302.

⁹⁵Ibid, 309 - 310.

Army that was stationed in Korea to cross the Yalu River and to support the battalions that were already stationed in Manchuria. On 19 September 1931, the commander of the Korean Army General Hayashi Senjūrō ordered his troops to mobilize and cross the Yalu River in order to support the Kwantung Army and to help further its advance. When news of the invasion of Manchuria reached Tokyo on 19 September 1931, there was little that the Wakatsuki cabinet could do. Despite having issued a censorship on the press about the incident, word of what had transpired in Manchuria eventually reached the general public. An inability to effectively deal with the incident eventually led to the collapse of the second Wakatsuki cabinet in early December 1931.

Having been devastated by the twin crises of the Great Depression and the Manchurian Incident, the jūshin decided that the *Minseitō* was undeserving for a third chance at the position of prime minister. Despite its recent setbacks during the previous decade, the *Seiyūkai* was experiencing a major resurgence. This resurgence was largely due to the *Seiyūkai*'s new president Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855 – 1932). The jūshin decided to nominate Inukai to the position of prime minister, which Inukai accepted on 13 December 1931. After accepting the nomination, Prime Minister Inukai immediately began establishing a cabinet based solely on *Seiyūkai* members. In order to show his determination to solve Japan's economic problems, Inukai's first move as prime minister was to appoint political veteran and longtime *Seiyūkai* member Takahashi Korekiyo as Minister of Finance. At the same time, Prime Minister Inukai attempted to appease the ultranationalists by appointing General Araki Sadao to the position of Minister of the Army.

In order to halt the devastating effects of the Great Depression on the Japanese economy, Minister of Finance Takahashi began to reverse the economic policies that had been undertaken

by the Minseitō cabinets of Hamaguchi and Wakatsuki. This included an embargo on gold, which prevented individuals from either buying or selling the precious metal. Once it was determined that no more specie was entering or leaving Japan, Takahashi ordered Japan to leave the gold standard.⁹⁶ In addition to this, Takahashi began a policy which essentially devalued the yen, causing it to be closer to the market price of other Western currencies. Following his appointment to the position of Minister of the Army, General Araki ordered additional reinforcements to the Kwantung and Korean Armies so that the two forces could continue with their occupation of Manchuria. By the outset of February 1932, the whole of Manchuria had been seized from Chinese control. On 15 May 1932, while waiting for a train in Tokyo, Prime Minister Inukai was assassinated by members of the *Ketsumeidan* (or Blood Pledge Corps) a secretive organization which was led by the Nichiren Buddhist priest Innoue Nisshō. This ultranationalist society had come to believe that Prime Minister Inukai was holding back the Kwantung Army from achieving its objectives in northern China, and so decided to permanently remove the impediment that the prime minister posed to further conquest in the region.

The Seminal Naval Years and Army Factionalism

The assassination of the *Seiyūkai* Prime Minister Inukai on 15 May 1932 spelled doom for any future prospects of political party members becoming prime ministers. It was at this important juncture in Japanese history when the *jūshin* lost faith in the political parties and after careful deliberation, decided that only the military seemed capable of providing the steadfast leadership that was called for in times of crisis. With approval from Prince Saionji, the *jūshin* nominated retired admiral Saitō Makoto (1858 – 1936) to the position of prime minister. The former admiral accepted the nomination and became the new Japanese prime minister on 26 May

⁹⁶See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 159.

1932. In order to avoid a political battle with the *Minseitō* and *Seiyūkai*, Prime Minister Saitō invited both parties to join his cabinet. .⁹⁷ The primary goal in forming a national unity cabinet was to solve the issue of partisanship by granting all involved in government a position within the new cabinet.

The unprecedented composition of the Saitō cabinet led to an aura of anticipation for the new cabinet. In the area of domestic affairs, the Saitō cabinet passed a comprehensive economic program that saw the expansion of the budget. This enabled the building and renovation of public works that ranged from railways to ports. In the area of foreign affairs, the Saitō cabinet extended diplomatic recognition to Manchukuo, a new state that was established in September of 1932 by the Kwantung Army. In order to further legitimize their new state, the Kwantung Army decided to utilize the last Qing emperor, Aisin-Gioro, as the head of state. After ascending to the throne of Manchukuo, Aisin-Gioro was rechristened with a new posthumous title of Kangde, but was better known in the West as Henry Puyi. On 27 March 1933, Japan decided to leave the League of Nations after that assembly had adopted the Lytton Commission's report, which criticized Japan's seizure of Manchuria. In an attempt to give Manchukuo security, Japanese officials began to negotiate with their Chinese counterparts over the issue of Manchukuo's borders. What resulted from these negotiations was the Tanggu Truce of 31 May 1933. The Tanggu Truce stipulated that a cease-fire between China and Japan would follow suit once Chinese forces had withdrawn troops some forty miles from the Tienstin-Beijing railway line. Tensions between the Republic of China and Japan were once again increasing.

As with the Yamamoto cabinet of 1913 – 14, the Saitō cabinet was brought down by a financial scandal. Following the announcement of this financial scandal, the Saitō cabinet

⁹⁷See Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 592.

decided to resign. Prince Saionji and the other jūshin decided to nominate another ex-Admiral from the Imperial Japanese Navy to the position of prime minister. On 8 July 1934, Okada Keisuke (1868 – 1952) accepted the nomination to become Japan's new prime minister, and like Saitō, Prime Minister Okada formed a national unity cabinet. During summer of 1935, the Kwantung Army succeeded in acquiring two additional agreements from Guomintang officials in northern China. The first agreement was signed on 10 June 1935 and was known as the He-Umezu Agreement. The He-Umezu Agreement forced the Guomintang to suspend all military and political activities within Hebei province (which contained the city of Beijing). The second agreement was signed on 27 June 1935 and was known as the Qin-Doihara Agreement. As with the He-Umezu Agreement, the Qin-Doihara Agreement forced the Guomintang to suspend all military and political activities within Chahar province, which was west of Manchukuo. These agreements further solidified Manchukuo's southern and western borders offering the newly created state some measure of security.

Lack of respect for the civilian government in Tokyo would continue to grow within the ranks of the Imperial Japanese Army well into the mid-1930s. At the outset of 1936, several mid-level officers from the First Division, a unit that was stationed for garrison duty in Tokyo, were planning to carry out a coup d'état against the cabinet of Prime Minister Okada. The General's Staff had actually planned to transfer the First Division to Manchuria at the end of the month, and this may have prompted the officers to speed up their plans.⁹⁸ The primary goal for these officers was to establish a "Shōwa Restoration," a term that had been utilized by renowned ultranationalist Kita Ikki. Some 1,500 men from the division, along with some civilian ultranationalists planned to seize the government district and assassinate every member of the

⁹⁸See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 359.

Okada cabinet. After removing the cabinet and seizing the government district, the leaders of the coup would establish their own cabinet and appoint advisers whom they thought would serve the Emperor better.

The coup d'état was launched on 26 February 1936, and after seizing control of much of the government district, the officers and men of the First Division carried out successful assassinations of Lord Privy Seal Saitō, Minister of Finance Takahashi, and the inspector-general of military education. Moments before the assassins reached the residence of the prime minister, Okada's wife hid him away in a closet. When the assassins stormed the Okada residence they mistakenly gunned down Okada's brother. From the outset of the coup, Emperor Shōwa was greatly displeased with the actions of the rebels: "I deeply regret that they have murdered my most loyal and trusted ministers. . . . They are trying to pull a silk rope around my neck. What they did violated both the constitution and the rescripts of the Meiji emperor. I shall never forgive them, no matter what their motives are."⁹⁹ During a counsel with the Minister of War, Emperor Shōwa is reported to have said: "This is mutiny. . . . I will give you one hour in which to suppress the rebels. Any soldier who moves Imperial troops without my orders is not my soldier, no matter what excuse he may have."¹⁰⁰ Later in the morning the Imperial Japanese Navy had discovered that ex-Admiral Saitō had been ruthlessly murdered in Tokyo, this prompted it to redeploy the First Fleet of the Imperial Japanese Navy which numbered some 40 battleships in Tokyo Bay and land marines in order to put down the rebellion.

While the Emperor was stalwart in his opposition to the coup, it took the General's Staff two days to issue reinforcements to Tokyo and to order those units to put down the rebels. Some

⁹⁹Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 439.

¹⁰⁰Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 361.

members of the General's Staff may have intentionally dragged their feet in order to bide the rebels more time to achieve their goals and ensure the success of the coup. By the 29 February 1936, however, with artillery and tanks surrounding their positions, it became clear to even mutual observers like Ishiwara Kanji that the cause of the rebels was lost. Upon surrendering, many of the mid-level officers chose to commit *hara-kiri* (or self-sacrifice) rather than face a court martial, and then a firing squad. A military court was established on the 30 February 1936 by the Emperor himself, and several officers along with renowned ultranationalist Kita Ikki were found guilty of treason and sentenced to execution. The failure of the coup d'état had a profound impact on the ultranationalist movement. Never again would the ultranationalist movement attempt to change the economic, political or societal order of Japan through violence. Another unexpected consequence of the Two Twenty-six Incident involved the *jūshin*, who as a group, would cease to play an active role in selecting potential nominees for the position of prime minister. That responsibility would fall solely on the shoulders of Prince Saionji.

Upon being appointed to the position of Minister of the Army, General Araki Sadao began making transfers and forced retirements of men who were loyal to General Ugaki Kazushige. This reprisal was in response to General Ugaki's refusal to support two proposed coup d'états that had been planned to be carried out by General Araki in March and October 1931. While ultra-nationalism was strong among the officers and men of the Imperial Japanese Army; another potent force that was rife within the army was factionalism. During the early Shōwa period there were two major factions within the Imperial Japanese Army: these were the *Kōdōhā* or Imperial Way Faction which was led by General Araki Sadao and the *Tōseiha* or Control Faction which was led by General Ugaki Kazushige. Both of these factions competed for top level positions within the government and the Imperial Japanese Army. The infighting

between these two groups was made public. . . . The influence with which the Imperial Way Faction and other ultranationalist societies had over the officers of the First Division who had initiated the coup on 26 February 1936, should not be overlooked. When the coup collapsed, so did the Imperial Way Faction and its potent influence that it had over the government and the army. The status quo returned to its former position as it was in the early 1930s, when both the Control and Imperial Way Factions competed for positions of power.

An Era of Total War

Once the dust had settled from the Two Twenty-six Incident, Prince Saionji began seeking out men who could become Japan's new prime minister and offer the necessary leadership that was needed to bring back not only stability, but discipline and order as well. Prince Saionji's first choice was Prince Konoe Fumimaro. Utilizing the excuse of ill health, Prince Konoe declined the nomination to become Japan's new prime minister. As a result of Prince Konoe's refusal of the nomination, Prince Saionji turned to his second choice: Hirota Koki (1878 – 1948). Before becoming prime minister, Hirota was a veteran politician who had acted as the Minister of Foreign Affairs under the Saitō and Okada cabinets. It was during this time that the Imperial Japanese Army exerted its influence over the government. This was done by pressuring Prime Minister Hirota into enacting several cabinet level reforms that the army wanted. The first of these involved the position of Home Minister. In order to limit their influence over the internal development of Japan, the army decided that the position of Home Minister should not be occupied by any member that belonged to a political party.

Other reforms included the continued departmentalization of the government. New departments included the Department of Railways (established in 1920) and Colonial Affairs

(established in 1928), both of which were organized under the Home Ministry.¹⁰¹ Following these reforms, Prime Minister Hirota, with approval from the army, dissolved the Cabinet Deliberative Council and set up the *Naikaku Chosakyoku* (or Cabinet Research Bureau). Largely composed of bureaucrats, this new political body sought to enact further administrative reform and the weakening of the Imperial Diet.

The army's influence was not limited to just reforms within the government. On 25 November 1936, Japan and Nazi Germany signed a treaty that was known as the Anti-Comintern Pact. The treaty stipulated that there should be joint cooperation between the two powers against the Soviet Union should it attack either nation. Following the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, the Minister of the Army Terauchi Hisaichi (1879 – 1946) planned to pressure Prime Minister Hirota into enacting additional cabinet-level reforms. Various members within the cabinet, as well as the prime minister himself saw no further reason for additional reforms. Unwilling to accept the cabinet's decision, Minister of the Army Terauchi refused to cooperate with it, and on 23 January 1937, Hirota resigned from the position of prime minister.

Following Hirota's resignation, Prince Saionji decided to nominate General Hayashi Senjūrō to the position of prime minister. On 2 February 1937, General Hayashi accepted the nomination and became the new prime minister. Like past army cabinets, Prime Minister Hayashi's cabinet was not cordial towards the mainstream political parties. In an attempt to ward off any political party threat, Prime Minister Hayashi decided to hold a general election with the hopes that it would weaken the political parties influence in the Imperial Diet.¹⁰² Realizing his error only after the election was held, and facing criticism for having called a

¹⁰¹See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 200.

¹⁰²Ibid, 204 – 205.

general election from other generals within the army, Hayashi decided to resign from the position of prime minister on 4 June 1937. Following Hayashi's resignation, Prince Saionji decided to nominate Prince Konoe to the position of prime minister for a second time. This time however, Prince Konoe accepted the nomination and became prime minister on 4 June 1937. Those that favored the "Strike North" strategy were very pleased when the Anti-Comintern Pact was signed in the fall of 1936 since it seemed to portend that Japan and the Soviet Union would eventually go to war. Those strategists wanted a war between Japan and the Soviet Union so that Japan could protect the rest of East Asia from the spreading of communism.

In the fall of 1928, the Guomindang decided to name Nanjing the new Chinese capital in an attempt to consolidate its hold over central China, which it had seized from various warlords during the Northern Expedition of 1926 – 28. At the outset of 1927, a schism occurred within the Guomindang when it decided to purge those members who belonged to the Chinese Communist Party from its ranks.¹⁰³ In an attempt to rid themselves of the Communist threat, the Guomindang launched a series of Extermination Campaigns which forced the Chinese Communist Party to evacuate its base in Jiangxi province and establish a new base in the northerly province of Yenan. In order to buy the Guomindang time to enact reforms that would strengthen the new regime, its leader, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, adopted a policy of appeasement towards the Japanese. What resulted from this foreign policy was the Manchurian Incident of 1931, as well as the Tanggu Truce of 1933, the He-Umezu and Qin-Doihara Agreements of 1935 that further encroached upon Chinese sovereignty in the north. As part of an effort to rebuild Sino-German relations in the early 1930s, Adolf Hitler dispatched a mission

¹⁰³The first president of the Guomindang, Sun Yat-sen, had allowed the fledgling Chinese Communist Party to merge with the Guomindang in order to acquire Soviet aid. This union between the two political parties is often referred to as the first United Front.

which was composed of several advisers to assist the Guomindang in undertaking statewide reforms.

Towards the end of 1936, Chiang Kai-shek felt confident enough to launch another series of Extermination Campaigns that would end the threat of the Chinese Communist Party and ordered the former Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang to attack the Communists in Yen-an. When it became clear that Zhang was reluctant to attack the Communists, Chiang personally went to Xi'an, a city south of Yen-an where Zhang had established his base of operations after being forced out of Manchuria in 1931. On 12 December 1936, the generalissimo arrived in Xi'an, and Zhang had Chiang placed under arrest. The reason why Marshal Zhang ordered the arrest of the Generalissimo remains unclear. It is more than likely however, that after having been forced out of his native Manchuria by the Japanese in 1931, Marshal Zhang had become greatly disgruntled with the policy of appeasement that Chiang had been using as his foreign policy. It is also possible that Marshal Zhang had become influenced by the Chinese Communist Party, which had established a new base in the province of Yen-an, which was just west of the city of Xi'an. What resulted from this Xi'an Incident was an alliance between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang that was known as the United Front. In addition to this alliance, Chiang Kai-shek was forced to end his policy of appeasement towards the Japanese. Chiang Kai-shek was eventually released from his imprisonment on 25 December 1936 once the generalissimo had agreed to the above terms.

On 7 July 1937, Chinese and Japanese forces clashed near the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing when Japanese troops entered the area to search for one of their own. An attempt to bring about an end to the fighting by local military personnel failed when negotiations between the two sides became impossible when Chiang, in accordance with his acceptance of the terms at

Xi'an, refused to accept any of the Japanese proposals for peace. Hostilities grew exponentially when both sides sent additional reinforcements to the city of Beijing. By 13 August 1937, hostilities expanded southward to the port city of Shanghai when Chinese soldiers attacked Japanese marines that had been stationed in the city to protect Japanese citizens and trade. Immediately following this attack, Prince Konoe sent reinforcements to the city. What resulted was the Battle of Shanghai, a four month long siege of the city that did not end until 26 November 1937.¹⁰⁴ Following its victory at Shanghai, the Imperial Japanese Army marched northwards and laid siege to the Guomintang capital of Nanjing. The capture of Nanjing on 13 December 1937 seemed to portend the inevitability of Japanese victory. To the disappointment of both military and political leaders in Tokyo, however, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek simply relocated the Guomintang capital to Wuhan, and then to Chongqing.

Throughout the following year of 1938, diplomatic missions were continuously sent to Chongqing by the Japanese but were ignored every time they were received at the new Guomintang capital. When it became clear that negotiations would not occur between the two powers, Prince Konoe began to seek other ways to find peace in China. On 3 November 1938, Prince Konoe announced that "What Japan seeks. . . . is the establishment of a new order that will insure the permanent stability of East Asia. In this lies the ultimate purpose of our present military campaign."¹⁰⁵ A secondary goal for Japan was "to perfect the joint defense against Communism, and to create a new culture and realize a close economic cohesion throughout East

¹⁰⁴See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 446.

¹⁰⁵Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 451.

Asia.”¹⁰⁶ It was at this time when Wang Jingwei (1883 – 1944), a political ally to Chiang Kai-shek within the Guomintang defected to the Japanese occupying Nanjing. Throughout the remainder of 1938 and well into 1939, Wang would act independently as a mediator between the Japanese and Chiang, attempting to negotiate a peace. Because of this service, and the fact that he was once a high ranking member of the Guomintang, the Japanese decided to promote Wang to the position of president of the “Reorganized” Government of the Republic of China on 30 March 1940. Unable to bring hostilities between China and Japan to an end, Prince Konoe decided to resign from the position of prime minister on 5 January 1939.

Before leaving the position of prime minister, Prince Konoe nominated Hiranuma Kiichirō (1867 – 19520) to be his replacement. A member of the Privy Council for most of his political career, Hiranuma accepted the nomination soon after Prince Konoe had submitted his resignation. Barely a year had lapsed into Prime Minister Hiranuma’s tenure when Tokyo received the announcement of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Upon hearing of the non-aggression clause that was within the pact, Prime Minister Hiranuma was so beside himself with disbelief that he submitted his resignation on 30 August 1939. Following Hiranuma’s announcement to resign from the position of prime minister, Prince Saionji decided to also submit his own resignation to Emperor Shōwa. The departure of Prince Saionji, who was the last of the genrō, from political life was not unexpected, for he had aged greatly during the past several years. After submitting his resignation, Prince Saionji had written that finding a potential nominee for the position of prime minister “is beyond me. If there is anyone I thought would be better than another I would

¹⁰⁶Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 451.

... speak up. . . .”¹⁰⁷ Prior to leaving his position of genrō, Prince Saionji had been prepping Kido Kōichi (1889 – 1977), who was the grandson of Kido Takayoshi with the task of assisting Emperor Shōwa in nominating qualified individuals to the position of prime minister. The jūshin were also re-established as an advisory committee after having been temporarily disbanded following the Two Twenty-six Incident.

After Hiranuma resigned from the position of prime minister, the Imperial Japanese Army took the initiative and nominated General Abe Nobuyuki (1875 – 1953) to become the new prime minister. Kido and the jūshin accepted the army’s proposal, and General Abe became the new prime minister on 30 August 1939. In an effort to stall the ever growing influence that the Imperial Japanese Army had over the government, Emperor Shōwa ordered Prime Minister Abe to choose from either Umezu Yoshijirō (1882 – 1949) or Hata Shunroku (1879 – 1962) as Minister of the Army.¹⁰⁸ The Emperor wanted to avoid any further disciplinary issues within the army and both men had served exemplary on the front when hostilities broke out between China and Japan in 1937. In addition to this, Prime Minister Abe was instructed by Emperor Shōwa to facilitate a diplomatic rapprochement with Great Britain and the United States. Before being able to accomplish anything worthy of note, Prime Minister Abe was brought down by the Imperial Diet. Sensing an opportunity to regain its lost influence over the government, the lower House of Representatives passed a motion of no-confidence on 26 December 1939. Twelve days later, on 14 January 1940 and with additional pressure to resign stemming from the army, Prime Minister Abe submitted his resignation to the jūshin.

¹⁰⁷Cited in Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 434.

¹⁰⁸See Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 212.

Having tried an army general as prime minister, the jūshin decided to give the Imperial Japanese Navy a chance at the position of prime minister. The individual that the jūshin chose to nominate to the position of prime minister was Admiral Yonai Mitsumasa (1880 – 1948), who had served as Minister of the Navy in three previously consecutive cabinets: Hayashi, Konoe, and Hiranuma. Pressure to join the Axis (which was composed of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) sharply increased when news of the fall of France reached Tokyo on 22 June 1940. Realizing that Prime Minister Yonai would not budge in his opposition towards joining the Axis, Minister of War Hata prepared to sacrifice himself for the cause of joining the Axis and orchestrated a dispute with Prime Minister Yonai which resulted in his own resignation from the cabinet.¹⁰⁹ Unable to find a replacement for Hata, Prime Minister Yonai submitted his resignation to the jūshin on 22 July 1940. After accepting the resignation of Yonai, the jūshin decided to nominate Prince Konoe to the position of prime minister for a second time later that same day.

Shortly after resigning from the position of prime minister in 1939, Prince Konoe had organized several meetings with numerous bureaucrats and intellectuals. What eventually resulted from these meetings was the creation of a new group that became known as the *Shōwa Kenkyūkai* (or Shōwa Research Association). At the outset of 1940, Prince Konoe announced that the purpose of the group was to create a new political party. One of the association's self-proclaimed Fascists, Rōyama Masamichi had written that he hoped that the new political party would be able to “achieve internal unity similar to the Nazis.”¹¹⁰ While there was extremely high optimism for a new political party that would be led by Prince Konoe, opposition to the

¹⁰⁹See Montgomery, *Imperialist Japan*, 439.

¹¹⁰See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 453.

political party that the Shōwa Research Association was planning to create arose from a wide spectrum when it became known just how much influence the political party would have over every facet of Japanese economics, politics and society. The most stalwart in their opposition to the new political party was the conservatives, making the claim that the party blasphemed the concept of *kokutai*. Ex-Prime Minister Hiranuma Kiichirō even made the assertion that the Shōwa Research Association was attempting to create a “new shogunate.”¹¹¹ Faced with such criticism, Prince Konoe had the Shōwa Research Association reconsider the purpose of the political party. After holding several meetings throughout the summer of 1940, the association decided that the ultimate goal of the political party was to strengthen national unity and end partisanship in the Imperial Diet.

In anticipation of the eventual creation of the new political party, the *Seiyūkai* voluntarily dissolved itself on 30 July 1940. The *Minseitō* followed suit on 15 August 1940. The dissolution of the two mainstream opposition political parties ensured that the new political party would have complete control over the lower House of Representatives. On 12 October 1940, Prince Konoe and the other members of the Shōwa Research Association approved the formal establishment of the *Taisei Yokusankei* (or Imperial Rule Assistance Association).¹¹² Upon announcing the establishment of the I.R.A.A., Prince Konoe made the following address to the Japanese people via radio:

What the new structure aims at is the perfection of a political system founded on the principle of the unity of sovereign and subject, under which the will and ideas of those who govern will be made known to those who are governed for the guidance of the latter; and the will and ideas of those who are governed will be communicated to those who govern. In other words, the function of government is to see that the people are enabled to find each his proper place; the duty of the

¹¹¹See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 454.

¹¹²Henceforth known as I.R.A.A.

subject is to devotedly serve the throne. This constitutes the essence of our national polity, which predicates loyalty as a supreme virtue existing between sovereign and subjects. . . .¹¹³

With this, it can be seen that the original political party that the Shōwa Research Association had planned to create had been drastically changed during the final months of the groups meetings. It had been replaced by a political party that was to support, not supersede the current and existing structures that comprised of Japan.

A brief examination of Japanese society in the 1930s will show that there was no need for a new mass political party like the one that the Shōwa Research Association had been planning to create, since Japanese society was already adhering to several of the same aspects that had been major components within other fascist states found in Europe. This change in Japanese society was being undertaken because there was a widespread belief among ultranationalists that uncontrolled Westernization was deteriorating the very heart and soul of Japan.¹¹⁴ Because of this belief, ultranationalists began to persuade government officials to implement necessary changes that they felt would improve Japanese society. On 1 January 1936, the government launched the Dōmei News Agency; a news company largely responsible for circulating government controlled printed newspaper. The government also attempted to control the usage of household radios by limiting ownership to one, and stressing the need to listen to public radios, with which the government controlled the content.¹¹⁵ The greatest example of the government imposing change on Japanese society occurred in March of 1937, when the Ministry of Education published the work *Kokutai no Hongi* or “Fundamentals of Our National Polity.”

¹¹³Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 998.

¹¹⁴This is a common viewpoint that is held by many Japanese historians and is often regarded as fact.

¹¹⁵See McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 466 – 467.

As mentioned in chapter 3, *Kokutai no Hongi* provided the ideological basis for many ultranationalists and their societies. The text of *Kokutai no Hongi* stressed upon certain aspects that the Ministry of Education thought were important, aspects which were necessary for allowing Japan to return to its :

Loyalty means to revere the emperor as [our] pivot and to follow him implicitly. By implicit obedience is meant casting ourselves aside and serving the emperor intently. To walk this Way of loyalty is the sole Way in which we subjects may “live” and the fountainhead of all energy. . . . In our country, filial piety is a Way of the highest importance. Filial piety originates with one’s family as its basis and, in its larger sense, has the nation as its foundation. The direct object of filial piety is one’s parents, but in its relationship with the emperor finds a place within loyalty.¹¹⁶

From this, it can be seen that the authors of *Kokutai no Hongi* clearly felt that there were certain aspects lacking within the mindset of the Japanese people. In order to improve the state and the people, *Kokutai no Hongi* stressed upon the need of every Japanese subject to be steadfast in his loyalty and obedience to the Emperor. In addition to this, the Confucian concept of filial piety was touched upon in order to improve the family structure, which was an important social unit in Japanese society. Despite all of this, the importance of the Emperor and his role as the supreme authority throughout the country remained a key cornerstone of the concept of kokutai. This text, along with other attempts made by the government in its push to control mass media clearly shows how much influence other fascist countries had on the Japanese.

On 22 July 1940, Prince Konoe accepted the nomination from the jūshin to become Japan’s new prime minister. While Prince Konoe did his best to ensure that the home front was secure through the establishment of the I.R.A.A., his second tenure as prime minister was to be dominated by foreign affairs. When forming his cabinet, Prince Konoe decided to rely on Matsuoka Yōsuke as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Matsuoka was the Japanese ambassador who

¹¹⁶Cited in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 969 – 970.

led Japan out of the League of Nations in 1933. On 27 September 1940, Minister of Foreign Affairs Matsuoka approved the signing of the Tripartite Pact. As with its predecessor the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936, the Tripartite Pact was an alliance of Japan, Germany and Italy that guaranteed cooperation between all signatories should the Soviet Union launch an attack against any of the countries that were involved with the pact.

Factionalism, as it had occurred during the early 1930s, became a major problem within the ranks of the Imperial Japanese Army in the early 1940s. This time however, the dispute was over strategy, not policy. Two schools of thought presented themselves to army commanders. The first strategy was known as “Strike North” and would force Japan into a war against the Soviet Union. The second strategy was known as “Strike South” and proposed that both the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy work together to end the “ABD” (American, British and Dutch) encirclement of the Japanese home islands by seizing the Pacific islands that made up their colonial empires in the Pacific. Ever mindful of the ongoing war with Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang on the Asian mainland, military leaders saw great potential in the “Strike South” strategy in that it would enable the military to cut Chiang from receiving critical Western aid, and also provide Japan with new territories with which it could exploit for the war effort. Having embraced the “Strike South” strategy for its potential, the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy seized control of the French colony of Indochina in September of 1940.

Following the seizure of French Indochina in September of 1940, the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy began making preparations for further conquests in the South Pacific for the following year. As a sign of protest to Japanese aggression in the region, the United States initiated economic sanctions which prevented Japan from purchasing iron and oil. This severely strained the Japanese wartime economy. In order to ease the economic stranglehold, Emperor

Shōwa ordered Prince Konoe, who was still acting as prime minister, to find a diplomatic solution to the rising tension between the Japan and the United States. Unable to curb the military's hawkish stance towards the United States or devise a diplomatic solution to the economic sanctions, Prince Konoe decided to submit his resignation to the jūshin on 18 October 1941. Before departing from the position of prime minister, Prince Konoe suggested to the jūshin that they nominate his own Minister of War Hideki Tōjō (1884 – 1948) as his replacement. The jūshin agreed to do so, and on the same day that Prince Konoe submitted his resignation, the jūshin nominated the fiery General Hideki Tōjō to the position of prime minister. After accepting the nomination to become Japan's new prime minister, General Hideki approved the full implementation of the "Strike South" strategy, which resulted in the Japanese conquest of all of the colonial territories of Great Britain and the Netherlands in the south Pacific. The stage was thus set for an eventual conflict between Japan and the United States. While the Japanese may have felt secure as a result of the internal transformation that had taken place during the 1930s, it was about to face yet another enemy in a war that it could not hope to win.

CONCLUSION

While the establishment of the Meiji political structure by Itō Hirobumi was a resounding success, the one item that was severely lacking in the new political structure was a sense of nationalism. The Genrō compensated for this by developing the concept of kokutai (or national polity) in the 1890s. A series of conflicts, the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95, the Russo-Japanese War of 1904 – 05, and the First World War, all contributed to the development of Japanese nationalism as well as an imperialist mentality. By the 1930s, many Japanese had succumbed to the allurements of ultra-nationalism, none more so than those that occupied positions within the Imperial Japanese military. The continuing development of nationalism, along with a growing sense of imperialism, led Japan to adopt an aggressive foreign policy towards the Asian mainland, eventually resulting in the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937 – 45. The issue of whether or not historians should label Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa period has been discussed by many historians, and nearly every one of them has tried to come up with a reason to either abandon or keep the label. The purpose of this thesis was to utilize a basic concept of fascism and to show how it could still be applied to Japan during the early Shōwa period. However, if the fascist label is inappropriate to use as some historians suggest, then perhaps a new political label is required all together.

“At first glance the course of Japanese history in the 1930s differs so radically from that of the decade before that it presumes a profound discontinuity. Terms like ‘military takeover’ or ‘fascism’ have been employed to complicate interpretation and understanding.”¹¹⁷ That was historian Marius B. Jansen, introducing the reader to the 1930s in his *The Making of Modern Japan*. After acknowledging the issue, Jansen does not investigate into it any further, and

¹¹⁷Cited in Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, 576.

refrains from using the fascist label for Japan during the time period and throughout his work. In his *Japan: A Modern History*, historian James L. McClain wrote: “Yet, in the end, Japan never did experience an epoch of fascism. There were Japanese who considered themselves fascists, just as there were individuals such as Rōyama Masamichi who were attracted by fascist ideology.” Unlike Jansen, McClain clearly stated his position on the issue of whether or not Japan should be labeled as a fascist state during the early Shōwa period, and disagrees with its continued usage. Despite all of this, McClain does not offer any alternatives with which to replace the fascist label.

In his *Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation, 1868 – 2000*, historian Richard Sims has much to say in regards to the issue of fascism and its role in Japan during the early Shōwa period. Sims wrote: “In the late 1930s, moreover, the attraction of what has sometimes been called ‘military fascism’ drew some support away from the other wings of the nationalist movement and even from the socialist Shakai Taishuto.”¹¹⁸ After discussing the events which transpired during the Two Twenty-six Incident, Sims would go on to write:

In a classic analysis Maruyama Masao maintained that the incident resulted in the defeat of ‘fascism from below.’ Whereas he regarded this as paving the way for ‘fascism from above’, though, others have seen it as ushering in a ‘conservative reaffirmation.’ Both these views now seem oversimplified. Even if it is accepted that Japan experienced fascism – a view which most Western scholars and a growing number of Japanese would not endorse – it must be noted that the young officers saw themselves as radical Japanists, not fascists.¹¹⁹

By claiming that the rebels of the Two Twenty-six Incident were nothing more than radical Japanists, Sims is simply claiming that the rebels were nothing more than another branch of the ultranationalist movement. Historian Michael Montgomery, who wrote *Imperialist Japan: The*

¹¹⁸Cited in Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 185.

¹¹⁹Ibid, 197 – 8.

Yen to Dominate, does not mention fascism, or the issue of labeling Japan a fascist state at all throughout his work. Per the title of his book, perhaps Montgomery believes that Japan was nothing more than another imperialist nation that harbored strong nationalist sentiments.

In the beginning of their article “Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan: The Failure of a Concept,” historians Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto introduced the reader to the topic of their article by writing:

Old paradigms never die; they just fade away, though often not soon enough. Historians and political scientists have managed to abandon a number of misleading descriptive or analytical concepts they had once used in talking about pre-war Japanese politics — ‘liberalism’ and ‘democracy,’ for example. But the metaphor of fascism persists, which is surprising, given the conceptual and empirical difficulties involved.¹²⁰

After introducing the issue of labeling Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa period, Duus and Okimoto go on to write: “Or better yet, perhaps we should abandon the paradigm of fascism as one that has served its purpose but is no longer particularly useful. The application of the concept to Japan in the 1930s has certainly helped us to ask better questions, but it is doubtful that it can help build any better models or suggest any new lines of inquiry.”¹²¹ The bulk of Duus and Okimoto’s article is primarily concerned with the ruling elite and how that elite utilized its power to give the government the right to intervene within Japanese economics and society. Duus and Okimoto eventually discussed the paradigm of “corporatism.” According to the two historians, corporatism “encompasses a wide array of approaches, but which emphasizes the vigorous role played by the state as the dominant actor in the political system.”¹²² In the final

¹²⁰Cited in Peter Duus and Daniel I. Okimoto, “Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (November 1979): 65.

¹²¹*Ibid*, 67.

¹²²*Ibid*, 72.

analysis of their article, Duus and Okimoto argue that the ruling elite allowed the government to intervene in the economy with the hopes that the government would be better able to manage both big business and scarce resources for the ongoing war in China. The two historians eventually come to the conclusion that Japan during the early Shōwa period was nothing more than a state that featured strict managerial policies, and that the time to move on from the fascist label is now.

In his “A New Look at the Problem of ‘Japanese Fascism,’” historian George M. Wilson also argued against the continued use of the fascist label. Rather than begin his article with the definitional problems of fascism as Duus and Okimoto had done with theirs, Wilson introduces the reader to the issue of labeling Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa period by using Soviet scholarship. Combined with Marxist ideology, Soviet scholarship adds a whole new style to the discussion for as Soviet scholar I. A. Latyshev had written:

The specific character of the . . . fascist regime in Japan lay in that absolute monarchy was its form, while the leaders of the Japanese military came forward in the role of fascist dictators [and were] the most ardent servants of the zaibatsu and landlords, the cruelest butchers of the Japanese people. Therefore, in order to set off and underline the specific character of the fascist dictatorship in Japan, [we may] call it monarcho-fascist dictatorship, or military-fascist dictatorship.¹²³

The second item that Wilson touches upon within his article is known as the “authoritarian-modernization thesis.” Wilson writes: “Is it not proper, this argument asks, to label as fascist all those governments which in the process of rapid and paternal industrialization, encounter domestic and foreign crises that lead them to pursue policies of repression at home and aggressive expansion abroad?”¹²⁴ The “authoritarian-modernization thesis” may seem to be an

¹²³Cited in George M. Wilson, “A New Look at the Problem of ‘Japanese Fascism,’” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (July 1968): 402.

¹²⁴Cited in Wilson, “Japanese Fascism,” 404.

ideal definition of fascism, it is incomplete however, for it lacks two important components of fascist ideology: (1) ultra-nationalism and (2) a cult of personality. In the final analysis of his article, Wilson stated that one should continue the study of the issue primarily through comparative studies, and attributes the failure of fascism as a revolutionary political movement to the strength of the ruling elite that had been established since Meiji times.

As with the other two journal articles already mentioned, Miles Fletcher's "Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Shōwa Japan," examines the issue of labeling Japan a fascist state during the early Shōwa period. Unlike the other two journal articles however, Fletcher favors keeping the fascist label. Following his argument for the continued use of the fascist label, Fletcher goes into some of the Japanese scholarship that deals with the issue of labeling Japan a fascist state.

After briefly examining the work of several Japanese academics, Fletcher wrote:

The analyses of fascism by Maruyama, Tōyama, and Ōuchi reveal just how difficult it is to apply the concept of fascism to pre-war Japan at the level of political institutions. Because the regime was oppressive, all three scholars agree that Japan was fascist. But they admit that what they call Japanese fascism bore little resemblance to the rise of the Fascist Party in Italy, or the Nazi Party in Germany. Indeed, in order to make the label of fascism fit, they have to argue that the Japanese pattern constituted a special case.¹²⁵

After this cursory mention of Japanese scholarship, Fletcher devotes the rest of his article to the Shōwa Kenkyūkai (or Shōwa Research Association) and a trio of intellectuals. These three intellectuals were Rōyama Masamichi, Ryū Shintarō, and Miki Kiyoshi. All three of these intellectuals conducted research in the areas of economics, and politics and developed ideas for the Shōwa Research Association which they thought, if applied to Japan, would vastly improve the stature of the nation. Fletcher had written that:

¹²⁵Cited in Miles Fletcher, "Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Shōwa Japan," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (November 1979): 40.

Rōyama and other members of the Shōwa Research Association were convinced, however, that a new domestic order was necessary to strengthen Japan economically, and politically before an Asian regional bloc could be fashioned. During 1939 and 1940, the Association drafted plans for economic and political reform that drew heavily upon the ideas of Miki, Ryū, and Rōyama. The plans were issued as pamphlets and circulated publicly.¹²⁶

In order to enact these reforms, the Shōwa Research Association was prepared to utilize the immense prestige of its founder Prince Konoe, who was due to become the new prime minister in the fall of 1940. Once Prince Konoe became prime minister however, support for the plans that the Shōwa Research Association had drafted and were preparing to enact quickly fell apart in the face of conservative opposition. Fletcher wrote: “The complete defeat of the New Order Movement as it was planned by the Shōwa Research Association revealed the great political power held by conservative elements of Japan’s modern elite.”¹²⁷ In his final analysis, Fletcher attributed the failure of fascism as a political movement in Japan to the Shōwa Research Association and its inability to enact any of its economic or political reforms.

The similarities and differences between Japan and other fascist nations are indeed many. And when examining a complex issue such as the one that this thesis is attempting, it sometimes helps to approach through the use of comparative studies. Before arguing his case against the continued use of the fascist label, McClain had used a comparative approach when he introduced the issue to the reader:

[Yoshino Sakuzō’s] comments serve as a reminder that Japan had historical commonalities with Germany and Italy: All three countries began to develop capitalist economies at a relatively late date; in each, democracy enjoyed only a brief and uneasy ascendancy as it fought to put down roots even while those countries struggled to overcome severe economic crises; and all three feared that

¹²⁶Cited in Fletcher, “Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Shōwa Japan,” 56 – 57.

¹²⁷Ibid, 61.

the British or Americans would stymie their aspirations for empire, so necessary for economic self-sufficiency.¹²⁸

After writing this, McClain then stated his position against the continued use of the fascist label, as mentioned above. When writing about Prince Konoe and the beginning of his second tenure as prime minister, Sims also utilized a comparative approach in his work, and wrote: “The label ‘fascist’ has been applied rather sweepingly by Japanese historians writing on the pre-war period, but in this particular case it is impossible to ignore the similarities between some of the advocates of a new order and the followers of Hitler and Mussolini.”¹²⁹ According to historian George M. Wilson, Japanese Marxist scholar Tanaka Sōgorō had written that Japan was similar to Italy and Germany in that all were: “middle countries, strong enough to be able to undertake fascism’s basic actions – internal repression and external aggression – but not great powers.”¹³⁰ When Tanaka’s definition is coupled with the components of ultra-nationalism and a cult of a supreme leader, one can easily see how the fascist label can still be applied to Japan.

Many historians have suggested that the differences between Japan and other fascist nations outweigh the similarities. In the beginning of their article, Duus and Okimoto write that Japanese historian Maruyama Masao “points out that in Japan there was no mass movement and no cult of the supreme leader, but a heavy stress on agrarianism, a central role for military officers, and so forth.”¹³¹ Later within his article, Wilson also pointed out that “There were in Japan no parallels for the Nazi and Fascist parties, their party armies, and their heroic “leaders”, the Führer and Duce. Japanese government operated as before under the control of the same

¹²⁸Cited in McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, 455.

¹²⁹Cited in Sims, *Japanese Political History*, 217.

¹³⁰Cited in Wilson, “Japanese Fascism,” 403 – 404.

¹³¹Cited in Duus and Okimoto, “Fascism and the History of Pre-War Japan,” 66.

elites, chosen largely among Tokyo Imperial University graduates, and in the military. . . .”¹³²

Even Miles Fletcher, who favored keeping the fascist label, wrote that “there were no similarities between the institutions of Nazi Germany and those of early Shōwa Japan. No single mass party in Japan served as an analogue to the National Socialist Party in Germany, no dictator seized power, and no one ideology became dominant.”¹³³ While it is certainly true that the I.R.A.A. was not as successful as the Nazi or fascist parties in retaining its power, to completely disregard it as an un-important movement within Japanese society would be wrong, for it was still heavily involved in massing support for the war in China. The other major difference is largely concerned with the manner in which fascism arose in each country. In both Germany and Italy, fascism came as a result of the political party leaders obtaining power through election or nomination, whereas in Japan, the Shōwa Research Association had attempted to impose fascism by using the prestige and leadership of its top ranking member, Prince Konoe.

Through its various articles, the Meiji Constitution was designed to protect imperial sovereignty. This was achieved by limiting the powers and responsibilities of the lower House of Representatives. Despite this, political partisanship became endemic during the early years of the Meiji political systems operation. That partisanship existed between the opposition political parties, and the ruling Sat-chō Clique. Four years after its initial startup, the Meiji political structure was still locked in a bitter battle between these two groups. The environment within which the Meiji political structure found itself greatly changed with the outbreak of the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894 – 95. Strong nationalist sentiment within the lower House of Representatives compelled the opposition political parties to cooperate with the ruling Sat-chō

¹³²Cited in Wilson, “Japanese Fascism,” 406.

¹³³Cited in Fletcher, “Intellectuals and Fascism in Early Shōwa Japan,” 40.

Clique, and the opposition political parties allowed the passing of a large wartime budget. Once the war was concluded, however, partisanship returned to end the cordial relationship that had existed between the Sat-chō Clique and the political parties.

In order to put an end to the partisanship, Genrō Itō Hirobumi, the architect of the Meiji political structure, and a leading member of the Sat-chō Clique, decided to break from the ruling elite's policy of transcendentalism and created his own political party. That party was officially established on 15 September 1900, and was known as the *Rikken Seiyūkai*. Unlike the original opposition parties, the *Rikken Seiyūkai* was not a part of the populist Jiyū Minken Undō, but it could overcome any obstacle presented to it by its enemies by relying on the immense prestige of its founder, Genrō Itō. Historians Peter Duus and R. P. G. Steven attribute the creation of a successful political party to the leadership of that political party and whether or not it was a part of the ruling elite. Thirteen years later, on 23 December 1913, Katsura Tarō, a former general in the Imperial Japanese Army, decided to create the *Rikken Dōshikai*. The eventual establishment of two new mainstream political parties by members of the ruling Sat-chō Clique demonstrated just how important it was to have a loyal bloc within the lower House of Representatives despite its weakened powers.

Unlike Genrō Itō, who wanted to take part in the political structure that he had created and ensure its success, Genrō Yamagata Aritomo was reluctant to allow the lower House of Representatives the ability to have even a minute impact on important matters of state. The partisanship which gripped the lower House of Representatives during the first years of its operation had a profound impact on Genrō Yamagata, which led to feelings of deep mistrust towards the legislative body. Widely recognized as the father of the Imperial Japanese Army, Genrō Yamagata was also one of the staunchest defenders of the state that Genrō Itō had created.

While he served as prime minister for a second time from 1898 – 1900, Genrō Yamagata had two imperial ordinances passed. The first imperial ordinance was known as the Peace Police Law of 1900, and like its predecessor the Peace Preservation Law of 1887, it dealt with political dissent and unrest. The second imperial ordinance that was passed involved the position of Minister of the Army / Navy, and restricted those positions to active duty Generals / Admirals. Both of these ordinances had a profound impact on Japanese history, in that the Peace Preservation Law oppressed any activity that seemed to threaten the livelihood of the state, and the military requirements for the positions of Minister of the Army / Navy ensured the independence of those positions from civilian meddling.

Apart from ensuring that the political structure worked as stipulated by the Meiji Constitution, one of the most grueling tasks that the genrō had to perform involved finding potential nominees for the position of prime minister. After the death of Matsukata Masayoshi in 1924, that responsibility lay solely with Prince Saionji. Some may criticize Prince Saionji and the manner in how he chose men for the position of prime minister, but one must remember that not every candidate was ideal, and the decision to choose a man for the position was a daunting as well as exhausting task. Despite having been president of the Seiyūkai and a long-time standing member of the party, Prince Saionji had no qualms of appointing military personnel or rival political party members to the position of prime minister. As a genrō, the first duty of Prince Saionji was to find men who he felt could lead the country. If his fellow Seiyūkai members were not up for the challenge, then he looked elsewhere for leadership. To the detriment of constitutionalism in pre-war Japan, this was often found in the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy.

It was during the early reign of Emperor Shōwa when great changes began to occur that would eventually affect not only Japan itself, but of every Japanese living within it. The assassination of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi on 15 May 1932, and the Manchurian Incident of 1931, are often seen as the starting points to when the military began to assert itself on the Meiji political structure. It was also during this time, that ultra-nationalism and many of the societies that espoused it became active. The importance that many ultranationalists and regular Japanese placed upon the concept of kokutai enables one to claim this as Japan's "cult of the supreme leader." The idolization and worship that Emperor Shōwa received from his subjects can certainly be construed as such. Despite this, Emperor Shōwa only assumed a leadership role once throughout his reign, and that was when the Two Twenty-six Incident had incapacitated the cabinet. Once the incident had been concluded, Emperor Shōwa relinquished his powers back to the cabinet.

Those historians who condemn the continued use of the fascist label and offer no substantial replacements should be ashamed of themselves. If one cannot label Japan a fascist state through its internal political institutions as some historians suggest, then one must look towards policies at the international and national level. Labels such as authoritarian or military dictatorship should be disregarded for being too generic. The idea that Japan was nothing more than another nation-state with strict managerial policies as proposed by Duus and Okimoto should also be discounted since it fails to acknowledge the importance of internal oppression and foreign aggression. While it is true that Japan did not possess a dictator, or a single party-state as the model existed in Germany and Italy, it nonetheless acquired other components of fascist ideology. These other components were integral parts of fascist ideology and included ultra-nationalism, an aggressive foreign policy, and internal oppression. Those components alone

should enable historians to continue applying and using the fascist label to early Shōwa Japan. In order to make matters easier, perhaps historians should follow in the footsteps of Michael Montgomery and adopt the imperialist label for Japan for the entire pre-war period. For as Miles Fletcher had pointed out, the Shōwa Research Association was unable to enact any of its economic or political reforms due to opposition from conservative forces within the ruling elite, and no significant changes had occurred within Japan's political structure. Due to the strength of the similarities within the areas of domestic and foreign policy between Japan and other fascist nations, the fascist label can and should still be applied to describe early Shōwa Japan.

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