

The Strategy of the Maritime Nation Japan:  
From Yukichi Fukuzawa to Shigeru Yoshida

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Introduction

As will be immediately evident, the title of this paper is borrowed from Kōsaka Masataka's *The Vision of Japan as a Maritime Nation*.<sup>1</sup> Kosaka's book was critical of the advocates of unarmed neutrality who dominated the postwar intellectual scene in Japan. It argued that Japan should strive to develop as a maritime trading nation, to which end it needed to maintain a minimum level of defense capability, the security relationship with the United States being one valid means of accomplishing that goal.

Of course, the vision of Japan as a maritime trading nation goes back to before the war. However, little systematic research has been done on these prewar views,<sup>2</sup> although there has been the occasional isolated study. This is because historians have tended to focus on the contrast between realism versus idealism, expansionism or imperialism versus "little Japan-ism" or anti-imperialism, and the argument of whether the army should be given preference over the navy, or vice versa. Prewar views of Japan as a maritime trading nation have thus largely fallen between the cracks.

This paper traces the evolution of the view that Japan should develop as a maritime trading nation, taking as its point of departure the last years of the Tokugawa and early years of the Meiji period. It also examines what military strategies were proposed in pursuit of that goal. It concludes by briefly considering the relevance of that debate for Japan today.

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<sup>1</sup> Masataka Kōsaka, *Kaiyō Kokka Nihon no Kōsō* (The Vision of Japan as a Maritime Nation) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> One exception is Akira Irie, "Heiwateki Hatten Shugi to Nihon" (The Ideology of Peaceful Development and Japan) (*Chuōkōron*, Oct. 1969).

## 1. The Significance of Naval Power in the Final Years of the Tokugawa Period and at the Time of the Restoration

The shock of western intrusion at the end of the Tokugawa period was above all the shock of confronting modern naval power. It was an objective truth that the “black ships,” as Western naval vessels were then known, were militarily far superior.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, not everyone regarded that superiority as a serious threat to their country’s security. In Qing-Dynasty China and Korea, that realization was late to take root and be recognized widely. Japan, by contrast, was immediately aware of the danger that the black ships posed, for two reasons. First, Japan’s geographical features and socioeconomic conditions made it highly vulnerable to Western naval power. Second, the country’s leaders, being from the warrior class, were accustomed to seeing things within a military framework.

At the time, Japan already possessed a highly integrated national market. The whole country was united by means of a series of coastal navigation routes converging on Ōsaka. Hence the black ships presented a direct threat to all of Japan. They were also able to menace the political heart of the country by penetrating deep into Edo Bay.

For China, on the other hand, the threat of the West was largely confined to the southern regions. The Opium War (1840-42) was fought south of Nanjing, and the ports that China was forced to open in consequence of its defeat were all located south of Shanghai. It was not until the *Arrow* War of 1856-60 that Beijing was threatened and occupied. Moreover, the Chinese economy as a whole depended little on coastal trade. In the case of Korea, Seoul could be reached from the ocean via the Han River, but any foreign attacker faced considerable difficulties, for the estuary was long and shallow. This geographical configuration was one of the chief reasons that the Korean government, committed to a policy of “expelling the barbarians,” was able to repel a French fleet in 1866 and an American fleet in 1871. In addition, the Korean economy as a whole was neither highly integrated nor very dependent on coastal navigation.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Japan’s warrior class was keenly aware of how militarily effective the black ships were. Toshiakira Kawaji, who was appointed

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<sup>3</sup> C. M. Cipolla, *Guns, Sails and Empires: Technological Innovation and the Early Phases of European Expansion* (Pantheon Books, 1965).

negotiator with the Russian admiral E.V. Putiatin, was amazed at the sheer audacity of the Russian: Putiatin had traveled halfway around the world to Japan, thought nothing of setting sail in storms into which no Japanese would have dared to venture out, and even tried to attack a stronger Anglo-French naval force in the midst of the Crimean War. A “magnificent hero” was how Kawaji effusively described him.<sup>4</sup> While Japan’s leaders hailed from the warrior class, those of China and Korea were mandarins who were not very familiar with thinking in military terms.

In these circumstances Japan threw considerable resources into purchasing and building modern ships. At the time of Commodore Perry’s arrival Japan did not own a single Western-style vessel, but in the fifteen subsequent years leading up to the Restoration it was to acquire some 190. These varied widely in tonnage and capabilities. Japan’s first modern vessel, the *Kankōmaru*, a gift from Holland, weighed 400 tons, and the *Kanrinmaru*, which crossed the Pacific, weighed 250-350 tons. By the end of the Tokugawa period, however, at least one vessel, the *Kaiyōmaru*, reached 2,700 tons.<sup>5</sup>

Whether these ships really possessed sufficient combat capability is debatable. Their transport capacity, however, had a decisive effect on political developments during the waning days of the Bakufu. The domain of Satsuma was able to exercise great influence on the national scene because it possessed vessels capable of transporting over a thousand troops each. The repeated visits of the Shogunate to the nominal capital of Kyoto were all made by sea. When Enomoto Takeaki chose to make a final stand against the new government in the fortress of Hakodate, he did so in the belief that he enjoyed naval superiority.

Modern ships also played a key role in the politics of the early Meiji period. In 1874 Japan launched its first overseas military expedition with the dispatch of an armed force to Taiwan, something that would have been impossible without a fairly substantial fleet. During the Satsuma Rebellion the government’s armies had enjoyed superiority because of the ease with which it was able to transport men and

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<sup>4</sup> Seizaburō Satō, “Kawaji Toshiakira,” in Satō, *Shi no Chōyaku o Koete* (Beyond the Leap of Death) (Toshi Shuppansha, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Park Young June, “Bakumatsuki no Kaigun Kensetsu Saikō: Katsu Kaishū no ‘Sempu’ Saikentō to ‘Kaigun Kakumei’ no Kasetsu” (A Reconsideration of Navy Construction at the End of the Tokugawa Period: A Reexamination of Katsu Kaishū’s “Sempu” and the Hypothesis of a “Naval Revolution”), in *Gunji Shigaku* (The Journal of Military History) No. 150 (Vol. 38, No. 2 (Sept. 2002)). This is an excellent study that offers an important new perspective on Japanese naval history starting with a reexamination of Katsu Kaishū’s writings, which are considered seminal to any understanding of naval construction in the waning days of the Bakufu.

materiel by sea. Although the government's land forces were superior, if it had not enjoyed an overwhelming advantage in sea transport as well, Saigō's troops could probably have overrun the whole of Kyūshū, putting the new government in a difficult political position. As is well known, Mitsubishi played a prominent role in both the Taiwan expedition and the Satsuma Rebellion, chalking up massive profits in the process.

As these examples suggest, the Meiji government gave priority not just to constructing modern vessels but also to encouraging development in the related fields of sea transport, trade and industry. In the field of sea transport, for example, it gave preferential treatment to Mitsubishi, which as a result was able to drive foreign vessels out of Japanese coastal waters and expand to shipping routes in Asia. At the same time the government encouraged direct exports with the intention of ensuring that the profits from trade went into Japanese pockets. Right in the middle of the Satsuma Rebellion, Toshimichi Ōkubo boldly decided to hold Japan's first domestic industrial exhibition; that demonstrates that Ōkubo was not merely satisfied with pacifying the country but was also determined to promote its industrial development.

## 2. Mid-Meiji Arguments for Expanding the Navy and Becoming a Maritime Power

In the 1880s Japan went into conflicts with China over the issue of Korea. However, in 1882 and again in 1884 it was outmaneuvered by the Chinese in two political struggles in Korea (the so-called Jingo and Kōshin incidents). The biggest reason for these setbacks was Japan's naval inferiority. At the time China possessed several 7,000-ton-class warships such as the *Zhenyuan* and *Dingyuan*. These were state-of-the-art vessels for the day, while the best that Japan could muster were ships in the 4,000-ton class. In 1886 China's Beiyang Fleet, to which these giant warships belonged, visited Japan and caused diplomatic problems when its sailors went on a rampage.

Until that point Japan had held back on building up its navy, due to the deflationary policies of Matsukata Masayoshi. However, when it became clear that Japan had fallen behind China in this regard, it launched an ambitious shipbuilding program. The biggest subject of debate during the Diet's first few years (1890-1894) was the question of strengthening the military, especially the navy.

In November 1890, when Prime Minister Aritomo Yamagata delivered a policy speech during the first session of the Imperial Diet, he made the famous remark that Japan needed to assert influence over its “line of interest” as well as defend its “line of sovereignty.” It is intriguing that, while Yamagata was the senior figure in the army, the first step to asserting control over Japan’s “line of interest” would have to be an expansion of the navy.

The Sino-Japanese War ended in victory for Japan in 1895, but as a result of the so-called Triple Intervention Japan was forced to return the Liaodong Peninsula to China. Then, in 1898, Russia, France and Germany, the three countries that had organized the intervention, led the rush to win territorial leases from the Chinese government, and China’s breakup appeared imminent.

The member of the intellectuals who most vociferously supported the race with China and then Russia to expand the navy was Yukichi Fukuzawa. He became a spirited advocate of a military buildup in the aftermath of the Jingo incident of 1882<sup>6</sup> and he emphasized in particular the importance of strengthening the navy rather than the army.<sup>7</sup> It is well known how he later became an enthusiastic supporter of the 1894 war with China. He donated ¥10,000 out of his own pocket to the war effort, the third largest donation from anyone in the country. It was a truly extraordinary amount for a private individual who was neither a former feudal lord nor a leader of the *zaibatsu* or financial conglomerates.<sup>8</sup>

Fukuzawa accepted the Triple Intervention that followed the Sino-Japanese War, recognizing that there was no other choice, and continued to advocate further building up the navy. In military matters, he argued, balance was important: in the case of a continental state, the military power of its neighbors served as the benchmark, but Japan, being surrounded by water, needed to achieve predominance in the East, particularly vis-à-vis Russia, France and Germany. To that end, he contended, Japan should spend all the war indemnity it received from China on expanding the navy and even raise taxes if need be.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Tōyō no Seiryaku Hatashite Ikansen” (What Political Strategy to Adopt in the East) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Dec. 7-12, 1882), in *Fukuzawa Yukichi Zenshū* (Complete Works of Yukichi Fukuzawa; hereafter abbreviated as *Zenshū*), Vol. 8 (Iwanami Shoten, 1958);

<sup>7</sup> “Heibi Kakuchō” (Military Expansion) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Dec. 11, 1885), in *Zenshū* Vol. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Masafumi Tomita, *Kōshō: Fukuzawa Yukichi* (A Historical Investigation of Yukichi Fukuzawa), Vol. 2 (Iwanami Shoten, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> “Tada Kannin Subeshi” (We Must But Endure) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Jun. 1, 1895), “Nisshin Dōmei Tōtei Okonawaru Bekarazu” (Sino-Japanese Alliance Absolutely Out of the Question) (*ibid.*, Jun. 6, 1895), “Nihon to Eikoku no Dōmei” (An Alliance between Japan and Britain) (*ibid.*, Jun. 21, 1895)

But Fukuzawa was not arguing that Japan should achieve dominance all on its own. He believed that Japan needed some type of ally, for he felt that the lack of an ally was the reason that the Triple Intervention had occurred in the first place. Some asserted that China would be a suitable partner for an alliance, but Fukuzawa disagreed, favoring an alliance with Britain instead. He countered doubts about whether Britain would even be amenable to such an alliance by averring that, since it was willing to ally itself with Turkey and China, it would most certainly be willing to ally itself with Japan.<sup>10</sup>

Fukuzawa's desire for a partnership with Britain was motivated by more than just considerations of balance of power. He had from early on been convinced that Japan needed above all to develop as a trading nation. And since global trade centered around Britain and the United States, he argued that learning English should be the first priority.<sup>11</sup> Always careful to observe where Japan enjoyed a comparative advantage, he also stressed that Japan should lose no time in shifting the mainstay of its economy from rice growing to silk production, and production of high-grade silk at that; otherwise Japan would be unable to compete against China with its low wages.<sup>12</sup>

In 1898, when tensions with Russia were on the rise, Fukuzawa wrote of Japan's China policy in the following terms. "Our true objective is not China's land; no matter to whom the land belongs, it is not of the least concern to us, as long as there is no obstacle to freedom of commerce. Our sole desire is commerce and nothing else. We are dealing with a country of over four hundred provinces with several hundred million people; once it opens up, it will take in merchandise from around the world, and the more the better. It is fair to say that the future of Japanese commerce is bright indeed even if it should be restricted to China alone."<sup>13</sup>

Fukuzawa was not the only one to argue along these lines. *Taiyō*, the most influential magazine of the day, editorialized in the same vein. During a visit to Japan in the fall of 1898, Charles Peresford, a member of the British House of Lords,

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and "Gunkan Seizō no Mokuteki" (The Purpose of Building Warships) (*ibid.*, Jul. 16, 1895), all in *Zenshū* Vol. 15.

<sup>10</sup> For example, "Nihon to Eikoku no Domei" (*Jiji Shimpō*, Jun. 21, 1895), in *Zenshū* Vol. 15.

<sup>11</sup> "Wagakuni Futsū no Yōgaku wa Eigo ni Kisu Beshi" (Western Studies in Japan Should Begin with Learning English) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Dec. 28, 1883), in *Zenshū* Vol. 9.

<sup>12</sup> "Nihon no Yōsanka wa Shina no Kyōsō o Wasuru Bekarazu" (Japanese Silk Producers: Don't Forget the Chinese Competition) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Aug. 5, 1887), in *Zenshū* Vol. 11.

<sup>13</sup> "Shōkō Rikkoku no Hoka ni Michi Nashi" (There Is No Other Path to National Growth but Industry and Commerce) (*Jiji Shimpō*, Feb. 25, 1888), in *Zenshū* Vol. 16.

enthusiastically made the case for a four-way alliance between Japan, Britain, America and Germany, which quartet of nations, he contended, should work together to maintain the status quo in China. In this way, he evidently thought, British commercial interests could be protected. *Taiyō* gave considerable prominence to Peresford's views, welcoming and supporting British arguments for an alliance between Britain, Japan and America.<sup>14</sup>

In 1902 *Taiyō* published a special issue entitled "Umi no Nihon" (Japan of the Sea). The back cover carried — in English — the slogan, "International Peace and Prosperity Depend Upon Enlightened Commerce and Industry," as well as a blurb describing the magazine: "Published Monthly in English and Japanese: a Faithful Exponent of Oriental Affairs, Especially Devoted to Commerce and Industry." In a piece entitled "Gunkoku to Shōgyō Seisaku" (Militarism and Commercial Policy), the magazine's editor, Shuntei Tōyabe, pointed out that the great powers were all vying to build up their navies "in line with a single clear principle." That principle as he defined it was "a principle whose goal is commercial expansion, rather than one rooted in policies of territorial invasion."

Thus the case for naval expansion in the mid-Meiji period, whether as made by Fukuzawa or *Taiyō*, was inextricably bound up with the vision of Japan as a trading nation. It also tied in with the opinion that the country should ally itself with Britain and America. The principles of the open door and equality of opportunity advocated by the Americans, dovetailed nicely with Japanese views on the maintenance of China's integrity. In East Asia on the eve of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan, Britain and America stood at loggerheads with Germany, France and Russia in what was effectively a confrontation between sea-based and land-based powers.

But did the vision of Japan as a maritime trading state inevitably entail a naval buildup? And did it require a commitment to the Korean peninsula?

As Yamagata stated in his speech before the first Diet, Japan would find its room for maneuver seriously hampered if it was unable to assert its influence in the Korean peninsula — if, to put it another way, the Korean government fell under the

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<sup>14</sup> Kitaoka, "Shoki *Taiyō* ni Miru Amerika-zō: Nisshin Nichiro Senkanki Nihon Gaikō ni Kansuru Ichikōsatsu" (The Image of America in Early Issues of *Taiyō*: An Observation on Japanese Diplomacy between the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars), in Sadami Suzuki, ed., *Zasshi Taiyō to Kokumin Bunka no Keisei* (The Magazine *Taiyō* and the Making of a National Culture) (Shibunkaku Shuppan, Jul. 2001).

sway of a third country hostile to Japan, or an unfriendly foreign power obtained a lease of territory on the south coast of the peninsula.

Such fears were not wholly misplaced. The Russians had briefly occupied Tsushima in the waning days of the Tokugawa Bakufu, and after the Koshin incident the British had occupied Komun-do, in Cholla Namdo, for two years beginning in 1885 in an effort to stem the tide of Russian expansion. Later, in February 1896, Korea's King Kojong and the Crown Prince fled the palace and took refuge in the Russian legation, where they remained for a year. With this the Korean government fell completely under Russian influence. Then, in March 1900, Russia attempted to acquire a lease on land in Masan. Russia already held the strategic port of Vladivostok and in 1898 had succeeded in obtaining a lease on Port Arthur; hence it made perfect military sense for Russia to try to secure a naval base on the south end of the Korean peninsula in order to guard the sea route linking these two points. The Russian occupation of Masan, had it occurred, could well have been fatal to the Japanese Navy; after all, four years later, at the outset of the Russo-Japanese War, the Russian navy constantly menaced communications between Japan and the mainland. Therefore, in light of international conditions at the time, it was of decisive importance—just as Yamagata insisted—to prevent the southern end of the Korean peninsula from falling into the grip of any of the other great powers if Japan was to evolve as a trading nation.

### 3. The Army and Navy Clash in the Aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War

Here I would like to turn briefly to the question of civilian control in modern Japan. The concept of civilian control is in origin, I believe, an Anglo-American one. It could only have arisen where the ocean acted as a buffer against foreign invaders and there was no fear of sudden attack from a hostile neighbor.

Establishment of civilian control is predicated on a second assumption as well, namely the existence of a stable political system. If the government is unstable and politics are susceptible to military interference, the army will end up taking control. To begin with, the army possesses overwhelming manpower. Its commanders enjoy greater opportunity to interact with politicians and bureaucrats than do those of the sea-based navy. Above all, it has the final say in any attempt to seize power.

The army had exercised considerable influence over the course of Japanese



politics since the end of the Tokugawa period and the Meiji Restoration. But construction of a navy was never put on the back burner as a result. That, I would argue, was because the country's entrenched leadership, known collectively as the *hanbatsu* (or "domain cliques" because their base of power lay originally in the powerful domains that had led the Restoration), constituted a kind of undifferentiated military-civilian elite that provided a form of civilian control. Despite the bitter conflicts that erupted between different groups within this elite, particularly between the Satsuma and Chōshū factions, its members shared a sense of pride and responsibility as the architects of Meiji Japan, and they never lost sight of the need to work together when it really counted. Moreover, the majority of them were, in origin, samurai who had lived through the revolutionary upheavals of the Restoration; thus even the civilian officials among them, like Toshimichi Ōkubo and Hirobumi Itō, had no aversion to or hesitation about using the military. Yamagata's determination to build up the navy although he himself was an army officer is one example of the *hanbatsu* model of civilian control.

It is hardly surprising, then, that friction between the army and navy intensified as *hanbatsu* dominance went into decline after the Russo-Japanese War.

As the result of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan won considerable interests on the mainland. The protection of these interests thereafter became a national priority. Indeed, the Imperial Defense Policy for 1907 made that an explicit objective, albeit from the army's perspective.<sup>15</sup>

But the navy refused to be satisfied with a subordinate role and, with the appearance of the *Dreadnought*-class of battleship, was adamant about the need to keep abreast of the new technology. Thus Japan ended up giving precedence to naval expansion. Moreover, by around 1911 Japan had largely asserted control over the interests in Manchuria and Mongolia that it had acquired in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War. It was in the context of these developments that in 1913 the magazine *Taiyō* published a special issue entitled "Nanshin ka Hokushin ka?" (Advance South or North?). Meanwhile, in 1912, the army proposed adding two new divisions to its existing forces, a move intended to counter the priority being given to the naval buildup. In the early Taishō years the conflict between the two services often plunged cabinets into crisis and even led to a cabinet's downfall. This state of

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<sup>15</sup> Shinichi Kitaoka, *Nihon Rikugun to Tairiku Seisaku* (The Japanese Army and Continental Policy) (University of Tokyo Press, 1978).

affairs resulted from the *hanbatsu's* dwindling ability to provide unified leadership.

With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, this confrontation ended, at least for the mid-term, in victory for the army and its view that Japan should seek a continental empire. And so Japan proceeded to strengthen its interests on the mainland with a series of policies beginning with the Twenty-One Demands.

#### 4. Visions of Japan as a Trading Nation between the Wars

In the 1920s the vision of Japan as a maritime nation came to predominate, as typified by Tanzan Ishibashi. Ishibashi argued that “Greater Japan-ism” was a chimera, for Japan derived no benefit whatsoever from either Korea or Taiwan or Guandong (Kwantung) or Sakhalin in terms of the amount of trade that they generated. The idea of extending the country’s borders, he contended, was in the end a timid idea in that it reflected a desire to remain confined within those borders; it would be far more ambitious to expand beyond them through trade. As for national security, war was most likely to break out on the front lines in Korea, Taiwan or Manchuria, and the Sea of Japan was more than adequate as Japan’s line of defense; he therefore proposed abandoning those colonies.<sup>16</sup> Ishibashi’s vision of Japan as a maritime state harked back to that of Fukuzawa, especially in that both thinkers gauged Japan’s interests in terms of volume of trade.

Another figure who may be cited in this regard is Kiyoshi Kiyosawa. Kiyosawa contended that Japanese interests in Manchuria and Korea were so vulnerable that they could not survive without the protection of the government. He was particularly critical of Japanese policy in Manchuria: Japan’s fixation on Manchuria could damage relations with China, a far more important trading partner, and that in turn could damage relations with America, an even more important trading partner.<sup>17</sup>

The 1920s marked the apogee of the moderate diplomatic policies of foreign minister Kijūrō Shidehara. The Takaaki Katō cabinet considered the Japanese sphere of interest on the mainland to be confined to southern Manchuria and the eastern part of Inner Mongolia. Shidehara — though not as radical as Ishibashi —

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<sup>16</sup> Tanzan Ishibashi, “Dainihon Shugi no Genei” (The Illusion of Greater Japan-ism) in Takayoshi Matsuo, ed., *Ishibashi Tanzan Hyōronshu* (Anthology of Writings by Tanzan Ishibashi) (Iwanami Shoten, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Kitaoka, *Kiyosawa Kiyoshi* (Chuōkōron-sha, 1987).

held a similar view in that he argued for steadily asserting Japan's legal interests and promoting trade as the chief engine of national growth.

The ascendancy of this vision of Japan as a trading state was made possible by the situation on the international stage. The turmoil that followed the Russian Revolution meant that Russia (or the Soviet Union), which the Japanese army had traditionally regarded as a potential adversary, had ceased to be a threat for the time being. China too was prostrate. As for the United States, the Washington Conference of 1921-22 had produced an agreement under which, while Japan could retain only 60% of the capital ships of the US, the Americans too had to maintain the status quo with respect to their naval bases in the West Pacific. Hence that country did not have enough naval power to pose a direct threat to Japan.

By the late 1920s, however, the progress of the Chinese revolution was beginning to have an impact on the view of Japan as a trading nation. As China tried to reclaim the rights that it had ceded to the imperialist powers, it was Shigeru Yoshida who argued for taking a hard line against China. In that regard Yoshida was the single figure within the Foreign Ministry most at odds with Shidehara. That was why Yoshida was appointed vice minister of foreign affairs in Tanaka Giichi's Seiyūkai cabinet, which had been formed in part in opposition to Shidehara's foreign policy. Yoshida was even more intransigent than the army, asserting that Japan should defend its interests in Manchuria with force if need be.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, Yoshida also stated categorically that Japan's commercial interests were the most profitable of all its overseas interests.<sup>19</sup> This was an understandable enough contention for Yoshida, who had been brought up in a merchant household. But promoting trade in areas such as Manchuria would require enforcing the treaties that guaranteed Japanese interests, Yoshida believed; commerce could not thrive in the absence of such legal foundations. This system of unequal treaties was at the time recognized and indeed considered necessary by Britain as well. Thus Yoshida's hard-line diplomacy was intimately connected to the policies of enforcing the treaties and cooperating with Britain, and it may be

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<sup>18</sup> Examples of studies that present this conventional view of Yoshida are Shinya Bamba, *Manshū Jihen e no Michi: Shidehara Gaikō to Tanaka Gaikō* (The Road to the Manchuria Incident: Shidehara Diplomacy and Tanaka Diplomacy) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1972) and John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1979).

<sup>19</sup> Letter of Jul. 25, 1916 to Makino Nobuaki, in Yoshida Shigeru Kinen Jigyōkai (Yoshida Shigeru Commemorative Project Committee), ed., *Yoshida Shigeru Shokan* (Letters of Yoshida Shigeru) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1994).

considered an extension of the idea of Japan as a trading nation.

## 5. The Wars of the Shōwa Period and Shigeru Yoshida

The Manchurian Incident of 1931 was decisive in cutting Japan's ties with the policy of international cooperation. The outbreak of the Great Depression had already dealt a blow to Japan's internationalists by driving Britain and the United States to adopt protectionist policies. Procuring resources was one of the main justifications for the Manchurian Incident.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently autarky — the pursuit of economic self-sufficiency — came to be regarded increasingly as the ideal.

The key question, however, is whether or not trade continued to occupy a central place in national policy.

Shigeru Yoshida, for whom Japanese interests in Manchuria were a primary concern, was not completely supportive of the Manchurian Incident. At the very least, he was critical of the way that the affair had been pulled off with total disregard for the views of Britain and America. He was to remain convinced of the importance of improving relations with Britain and America: when war broke out with China, he formulated a peace plan involving Britain as mediator, and he opposed any alliance with Germany.

The upshot was that many diplomats who had once been more in favor of international cooperation than Yoshida became, relatively speaking, more hard-line.<sup>21</sup> Yoshida and Shidehara found themselves less at loggerheads, and Yoshida came to be on close terms with Kiyoshi Kiyosawa and Tanzan Ishibashi, the erstwhile advocates of “little Japan-ism,” because they now shared the same perspective.<sup>22</sup> All four basically rejected the foreign policy that Japan had pursued since the Manchurian Incident and criticized the way that Japan had abandoned cooperating with Britain and the United States, and all emphasized the importance of Japan's trade interests.

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<sup>20</sup> Sakuzo Yoshino, “Minzoku to Kaikyū to Sensō” (Race, Class and War) (*Chuōkōron*, Jan. 1932), in Yoshitake Oka (ed.), *Yoshino Sakuzō Hyōronshū* (Anthology of Writings by Yoshino Sakuzō) (Iwanami Shoten, 1972).

<sup>21</sup> Kitaoka, “Yoshida Shigeru ni okeru Senzen to Sengo” (Yoshida Shigeru Before and After the War), in *Kindai Nihon Kenkyūkai* (Modern Japan Research Society), ed., *Nempō Kindai Nihon Kenkyū 16: Sengo Gaikō no Keisei* (Modern Japan Studies Annual 16: The Making of Postwar Diplomacy) (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Kitaoka, *Kiyosawa Kiyoshi*; Kitaoka, “Gaikokan Shushin Sōri ni Miru Rekishi Ishiki” (Historical Attitudes of a Former Diplomat in the Role of Prime Minister), in Kitaoka, *Seitō Seiji no Saisei* (The Resurrection of Party Politics) (Chuōkōron-sha, 1995).

Yoshida and Ishibashi were not necessarily isolated in their point of view. The Economic Club lectures organized by the magazine *Tōyō Keizai Shimpō* enjoyed a nationwide following, and they provided Kiyosawa, who found his freedom of speech increasingly curtailed over the course of the 1930s, with much of his living. Everywhere in Japan there were businessmen who sought greater liberty to engage in their economic pursuits, even if they tended to keep low profiles. This was one of the reasons that Yoshida and Ishibashi opposed GHQ's decision to break up the *zaibatsu* after the war, believing the *zaibatsu* to be a force for peace.

Some within the military were also convinced of the importance of trade.

One of them was Shigeyoshi Inoue, who served as vice minister of the navy and opposed strengthening the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Italy. In 1941 Inoue wrote *Shin Gumbi Keikaku Ron* (A New Doctrine on Armaments Planning), which attacked the very foundations of the navy's current policies. This argued that self-sufficiency and absolute security were objectives that only a superpower could aspire to; they lay beyond the reach of a country like Japan. If Japan required, say, resources from lands to the south, it could simply obtain them peacefully through trade. Inoue was thus highly critical of any policy of expansion by force, which was guaranteed to trigger a conflict with America. Should Japan go to war with America, he contended, geographical and economic factors ensured that it would never be able to win; the best it could do was try not to lose. From America's perspective, Japan's biggest vulnerability lay in the transportation routes linking the country with Southeast Asia and China. The defense of these routes therefore assumed paramount importance. Hence placing one's faith in big battleships with overwhelming firepower was folly; rather, air power and submarines would be decisive, along with escort vessels to protect Japanese ships from attacks by enemy submarines.<sup>23</sup> It is a well-known fact that Japan's fate was indeed sealed by its failure to sufficiently defend its shipping routes and the consequent severing of its supply lines.<sup>24</sup>

These considerations prove that becoming a trading state and building up one's navy are not necessarily the same thing. Becoming a trading state certainly requires a strong navy. But it defeats the whole purpose if the naval buildup

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<sup>23</sup> Inoue Shigeyoshi Kankōkai (Inoue Shigeyoshi Publishing Committee), ed., *Inoue Shigeyoshi* (1982).

<sup>24</sup> Atsushi Ōi, *Kaijō Goeisen* (The Convoy War on the Ocean) (Gakushū Kenkyūsha, 1992).

precipitates a confrontation with one's most important trading partner and, on top of that, the navy is ineffective in protecting shipping .

During the mid-Meiji period it may have made sense for Japan to build a strong navy with the backing of its trading partners, Britain and America, in order to counter their common rivals China, Russia, France and Germany. The fleets of these potential foes were all stationed nearby, and there was a good chance of a showdown on the high seas with one or more of them. But the likelihood of a similar showdown with the American navy was much smaller given the fact that the US lay far away on the other side of the Pacific. The policy of building massive battleships with overwhelming firepower that characterized the Japanese navy in the early Shōwa years was completely inconsistent with the vision of Japan as a maritime trading state.

These considerations allow one to understand better the significance of the policy that Yoshida pursued after the war. Under the circumstances, anybody would have tried to work with the US in an effort to rebuild the economy and set Japan on the path to economic prosperity. But Yoshida's thinking and career made him the most suitable man for the moment.

As far as military matters went, Yoshida is well known for his dogged refusal to bow to American demands to rearm. But he had his reasons. First, had Japan re-established a full-fledged military, it could well have ended up becoming embroiled in the Korean War. Second, as a recent studies have revealed, Yoshida believed that Japan did not require that large a land force as long as the US controlled the seas and skies.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, US demands to rearm were reasonable enough as a question of burden-sharing, but it was not very convincing for the Americans to argue that Japan needed a land force of over 300,000 when they themselves were already occupying the country, using its bases and had complete control of its seas and skies. In that regard circumstances in Japan differed markedly from those in Europe, where the Soviets enjoyed superiority in conventional forces. Japan's peculiar geopolitical situation was surely the primary reason that American demands to rearm ultimately fell on deaf ears.

Yoshida was more accommodating when it came to the navy. During the

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<sup>25</sup> Kazuya Sakamoto, *Nichibei Ampo no Kizuna* (Japan-US Security Ties) (Yūhikaku, 2000).

Korean War he even sent the coast guard on a clandestine minesweeping mission.<sup>26</sup> Yoshida regarded freedom of maneuver on the ocean as of vital importance.

## Conclusion

The policy that Yoshida established of possessing limited military forces and giving priority to economic development later came to be known as the “Yoshida line.” There is debate as to how long that policy lasted. By the beginning of the 1960s, Yoshida himself switched to the position that Japan should contribute more actively to global security.

The Yoshida line regained the limelight in the late 1970s, when the Cold War once again intensified. Professor Yōnosuke Nagai defended the Yoshida line and criticized the government for deviating from it.

In the first half of the 1980s President Reagan and Prime Minister Nakasone strengthened the alliance, with Nakasone comparing Japan to an unsinkable aircraft carrier. It was certainly true that simply defending Japan would in itself restrict the Soviets’ ability to launch a second strike.

However, by the same token that meant that, even under Nakasone, Japan did not need to take action far from its shores. During the Iran-Iraq War a controversy arose over the issue of dispatching minesweepers to the Gulf, and ultimately the idea was scrapped.

For that reason, when the Gulf War broke out in 1990, the question of whether or not to cooperate with the international coalition presented a new challenge for Japan. The country did end up sending minesweepers, in 1991, and in 1992 it started participating in UN peacekeeping operations elsewhere, but only where there was already an agreement in place between the parties concerned.

A further change came in the wake of the terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001, when Japan cooperated with the American war in Afghanistan. Even so, that cooperation was limited to sea-based logistical support. Most recently, in December 2003, the decision was made to send ground self-defense forces to Iraq. That move, it may be argued, is still an extension of the Yoshida line in that it is designed to protect the country’s commercial interests.

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<sup>26</sup> James E. Auer, *Yomigaeru Nihon Kaigun* (The Japanese Navy Rises Again) (Jiji Tsūshinsha, 1972).

At any rate, it is possible to trace a single line of thought from Yukichi Fukuzawa to Shigeru Yoshida, which emphasizes the importance of trade with Britain and the US and the need to maintain a strong navy to defend that trade. This school of thought regarded commerce as the cornerstone of Japan's national strategy and focused on what military forces were appropriate for achieving the country's commercial objectives. Following the evolution of this line of thought may turn out to be more revealing than the traditional dualistic approach contrasting militarism versus pacifism, expansionism versus "little Japan-ism," and land power versus sea power.