

Gaijin Shogun: The Effectiveness of MacArthur in the Early Stages
of the Military Occupation of Japan

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Abstract

In the aftermath of World War II, the Allied powers occupied Germany and Japan to ensure a peaceful transition at the end of the war. While the Allies had conquered Germany in its entirety, Japan's surrender in the wake of the atomic bombs forestalled a costly invasion of the Japanese mainland. President Harry Truman granted General Douglas MacArthur the title of Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) when he appointed the general as the leader of America's occupation force in Japan. As SCAP, MacArthur oversaw the initial years of the reconstruction of Japan and its transition from a war-torn military dictatorship to a stable democracy and strong American ally. As a sign of respect, the Japanese people referred to MacArthur as "Gaijin Shogun," invoking the historical title of Japan's military leaders. Rather than flaunting his power, MacArthur's policies during his term as SCAP focused on rebuilding Japan, rather than completing its subjugation. This action paved the way for Japan to rise again as one of America's strongest regional allies once the occupation ended.

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On the morning of September 2, 1945, the United States battleship *Missouri* lay moored in Tokyo Bay, awaiting a delegation from the Japanese government for the signing of the document which would bring the end of World War II. From its mast flew the same American flag which adorned the White House on the day of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, four long years ago. The delegation approached in somber spirits, for in the words of delegate Kase Toshikazu, “Were we not sorrowing men, come to seek a tomb for a fallen empire?”¹ Naturally, the delegation, and indeed the world at large, expected America as the conqueror to mete out punitive punishment against the nation which had attacked it unprovoked.² However, General Douglas MacArthur, who Washington assigned as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan, explained in a speech that day that he did not come to Japan with the intent of kicking a downed nation, nor of exacting a price in blood for the pains of war. Instead, he preached a message of reconstruction and an occupation characterized by “freedom, justice, and tolerance.”³

Although MacArthur’s time as SCAP was not free of quarrels and friction with the domestic Japanese government, he remained committed to promoting the ideals of freedom,

¹ Kase Toshikazu, *Journey to the Missouri* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 4.

² Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1956), 217.

³ “General MacArthur’s Speech at the Surrender of Japan,” *Naval History and Heritage Command*, March 8, 2021, www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digital-exhibits-highlights/vj-day/surrender/macarthur-speech.html.

democracy, and equality which America's Constitution holds as sacred. MacArthur proclaimed at the surrender ceremony, "It is my earnest hope and indeed the hope of all mankind that from this solemn occasion a better world shall emerge out of the blood and carnage of the past ... a world dedicated to the dignity of man and the fulfillment of his most cherished wish – for freedom, tolerance, and justice."⁴ By approaching the Japanese surrender and impending occupation with respect and magnanimity, MacArthur avoided alienating the Japanese people and forged an international alliance that would transform America's erstwhile enemy into one of its strongest allies in the region.

As an important figure in American military history, MacArthur is the subject of many biographies. Historians consider Clayton James the leading authority on MacArthur, and his work *The Years of MacArthur* is among the most detailed accounts of MacArthur's life. James is meticulous in recounting the events of MacArthur's life and examines the numerous controversies which embroiled the general's extensive career with an even hand.⁵ For a more personal look at the general's life and perceptions, MacArthur's *Reminiscences* provides invaluable insight. The reader must take his description of events with a grain of salt, however, as MacArthur writes that he drew the contents of the book primarily from his memories alone. Nonetheless, when combined with a thoroughly researched biography and other sources to verify events, *Reminiscences* becomes a vital resource to allow the reader a glimpse into MacArthur's mind.⁶

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Dorris Clayton James, *The Years of MacArthur* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970).

⁶ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), vi.

In the analysis of the political aspects of MacArthur's career, Masuda Hiroshi's *MacArthur in Asia* provides an excellent examination of the impact MacArthur had on the Asian countries where he spent his career. Masuda's work is particularly interesting in its examination of MacArthur's influence on the Japanese political sphere and his role in constructing a post-war constitution that did not favor war as a viable recourse. Masuda views MacArthur's time in Japan as a continuation of his tenure in the Philippines, emphasizing how his previous experiences influenced his behavior towards the Japanese government during his time as SCAP.⁷

Focusing on one specific aspect of MacArthur's reconstruction philosophy, Ray Moore's *Soldier of God* looks at MacArthur's influence on the establishment and promulgation of Christianity in Japan. Having broken the power of the emperor as an undefeatable deity, Moore writes that MacArthur perceived a spiritual power vacuum in Japan. Moore explains how MacArthur saw Japanese Christianity as a vital development, both as a foundation for democracy and as a defense against Communism.⁸

The History of US-Japan Relations From Perry to the Present, written by Iokibe Makoto, provides an excellent overview of the state of relations between the United States and Japan since their first political encounter. Iokibe's work provides analysis of Japan's post-war democratization, contextualized against both the rocky state of relations in the lead-up to World War II and Japan's current state as a strong U.S. ally. He demonstrates how the relationship between Japan and America has oscillated between friendship and cooperation, as seen in the

⁷ Masuda Hiroshi and Yamamoto Reiko, *MacArthur in Asia the General and His Staff in the Philippines, Japan, and Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), x.

⁸ Ray A. Moore, *Soldier of God: MacArthur's Attempt to Christianize Japan* (Merwin Asia, 2011).

early 1900s and the post-war era, and political or economic friction, as seen before World War II and in the late 1970s.⁹

John Dower's *Embracing Defeat* provides incredible insight into the Japanese psyche in the years following the country's surrender in World War II. Both America and Japan were proud nations and fought with intense racial hatred of each other, but Dower argues that it was Japan's crushing defeat that allowed the countries to move forward into a beneficial post-war partnership. The killing blow of the atomic bombs, combined with Emperor Hirohito's acquiescence to an unconditional surrender, left no doubt in either party's mind that Japan had been utterly defeated, thus allowing the two nations to quickly move past the conflict when a controversial surrender would have brewed resentment among the Japanese populace.¹⁰

Also from John Dower, *Empire and Aftermath* views the timeline of the American occupation of Japan and the ensuing decades through the eyes of Yoshida Shigeru, who served as Japan's prime minister for a substantial portion of that time. Rather than portraying the occupation as an isolated period of time, uninfluenced by the years preceding or following it, Dower contextualizes the Japanese experience of occupation against its history. Yoshida, whose political career began in an era more characterized by Meiji reformism than ultranationalism and militarism, is an important figure in the occupation for his connection to Japanese conservatism. Using Yoshida's experiences, Dower argues that much of Japan's government was more

⁹ Iokibe Makoto and Minohara Tosh, eds., *The History of US-Japan Relations From Perry to the Present* (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2017), viii.

¹⁰ John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co./New Press, 2000), 27.

concerned with preventing the rise of Communism in Japan than in fighting the occupation authorities.¹¹

Michael Schaller's *The American Occupation of Japan* highlights MacArthur's role in cultivating the reconstruction of Japan's government and economy. Schaller illustrates MacArthur's efforts to balance his responsibility to ensure Japan's stability with orders from Washington to exact reparations from the defeated nation. Schaller further argues that a portion of MacArthur's success can be attributed to his willingness to collaborate with Japanese politicians to institute reform, rather than dominating the country and governing by edict alone.¹² This source is especially useful for looking at how the looming threat of Communism from Soviet Russia aided in convincing Japan to stick closely to America in the ensuing decades.

More crucial to understanding the cultural mindset and thought processes of the American occupation are the memoirs of those most involved in the process. Major General Courtney Whitney, head of the government section of MacArthur's occupation administration, records his memories in *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History*. Although the account covers everything from MacArthur's command during World War II to his experiences in America after his dismissal during the Korean War, his description of MacArthur's time in Japan is of particular interest. As Whitney worked closely with MacArthur, he provides a second viewpoint into certain events and offers a degree of objectivity in cross-referencing with MacArthur's

¹¹ John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1979), xxviii.

¹² Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, USA, 1987), 8.

Reminiscences. However, as the book's grandiose title indicates, readers cannot count on Whitney to give a fully objective view, as he held the general in quite high regard.¹³

Especially useful for looking at the Japanese point of view are the memoirs of Yoshida Shigeru, the Japanese prime minister who interacted most with MacArthur during his tenure as SCAP. *The Yoshida Memoirs* tell the story of Japan's crisis of militarism in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by Yoshida's interactions with, and opinions of, the policies and officials of MacArthur's occupation administration. Importantly, although he was initially wary of MacArthur's intentions with Japan, Yoshida makes clear that he developed the utmost respect for the General. Instead, whenever Yoshida complains about behavioral or policy issues, he pins the blame on the "idealistic" members of SCAP's government section. Yoshida calls out General Whitney and Colonel Charles Kades, Whitney's second-in-command, by name, stating his belief that he was not particularly well-liked by either individual. Yoshida's commentary helps to show the Japanese government's focus on the threat of rising Communism and the respect they had for MacArthur's management of the occupation.¹⁴

Another important source to understand the Japanese viewpoint of the surrender and subsequent occupation are the memoirs of Kase Toshikazu, titled *Journey to the Missouri*. Kase was a high-ranking official in the Japanese Foreign Ministry and was among the delegates which the Imperial government sent to confirm Japan's surrender. Kase's account is particularly important because it provides a window into the Japanese perception of the results of the surrender and how MacArthur's behavior and choice of words during his speech at the surrender

¹³ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, Preface.

¹⁴ Yoshida Shigeru, *The Yoshida Memoirs* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 53.

ceremony aboard the *Missouri* inspired his Japanese listeners with hope for the future.¹⁵ Kase's recollection of the surrender ceremony specifically is cited as representative of the Japanese perception in several other works, such as MacArthur's *Reminiscences* and Whitney's *Rendezvous with History*.¹⁶

One final source which is crucial for viewing the American occupation is the account of Ambassador William Sebald, *With MacArthur in Japan*. Similar to Whitney's account, Sebald worked closely with MacArthur during the occupation, but Sebald provides a unique perspective as MacArthur's assigned political advisor. Lacking the same degree of admiration seen in Whitney's account, Sebald is equally candid about MacArthur's short fuse when it came to public relations as he is about MacArthur's magnanimity in dealing with the Japanese government. Particularly, Sebald's account deals in MacArthur's frequent clashes with the United States State Department.¹⁷

As the leader of a post-war military occupation of a defeated power, MacArthur held immense power over Japan's internal politics. Following the path which he laid in the initial years of the occupation, Japan has grown into a stable democracy and now acts as one of America's strongest allies in Eastern Asia. The story of Japan's post-war reconstruction is a rare case of successful state-building, whereby a former belligerent regime grew and evolved into a liberal ally. In recent history, America has seen numerous attempts at state-building in other

¹⁵ Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 5.

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 272.

¹⁷ William J. Sebald, *With MacArthur in Japan: a Personal History of the Occupation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 107.

areas, such as the Middle East, go horribly wrong. Examining MacArthur's policies with a specific focus on his cooperation with local politicians and respect for local culture and customs can provide valuable insights into how America might adjust foreign policy to imitate the success of the Japanese reconstruction.

The success of the American occupation of Japan began with the manner in which MacArthur managed Japan's surrender. Rather than attempting to humiliate the enemy power, he framed the surrender as a good faith attempt to bring the war to a peaceful conclusion. In addressing the delegates at the surrender ceremony, MacArthur asserted, "Nor is it for us here to meet ... in a spirit of distrust, malice or hatred. But rather it is for us ... to rise to that higher dignity which alone befits the sacred purpose we are about to serve."¹⁸ Thus, he demonstrated his desire that there be no lingering ill will on either side of the surrender, hoping instead that the opposing powers could move on to build a better world. However, that is not to say that he treated the Japanese in a manner that they would perceive as weakness. MacArthur continued, "As Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers I announce it my firm purpose ... to proceed in the discharge of my responsibilities with justice and tolerance."¹⁹ By combining justice with tolerance, MacArthur conveyed the implication that while he would not be cruel to a people who had suffered enough, he would not be denied in punishing those responsible for the suffering.

Having operated in East Asia for a large portion of his military career, MacArthur understood how to project strength without disrespecting the Japanese people.²⁰ For instance,

¹⁸ "General MacArthur's Speech," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, March 8, 2021.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 225.

when a Japanese delegation came to Manila to work out the details of MacArthur's arrival in Japan for the signing of the documents of surrender, MacArthur's Chief of Staff informed them that they needed to leave their swords in a separate room and would not be allowed to wear them at the negotiating table. The Japanese delegation attempted to circumvent this requirement by claiming that the instructions were unclear, but MacArthur's staff refused to budge on the requirement, but assured them that they would be returned once they concluded the meeting.²¹ Furthermore, MacArthur gave specific instructions for the repair and disarmament of Atsugi Airfield, where he planned to land for the surrender ceremony, within just a few days. The Japanese officials complied, though it required the dismissal of a fanatical unit of former kamikaze pilots, showing the level of respect and fear they held for the power the occupiers would wield.²² Many people in Japan feared that the American occupation force would mirror the behavior of their own army in China, plundering their way through the defeated nation, so the Japanese government dedicated itself to appeasing the Allied powers by ensuring a smooth transition.²³

In order to govern Japan effectively, however, MacArthur needed to balance determination against a willingness to work with the Japanese government. Too much of the latter, and he would risk losing all momentum for achieving his goals of democratization and demilitarization. Too much of the former, however, and MacArthur would risk coming across as

²¹ Ibid., 212.

²² Ibid.

²³ Herbert P. Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 537.

a domineering conqueror, unwilling to listen to those around him. MacArthur showed his respect for the Japanese people by listening to their suggestions and paying attention to their cultural necessities. For instance, when the Japanese delegation did not feel that the surrender documents afforded proper respect for the emperor, MacArthur amended the document accordingly, stating that he had absolutely no intention of unnecessarily insulting or disrespecting the emperor.²⁴ He understood that the emperor performed a central role in unifying the Japanese people and that disrespect to the emperor would be interpreted as contempt for the Japanese people.²⁵ As MacArthur dictated to Major General Courtney Whitney on the flight to Japan, his intention was to rebuild Japan into an American-style democracy, not to grind them into dust as retribution for the war.²⁶

Unlike many other leaders in history, MacArthur lived up to the expectations he laid in his hopeful speech at the Japanese surrender. Although Yoshida was initially wary of the general's ability to achieve his high-minded promises, he recounts that he quickly gained a great deal of respect for MacArthur's leadership style. Specifically, he writes, "In addition to [MacArthur's] innate friendliness, which might be taken as stemming from a genuine understanding of the country and its people, I found the Supreme Commander remarkably quick

²⁴ Steve Byas, "MacArthur Makes a New Japan: After Japan Capitulated in WWII, Douglas MacArthur, Drawing on Years of Experience in the Orient, Guided the Country to Peace and Progress," *The New American*, 36, no. 18 (2020): 34.

²⁵ Aleksandra Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial, Justice, and the Postwar International Order* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 71.

²⁶ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 213.

in sizing up a situation and acting on it.”²⁷ One specific instance which Yoshida cites as evidence of MacArthur’s quick and shrewd actions dealt with one of the general’s interactions with General Kuzma Derevyanko, the Soviet representative in Japan. President Harry Truman previously rejected the Soviet Union’s proposal for the occupation of Japan to be divided between the two nations, with the Soviet Union moving to occupy the northern island of Hokkaido.²⁸ Derevyanko attempted to pressure MacArthur into accepting Soviet occupation anyway. Yoshida praises MacArthur for remaining firm in his refusal of Derevyanko’s offer, and states that MacArthur’s attitude towards the Soviet representatives prevented them from effectively promoting Communism directly.²⁹

This level of respect, which MacArthur cultivated with Yoshida and other Japanese officials, meant that Yoshida trusted him enough to comply with his decrees without undue complaint, even when he disagreed with them. Sebald writes that, even when proposals from the occupation authorities seemed unreasonable, MacArthur could count on Yoshida to carry them out to the best of his ability. Sebald further adds that, despite consistent conflicts with General Whitney, Yoshida’s respect for MacArthur kept him from ever standing in direct opposition with the American officials.³⁰ This respect went both ways, as MacArthur understood that Yoshida

²⁷ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 49.

²⁸ Josef Stalin, “The Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars of the Soviet Union (Stalin) to President Truman,” Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers, 1945, The British Commonwealth, The Far East*, Volume VI, Document 450, 16 Aug. 1945.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁰ Sebald, *With MacArthur in Japan*, 98.

wanted to do what was best for his country, which often meant complying with MacArthur's objectives in the most efficient way possible.³¹ Yoshida writes that he felt the best course of action would be to accomplish the Americans' requests, then accept any corrections when they realized they had made a mistake. While other officials interpreted this as obtuse obstructionism, as though Yoshida were intentionally misconstruing their instructions, MacArthur understood that this was Yoshida's way of cooperating with the occupation authorities.³²

Before Japan could rebuild into a democracy, the occupation forces first had to accomplish the twofold goals of demobilization and demilitarization. Until shortly before MacArthur arrived in Japan, Atsugi Airfield had been a staging ground for kamikaze pilots, many of whom rebelled against their superiors and were killed by Japanese forces before they would lay down their arms.³³ To show that he trusted the word of Japanese officials, MacArthur and his entourage traveled to the surrender ceremony via Atsugi Airfield without so much as a sidearm. Japanese servicemen guarded their route to the USS *Missouri*, where the surrender was to occur.³⁴ These soldiers stood with their backs to MacArthur's passing, not as a sign of disrespect, but as a show of deference, for this was the same manner in which they had trained to defend the emperor: facing outward to better identify and eliminate threats.³⁵ The pacification of Atsugi Airfield and the defensive contingent of Japanese soldiers showed that the nation was

³¹ Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 313.

³² Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 58.

³³ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 212.

³⁴ Byas, "MacArthur Makes a New Japan," 35.

³⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 271.

willing to cooperate with MacArthur's goals, yet also showed that the road to peace would be a long one.

Naturally, one major step of the demilitarization project was to remove Japanese military officers or officials with militarist and ultranationalist philosophies from key positions of government.³⁶ The list of officials to be purged was compiled in late 1945 by Colonel Charles Kades, the chief of MacArthur's Public Administration Division, and originally included all high-level officials in every ministry of the Japanese government, in addition to all military officers with the rank of major or above.³⁷ However, in the interest of maintaining coherency in the government and guarding against the eventuality of war with the Soviet Union, Kades abridged the list of governmental officials, affecting only officials in the ministries of the army, navy, and munitions, and military officers above the rank of second lieutenant.³⁸ The latter expansion was due to the understanding that much of the Japanese military's fanaticism was encouraged by the eagerness and dedication of its junior officers. The final extent of the purge effectively removed approximately one million officials from power, whether the purge removed them directly or they resigned to avoid the purge.³⁹

Crucial to the problem of demilitarization was the compilation of a list of war criminals who would have to come before an international tribunal to answer for the many atrocities

³⁶ National Diet Library, *United States Initial Post-Surrender Policy for Japan, 6 September 1945*, 2004, www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/shiryō/01/022/022tx.html.

³⁷ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 211.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.

committed by Japan during the war.⁴⁰ Naturally, this was a delicate process, with political necessity and personal relationships playing a major role in the ultimate decisions, regardless of whether a party deserved to be held responsible.⁴¹ Among these, the most high profile case was the issue of whether Emperor Hirohito would be tried as a war criminal.⁴² Many in the Allied nations held him personally responsible for the attack on Pearl Harbor and wanted to see him pay for the war.⁴³ However, MacArthur cautioned his superiors in Washington that, if the emperor were to be executed as a war criminal, his administration would require millions of reinforcements to put down the insurrection and outbreaks of guerilla warfare that would surely follow.⁴⁴ After all, as of the surrender, the Japanese people still revered Hirohito as a god incarnate, the descendent of the sun goddess Amaterasu.⁴⁵ To execute him as a war criminal would be the ultimate outrage and deliver a catastrophic blow to MacArthur's democratization efforts.⁴⁶

Bearing this in mind, MacArthur sought to prevent Hirohito's inclusion on the list of Class A war criminals and looked to instead pin culpability for the war on former Prime Minister

⁴⁰ Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 6.

⁴¹ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 203.

⁴² Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 71.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Byas, "MacArthur Makes a New Japan," 36.

⁴⁵ Joseph M. Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 145

⁴⁶ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 203.

Tojo Hideki.⁴⁷ To Hirohito's credit, he requested an audience with MacArthur in September 1945 to plead the case of his people, which MacArthur gladly accepted. Though Hirohito was afraid during this meeting, he nonetheless argued that he bore sole responsibility for the war and begged for MacArthur to punish him alone, rather than execute retribution against the Japanese people.⁴⁸ In turn, MacArthur assured him that he need not fear, for it was not his intention to destroy the Japanese people. Here, MacArthur's interests converged with those of the Japanese government, for they had endeavored since the end of the war to absolve the emperor of any culpability in initiating the conflict.⁴⁹ Despite Hirohito's confession of guilt, however, MacArthur's administration asked Tojo to assume responsibility for the war and portrayed the emperor as a mere ceremonial puppet who had no real power to counteract the warlike ambitions of his cabinet.⁵⁰ In turn, the emperor expressed relief at MacArthur's plan to utilize his position to maintain order and stated his belief that MacArthur had thus far conducted the occupation in a most honorable fashion.⁵¹

Nonetheless, the military tribunal was not free from controversy. Law dictated that the emperor's innocence was predicated on his abdication, which was impossible given the politics

⁴⁷ Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 74.

⁴⁸ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 204.

⁴⁹ Bix, *Hirohito*, 556.

⁵⁰ Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 72.

⁵¹ Bix, *Hirohito*, 549.

of the time.⁵² Accusations of “victor’s justice” and retroactive application of international law were widespread.⁵³ Specifically, the tribunals expanded the previously held definitions of “crimes against humanity,” with some of the judges noting that international law was moving towards making war itself a criminal offense.⁵⁴ Furthermore, there were numerous instances of prisoners, including Tojo himself who were set to stand trial, who attempted suicide rather than face the humiliation of being found guilty by a foreign court.⁵⁵ In the end, the Allies were placated with the fate of those included in the list of war criminals, and Emperor Hirohito managed to avoid execution thanks to the counsel of certain officials such as MacArthur who understood that such an action would bring more harm than good to the post-war peace.⁵⁶

Part and parcel of MacArthur’s demilitarization and democratization efforts were his program to break-up the Japanese family corporations, known as *zaibatsu*, who held monopolies on much of Japan’s industry.⁵⁷ These corporations, including Mitsubishi and Yasuda, had proven integral in supplying the Japanese war machine during World War II, and thus MacArthur felt that they had to be broken up to prevent future war mobilization.⁵⁸ Furthermore, under the

⁵² Ibid., 74.

⁵³ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 203.

⁵⁴ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 444.

⁵⁵ Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 78.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁷ National Diet Library, *United States Initial Policy*.

⁵⁸ Whitney, *His Rendezvous with History*, 213.

principles of democracy, he did not feel that so few families should hold such tremendous power over the Japanese economy. MacArthur recalls, “A monopolistic control of the means of production and distribution had been exercised by the so-called *Zaibatsu*—about ten Japanese families who practiced a kind of private socialism.”⁵⁹ The heads of the *zaibatsu* argued to MacArthur that they could not be held responsible for their actions during the war, as they claimed they had been forced by the Imperial government.⁶⁰ Their cries were joined by Prime Minister Yoshida himself, who contended that the imperial government compelled them to aid the war effort, even though such actions caused them to operate at a deficit.⁶¹ Whether or not they had played a direct part in causing World War II, as some among MacArthur’s staff believed, MacArthur held that no democratic nation could allow so great a concentration of a nation’s wealth to be held by so small a collection of families.⁶²

Aside from MacArthur’s goals of demobilization and demilitarization, the Truman administration also sought to rebuild Japan into a lasting democracy modeled after America’s own system. With the end of World War II and the division of Europe, tensions began to grow between the United States and the Soviet Union, as the two nations found themselves in positions of great power in the post-war order.⁶³ As such, the United States sought to prevent Communism

⁵⁹ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 308.

⁶⁰ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 217.

⁶¹ Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 33.

⁶² MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 308.

⁶³ Babovic, *The Tokyo Trial*, 74.

from spreading into Japan, as it already had in China, so that Japan could serve as a valuable ally and staging ground for potential operations in East Asia.⁶⁴ Towards this end, MacArthur's attempts to dissolve the *zaibatsu* conglomerations met with additional resistance from his own government. The State Department saw the stability the *zaibatsu* provided as being crucial to building Japan as a bastion against communism, so it took what measures it could to prevent MacArthur from fully democratizing the Japanese economy.⁶⁵ However, they were too late to stop MacArthur's dissolution bill, labeled Far Eastern Commission (FEC) 230, before it passed in the Japanese Diet in December 1947.⁶⁶ The bill was not meant to break Japan's economic strength, but to break the major monopolies and create a competitive market. In MacArthur's words, "These great trusts were partially dissolved, and a truly competitive free enterprise system inaugurated. ... The stockholders, practically all belonging to the big families, were paid off. The main thing was that their influence was broken."⁶⁷

In seeking to counteract growing communist presence, the newly formed Japanese cabinet under Yoshida Shigeru agreed with the occupiers, as Yoshida and the Japanese conservatives had been working against communism in Japan for some time.⁶⁸ This sentiment was most heavily emphasized in a memorandum which former Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro

⁶⁴ Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 296.

⁶⁵ Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 121.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁶⁷ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 308.

⁶⁸ Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 283.

presented to Emperor Hirohito in February of 1945, urging him to surrender to the Americans and present a united front against the threat of the Soviet Union and Communist China.⁶⁹ This looming threat of communist influence in Japan hastened MacArthur's plans for the democratization of Japan. With the fall of the Imperial military and the myth of national invincibility, MacArthur understood that the end of the war had created a vacuum of ethics and power in Japan, which he believed would either be filled with Christianity or communism.⁷⁰ High-ranking officials in the Japanese government concurred, as Prince Higashikuni, uncle to Emperor Hirohito, emphasized that only belief in Jesus Christ could grant the Japanese people the ethical fortitude to forgive their erstwhile enemies and move on from the war.⁷¹ While this does not necessarily mean that Higashikuni was a Christian himself, it does indicate that he understood the value Christian virtue would have in the reconstruction of his nation.

Indeed, MacArthur's depiction of his mission in Japan, beginning with his address at the surrender, included much religious language and imagery. He described the actions of the members present at the surrender ceremony, undertaken to bring an end to the war, as "sacred purposes." He claimed that the world which the nations sought to build in the aftermath of such a terrible conflict would be one built on principles of "faith and understanding."⁷² So impressed was he by MacArthur's words that Kase wrote, "After all, we were not beaten on the battlefield

⁶⁹ Konoe Fumimaro, "The Konoe Memorial," University of Texas, 1945.

⁷⁰ Lawrence S. Wittner, "MacArthur and the Missionaries: God and Man in Occupied Japan," *Pacific Historical Review* 40 (1971): 79.

⁷¹ Byas, "MacArthur Makes a New Japan," 37.

⁷² "MacArthur's Speech."

by dint of superior arms. We were defeated in the spiritual contest by virtue of a nobler ideal. The real issue was moral—beyond all powers of algebra to compute.”⁷³ In fact, MacArthur was not long in his position as SCAP before he had earned a level of respect and reverence from the Japanese people which they had previously reserved for the emperor alone.⁷⁴ On the anniversary of the surrender, MacArthur proclaimed that the democratic virtues brought by the occupation forces, which he claimed were rooted in Christianity, had effectively filled the vacuum in Japan, imbuing the Japanese people with enthusiasm for his ongoing democratization efforts.⁷⁵

Despite the alignment in his and Yoshida’s desire to prevent the rise of communism, MacArthur’s understanding of the Japanese fell short in predicting their reaction to his proposed democratic reforms. On MacArthur’s agenda for the democratization of Japan were the creation of a new constitution, voting rights for women, the release of political prisoners, and the abolition of laws which prohibited “dangerous thought.”⁷⁶ It was these latter two points which caused such friction between MacArthur and Yoshida. Prior to the end of World War II, Japan had maintained laws to limit the speech of and arrest individuals who spoke against the imperial government.⁷⁷ Among these dissidents were communist thinkers, who MacArthur’s edicts allowed to re-enter the political forums. In fact, MacArthur’s commitment to democratization

⁷³ Kase, *Journey to the Missouri*, 14.

⁷⁴ Byas, “MacArthur Makes a New Japan,” 37.

⁷⁵ Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan*, 50.

⁷⁶ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 205.

⁷⁷ Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 281.

and freedom of speech led to the legalization of the Japanese Communist Party.⁷⁸ These measures were so contrary to Japan's prior stance that Yoshida confronted MacArthur and asked him if it was his intention to turn Japan into a communist nation.⁷⁹

Of course, MacArthur's intention was not to increase the influence of Communism in Japan, but his methods and understanding of how communism might gain purchase in Japan were vastly different from Yoshida's cabinet.⁸⁰ One major edict which MacArthur believed would lessen the chance of a Communist revolt was the Land Reform Act of 1946. This act would have overturned the previous feudal system of landlords and redistributed much of Japan's farmland amongst the tenant farmers who already worked them.⁸¹ MacArthur's reasoning was that, similar to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Japan would only fall to communism if a population comprised mostly of peasant farmers grew tired of working for another without any property of their own.⁸² By revoking the feudal landlord system which had been commonplace until that point, the tenant farmers would have a personal stake in maintaining their land and would have no motivation for civil unrest.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., 295.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 294.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 296.

⁸¹ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 218.

⁸² Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 298.

⁸³ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 219.

By contrast, Yoshida and the conservative party wished to suppress communism in much the same way as they had before the war. From their viewpoint, there would be no threat of communism in Japan if the prominent communist thinkers and agitators were silenced through policing.⁸⁴ Furthermore, they were wary of MacArthur's land reforms and dissolution of the *zaibatsu*, as they believed those actions served a dual purpose of discouraging communism and breaking apart the legacy of the Meiji Restoration.⁸⁵ Where the Japanese leadership saw the militarism and ultranationalism of the interwar period as a departure from Meiji values, MacArthur sought to bring Japan out of its feudalistic roots and into a modern era. In MacArthur's eyes, there was no viable past for Japan to return to.⁸⁶ As a result, MacArthur embarked on a complete overhaul of the Japanese constitution and education system to eliminate any vestiges of the traditional values which he saw as the root causes of both militarism and communism in Japan.

One such root cause in MacArthur's eyes was the Japanese education system. MacArthur recalls that, at the time of the occupation, much of Japan's wartime curriculum was steeped in militaristic ideology which he found to be more suited for indoctrination than education.⁸⁷ MacArthur writes, "These textbooks were filled with militaristic and anti-American items, and

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁸⁵ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 292.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁸⁷ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 311.

all was under the control of Tokyo.”⁸⁸ A survey of the education curriculum of the time only served to deepen MacArthur’s belief that democratization of the country would need to be accomplished from the ground up, as he perceived that there was no democratic foundation on which to build. As such, MacArthur’s education reform plan included the suspension of courses in Japanese morals, history, and geography, since the Imperial government often used these topics to disseminate ultranationalism and militarism among the nation’s youth.⁸⁹ These measures were alarming to Yoshida, however, as he saw them as teaching the nation’s youth to be good democratic citizens of America, not Japan. Indeed, Yoshida feared that such teachings opened the door to communism by teaching students that loyalty to one’s own nation was undemocratic.⁹⁰

However, it was the speed at which MacArthur sought to restructure the school system, not the banning of certain subjects, which Yoshida found most concerning. Japan faced extreme economic crisis during the early years of the occupation, owing to the amount of infrastructure it had lost during World War II. In many instances, such as his decree that American soldiers would not require the Japanese government to provide their rations, MacArthur was incredibly sensitive to the Japanese state of affairs.⁹¹ In contrast, in the sphere of educational reform, the requests made of the Japanese government with regards to education reform were

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 220.

⁹⁰ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 173.

⁹¹ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 216.

uncharacteristically uninformed. Yoshida writes that the system was to transition from six years of compulsory primary school to requiring an additional three years of middle school, a change which Yoshida argued would place an incredible amount of stress on Japan's already tenuous economic state.⁹² However, Yoshida failed to stop the implementation of the extended compulsory schooling period which, although it did not collapse the Japanese economy, did cause extensive problems as previously specialized trade schools hastened to adapt to a more generalized curriculum.⁹³

Yoshida admits that such a change would be beneficial, but argues that the immediacy of the request strained both the Japanese treasury and their stock of teachers, a situation which he feared opened the doorway for an increase in communism's influence in the school setting.⁹⁴ His concern only heightened on account of MacArthur's insistence that "Discrimination against any student, teacher, or educational official on grounds of race, nationality, creed, political opinion or social position, will be prohibited."⁹⁵ Although such a decree was a major step towards democratizing the Japanese education system, it did allow for a noticeable increase in the number of teachers who subscribed to communist ideology. Interestingly, Whitney's account of the education reforms focuses on the success of MacArthur's decentralization efforts and omits any mention of issues relating to the duration of compulsory education or political alignment of

⁹² Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 169.

⁹³ Dower, *Empire and Aftermath*, 349.

⁹⁴ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 172.

⁹⁵ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 312.

teaching staff.⁹⁶ Thus, one can conclude that such issues were particular to Yoshida and the more conservative elements of the Japanese government.

Nowhere was the disconnect in perceptions of Japanese culture between the American and Japanese officials more apparent than in the creation of Japan's replacement constitution under the authority of the American occupation. MacArthur considered the drafting of a new Japanese constitution as paramount for the goals of demilitarization and democratization, as he perceived that the existing constitution contained no basis for civil liberties or human rights for the Japanese people.⁹⁷ However, in keeping with his policy of not interfering unnecessarily with the Japanese government, so as not to micromanage the reconstruction process or risk insulting important officials, MacArthur initially requested that Baron Shidehara, the prime minister at the time, assemble a committee to produce a draft of a new Japanese constitution.⁹⁸ However, rather than producing a draft constitution which included provisions for civil liberties or new protection of rights under the post-war government, the Shidehara Cabinet only proposed slight changes in phraseology from the initial constitution.⁹⁹ MacArthur found this draft particularly concerning, as it preserved the primacy of the emperor in the Japanese government and contained no explicit definition of the rights of Japanese citizens.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 276.

⁹⁷ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 246.

⁹⁸ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 299.

⁹⁹ Masuda and Yamamoto, *MacArthur in Asia*, 212.

¹⁰⁰ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 299.

To understand why the Japanese delegation would present a proposition with such minimal changes, one must first consider their understanding of the assignment. According to Yoshida's account, the Shidehara Cabinet were under the impression that they were meant to examine the existing Meiji Constitution and produce the basis for future revisions.¹⁰¹ Although the Japanese government understood from the first reception of the Potsdam Declaration that the constitution would require revisions, Yoshida asserts that such an action had to be carried out with due care and without undue haste.¹⁰² In contrast, MacArthur's officers, and Whitney specifically, wanted to create a new constitution with the utmost urgency so that their democratization reforms could be implemented more rapidly.¹⁰³ As such, though MacArthur was loathe to force the Japanese government to accept an American-style constitution, he nonetheless directed his staff, headed by Whitney and Kades, to draft a new constitution to present to the Japanese government immediately after receiving and rejecting the Shidehara draft. However, MacArthur was explicit that the American draft was to be a framework for the Japanese government to follow, not a mandate for them to adopt.¹⁰⁴ Instead, he hoped that the push of an American framework could streamline the Japanese process to produce a viable constitution in time for the general election in 1946.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 131.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰³ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 246.

¹⁰⁴ MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 300.

¹⁰⁵ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 250.

However, the completion of the American draft of the proposed constitution did not mark the conclusion of tensions between MacArthur's government section, headed by Whitney, and the Japanese government. As previously stated, Yoshida recalls that Whitney did not give the impression of liking him, or his fellow Japanese officials, very much, as Whitney perceived their hesitations as intentional obstructionism.¹⁰⁶ Whitney's recollection of the presentation of the newly revised constitution accentuates Yoshida's sentiment, as he recalls a desire to accelerate the drafting process by exercising a great deal of psychological pressure against the Japanese delegation when they met to discuss the new draft on February 13, 1946. In response to the Japanese delegation's apologies for keeping him and his committee waiting, a few hours at most, Whitney writes, "I responded with a smile: 'Not at all, Mr. Shirasu. We have been enjoying your *atomic* [emphasis added] sunshine.'" ¹⁰⁷ By using such provocative language, complemented by an unplanned B-29 flyover, Whitney clearly harkened back to the annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.¹⁰⁸ His message to the Japanese delegation was clear: any American concessions were made out of mercy, not necessity.

Necessary or not, Whitney had effectively made his point, and the delegates swiftly set to work, drafting a new constitution based on the framework provided by Whitney's committee. The Japanese delegates sent Whitney a letter in response, expressing surprise at the extent of the changes in his draft constitution. The author, Shirasu Jiro, writes, "Your way is so American in

¹⁰⁶ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 53.

¹⁰⁷ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 251.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

the way that is straight and direct. Their way must be Japanese in the way that is roundabout, twisted, and narrow.”¹⁰⁹ In this way, Shirasu echoes Yoshida’s belief that the process of constitutional revision needed to be slow and methodical, rather than direct and abrupt. This approach to constitutional reform raised concerns in Whitney’s section, as he feared that the slow deliberations in the Diet would give new life to old Japanese militarism and nationalism.¹¹⁰ In the end, however, the Japanese committee managed to work in tandem with Whitney’s section to produce an acceptable draft constitution for the review of the Japanese people in time for a general election of the Japanese Diet.¹¹¹ While this constitution underwent many rounds of revisions before the Diet approved it, the new document, which the Diet adopted on March 6, 1946, maintained the spirit of the draft produced by Whitney’s officials and the Japanese committee.¹¹²

One of the most notable inclusions in the final draft of the constitution produced by the Shidehara Cabinet was a clause precluding Japan from arming itself for aggressive conflicts, a proposal brought forth by the prime minister himself.¹¹³ The exact article reads, “In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 252.

¹¹⁰ Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 391.

¹¹¹ Yoshida, *Memoirs*, 136.

¹¹² Max W. Bishop, “Mr. Max W. Bishop, of the Office of the Political Adviser in Japan, to the Secretary of State,” Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946, The Far East*, Volume VIII, Document 141, 9 Feb. 1946.

¹¹³ Whitney, *Rendezvous with History*, 258.

potential, will never be maintained.”¹¹⁴ This article is particularly significant because it was not forced upon the Japanese delegation by the American occupiers, but originated from within their own government. Had MacArthur attempted to force Japan into complete and perpetual disarmament so soon after its surrender, there likely would have been much public backlash from the Japanese. Because it was Prime Minister Shidehara who made the recommendation, it instead reflects the Japanese desire to move on from their regrettable actions during the war and a commitment to avoiding future militarism.

The American occupation of Japan in the aftermath of World War II is one of the few instances in human history of military occupation being successful in preventing future conflict between the belligerent nations. This result was far from a forgone conclusion as of Japan’s surrender, as many nations and people, including many American politicians, wanted to see Japan pay for its actions during World War II. Beyond external pressures, many of the demilitarization and democratization reforms caused friction between MacArthur’s administration and the native Japanese government. For instance, MacArthur’s zeal to end laws which governed free speech and policed “dangerous thoughts” indirectly led to the growth of the Japanese Communist Party, a move which met much resistance from the Japanese officials. However, there were several factors which contributed to the success of the occupation’s initial years and Japan’s prolonged friendly relations with the United States. Chief among these factors was MacArthur’s interactions with the Japanese officials in his role as SCAP. Not only did he gain respect from his Japanese counterparts for being a shrewd judge of situations and an effective decision maker, but he had a deep respect and understanding for the Japanese people.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 259.

Beginning with his magnanimity in his speech accepting Japan's surrender, he made every effort to show the Japanese people that he was not there to keep them down, but to help them to their feet. Most importantly, he understood the importance of the emperor to Japanese culture, and thus deftly avoided potential years of guerilla warfare had he allowed the tribunal to execute the emperor as a war criminal. Although MacArthur has a reputation for inflexible arrogance, his style of leadership was exactly what the occupation and reconstruction needed to effectively establish its legitimacy and accomplish the initial stages of its goals.

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