

# SOCIAL CHANGE IN POSTWAR JAPAN

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## I. PREWAR JAPAN

**B**EFORE DISCUSSING social change in Japan since World War II, I feel that it is first necessary to give a brief sketch of prewar Japanese society. Unless one is acquainted with prewar society, it is impossible to understand the nature of postwar social change: which segments of society changed? which did not? what form did this change take? In order to respond to these questions it is necessary to recognize the patterns which existed before the change. As is widely known, modern Japan was inaugurated with the Meiji Restoration which occurred some one hundred years ago. While this was a transition of historical importance which should be compared with both the Glorious Revolution in 17th century England and the French Revolution in the 18th century, on at least two points it bears significant difference from the revolutions of Western Europe.

In Japan as in the case of England and France, there were any number of significant changes which took place within pre-modern feudal society prior to the revolutions. The development of small-scale industry, the growth of cities, the rise of commerce, the dissemination of education, and the gradual disintegration of a status-ordered estate system, were elements common to all three societies.

The Meiji Restoration, however, differs slightly from the other two in that the formation of modern societies in both England and France was brought about by a self-generating, indigenous revolution, which resulted when the developments outlined above reached their climax. It is probable that in the case of Japan too, an era of modernization would have evolved, sooner or later, from self-generated change. In point of historical fact, however, an American fleet led by Commodore Perry visited Japan in 1853 and sought a treaty of international trade and commerce with the Japanese government. This came as a severe shock to the Japanese of that time, and those who were in positions of leadership sensed a threat to the continued existence of the state.

Thus, the first major difference between the Meiji Restoration and the French and British revolutions lies in the fact that in the case of the

former, the social revolution occurred in a nation late to develop. From the 15th through the 18th centuries, there was some slight contact between Japanese and Westerners; however, neither side designated the other as "advanced" or "late-developing." But from 1853, when Perry's boats came to Uruga, it became common usage for both Westerners and Japanese to refer to Japan as "late-developing." Toshimichi Ōkubo, one of the outstanding statesmen of the Meiji era, wrote on this point as follows: "Very recently there has been an industrial revolution in the West. Democratic politics have made progress. Neither of these may yet be found in Japan; therefore, we are 'late-developing.' Among the various Western countries there are several which have already achieved both; hence, they are 'advanced.'"

The Meiji Restoration, instigated under such historical conditions as these, naturally followed a path to modernization which assumed its own particular form. Modernization did not derive its primary dynamism from strength within the country or from the strength of the populace "from below"; rather, having felt the shock of an external impact, the government led the people "from above." Thus, schematically speaking, the major characteristic of modernization in the late-developing pattern lies in the skillful blending of forces "from within→from below" and "from without→from above."

The second basic difference is that although Japan undertook modernization, this does not mean that, simultaneously, she was Westernized. Those aspects of culture which can be formalistically organized, such as legal, economic and political systems, or science and technology, were adopted in Japan upon Western models. However, age-old Japanese traditions, such as informal social relations, ways of feeling about people or nature, and values, etc., continued to possess vitality. As a result, the modernization of Japan followed a unique path which involved partial Westernization and partial support of Japanese tradition. In other words, her modernization was distinguished by its combination of two disparate elements.

In short, the process of modernization in Japan differed from that in France and England in that (1) it occurred later in time and (2) it was necessary to preserve a non-Western culture. Consequently, there are certain special characteristics in Japan's development from the Meiji Restoration until the end of World War II which may be epitomized in the slogan *fukoku kyōhei* (wealthy nation and strong army) which expresses post-Restoration national policy. To realize this policy, the country was consistently efficient: the industrial revolution was completed by 1910.

Japan's postwar economic growth has astonished the world; yet this is certainly not a new phenomenon. According to recent scholarly research, Japan consistently sustained a growth rate of almost 4% during the prewar period.<sup>1</sup>

Briefly, one significant historical aspect of prewar Japan was that with strong government leadership and the dissemination of education, the Japanese people as a whole cooperated in the national policy of *fukoku kyōhei*, with an awareness of communal solidarity as if they were all living in one vast house.

On the other hand, this meant that even when it became necessary to alter national priorities, such alteration was in fact remarkably difficult to undertake. After the completion of the industrial revolution around 1910, Japanese society required drastic reform. In a society in which the vast majority of farmers—who accounted for approximately 45% of the working population—were tenants, land reform became an urgent matter. The elimination of the monopolizing of capital, the strengthening of labor unions and of higher education, the reform of the Diet, etc., were considered essential by the society of that time. These were all matters of concern during the 1920's; but with the exception of the partial expansion of universal manhood suffrage, none of the aforementioned reforms was successful.

The Japanese pattern of modernization possesses two attributes: the non-Western and the late-developing, and these are characteristics peculiar to her pattern. Within Japanese society, there has been both conspicuous change and astonishing stagnation. These are points which cannot be overlooked in an understanding of modernization and social change in Japan.

## II. SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE DEFEAT OF 1945

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese Empire was defeated in its war with the Allied Powers. In September of the same year, the Occupation of the Allied Forces commenced; and until the Peace Treaty was concluded in September 1951, S.C.A.P., as the responsible party, implemented Japan's policies. What may be noticed here first is that the Occupation forces took charge of and in good measure accomplished the social reforms which Japan of the 1920's and early 1930's had considered necessary, but which she had been unable to achieve with her own hands. In May of

<sup>1</sup> See Government of Japan, Economic Planning Agency, *Keizai hakusho, 1969* (Economic White Paper for 1969), Tokyo, 1969, pp. 99-100.

1947, the new Constitution was put into effect, and the principle of popular sovereignty was established. In a political system calling for a three-way division of powers, the Diet would occupy the position of importance. The fundamental sovereignty of the people was recognized. The patriarchal family system was abolished and the conjugal nuclear family, based upon the principle of equality of the sexes, was recognized.

Land reform was undertaken, and tenancy abolished on agricultural land with the special exception of forest land. Labor unions were strengthened and, in one drive in 1946, seven million people became union members. The elimination of monopolies was undertaken and the prewar *zaibatsu* were dissolved. Not only was compulsory education intensified; in addition, facilities for higher education were greatly expanded.

But it is worthy of note that in this process of change too, there are points which are analogous to the situation which pertained at the time of the Restoration. As is indicated by the fact that Japan of the 1920's sought reform, the potential for change had long existed within the society. However, change was not brought about through the dynamism of "from, within→from below." It was the military force of foreign nations—to say nothing of the impact from without—that occupied Japan and imposed leadership from above. In this sense, S.C.A.P. constituted an absolute authority which existed within Japan and drew together force from without and leadership from above. Upon occasion, S.C.A.P. found itself in disagreement with the latent demands for liberation from below, but in most instances it helped to make these demands explicit.

Further differences between the eras of the Meiji Restoration and the Occupation lay in the weak national leadership during the latter and in the fact that national independence remained a problem. An additional problem was that as the United States and the Soviet Union entered into the Cold War around 1947, the precautions which the Occupation Forces took against the Left were intensified, and its policy became conservative. It cannot be denied that this resulted in a strengthening of a bureaucratic, centralized, authoritarian rule which easily found its nucleus in the government.

In any event, the social reforms which had long been a problem for the Japanese made remarkable progress, and the changes outlined above did take place. It is probable that had this social change not occurred, the subsequent rapid economic growth could not have taken place. However, during the interval after the Occupation ended and Japan was restored to legal independence in 1951 and until around 1955, economic reconstruction itself was the greatest problem. Japan was able to achieve

her first successes in the reconstruction of her destroyed economy by 1955.

### III. THE SECOND STAGE OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Although the social changes which took place during the Occupation are important, it is not the purpose of this issue to treat them in detail here. Rather, it will focus upon change since 1955. It is, in other words, possible to divide postwar social change into two periods. The first was from 1945 to 1955; during this period, the most significant topics were the social reform brought about by the Occupation Forces, and economic reconstruction. The second period, from 1955 to the present, has been a time when, within the new social structure, the latent energy of the people has exploded and rapid social change—including economic development—has taken place. To reiterate, this special issue deals with the social change of the second period.

As noted above, Toshimichi Ōkubo once stated that in lacking the two elements of an industrial revolution and a democratic polity, Japan was "late-developing." To this should be added a third element—an almost hermetically sealed (*sakoku-teki*) isolation from international society. This too is analogous to the "late-developing" qualities in Japan during the immediate postwar period, in which the technological revolution is the equivalent of the industrial revolution, and the problem of creating a more effective mass society is equivalent to a democratic polity. During the period of the war and the Occupation, Japan was isolated internationally. Thus, when one looks at the situation, there were three critical problems facing postwar Japan, just as there had been immediately after the Restoration. It may be said that the policies of the Occupation Forces tried to solve these three problems along the lines of American policies.

Since 1955, when economic reconstruction was first successful, the Japanese have exerted themselves in pursuit of the technological revolution. This effort is still continuing. Akira Uchino treats this problem in his article, which is supplemented by the data offered by Ryōichi Iwauchi. Even though Japan has sought a technological revolution, she has been unable to attain American standards at one jump, either in energy, communications, or transportation. In the secondary sector, there has been particularly conspicuous advance in the areas of chemicals and machinery, and recently, the transition in management which has accompanied automation has continued to be apparent. A society with a high level of mass communication has developed, as has research. However, in the early 1960's there was a high degree of dependence on Western technology

and expenditures relating to the import of technology amounted to approximately 40 times the revenue from exports. By 1968, this had dropped to about 10 times, but Japan's degree of dependence upon the West is still high. From now on, what kinds of policies will be desirable? It is from these points of view that Uchino and Iwauchi examine the characteristics of Japan's technological revolution.

During the interval from 1955 to 1969 the industrial structure of Japan, though containing many weak points, has achieved rapid change. On the basis of abundant data both Ken'ichi Tominaga and Shigeru Susato show, in their articles on social mobility and white collar workers respectively, that within a society which has witnessed dramatic economic growth, there has been advancement in vertical and horizontal mobility on a scale that far exceeds the prewar period; and that even among white-collar workers the appearance of professionals has brought great change. These articles are theoretically excellent, and instructive in that they inform about on-going changes in occupational structure and social relations in contemporary Japan.

Tominaga points out that a major factor in the promotion of social mobility today is the dissemination of education. The development of postwar education, which Yoshio Hara and Masakazu Yano outline in their diagrams, clearly indicates that there has been rapid expansion of scale. In addition, the transition in communications to the medium of television has been truly astonishing.

Naomichi Nakanishi's article "Changes in Living Patterns Brought About by Television" relies chiefly upon N.H.K. surveys, and testifies eloquently to the fact that in the 1960's, Japanese have spent increasingly large amounts of time watching television. The time that Japanese of all ages spend watching television averages more than two and one-half hours per day, and is about one hour longer than the American average. What kind of concrete change is brought to man's daily life when he spends such a quantity of time before a television set? This is a difficult matter to grasp readily. However, a reading of Nakanishi's article together with the theories of the family of Haruo Matsubara may indicate that the small world of the nuclear family is enveloped in the giant communications net of television; that the expansion of the stratum of white collar workers is interrelated with the progress of social mobility; and that during the 1960's an extensive mass society was established with great speed.

We may say that the technological revolution and the creation of a mass popular society form two axes of change, while economic growth is an expression of a different aspect of change. These three factors

act as both cause and effect and, over almost fifteen years, have sustained rapid social change. During this period, the economy achieved miraculous growth and came to rank second in G.N.P. In this, however, lie new problems. When growth is this rapid, there is severe discord and profound distortion. I would like next to turn to these points.

#### IV. THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

As is already widely known, the reverse side of Japan's economic growth has been her many recent problems. Ryōhei Kakumoto's "The Revolution in Commuter Transportation" is one article which treats these problems. Tokyo is the world's largest city in terms of population. But there are those foreigners who, upon visiting Tokyo, write that it is also the world's ugliest.<sup>2</sup> The population of Tokyo within its administrative boundaries is 11 million. But the population of the metropolitan area including the city is in fact 23 million. The numerous problems of this city are contained in this simple fact. One phenomenon which is not limited to Tokyo but is found in all Japan's cities is that in comparison with the sharp rise in population the proportion of space allotted to roads is low. In Washington, D.C., the proportion is an especially high 40%, while in the average American city it is about 25%; in Tokyo, it is only 15%. Moreover, on account of the sharp rise in the number of automobiles, a sharp increase in the number of casualties in traffic accidents has been unavoidable. In August 1969, the government announced that since the war there had been 200,000 instantaneous traffic fatalities.

One further characteristic of Tokyo is that land values are high and housing problems are severe. It is said that the price for 1 *tsubo* of land (about 3.9 square yards) is about \$20,000 in the environs of Shinjuku station (one of Tokyo's major railroad terminals and surrounded by a large shopping area).

The government's *Economic White Paper for 1969* announced that Japan ranked second highest among the nations in national income and twentieth in per capita income;<sup>3</sup> yet the life of Tokyo's inhabitants is certainly not easy. Housing is the worst problem; but in addition, the *Economist* has noted that there are many essential commodities whose retail prices are either the world's highest or near to that. The prices of meat, eggs and butter are extremely high; and although once it was said that the pur-

<sup>2</sup> Robert Hutchins, upon his return from a visit to Tokyo in the spring of 1967, wrote his impressions of Tokyo for the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Aug. 20, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> *Keizai hakusho*, 1969, p.100.

chasing power of the yen was high and living in Japan was easy, that era has ended, at least for Tokyo.

Kakumoto suggests in his article that it is likely that at the least, Tokyo's high land prices and tight housing conditions will be partially alleviated through a drastic renovation of urban transportation extending to the suburbs. From this point of view, his proposition is of considerable interest. This is, however, merely a suggestion and he does not treat all of the problems of Tokyo and the vast metropolitan areas. Nonetheless, by reading the article the reader may come to learn about the severity of the problems facing the giant city of Tokyo, and about one part of the problem of urbanization in Japan as reflected in the great metropolitan areas.

One further social problem which, as is well known, faced Japan in 1969 was the university disputes. In January of that year, students at the University of Tokyo, Japan's leading university, clashed violently with the police. There were controversies at 75 public institutions and at no less a number of private colleges. For more than a year or, in some places, for many months, either entire universities or parts of them would be occupied by students with all lectures and classes cancelled. Students affiliated with the Communist Party aimed at a restructuring of university administration, while students of the New Left, critical of the Communist Party, called for destruction of the universities.

In August 1969, the government's proposed temporary bill for university disturbances was passed in the Diet on the strength of the ruling party. This law includes a provision providing for closure of an institution long-embroiled in dispute upon the recommendation of a third party. From the time of the enactment of this law, police riot squads have been called into many campuses. During the latter half of 1969 classes were resumed at many schools and disputes continued at only a few.

In the background of the university disputes lies the international tension which exists in the Far East. However, it is undeniable that Japan's universities have many problems which require reform. In an outstanding article, "The Academic Marketplace in Japan," Michiya Shimbori demonstrates that there is stagnation in the pattern of employment among university professors. There is little flow of personnel among schools, and moreover, the patterns of seniority and lifetime employment are being preserved. In addition while per capita income in Japan averages one-third of U.S. per capita income, in the case of university professors it is approximately one-fifth; and until very recently, the government did not offer any solution to the problems of long-range plans for university



finance or for modernization of their management.

The problem of the universities may be stated in brief. Within a context of rapid social change, the traditional character of the universities as a close-knit, exclusive entity is even now being maintained, (although analogous phenomena exist in other parts of society). Susumu Kurasawa's "Japanese City" illustrates well the historical changes in the cities. According to this article, there is a complex interrelationship between the rapid penetration of modern large-scale companies to small and medium sized cities, and the old elite stratum in these cities; and it is clear that these two elements have combined to form a ruling class. Particularly within the old elite, there is strong consolidation based on regional ties, marriage, etc.

Farmers used to account for more than 40% of the working population of Japan; but already they have dropped to less than 30%. One of the most pronounced forms of social change has taken place in farming villages, and one wonders whether the traditional farm village has not been wiped out thereby. It is regrettable that more articles concerned with farm villages are not presented in this issue. However, Junji Kawagoe discusses the great confusion existing in these villages in "Value Orientation Innate to Japanese Farmers." A review of this article makes it clear that while there has been rapid transformation in farmers' awareness of social changes on the other hand values which have long sustained social relationships are firmly rooted.

## V. JAPAN: A CASE STUDY

When we look at Japan in the ways suggested above, we may conclude that the second stage of social change—characterized by prosperity and growth from 1955 to the end of the 1960's—is now entering a third stage. Or, to be more precise, that the reverse side of the prosperity and growth of the second period has been stagnation and distress in the lives of the Japanese people, with the latter gradually being manifested in the form of social problems during the second half of the 1960's. Japan will not be able to avoid these problems in the future. The third stage, then, will be a period taken over by these difficulties. Along with "prosperity" and "growth," the words "harmony" and "stability" are making an appearance in the mass media; but at the same time, on the other hand, the expressions "social disorder" and "anxiety" are being widely used. We may perhaps predict that the course of complex social change during the third stage is symbolized in these words.

Above, I have outlined the characteristic shape of social change in Japan from the Meiji Restoration to the present. As the three factors differentiating social change at the time of the Restoration from France and England, I have cited "late development," "non-Western culture," and "international isolation." Social change in Japan, born from the union of these elements, thus possesses both positive and negative aspects.

The positive aspect is revealed in how an isolated people, unified under strong leadership from above, cooperated with national policy. The Diet was instituted in 1890 and party politics came into being, but it was not easy for powerful opposition parties to arise which would enter into direct confrontation with the government. Among business enterprises, there was rapid development of such industries as iron and shipbuilding, etc., with the protection and aid of the State. Although at that time the government, the ruling party, the military and business were to be four distinct powers, if we examine the actual situation, in fact they formed one unified, powerful, controlling authority which supported the national policy of *fukoku kyōhei*. In turn, the feeling of national unity as a people which existed among the Japanese, as well as the dissemination of education, the striving for achievement, and the awareness of communal solidarity, etc., both supported this cohesion of powers and provided a basis for a faithful realization of the policy of *fukoku kyōhei*.

How different has the nature of ruling power been since the War? There is no powerful military, but the three authorities of the government, ruling party and business, supported by the state, have formed a ruling trinity which has promoted economic reconstruction and growth. The qualities of a feeling of unity, dissemination of education, awareness of communal solidarity, striving for achievement, etc., have not changed so much as has been commonly supposed.

Japan of the Meiji era achieved *fukoku kyōhei* within a short period of time; likewise, postwar Japan quickly achieved economic reconstruction and growth. In the analysis presented above, I have attempted only one interpretation, in which Japan's rapid social change is not necessarily regarded as a miracle.

On the negative side, however, this kind of social structure is not amenable to fundamental changes in priorities. Despite the fact that Japan of the 1920's required social reform, it was difficult to undertake this. In short, there was but a weak basis among the people for support of opposition parties or for devising policy changes to be carried out by a strong opposition. In order to strengthen this foundation, it would have been necessary to intensify elements which, transcending petty sectional-

ism, would have increased social welfare, independence of the individual, public solidarity, and individual achievement, and which would have worked for a frank and open atmosphere on the international level.

Although these elements were weak during the 1920's, how much have they changed today? This is a problem not easily measured. Probably it is possible to say that each of these elements has come to have considerably greater strength in facilitating fundamental policy changes than was the case in the 1920's. At the same time, there has been the development of mass communications and progress toward the nuclear family; while within mass society there has been more atomization than individualism of man. Individualism is not necessarily a contradiction of solidarity, but in the process of atomization, there is a tendency for men to be isolated from each other. In his article, "The Family and Japanese Society after World War II," Matsubara deals with this kind of isolation of the family or, in other words, the correspondence between atomization and communal solidarity within the small nuclear family.

Thus it is not easy to undertake fundamental changes in priorities and it may be predicted that in the 1970's social change during the third stage will include many difficulties. But it is not easy to predict the future. The technological revolution, the creation of a mass society, the tendency toward internationalism, which have progressed since the 1920's, operate as positive factors; and in them lies a new force.

Is it, then, possible to view the aforementioned social changes as totally unique to Japan? She resembles Western Europe and differs from Africa and the rest of Asia in that self-generated change did occur in her society before the Meiji Restoration. However, she has certain elements in common with the newly awakened regions of Asia and Africa in that she began as a late-developing nation and, in the course of modernization, experienced transformation of her traditional culture; i.e., she strove for modernization of a non-Western culture.

Undertaking a treatment of postwar social change from this point of view, the special issue attempts only to provide one point of departure. In this sense it is not merely a report concerned with Japan alone, but may be conceived of as a case study of social change in Japan in the context of world history. Such has been the intention of the editors in weaving this special issue out of the twelve articles presented herein.