

## POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE "ADVOCACY OF AN EXPEDITION TO KOREA" IN THE 1870S: AN ASPECT OF JAPANESE IMPERIALISM

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*Japan launched her modernization in reaction to the foreign crisis after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Meiji government sought to construct "rich nation and strong military." For these goals, Japan became an agent of Western imperialism showing aggression against neighboring countries in East Asia. However, the nature of Japanese imperialism was different from that of European imperialism. It was influenced by the historical foundation of the East Asian political order, ideology, and culture. This paper studies the cultural foundation of Japanese imperialism by examining the "advocacy of an expedition to Korea" (Seikan-ron) in the early Meiji period. The main purpose of this study is to examine the conflict in the theme of rationality appearing in the advocacy using a Weberian framework.*

### INTRODUCTION

[A]ll the activities and situations constituting an historically given culture affect the formation of material wants, the mode of their satisfaction, the integration of interest groups and the types of power which they exercise. They thereby affect the course of "economic development" (Weber 1949, p. 66).

In the nineteenth century, Western imperialism reached the whole globe and began to exercise its dominant material power all over the world. The impact of the West was "the effort of the Western bourgeoisie ... to remold the world after its own image by means of terror" (Mao 1959). The motivation of expansion was economic in its essence and political on the surface. The aggressive force of Western imperialism swayed other societies, and its exploitative nature hindered these societies from gaining momentum for capitalist development. Most nations fell under Western countries in colonial and semicolonial status.

Japan faced a Western threat by Commodore Perry from the United States in 1852. This foreign crisis weakened the legitimacy of the ruling class and exacerbated internal social conflicts (Trimberger 1972). Japan reacted to the foreign crisis and began to mold her own way of survival in the competitive world capitalism. The first reaction of this sort at the national level was the Meiji Restoration in 1868 that ended the Tokugawa regime together with its

stagnant nature of the society. The Restoration was to restore the power of Emperor Meiji by the revolt within the ruling class.<sup>1</sup> The Meiji leaders abolished the feudal political system, consolidated political factions, and built a centralized government.

The Meiji government sought to construct "rich nation and strong military" (*fukoku kyohei*). This slogan represents the change and continuity of the Meiji regime. The emphasis on rich nation indicates an ideological change from economic stagnation to economic progression. The emphasis on strong military reflects the continuity from the militaristic feudal Japan. With the combination of these two goals, Japan became an agent of Western imperialism carrying violence and aggression to other countries in East Asia (Moore 1972). However, the nature and the logic of Japanese imperialism were not the same as those of European imperialism. Japanese imperialism was "a continuation of a movement dating back many decades, perhaps even centuries" (Boulding and Gleason 1972, p. 245). It stood on the foundation of the East Asian political order, ideology, and culture. Furthermore, the purpose of Japanese imperialism in East Asia was to defend not only the territory but also Asia's soul (Beasley 1987). This paper studies the cultural foundation of Japanese imperialism by examining the "advocacy of an expedition to Korea" (*Seikan-ron*)<sup>2</sup> in the early Meiji period.

## JAPANESE IMPERIALISM AND CAPITALIST DEVELOPMENT

It has been widely accepted that nineteenth century imperialism was essentially economic: "[T]he need of capitalist industrial societies to find new markets, sources of raw materials, areas of investment, and outlets for surplus population" (Mayo 1970, p. viii). The Japanese advance into Korea also has been understood in the same context (Hong 1973; Nakamura 1974; Myers 1984; Calman 1992). The most influential explanation of economic imperialism today is derived from the Marxist tradition (Roxborough 1979; Gann 1984). Associating the imperialist expansionism with the potential crisis at the highest stage of capitalist development, Lenin (1917) argues that the crisis of capitalism had been receded by imperialistic exploitation of colonial areas and by exporting capital to backward countries. Most

<sup>1</sup>The revolt within the ruling class in the Meiji Restoration is often characterized by the names such as "elite revolution" (Trimberger 1972), "aristocratic revolution" (Smith 1961), and "revolution from above" (Moore 1966).

<sup>2</sup>The advocacy of Korean expedition is commonly known as the "Seikan-ron" in Japanese and the "Jeonghan-ron" in Korean. This paper uses the term "Seikan-ron" to accommodate the purpose of the paper, which is to understand political culture in the early Meiji period.

Japanese scholars in the fifties and sixties preferred to discuss Meiji imperialism in the context of the Leninist thesis (Ono 1959; Sato 1961).

Japanese imperialistic aggression in the nineteenth century, however, was generated under pre-capitalistic economic conditions. At the time, the Japanese economy was mainly based on agricultural production, and production systems were semi-feudal (Inoue 1968; Calman 1992). These economic conditions imply that early Meiji aggression cannot be ascribed to the Leninist thesis.

Wallerstein, articulating the dependency perspective, interprets that the rise of capitalism "was from the beginning an affair of the world economy and not of nation-state" (1974, p. 19). In this view, Japanese imperialism was a reflection of the incorporation process into the world system. However, Japan was a periphery nation in the nineteenth century in the world division of labor. Like most non-European nations, Japan was forcibly incorporated into the world economy by Western imperialism. While most nations that were incorporated into the world economy in the nineteenth century became depleted and impoverished,<sup>3</sup> Japan was an exception in the pattern of the world capitalist development. Japan was not fully incorporated in the world system, because geographical distance and poor natural resources made Western powers not much interested in Japan (Moulder 1977). Japan had a "breathing space" in the tight competition for territories and markets of the world system (Norman 1975).

Given the room for indigenous economic growth, the Japanese strategy for industrialization was also an exception to the classical pattern of capitalist development. While the order of industrialization has usually been the transition from light industries to heavy industries, the developmental pattern of Japan was reversed. "Before the first introduction of cotton spinning machines in Japan in 1866, ... [c]annon were cast as early as 1844 in Mito, and engineering works were established ... in 1856 for military and naval purposes" (Norman 1975, p. 233). Japanese capitalist development began with military technologies because Japan needed to secure her own territory as an independent nation-state at the threat of Western advancement in East Asia (Jansen 1968). To become a "rich nation" Japan had to attain political equality with the West, and "strong military" was a necessary requirement to withstand the threats of Western powers (Oh 1983). "[T]he correspondence of the vital interests of Japanese capitalism with military requirements for national survival was of

<sup>3</sup>The dependency perspective views that industrialized capitalist nations blocked further development of non-industrialized nations. For dependency theory, refer to Johnson (1973), Cockroft, Frank, and Johnson (1972), Cardoso and Faletto (1979), and Frank (1984).

momentous importance in determining the speed of Japan's economic and political development after the Meiji [Restoration]" (Baran 1957, p. 161). This somewhat passive nature of Japanese imperialism is often characterized as "self-defensive" imperialism (Mayo 1970) or "petty" imperialism (Houston 1984).

#### *Specificity of Japanese Imperialism and East Asian Order*

Imperialism has been viewed without resorting to economic interests by some scholars. Schumpeter identifies imperialism with "a heritage of the autocratic state [that] has reorganized ... [and] would never have been evolved by the 'inner logic' of capitalism itself" (1951, pp. 98-128). Pollard argues that pleas of self-defense or special economic needs were only pretexts and not the real causes of Japanese empire-building in Asia: "Behind the Japanese hopes of social, economic, and political salvation to be gained by territorial acquisition, lies a long history of dreams which seem to bear little relationship to population pressure, the need of markets and raw materials, political necessities, or strategic needs" (1970, p. 13). A long history of dreams refers to the Hideyoshi's dream to create a great Asiatic Empire in the sixteenth Century (Aziz 1955).

In the Confucian world of traditional East Asia, where order and tranquility were ensured by the voluntary submission of the "lesser" states, struggle for the mastery of the Chinese continent was an unavoidable requisite for obtaining political and cultural hegemony in East Asia (Kim 1980). As a result, the aggression of Japanese imperialism was destined to be directed towards adjacent regions and the continent (Kubin 1959; Peattie 1984).<sup>4</sup>

The English humiliation of the Chinese in the nineteenth century was evidence for China's disability to maintain her suzerainty over the East Asian countries (Kim 1980). The Meiji leaders recalled and began to see the possibility to achieve Hideyoshi's glorious dream of the expedition into the continent and building an empire (Pollard 1970). Korea became a stepping stone of the Meiji expansion into the continent again.

#### *Internal Conflicts and External Violence*

Power struggles in the Meiji's politics were important forces that influenced how and when Japan became an imperial power (Matsukuma 1963). After the Meiji Restoration, the new regime was unable to centralize

<sup>4</sup>These characteristics were realized in the idea of the East Asian Co-Prosperity Zone in later development of Japanese imperialism.

political and administrative authority over internal and external affairs. There were power factions among the leaders of the Meiji Restoration. One faction was lined along the former *bakufu* system consisting of the main participants of the Restoration: Choshu, Satsuma, Hizen, and Tosa *hans*. The other factions after the Restoration were generated by ideas and ideologies of new Japan, sometimes within one *han* or sometimes across *hans*.

Those who participated in the Restoration, mostly lower samurai and *ronin* (samurai without fiefs), suddenly lost their roles in Japanese society. There were a considerable number of samurai who were uncomfortable with enforced leisure and needed military action to maintain their prestige (Norman 1975). In addition to the loss of prerogatives that they expected to obtain as participants, militaristic aristocracy sought a way to evaporate its violent heat. Schumpeter argues that "if civil war was to be avoided, then external wars were required. Foreign campaigns preoccupied and satisfied ... the military machine, which must not be allowed to rust or languish" (1951, p. 47). The Meiji government used the external violence and internal suppression of political opponents alternatively to alleviate the tension within the leadership. The *Seikan-ron* reflects internal conflicts interwoven with the external violence.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SEIKAN-RON

### *Exclusionism of Korea*

Korea avoided contact with Western powers longer than any other country in East Asia. Under the protection of China, Korea enjoyed relative autonomy in the turmoil of political collisions between the West and the East. Up until the 1870s, any contact with nations except China was loathsome for the Korean ruling classes. Kim (1980) argues that the root of Korean exclusionism is traced to her historical experiences in the late sixteenth century and the early seventeenth century that had bequeathed a deep distrust of foreigners. The first incident was the invasion of Hideyoshi in the 1590s. The Japanese destruction of the Korean kingdom was followed by two invasions of the Manchus in the seventeenth century. These invasions of two and half centuries before the modern era had left deep historical scars and distrust of foreign nations. Blended with the Confucian goal of the state, the wish for peace, the remnants of the past led to the isolation of Korea.

While Koreans were deeply wounded by foreigners, the only formal relationship with China—the Ching dynasty—was maintained by the control of China. This was possible at the expense of Ching's severe

restriction on the Korean government's foreign policy. For more than two centuries, this restriction had provided relatively secure Korean performance in international politics. National security became one of the most important aspect of foreign policy. Korean statesmen have become accustomed to seclusion based on Chinese courtesy. In the late nineteenth century when China was not able to cope with the Western powers, the two centuries old seclusion policy remained strong.

When Western expansionism reached the high point in East Asia in the early 1860s, Korea still maintained her exclusionism. The lack of sustained Western interests in Korea made Korea's isolation possible. Koreans were proud of such a stand in light of Western threats and viewed China and Japan as if they invited calamity when they established trade and diplomatic relations with the Western barbarians. In so viewing, Koreans decided not to follow the Chinese and refused to enter into political relations with Westerners. Most Koreans believed in their "superior moral virtue" as if it prevented the barbarious powers of the West from coming into Korea, and thought that it "enabled them to withstand Western pressure" (Kim 1980, p. 63). Rigid conformity to Neo-Confucianism bred a militant form of cultural chauvinism that intensified the exclusionism of Korea (Kim 1980).

#### *Meiji Efforts and Korean Rejection*

The new Meiji government, shortly after its establishment in 1868, sought to notify Korea of the restoration of the Emperor to power in Japan and to re-establish official relations with Korea that had been preserved from the early Tokugawa regime. Korea, however, having been proud of her seclusion and Confucian moral superiority, refused to accept the official notification of the new Meiji government. In the context of the Confucian political order in East Asia, the use of "Emperor" or "Imperial Edict" referring to Meiji appeared impudent to Korean officials (Kim 1980). Moreover, the Japanese collaboration with Westerners was deemed to be Japanese attempts to breach the Korean seclusion with Western "barbarians." The impertinent attitude of the Meiji government reminded Koreans of the deeply scarred experience of Hideyoshi's invasion and devastation of Korean land in the 1590s (Conroy 1960; Kim 1980).

In so viewing, Koreans were not happy with the Japanese effort to resume the formal relationship with the Korean government. The Korean officials mainly tried to ignore the Japanese political attempts to re-establish a formal relationship with Korea. Japanese officials began to seek other ways to deal with Koreans and became more aggressive and belligerent. Lord So

of Tsushima who was instructed to negotiate with Koreans notified the Japanese foreign office in June of 1869:

Korea does not accept our notification of the establishment of the new government. This is because they wish to avoid intercourse with the Imperial government. There is no other recourse than to negotiate with the Korean King face to face in his capital ... Therefore you must decide whether to adopt a strong policy (Conroy 1960, p. 24).<sup>5</sup>

The problem with Korea at the time was not significant enough to provoke an intensive reaction from Japanese officials. Although Japanese officials preferred the long term solution with an overly optimistic estimate in the beginning (Conroy 1960, p. 29), their patience did not last long. Continuous Japanese efforts and consistent Korean refusals were adding intensity to the fever of a Korean expedition among Japanese leaders.

#### *Development of Seikan-ron*

The Meiji leaders were divided by their political outlooks and interests. In the internal and external turmoil, the Meiji government sought to develop Japan as a rich nation through strong military. Under this general consensus, however, there was a conflict among the Meiji leaders on the issue of the priority—whether internal reconstruction and industrialization along Western methods or immediate and forceful expansion should be done first (Norman 1975, p. 192). This tension collided over the question of a punitive expedition to Korea, whether Japan should inflict “military chastisement” upon the Korean government (Conroy 1960; Najita 1974).

This incident was the beginning of the *Seikan-ron* in 1873. The debate between the two parties, however, was not aimed at the expedition itself but rather to the timing of using physical power. In regard to Korean insolence, the pro-seikan party insisted on the immediate chastisement on normative basis, while the anti-seikan party tried to cool down heated emotion and insisted on postponing execution until Japan became internally matured and modernized (Conroy 1960).

The anti-seikan party was led by samurai from Choshu and Satsuma, Okubo Toshimichi, Kido Takayoshi, Iwakura Tomomi, Ito Hirobumi, and Yamagata Aritomo. The pro-seikan party was composed of Saigo Takamori of Satsuma, Itagaki Taisuke and Goto Shojiro of Tosa, Eto Shimpei and Soyejima Taneomi of Hizen. Among these members, Saigo Takamori was the most famous, stoutest, and consistent champion until the defeat of the

<sup>5</sup>Cited from Gaimusho, *Nihon Gaiko Bunsho* (Tokyo) volume 2: 217 and volume 3: 410-12.

"Satsuma Rebellion" in 1878. He was generally known to be most responsive to the samurai's dissatisfaction that was generated by the abolition of the clans in 1871. The leaders from Tosa and Hizen were interested in revitalizing their clans in opposition to the Meiji government in which Satsuma and Choshu were predominant.

The anti-seikan party achieved a first round political victory over the expansionists by the resignation of the pro-seikan party from the government in 1873. In 1874, the political battle between the two parties appeared again in the form of a violent military clash. Eto Shimpei rebelled against the Meiji government with 5000 former samurai from Hizen. This incident, called the "Saga Rebellion," was suppressed quickly by the government military led by Okubo Toshimichi from Choshu. Meanwhile, Saigo busied himself with a private school (*Shi-gakko*) for Confucian principles and samurai ethics in Kagoshima. In the summer of 1875, a small battle between Korea and Japan near Kangwha island in Korea<sup>6</sup> brought serious debate about invading Korea between the two parties. The advocates of an expedition to Korea positioned themselves against the government more strongly this time.

This consistent conflict within the Meiji leadership was moving toward the final battle in the years to come after the Kangwha incident. In 1877-1878, the last and the largest rebel against the Meiji government rose from the biggest participant of the Restoration, Satsuma. This final battle between Saigo Takamori and the government ended by the defeat of the rebellion and the death of Saigo in 1878. Having defeated the largest reactionary faction, the Meiji government gained political ground for the centralization of political powers under the nominal authority of the Emperor and speeded up the modernization of Japan. However, the expansionist opposition to the government did not die away. The goal of expansion was adopted by the extreme right-wing for many years to come, and finally realized within twenty years of Saigo's death by the next generation of expansionists (Norman 1975).

## CULTURE OF SEIKAN-ROK

The Meiji mind was one of continuity and change. The Meiji intellectuals saw themselves as living in a momentous period of change. The Western way of thinking offered a justification for political and social change in

<sup>6</sup>This battle is called the Unyo Incident in Japanese and the Kangwha Incident in Korean.



terms of “enlightened government,” and enabled the Meiji leaders to disprove the unconditional acceptance of traditional norms and ethical ideas of duty (Davis 1980). The dilemma was the obsolescence of the old structure in the coherence of the social and political universes based on Confucian morality (Najita and Koschmann 1982). It was an anomic situation as Durkheim described: “tradition has lost its sway; ... the new life which has emerged so suddenly has not been able to be completely organized, and above all, it has not been organized in a way to satisfy the need for justice” (1933, pp. 408-409).

The disapproval of the old society gave rise to ideas and directions of changes that were divergent and even conflicting each other. The confusion of the times permitted freedom of debate on the national goal and governmental policy.<sup>7</sup> As anywhere else, the process of consolidating divergent views was not simple and smooth. Traditional norms became questionable in the face of the efficiency-seeking mind on the one hand. On the other hand, emerging new ideas were not morally right from the viewpoint of traditional culture (Najita 1974). The traditional and the modern opposed each other.

#### *A Weberian Framework*

From Weber’s point of view, the confusion of the times was caused by the coexistence of traditional norms and modern rational orientations. Among Weber’s ideal types of rationality, the formal rationality and the substantive rationality are the two important conceptual devices in distinguishing modern and traditional societies. The formal rationality legitimates a calculation of ends and means to the attainment according to universally applied abstract principles on the level of social groups and institutions; on the other hand, substantive rationality orders patterns of action in relation to ultimate points of view (Kalberg 1980).<sup>8</sup>

Weber identifies modernization with the penetration of formal rationality

<sup>7</sup>At the end of the Tokugawa period, many samurai purposely left their lords and became *ronin*. Fujita argues that the prime mover of the Meiji Restoration was “free debating, free association, free action, the horizontal orientation of *ronin*” (1970, p. 74).

<sup>8</sup>Weber distinguishes two rational orientations on the discrete individual level. The instrumentalrational orientation (*zweckrational*) makes use of expectations as “conditions” or “means” for the successful attainment of the actor’s chosen ends. The valuerational orientation (*wertrational*) involves a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of any prospects of external success (Weber 1947). However, Weber did not provide a theme of rationality on the level of largescale social groups to which Stephan Kalberg (1980) appears to have provided a key solution (Cohen 1981).

to all levels of society. As a result, "one can, in principle, master all things by calculation ... [, and that] one need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits" (1946, p. 139). The domination of formal rationality in the private economic sphere and the state are particularly important in this process. Weber identifies capitalism with the existence of the formal rationality "as the norm for all large industrial undertakings which are concerned with provision for everyday wants" (1981, p. 276).

The rationalization of private economy involves accounting for profitability, rational modes of work, and separation of property from political power (Nisbet 1966). Similarly, bureaucracy is characterized by the penetration of formal rationality with respect to a code of universally applied regulations to any form of organization (Weber 1968). The rationalization of government implies the development of bureaucratic administration that involves centralization, generalization, and abstraction of power (Nisbet 1966).

The Meiji government was confronted with small and large conflicts in the process of transition to a modern state. Particularly, the rationalization process of the government generated political upheavals in the early Meiji period. The *Seikan-ron* was the first serious political crisis of the Meiji state. Behind this debate, there was conflict between those who sought the "right" action and those who sought the "appropriate" action. It was a conflict caused by confusion of different judgements based on different rationalities.<sup>9</sup> The pro-seikan party made judgements from the viewpoint of the traditional idealism that the punishment of Korea was morally "right," and that the samurai had to be single-mindedly devoted to this without calculating the consequence. On the other hand, the anti-seikan party considered that an immediate invasion would have been inappropriate and irrational on the basis of the calculation of national priorities of the time. The view of Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834-1901), one of the most famous progressive thinkers of the time, reflected the view of the rationalist: "To operate emotionally on the international level is not only foolish and mistaken, it is against our sense of what is right."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Weber argues that "what counts as 'rational' from one of these points of view may be 'irrational' from another" (1978, p. 340). "For instance, it is possible to 'rationalize' mystical contemplation— in other words, a form of behavior which, from the point of view of other areas of life, is specifically 'irrational'—just as much as the economy, technology, scientific work, education, war, the law and administration. Furthermore, any of these areas may be 'rationalized' from many different ultimate points of view and with many different purposes" (Weber 1978, pp. 339-40).

*Sentiment of Chastisement: An Expression of Traditional Culture*

The general anger of the Meiji leaders against Korea was generated from their hearty spirit of the samurai that recognized the contradiction between reality and traditional norms.<sup>11</sup> In the Confucian norms and ethics, invitation of Western civilization was a betrayal of the traditional norms and social orders. The *sonno-joi* movement — “Revere the Emperor, Expel the barbarian” — to which the Meiji builders were allied, was not fully accomplished by the new government. While the restoration of the Emperor to power was attained, the accommodation of Western powers was an inevitable fate. “In their heart, ... [the Japanese] were sorely troubled that old ways were inadequate to meet the exigencies of the new situation, and they were ashamed that they, with samurai swords and bushido spirit, could not hold back the Western wave” (Conroy 1960, p. 18). The stubborn and admonitory rejection of the Korean government agitated the ashamed sentiments of the Meiji leaders.

The Korean problem was also recognized as threatening the new government under the unsettled political circumstance. The acceptance of Western civilization by the Meiji government may have been seen as evidence for the weakness of the regime. In this situation, the Korean refusal to accept the Meiji government could have provided further evidence for the regime's weakness and thus threatened the public endorsement of the new government. The Meiji government worried that the Korean refusal might invoke the rise of opposition among the former ruling members in the Tokugawa regime. Therefore, the Korean problem was not only a matter of insolence to their hearts and spirits but also a source of political crisis for the new regime.

In addition, there was a sentiment of expansion that originated from the mythological teachings of Shintoism that had been taught by *kokugakusha* (the national scholars). The mythological characteristic of the Meiji's nationalism led to the emphasis of Emperor worship, the *fukko Shinto* (revival of Shintoism) as a national state religion (Aziz 1955).<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>10</sup>Cited in Fujita (1970). Fukuzawa wrote these words in response to violent attacks by the “right” reactionaries in *Gakumon no susume no hiho* (*Criticisms of The Encouragement of Learning*).

<sup>11</sup>Although emotional actions are more suitable to the type of affectually-rational orientation of Weber's ideal types, the anger among the Meiji leaders was originated from the traditional value system.

<sup>12</sup>Shinto is an Emperor-based theocracy that positions Japan at the center of the universe and teaches that the whole world can be in “harmony” under the rule of the Japanese

mythological nationalism preached the belief that Japan was a nation divinely established and favored, and that the Japanese were the chosen people of the Orient and destined to rule other people. This belief provided the Meiji leaders the expansionist pride and sentiment to chastise the Korean government (Pollard 1970). Moreover, the mythological nationalism was cultivated and exercised through the expansionist policy of *fukoku kyōhei*.

### 1. Bushido Spirit

Bushido is the code of the samurai. The spirit of bushido provided a fertile ground for the sentiment of chastisement (Aziz 1955). The most cogent precept in bushido was Righteousness. "Rectitude [Righteousness] is the power of deciding upon a certain course of conduct in accordance with reason, without wavering; —to die when it is right to die, to strike when to strike is right" (Nitobe 1905, p. 23). The bushido spirit provided a meaningful justification for the Righteous punishment of Korea for her insolence to the Emperor. If Righteousness was the principle of the samurai's action, what made it conducive was Courage or Valor: "Courage is doing what is right" (Ibid, p. 29). Courage is an expression of the spiritual strength that pushes forward what has to be done. Spiritualism preaches "nothing is impossible to a determined mind" (Minami 1983, p. 134). Thus, Righteousness is realized by courageous individuals with spiritual strength.

From the standpoint of bushido's spiritualism, punishing Korea was a righteous action. Moreover, avoiding military collision with Korea was considered lacking in Courage and spirit. A courageous and sincere hero was created to stand against the anti-seikan party. He was an active loyalist, Saigo Takamori of Satsuma.

### 2. Saigo Takamori and the Virtue of Personal Authority

Saigo Takamori was a model samurai. He was respected as one of the greatest heroes of Japan not only by his followers but also by his opponents. His death in 1878 after the failure of the Satsuma rebellion brought to many Meiji leaders ambivalent feelings when they should have been submersed in the joy of victory. Those who were Saigo's military cliques in the battle for the Restoration and enemies in the battle against the Satsuma rebellion mourned for his death as an "unavoidable product of circumstance" caused by the conflict between samurai virtue and the national demand for the

Emperor (Calman 1992). A well-known *kokugakusha* and an activist, Maruyama Masahiko wrote that "Our Emperor is not just the Emperor of these islands but the Great Emperor of the six continents" (1899, p. 111).

modernization. Yamagata from Choshu, who led the universal conscription system of the imperial army, sorrowed for his fate and celebrated the fallen hero (Hackett 1971, p. 81):

With only the autumn moon  
 where is any trace of the skies  
 which saw the mountains burst  
 and the oceans dry up?

Saigo Takamori was most responsive to the *shizoku's* (former samurai) dissatisfaction. Industrialization of Japanese society demanded structural changes. The first attack was on the *bakufu* system of feudal Japan. The abolition of the *fief* in 1871, the new Fundamental Code of Education of 1872, and the first universal conscription law in 1873 quickly led to the disintegration of the samurai class. Soon after the abolition of the feudal system, many samurai became impoverished and some even rose up against the new government. Although most *shizoku* were staffed by either central and prefectural governments or subsidized in private business, they were not able to adjust themselves to the modern economic system and not successful in competing with commoners (Halliday 1975). Furthermore, the samurai were deprived of the key substantive items that had defined them as a proud aristocracy—their monopoly of arms and knowledge (Najita 1974). The loss of surplus agricultural wealth and socio-political privilege contributed to a sense of psychological disorientation among *shizoku* and rural elites (Davis 1980, pp. 15-6).

Saigo Takamori felt responsible for the discontent of *shizoku* (Norman 1975). Saigo's feeling of responsibility rose from the patriarchal relationship between the leader and followers. Weber argues that the patriarchal domination is the most important pre-bureaucratic type of domination of which the salient characteristic is its authority relationship based on personal ties. "Practically everything depends explicitly upon the personal considerations: upon the attitude toward the concrete applicant and his concrete request and upon purely personal connections, favors, promises, and privileges" (Weber 1968, p. 1041).

The emphasis on the value of the "personal responsibility" was *giri* in the traditional Japanese society. *Giri* is a duty that a man owes to parents, to superiors, to inferiors, and to society at large (Nitobe 1905, p. 25). It provides a normative basis between people by converting a functional duty of society to duty in the personal relationship. Though one may not be genuinely willing to do so, the *giri* relationship obliges one to come to the aid of other persons (Azumi 1974). In the context of the relationship

between different ranks of samurai, the underlying cultural basis for the *giri* of the higher ranked officials was the patriarchal and paternal care of his subordinates, and that of subordinates was the personal loyalty and fidelity to their superior.

### *Emergence of Nationalism*

The anti-seikan party's policy was directed toward nationalism under the centralization of military-political powers. The pro-seikan party was not pleased by the direction of the Meiji bureaucracy that tried to move political centers from feudal domains to one national center. The advocates of an expedition to Korea sought to create conditions to form a national samurai army which would have been a military-political instrument of class rule at home. "The central issue at stake was the traditional monopoly force by the samurai class" (Crowley 1970, p. 272).

The effort of the Meiji government to centralize political powers was confronted with factional patriotism. Factional patriotism was a continuation of the feudal politics in which patriotism was confined to the domain (Craig 1968, p. 100).<sup>13</sup> Ozaki Yukio described the political factionalism of the time as follows: "political parties ... are really affairs of personal connections and sentiments, the relations between the leaders and members of a party being similar to those which subsisted between a feudal lord and his liegemen" (1918, p. 93). Factional patriotism based on the doctrine of personal loyalty to the lord had been dominating samurai psychology since the middle ages (Fujita 1970). The process of the transformation of patriotism from a feudal to a national doctrine, therefore, required the reconstruction of the basis of authority relations from personal to impersonal ones.

Weber argues that "bureaucratic administration converted the duty to personal loyalty to the modern loyalty to an office, the devotion to *impersonal* purposes" (1968, p. 959). The process of establishing impersonal authority in Japanese politics was done through bureaucratic administration by changing the object of loyalty from many feudal lords to one national figure, the Emperor. This process led to the achievement of impersonal authority relationships and in turn to unified nationalism and expansionist desires.

In the course of nationalism, the egalitarian ideology was developed and spread among the people. Bureaucracy played an important role in this process. Weber (1946, p. 224) describes the process as follows:

<sup>13</sup>Cited from Ito (1928, p. 2).

Bureaucratic organization has usually come into power on the basis of a leveling of economic and social difference... Bureaucracy inevitably accompanies modern *mass democracy*... This results from the characteristic principle of bureaucracy: the abstract regularity of the execution of authority, which is a result of the demand for "equality before the law" in the personal and functional sense.

Furthermore, the industrialization process demanded the mobilization of the full population for the labor force. The Neo-Confucian hierarchy in Japan became a nuisance to this modernization process. The privilege and the pride of the samurai class were destroyed by the abolition of the *bakufu* system in 1871 and the universal conscription system in 1873. The abolition of class distinction allowed room for free competition, a universal education system provided the egalitarian ideology, and bureaucratic social control cultivated impersonal authority relationships and free spirit among the people.

#### *Traditional Idealism and Rationality*

Yamamoto constantly warned samurai that "a calculating way of thinking comes from conceited, citified bushido, [and] ... see[ing] through things too far is not desirable" (1980, p. 35, 90). However, constant defeats of the Japanese military motivated by samurai spirit and soul disproved that traditional idealism was proper to the conditions of life of the times. To compete in a hostile capitalist world economy, what was needed for the Meiji leaders was not an idealism based on traditional beliefs nor unconditional loyalty and noble soul but rather the accurate calculation of national benefits. In this context, Fukuzawa preached to the Japanese to "think only in terms of national benefit and calculated self-interest."<sup>14</sup> What was condemned before became more useful and important, and what was respected became stubborn and obsolete.

In contrast to traditional idealism that specifies the ends and more or less orders the means to its ends, the rational action is "to adapt the given means to the pre-established end and to that extent to act logically or 'consequently'" (Loewith 1970, p. 112). There can be many different ends that are weighed in respect to the choice of means in formal rationality (Weber 1968, p. 26). Because of a wider scope of choices of ends and means formal rationality tends to provide more flexible decision-making processes than does substantive rationality.

Having been against the *Seikan-ron*, Okubo emphasized the flexibility: "In order to govern the country and protect the people it is necessary to have a

<sup>14</sup>Cited in Fujita (1970, p. 76).

flexible policy" (Conroy 1960, p. 48). There was also a quiet change of the slogan from *joi* (expel the barbarian) to *kyohei* (strong army) in those years after the downfall of the *bakufu* (Norman 1975). The strongly value laden statement of "barbarian" disappeared, and a more flexible expression became the goal of Japanese national politics. This change signified the modification of the national goal from a substantive form with a firmly specified objective to a less substantive form without directly specifying the objective.

It is important to note that even though the slogan changed, the expansionist ideology of the Meiji leadership did not disappear in the new slogan. There was a strong tendency of continuity of traditional political ideology in what seemed to be entirely new Japanese politics. In the case of the *Seikan-ron* particular, the Meiji leaders had to subjugate those who valued the traditional samurai ideology, not because of the difference in the goal of expansionism, but because of the difference in ways to achieve it. The victory of the rationalist over the traditional idealist did not seem to be a sweeping replacement of the old by the new but rather a temporary friction in the blending process of Western rationalism and traditional idealism. This interwoven feature of Japanese political ideology was the reason why there was incessant revival of spiritual and moral emphasis against material strength in Japanese militarism (Ike 1968, p. 207).

## DISCUSSION

The *Seikan-ron* was the first serious expression of Japanese aggression after the Meiji Restoration, but not in the sense of Western imperialism to which Japan became close around the turn of the century. We cannot equate the *Seikan-ron* with Western style economic expansionism. Nonetheless, the *Seikan-ron* played an important role in the development of Japanese imperialism by providing a chance to resolve conflict in internal politics. In the course of the resolution to the *Seikan-ron*, divergent political ideologies converged, and factions of political power were consolidated under centralized government. Factional and patriarchal features of traditional ideology and the political system were replaced by a unified nationalist ideology and a centralized bureaucratic system. Under the centralized government machinery, the Meiji leaders were able to pursue political and economic development for the next seventy or so years.

The split of the Meiji leaders over the *Seikan-ron* reflects the conflict and confusion of two large trends of the Japanese polity in transition to a modern state. The pro-seikan party, represented by Saigo Takamori



emphasized the samurai's normative reasoning. On the other hand, the anti-seikan party symbolized the ideological transformation of Japan from traditional to modern. This paper has described the political conflict in the *Seikan-ron* in terms of the Weberian theme of rationality. From this standpoint, the pro-seikan arguments were based on substantive rationality that worships personal loyalty of feudal Japan, whereas the anti-seikan arguments emerged from formal rational calculation of the means and ends in respect to the expedition to Korea.

The irony of this political conflict, however, was the bearing of the expansionist ideology in both parties. This suggests that Japanese expansionism was bound to blend the old dream of the East Asian Empire and capitalist imperialism. It became obvious when the Meiji government adopted the expansionist policy and attempted many wars in the years to come. Moreover, there remained the stress on spiritualism in the military that helped Japan to cope with the aggressive competition of Western capitalist imperialism and to develop her own imperialist power. This is why traditional idealism and spiritualism remained strong in later development of economic imperialism in the Japanese modernization process.

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