

The Meiji Restoration as Japanese Aesthetic Destruction

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During the Sui (581 – 614) and Tang (618 – 907) Dynasties, Japan for three centuries sent successive envoys of its brightest men to China, the most powerful East Asian nation of the era.

In the beginning of the 19th Century, at the hands of the British Empire, China became the unwilling recipient of astronomical amounts of expensive opium exports. The ruling Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1912), which was feared as a “Sleeping Lion” by its Imperialist counterpart, rejected this opium and burned it. In retaliation, the British waged a horrific war upon China. The Sleeping Lion suffered an ignominious defeat.

The United States and European powers had been portioning off the South American continent as well as all of Africa and Asia as spoils of global manifest destiny. Japan and Thailand were the only countries where blood had yet to spill.

Japan, then known as “Zipangu,” was a land of abundant gold and silver. It was this island nation that Marco Polo had dreamed about. Christopher Columbus, searching for a short route to Japan, sailed west.

Although there was no shortage of gold coins in Japan, the nation lacked weapons for killing large numbers of people. Japan was unable to protect its people and assets from the European and American pirates that attacked from the sea. This country had 250 years of peace during the Shogun regime, and had no need to improve its military technology.

During the 1850s, avaricious Caucasians from the U.S., Europe, and Russia found Japan’s “national isolation” policy as disrupting their commerce. They sent a fleet of massive warships to invade Edo Bay (modern-day Tokyo), and thoroughly intimidated Japan with many cannons, the size of which the island nation had never seen before.

Russia came from the north, Britain from the south, and the U.S. from the east. To the west was Qing China, which was in its weakening final throes against invading foreign forces. The Western powers like vultures swarmed this mangled and dying lion. Smacking their lips still wet with China’s blood, they looked to Zipangu as their next prey.

Opium

The white Western powers pillaged anywhere on the planet where there was money to be made. They used advanced weapons to enslave indigenous peoples and sell them around the world for enormous profits.

Qing China was a self-sufficient, affluent nation that had been isolated for more than 250 years. It was destroyed by the opium produced in the British colony of India.

Pure silver was piled high in the national treasury in Beijing. These precious mountains were chipped away at every day to pay for opium and eroded like the aftermath of a massive landslide in a short time. Moreover, opium-related corruption crippled the Chinese, from high officials in Beijing’s Forbidden City to the mass of addicts in filthy opium den alleys. China decayed, and Qing became its last dynasty.

Britain knew that Qing China was very wealthy, so it brought about the two Opium Wars and extorted large indemnities from China. The total amount Qing China had to pay Britain was 34 trillion yen (3.4 trillion U.S. dollars) in today’s currency. It also paid seven trillion yen to France.

Qing China struggled in this living hell and tried to escape into the transient pleasures of flesh and wine and drugs, but was unable to continue this unsustainable façade in the wake of its newfound poverty. China could not even recall the brilliance of its wealth and splendor and its pride as the birthplace of great civilization. The country was in shambles, experiencing misfortune after misfortune, and signs of restoration would never be seen again. China tumbled down the steep staircase of disrepair, thanks

to an enthusiastic kick in the back from Britain.

The British Empire showed off its elegant way of life as a wealthy nation that had successfully realized a popular shibboleth of the time: to become “wealthy and militarily powerful.” Britain had colonized one fourth of the globe. In the world of the 19th century – which was rife with poverty, starvation, infectious disease, and despair – Britain was revered as a parliamentary democracy, which was said to show off the maturity of its government.

Most history books about the Meiji Imperial Restoration of 1868 make no mention of opium.

Opium flows through the arteries of world history from time immemorial. If the Opium Wars had not occurred in China, the Meiji Restoration would not have taken place. Did the young lowly samurai men who played leading roles in the Restoration have any connections to opium?

The profit from opium was of a different order of magnitude from any other trade goods. That is why Asia was flooded with opium from India and Turkey that Britain and the U.S. brought in.

It is a vain hope, and indeed self-deluding, to believe that opium did not cross the narrow Sea of Japan. There was no reason for the raging torrent of opium throughout Asia to suddenly subside before reaching the new market of Japan. Japan had no breakwaters or divine winds to guard against this flood, either.

When the Second Opium War ended in Qing China and opium had been legalized by British insistence, the Western powers would not have overlooked the Japanese market right before their eyes.

Upon arriving in the defenseless Japanese archipelago, did the U.S. and Britain – countries that prospered enormously from the opium trade – miraculously transform into irreproachable saints? Did they, when faced with the new frontier of Japan, become introspective and repent for their sins of imperial barbarism? Even should they have been capable of any degree of reflection, they would not have had the semblance of an intention to accord such consideration to an inferior non-Western country like Japan. The possible profit from opium was too great to resist the meager force of conscience.

The entry of opium into Japan is proven by the fact that opium is mentioned in the first unequal treaties that Japan was coerced into with Britain and the United States.

On July 29, 1858, the frightened Shogun was forced to sign the Treaty of Amity and Commerce by Townsend Harris, the first American envoy to Japan (aged 54). Its Article 4 stipulated that Japan would permit imports of opium up to three kin (1.8 kilograms or four pounds). This treaty was signed four years after the sudden appearance of the piratical Commodore Matthew C. Perry.

James Bruce, the Earl of Elgin, was the special envoy from Britain, who was waiting for his turn to land in Japan. Only 28 days after the conclusion of Japan’s treaty with the U.S. and during the Second Opium War, Elgin took a battleship from Guangdong (Guangzhou) to Yokohama to conclude the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Amity and Commerce.

This British treaty also mentioned the precise quantity of “three kin” as the maximum permitted amount of opium import.

The U.S. can bring in 1.8 kilograms of opium.

Britain can bring in 1.8 kilograms of opium.

Was this merely coincidental? Certainly not.

This minuscule amount, formally included in these unequal treaties with the U.S. and Britain, is the concrete evidence that enormous amounts of opium were secretly waiting for shipping.

At no point in history did the beauty of idealistic thought triumph over the unsightliness of reality. No countries were able to resist the allure of opium.

Imperial Japan earnestly accepted Western medicine and used huge amounts of opium and morphine. Surgeries could not be performed without anesthetic morphine made by refining opium. Opium and morphine are also instantly effective painkillers and cough suppressants for tuberculosis patients. The army and navy of the Meiji Period required vast amounts of morphine for every battle.

To ignore the flood of opium from Qing China and insist that Japan was the only country without opium is to espouse a historical falsehood.

The American Civil War (April 1861 – May 1865) was the bloodiest war in American history with 650,000 people killed in action. Millions of wounded soldiers became addicted to alcohol and morphine by drinking whiskey or bourbon into which morphine had been generously mixed as a painkiller.

To believe that opium did not cross the narrow Sea of Japan – especially when large quantities of opium and morphine were brought to the American continent across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans from India, Turkey, and China – would mean to be willfully blind.

Western Arms in Japanese Hands

Right after the end of the American Civil War, vast volumes of ammunition and 300,000 used and new rifles crossed the Pacific Ocean and were delivered via Shanghai to the Imperial rebel force that was planning to topple the Shogun regime.

Thomas Blake Glover (1838 – 1911), a young weapons merchant, was in charge of the arrangements. He brought warships and modern Armstrong Guns from Britain to Nagasaki and Kobe, where they were sold to the Imperial rebel force.

Who had the great sums of money to buy these weapons?

The Glover Trading Company handled the expense. But who financed Glover, who was the Nagasaki branch manager of Jardine Matheson and Company? Jardine Matheson in Guangdong was Asia's premier opium trader.

Was it the British government that financed Glover? The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank? Jardine Matheson? The Rothschild's London bank? Was it all of the above? None of them would have undertaken such risky liability if they were not certain that the Imperial force would win over the Shogun's army.

The Western powers believed Japan's civil war, called the "Boshin War," would be fought for a long time, making itself a highly profitable venture. But this war ended quickly.

The victorious Imperial force, facing an economic crisis, could not reimburse the debt to Glover. Glover went bankrupt.

Tokugawa Yoshinobu (1837 – 1913), the last Shogun, encamped at Osaka Castle before the outbreak of the Boshin War, and upon hearing that his side was defeated in the initial skirmish, fled in the middle of the night to the USS Iroquois (1,032 tons), a new warship from the U.S. Asiatic Squadron in Osaka Bay. He returned to Edo on his warship the Kaiyo Maru (2,590 tons), which was anchored off the coast, and placed himself under voluntary confinement at a temple in Ueno (Tokyo).

Sir Harry Smith Parkes, the British envoy who started the Second Opium War, had already made a secret agreement with the Imperial force to overthrow the Shogun, yet he met with him in Osaka Castle. Did Parkes courteously threaten the Shogun there?

Parkes' interpreter was Sir Ernest Mason Satow (1843 – 1929), who was a gifted interpreter and a preeminent spy. The top men of the Imperial force were Satow's close friends. Top secrets of the Meiji government were readily leaked to the British government via Satow. In 1906, Satow was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun 1st Class, the highest honor given by the Empire of Japan.

The Shogun army, totaling one million soldiers, was preparing for a decisive battle. But after seeing their supreme commander flee from the headquarters of Osaka Castle, the massive army set fire to the castle and dispersed. The fire spread to the powder magazine, and the large, beautiful castle collapsed amidst thunderous explosions and roaring flames.

All Japanese learned in their school days that Saigo Takamori of the Imperial force and Katsu Kaishu of the Shogun Army agreed to the bloodless surrender of the Shogun's Edo Castle, triggering the quick demise of the Shogun regime. I, however, cannot swallow this fairy tale.

France and Britain manipulated the Shogun and the Imperial forces like pieces on a chessboard. After inciting them to civil war and exhausting both sides, Britain's goal was to make the Imperial force win and then by proxy gain control of Japan.

It is rumored in Japan even to this day that Britain and France were hostile to each other, but that is not true. Britain and France fought together in the Crimean War (1853 – 1856) and Second Opium War in Qing China (1856 – 1860). Both of them received enormous indemnities totaling 41 trillion yen. Afterwards, to prolong the life of the dying Qing Dynasty, they besieged Hong Xiuquan (age 50), the leader of the Taiping Rebellion, whose army was headquartered in Nanjing. Hong ended up dying of starvation, by which they suppressed the rebellion that had threatened Beijing for 15 years.

Britain and France were comrades in arms who fought on fierce battlefields together for 10 whole years. They were not battling in Japan; they were united in greed up until right before the Meiji Imperial Restoration of 1868.

Japan was in a state of chaos during the 1850s and 1860s. The violent slogan of "revere the emperor and expel the barbarians" appeared to justify the assassination of foreigners in Japan.

Britain and France urged the Imperial force to fight a civil war against the Shogun, which was perfectly orchestrated as a justifiable coup d'état. Compared to the large-scale civil war in Qing China, it was much easier to control the small domestic battle in an island nation.

One can easily imagine why Britain determined it would be simpler to manipulate the Imperial force, which was led by the young, spirited men from rural Japan who lacked modern arms and had no way to produce them. Britain and France had wasted warships, officers, and men in the Opium Wars and Taiping Rebellion. However, thanks to hindsight gained from prior experience, they acted with new cleverness in Japan. By the time they landed in Japan, Britain and France were well versed in the ways of colonization.

The Destruction of Aesthetics

Why did Yoshinobu, the last Shogun from the long-lived Tokugawa family that had lasted for 250 years, not fight? Why has the bloodless surrender of his Edo Castle been glorified even today and passed down as a heroic tale starring Saigo (age 40, 1827-1877) and Katsu (45 years old, 1823-1899)?

Katsu, a prominent Shogunate retainer who very likely would have been sentenced to decapitation after the defeat, became a distinguished leader in the Imperial government. Did he have any dealings, such as his secret betrayal of his master, which are not written down on the pages of history?

We learned during our school days that on March 14, 1868 during the Boshin War, Shogun's top leader Katsu (45 years old, 1823 – 1899) and Saigo (age 40, 1827 – 1877) of the Imperial force sat across from each other as the only two men in a large reception hall at the Sago residence in Edo. There, the two men decided on the bloodless surrender of Edo Castle to the Imperial force. This tale deeply moves us Japanese because it speaks to the emotional aesthetics that we so prize.

But this scenario played directly into the hands of Britain.

The new government preserved Edo because it wanted to use the city. Britain wanted to establish a headquarters in beautiful Edo, which was about to be renamed “Tokyo.”

That reception room was the final stage where Saigo and Katsu put on their last performances as samurai. Saigo believed that Bushido (“the way of the samurai”) was eternal. He could not imagine that the sun would rapidly set on the age of the samurai from that historic day.

The tragedy of the samurai began when Bushido, an aesthetic cultivated in one-on-one combat for 2,000 years, was crushed due to the influence of Western weapons designed for wide-scale slaughter.

Even after this samurai aesthetic was decimated, its heartbeat kept faintly pounding in the depths of Japan's spiritual culture. In a country that had been laid waste, the people, realizing the preciousness of what was lost from their daily life, continued dreaming that Bushido would someday be revived like a phoenix from the ashes.

However, a tragic turn of events stuck Japan. Even after achieving a complete victory guided by the ruthless British Empire, the Imperial force pursued and killed its fellow samurai throughout Japan.

The corps of samurai, called “Shogitai,” resisted in Ueno, in the middle of Edo (Tokyo). They remained loyal to the Shogun, who disgracefully deserted the battlefield. These old-fashioned samurai brandishing spears and swords charged against American repeating rifles and British Armstrong cannons. The Imperial force did not permit the Shogitai bodies to be buried. The bodies were abandoned on a hill in Ueno, in the middle of summer.

The Shogitai was a rebel army, so its members are not interred at Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which the Emperor had built for his own soldiers.

A further tragedy descended upon the young boys and girls who took their last stand at Aizu (where Japan's first nuclear reactor meltdown occurred in 2011). Despite their castle being besieged by the overwhelming Imperial force, Aizu men and women continued their valiant fight. Their food ran out. Their bullets ran out. There were no reinforcements anywhere in Japan to rescue them. The “White Tigers,” composed of brave young men in their teens, charged out of the castle to fight in hand-to-hand combat, but they were met with the Western rifles and cannons. The women inside the castle chose to commit suicide with their own daggers.

The Imperial force, intoxicated on its victory, forbade the burial of the young bodies lying where they had perished on the mountains near their castle. The corpses, exposed to wind and rain, slowly and unceremoniously decayed.

Japan had fought many internal battles up to 1610, but the victorious samurai lords never disrespected or abused the bodies of the vanquished. Yet the Imperial force, financed and armed by the British Empire, abandoned the dead in Ueno as well as in Aizu to rot in public. The Japanese see beauty in death; such conduct never before seen in Japan was a blatant desecration of its sense of honor and aesthetics.

Was the Western germ of auto-cannibalistic eugenics injected into the vein of the Imperial force, causing it to trample the long-cherished aesthetics of the battle and feel no compassion for its fallen adversaries?

Was the new Imperial doctrine of “leave Asia and join Europe” such a precious aspiration to justify debasing the samurai aesthetic? Ordinary Japanese people murmured their abhorrence toward the victors who, while breaking the sacrosanct code of Bushido, authored a revised history glorifying only themselves.

Japanese people regard the spirit of loyalty of the dead men and women who would not “read the tide of time” not as naïve and out of touch, but as an awe-inspiring symbol of Japanese aesthetics entitled to respect. Even to this day, they see the actions of these men and women as genuine and pure, and are profoundly touched by the devotion of the defeated.

Britain, which contributed significantly to the Imperial force, received land in the best residential area of Tokyo. The British Embassy was built on high ground that overlooks the Imperial Palace, only a stone's throw from the castle gate.

What did Britain gain? It acquired trade and financing of the Imperial government and became the most eminent instructor for all movement in Japan. Britain was the first country to recognize a new Japan, by which it appeared to be singing its own praises.

On October 14, 1872, the nation's first railway was built from Yokohama, where Western fleets entered and exited Japan, to Shimbashi near the Imperial Palace. Shouldn't this railway have serviced the large population centers of Kyobashi, Asakusa, and Ueno?

The building of this railway was Britain's strategic measure to restrain the Imperial Palace (the cornerstone of Japan) and guard against the potential danger that a citizen revolt might take place to expel the foreigners from Japan, as the Taiping Rebellion in China had tried. British and American soldiers, arms, and ammunition could be transported swiftly by trains from Yokohama to Shimbashi, which is located at the south of the Imperial Palace. In fact, the rail line was like a spear thrust into the Palace's underbelly.

The ghosts of the Imperial Restoration still haunt Japan today. Presently, the people are encouraged to embrace globalization

out of anxiety that Japan might be lagging behind the times. Japan's first globalization in the early Meiji Period (1868 – 1905) was based on the slogan “civilization and enlightenment.” The goal of this was to accept Western culture without questioning, even at the expense of Japan's own sophisticated culture, with the unspoken premise being that Western culture was in all ways superior to the anachronistic ways of Japan.

Imperial Japan was galvanized by its inferiority complex, which mandated that it had to catch up to the British and American empires. Japan dove headfirst into the deep end of modernization, imitating the brutal imperialism of the belligerent West until the midsummer of 1945.

The story we learn in our compulsory education overtly praises only the 1868 Imperial Restoration, leaving out the details that would mar such an optimistic account of convenient, biased history.

Sakamoto Ryoma, a young energetic rebel and a close friend of British arms dealer Glover, has been deified in our academic and popular cultures. Even asking who paid for his traveling expenses (such as his transportation and living costs) is blasphemy.

The dangerous liaisons between the highest echelon of the Imperial government and the British and Americans who became hugely wealthy on opium have been erased as if such relations had never occurred. The same applies to gold and silver. Japan's plentiful precious metals flowed overseas via underground channels with the force of a glittering pyroclastic flow. Perhaps it was to pay the “tuition fees” for receiving the Western education.

We are used to hearing the phrase “modernization of Japan,” but behind this phrase is a stigma condemning the ages of samurai as feudal and regressive, and as shamefully unaware of its own shortcomings and archaic traditions that had no place in a progressive world. Such condemnation only justifies the Imperial Restoration as having brought about wonderful modernization to a backwards country desperately needing the generous hand of the West.

There is no indictment of the arrogant Western powers that used arms to forcibly open up the Japanese archipelago from its peaceful isolation. It seems that the Japanese have to be grateful for the brutal imperialism of the U.S. and Europe, which colonized the globe through racial discrimination and slaughter.

The Western powers declared that Japan's isolation was a bad policy. The cheerful euphemism “opening of the country” is used presently, but what was really opened was a gate to hell that destroyed this country of advanced aesthetics and morals.

The Imperial Restoration is revered as right and good, while isolation by the Shogun is despised as wrong. It has also arbitrarily indicted the Shogun regime as an incompetent government. Rather than judging the peaceful tranquility of the Shogun period as a shortcoming of a stagnant nation devoid of innovation, we should recognize the Shoguns' great deed of maintaining peace for 250 years.

The new Japanese Empire developed an obsession with becoming westernized. In a short time, it rushed into foreign wars, one after another, engaging in fierce battles over its vested interests in neighboring countries, ironically against the very Western powers that had forced Japan into its dogmatic globalism.

Just 77 years after the Imperial Restoration, the corpses of the nation's two slogans “wealthy nation and strong soldiers” and “civilization and enlightenment” could be seen rotting on the bloody battlefield in the summer of 1945.

Japan should not have modeled itself on the British Empire as a paragon.

Globalization Born from Domestic Destruction

The terms “internationalization” and “globalization” have been hugely popular in Japan for the past 30 years. These abstract, meaningless slogans cast magic spells upon Japan.

This brainwashing says that Japan must “align itself with the global standard” and abandon its refined aesthetics and morals. Is this a relapse of the inferiority complex that infected Japan right before the Imperial Restoration?

Why is it necessary for the entire country of Japan, a major technological and economic power, to meet the standard set by the U.S. and Europe, or by the United Nations or UNESCO? The Japanese political world, financial circles, Ivory towers, and mass media all blindly chant the praises of globalization.

Globalization would erase Japan's borders, condemn our own spiritual culture as a symptom of the so-called “Galápagos syndrome,” and hasten the destruction of Japan itself. Are not Japanese leaders merely groveling to powerful figureheads in other countries?

Japan's “globalization” has already brought about strange results. For instance, Tokyo's world-famous hi-tech Akihabara Station is labeled “AKB” for the sake of foreign nationals. (AKB also happens to be a very popular singing group of teenage girls.)

Is this globalization an ephemeral moneymaking attempt? Is it a way of appealing to people from the English-speaking world? Will the pride of the Japanese people be crushed as they become obsequious to other countries, become rootless “citizens of the world,” and lose their native homes? The globalization being pushed forward in Japan is just another name for “westernization.”

Today a type of globalization is in vogue in which Japanese words written in kanji characters are replaced with the much less complex katakana script used to write foreign words. This is an attempt to ruin the country by abolishing the Japanese language and making English the national language. After defeating Japan in World War II, the U.S. Army General Headquarters (GHQ) in

Tokyo seriously seriously considered abolishing the Japanese language altogether.

Globalization is nothing but a blatant scheme in which major corporate groups across the world are striving to do business in multiple countries, abolish customs, liberalize trade, and monopolize the global economy.

The Japanese government is frantically trying to improve the English skills of the people by inviting many so-called “native” teachers from the English-speaking world to Japan.

English has been a required subject in Japanese schools since the hot, humid summer of 1945. It is required in examinations for entering schools or companies. The alphabet is also included in tests for some kindergarten children.

Globalization inspires an inferiority complex among the Japanese people who have poor English-language skills. Japanese who cannot speak English are discriminated against as uneducated or intellectually challenged – there is a certain shame should one have poor English skills. Yet the surprisingly overwhelming majority of Japanese people struggle to master it. This is a nation of very talented and smart individuals – if they studied hard, shouldn’t they have the top English skills in the world?

American universities judge whether or not to accept international students according to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). But the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is used in Japan.

The difference between these two exams is embarrassing to elaborate.

The TOEFL, which is required for aspiring international students, is too difficult for the Japanese. As a result, the TOEIC was produced by the same American company that created the TOEFL as an alternative English test that would be easier for Japanese people.

An annual ranking of TOEFL results in 27 Asian countries tells all.

North Korea is number 25. Japan is number 26.

In postwar Japan, the students study English on the verge of tears because they believe they must know English, the international language, to become true citizens of the world. Despite this, their results are atrocious.

Japanese pupils have an inferiority complex en masse because they will be seen as uneducated if they cannot speak English. These harsh, adverse repercussions are caused by the nation’s shallow educational policy whipped into a fury by globalization. No Japanese prime minister intervenes, because he too believes in learning English over Japanese.

A New Golden Dawn

Japan’s golden age was not the Heian Period of 1,200 years ago, when a few nobles enjoyed genteel entertainments. Nor was it the Genroku Era of 400 years ago, when only rich merchants indulged in luxuries.

The aesthetic fusing of character and morals – rightly described as Japan’s national characteristic – is the DNA of Japan’s spiritual culture, which has been nurtured and cultivated over thousands of years. It gives us the intrinsic power to take a stern look at the truth and the courage to speak it. This courage feeds the dynamism for building a new Japan.

The backbone of Japan’s golden age is our cultural, genetic core of our mature aesthetics and morals, which is like no other in the world.

The heartbeat of these aesthetics and morals will forever resound in the hearts and souls of the people who are born in Japan and grow up hearing the beautiful rhythm of the Japanese language.

Japanese people cherish order and harmony, exercise considerations for other people, and strive to aid others even in tragic circumstances like the Great Osaka Earthquake and the Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami, and Fukushima nuclear accident. The hungry people affected by these disasters did not break into supermarkets or steal goods. There was no looting or theft anywhere. They waited in long lines to receive precious water, and hundreds of pairs of shoes were arranged in an orderly manner at the entryways to the shelters for the victims. The international media was deeply moved upon witnessing these scenes. The world saw the living aesthetics and moral sense of the Japanese. Bushido, which the Western powers tried to kill 150 years ago, is still alive.

Seventy-seven years passed between the Imperial Restoration and 1945. Seventy-one years passed between 1945 and 2016.

The Japanese people shall cherish their aesthetics and morals without being disheartened by these repeated interventions and tragedies. This would inspire respect and awe from people across the world.

The first golden age of Japan is imminent. Indeed, the sun will rise again.