



JAPAN ON DISPLAY

Photography and the emperor

Morris Low

Japan on Display

Sixty years on from the end of the Pacific War, *Japan on Display* examines representations of the Meiji Emperor, Mutsuhito (1852–1912), and his grandson the Shōwa Emperor, Hirohito, who was regarded as a symbol of the nation, in both war and peacetime. Much of this representation was aided by the phenomenon of photography.

The introduction and development of photography in the nineteenth century coincided with the need to make Hirohito's grandfather, the young Meiji Emperor, more visible. It was important to show the world that Japan was a civilised nation, worthy of international respect. Photobooks and albums became a popular format for presenting seemingly objective images of the monarch, reminding the Japanese of their proximity to the emperor, and the imperial family. In the twentieth century, these 'national albums' provided a visual record of wars fought in the name of the emperor, while also documenting the reconstruction of Tokyo, scientific expeditions, and imperial tours. Collectively, they create a visual narrative of the nation, one in which Emperor Hirohito (1901–89) and science and technology were prominent.

Drawing on archival documents, photographs, and sources in both Japanese and English, this book throws new light on the history of twentieth-century Japan and the central role of Hirohito. With Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, the emperor was transformed from wartime leader to peace-loving scientist. *Japan on Display* seeks to understand this reinvention of a more 'human' emperor and the role that photography played in the process.

Morris Low is Professor of East Asian Sciences and Technology at Johns Hopkins University. His previous publications include *Science, Technology and Society in Contemporary Japan* (1999); *Science, Technology and R&D in Japan* (2001); *Asian Masculinities* (2003); *Building a Modern Japan* (2005); and *Science and the Building of a New Japan* (2005).

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Preface

On 7 January 1989, when I was an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo, Emperor Hirohito died. His death was front-page news and I hurriedly bought copies of the daily newspapers that morning at Takadanobaba Station. My professor drove me to the Imperial Palace that afternoon, where I observed the mourning crowds, and signed a book of condolence. The palace appeared rather gloomy. Foreign tourists, crowds of Japanese, and media representatives all waited expectantly outside the palace, waiting for something which never came. It was with a sense of anti-climax that I witnessed the end of the Shōwa period.

In subsequent weeks, I collected the many magazines which commemorated the life of the emperor, fascinated by how the media had helped transform the emperor from a man of war to a family man, a man of science. Since that time, in various studies, I have come to a better understanding of the ways in which photography has been complicit in maintaining and perpetuating the emperor system.

I am grateful to Thomas A. Robinson at Duke University Press for permission to include a version of my chapter 'The Japanese Colonial Eye: Travel, Exploration and Empire', which first appeared in Nicolas Peterson and Christopher Pinney (eds), *Photography's Other Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 100–18. Amy Woods, Taylor and Francis, kindly provided permission to include a version of 'The Emperor's Sons Go to War: Competing Masculinities in Modern Japan', in Kam Louie and Morris Low (eds), *Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), pp. 81–99. I have also drawn on the following two papers published by journals in the Taylor and Francis Group, www.tandf.co.uk: 'The Japanese Nation in Evolution: W.E. Griffis, Hybridity and the Whiteness of the Japanese Race', *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 11, no. 2–3, 1999, pp. 203–34; 'Displaying the Future: Techno-Nationalism and the Rise of the Consumer in Postwar Japan', *History and Technology*, Vol. 19, no. 3 (September 2003), pp. 197–209. Thanks to Jan Dennyschene for facilitating this, and to Dr Caroline Turner, Humanities Research Centre, The Australian National University for permitting a version of the following article to be included: 'Japan, Modernity and the Tokyo Olympics', *Humanities Research* (July 1999), pp. 33–51.

Readers will be aware that there is an extensive literature on the emperor in both Japanese and English. Routledge has previously published *Emperor Hirohito and Shōwa Japan: A Political Biography* (1992) by Stephen S. Large. Large also placed Hirohito's life in context with his short book *Emperors of the Rising Sun: Three Biographies* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997) which included chapters on the Meiji Emperor and the Taishō Emperor. Around the same time, Takashi Fujitani's important *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996) appeared. Peter Wetzler's *Hirohito and War: Imperial Tradition and Military Decision Making in Prewar Japan* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1998) addressed the key question of the extent of the emperor's role in military planning. This was soon followed by Sterling and Peggy Seagrave's *The Yamato Dynasty: The Secret History of Japan's Imperial Family* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 1999). John W. Dower's *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 1999) was arguably most important in situating the Emperor in the context of postwar Japan. While Dower (1999) does provide useful insights on the role of photography in portraying the emperor, the connection with science is not really made.

In the last few years, the key books on the Japanese imperial family have been Herbert P. Bix's *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2000); Kenneth J. Ruoff's *The People's Emperor: Democracy and the Japanese Monarchy, 1945–1955* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001); and Donald Keene's *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and His World, 1852–1912* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002). *Japan on Display* builds on these excellent studies, but it is not a biography, nor is it strictly a history of photography in Japan. Rather, the book examines the role of photography in representations of Japan and the emperor. In addition, *Japan on Display* covers a period of over 100 years, beginning with Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition to Japan in 1853 and 1854. It ends with the death of the Shōwa Emperor in 1989. I use an array of sources, including collections of old photographs and Allied Occupation-period archival documents, to argue that, through photography, the emperor and the nation were able to be reinvented.

Since 1989, my own trajectory has taken me from Waseda University to Monash University in Melbourne, where I had my first academic position in the Department of Japanese Studies. Lecturing at Monash and completing a Ph.D. dissertation in the Department of History at the University of Sydney was a challenge. The thesis was finally completed in 1993. After six years at Monash, I took up a research fellowship for three and a half years in the Division of Pacific and Asian History in the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University. I then moved on to a position at the University of Queensland in what became the School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies where I taught for five and a half years, most of which time I was also a trustee of the Queensland Art Gallery. I am now in the Department of the History of Science and Technology at Johns Hopkins University, where I have finally

been able to bring this long-term project to some closure. I thank all my friends, colleagues, and students at these institutions for their support over the years.

Many of the illustrations contained in this book have been sourced from the collection of the author, unless otherwise indicated. I am grateful to Nao Kawai, Kyodo News International, for permission to use Yuichi 'Jackson' Ishizaki's photograph of General Douglas MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito. Thanks also to Russell Atkinson and Fee Jessen at the eSales Unit of the Australian War Memorial for permission to use Occupation-period photographs of the emperor's tours of Osaka and Kure.

I also wish to express my warm thanks to Stephanie Rogers and Helen Baker at Routledge, and the copy-editor who has worked on this project. Without their interest, support, and patience, this book would not have been possible. I am also grateful to Tessa Morris-Suzuki who agreed to include this in the ASAA East Asia series of research monographs and for her helpful comments and suggestions especially in the final stages of the manuscript.

As with most books dealing with Japan, a few words are required on romanisation and other conventions followed in this book. Although family names precede given names in Japan, many Japanese (often those who have lived abroad for extended periods) write their names in reverse order when writing in English. In this book, Japanese names are generally given in the text in Japanese order. This also applies in the notes for Japanese language sources. When English-language sources by Japanese authors are referred to, their names are given as published, in order to respect the intent of the authors.

The romanisation of Japanese follows that found in Koh Masuda (ed.), *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary*, fourth edition (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1974). I have avoided use of hyphens unless absolutely necessary. The names of some people are romanised differently, because they are widely known by a certain spelling. Macrons over elongated vowels in well-known place names, such as Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka have been dropped, unless when appearing in romanised titles of publications. This book follows British spelling. Verbs are spelt with 'ise' instead of 'ize'. In quotations, the original spelling has been retained.

Morris Low
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1 Imagining the emperor

Introduction

Sixty years after the end of the Pacific War, it is still difficult to understand the process by which the Japanese people came to imagine themselves as a distinct nation centred on the emperor. For better or for worse, the emperor was used to help define Japan as a nation and photography played a significant role in representing him. How was he imagined? His legitimacy was associated with having been part of a mythic ‘unbroken’ imperial line but in the postwar period, he aligned himself with science and rationality. How do we reconcile these contrasting representations?

Many studies of modern Japan contrast tradition with modernity. The former is portrayed as being continually eroded away by the latter. We can view the emperor system and ideas surrounding it in terms of a culturally constructed version of the past which has helped the Japanese people make sense of who they are and where they come from. At the same time as the introduction of Western science and technology occurred in Japan, the nation was reinventing the imperial institution and the mythology associated with it.¹ The maintenance and elaboration of the imperial house needs to be understood as part of Japan’s process of modernisation and the ‘invention of tradition’.²

An impetus behind the introduction of Western institutions in late nineteenth-century Japan was not only to build a strong and rich nation, but crucially, to be seen to be doing this. As the late writer Susan Sontag suggested, ‘sentiment is more likely to crystallize around a photograph than around a verbal slogan’.³ Japan needed to be perceived as modern by the Japanese public and by the Western powers that had imposed unequal treaties on Japan. Like it or not, Japan was on display and seeking validation that it was a civilised and great nation. We can talk about Japan seeking to embrace what has been called ‘exhibitory modernity’.⁴ At the same time, however, the Japanese people looked to their past in the form of the imperial institution to unify their country. The emperor lent an aura of continuity with the past that reassured the Japanese embarking on a path of Westernisation. The image of the emperor helped to integrate the national space of Japan.

In the Meiji period (1868–1912), the introduction of science and technology not only helped create a network of national power in Japan but it facilitated Japan's entry into the global knowledge system. Western science was seen as a way of demystifying the world and overcoming superstition.⁵ Technology, in the form of the camera, the telegraph, and railways, provided a communications system for the nation, breaking down feudal barriers and linking the Japanese people. Photography provided new modes of documentation and ways of transmitting information, enhancing the way Japanese imagined Japan and how they visualised the emperor and the nation. Telegraph lines became the foundation of nation-wide information networks, and the development of railway lines helped move people and goods both in Japan and the growing empire. The expansion of railways enhanced access to the remote reaches of the empire. Photography was also an enabling technology for imperial expansion, linking images of colonial subjects and territories to the centre in Japan.

The spectacle of court ceremonies, imperial tours and military parades was used to support imperial power. Such events were part of the staging of the modern nation.⁶ Spectacle was highly political, helping to legitimate colonial expansion and maintain social control within Japan. The continuing role of the emperor served to bridge the break between modernity and tradition. The story of the unbroken imperial line and descent from the Sun Goddess Amaterasu somehow defied close inspection, remaining at the core of Japanese national identity at least until the end of the Second World War.

Perry goes to Japan

Our story begins back in the mid-nineteenth century. The global expansion of European and American power promoted the spread of photography. In 1854, Commodore Matthew C. Perry visited Japan with a view to forcing Japan to open its ports to trade with the West. He had visited previously the year before. This time he brought with him a telegraph set and model railway, symbols of Western science and technology. Perry's visits are often seen as heralding the beginning of rapid, almost miraculous industrialisation during the Meiji period (1868–1912). The Japanese were taught the need to learn Western science and technology 'at the point of a gun' with the arrival of Commodore Perry and his 'black ships'. But what tends to be forgotten is that photography was one of the technologies that was introduced and, in many ways, the camera was seen as a scientific tool, a means by which the world could be represented more accurately. Despite this perception, images were produced within a context of social power and ideology. This book examines how photography provided a means by which to project beliefs regarding the emperor of Japan, his relationship to his subjects, and his empire. We shall see that visual culture reinforced power relations, affirming the role of the emperor and through him, the state, in modern Japan.

At the same time as Japan was modernising, there was a reaching back to traditions with the nation rallying behind the emperor. The historian Herbert Bix argues that much of Japan's modern history needs to be reinterpreted 'by

placing the emperor, the imperial institution, and emperor ideology at the very center of events'.⁷ However, we need to view the emperor not only as an active figure in Japan's modern history but also as a product of it.⁸ How do we reconcile these very different images of Japan: Western technological innovation and a centuries-old monarchy?

David Harvey has recently argued that 'one of the myths of modernity is that it constitutes a radical break with the past'.⁹ The Meiji Restoration of 1867–8 is better seen as a period of transition rather than a revolution which obliterated the past. The centrality of the emperor in modern Japan illustrates how the new could only be inscribed with reference to the past. Indeed, Yoshimi Shunya suggests that Japan's emperor system itself can be understood as a system of power that is mediated by communication technologies. The visibility and absence of the emperor's body was registered by the media, which reported on it at a national level.¹⁰ The emperor system was not possible without the active cooperation of the mass media. This book is about how the emperor came to symbolise Japan, and how visual technologies (especially photography) helped to put Japan on display.

What it also sheds light on is how the Japanese experienced modernity. Takashi Fujitani has argued that the Japanese monarchy has been at the 'heart of Japan's modernity'.¹¹ By examining the link between Japan's modernisation and the emperor, this book can challenge the idea that modernity was simply viewed as an import from the West.¹² Representations often attempted to promote a syncretic image of Japan as a hybrid culture, one which borrowed from other nations and yet remained distinctive. Japan's industrialisation unleashed modernising social forces which eroded some local cultural difference but at the same time helped create a national identity. This identity was paradoxically linked not only with the nation's ability to borrow from other nations, internationalise and modernise, but also with the preservation of cultural traditions such as the emperor system.

While Perry offered quite a spectacle, what we sometimes forget is that Japan was on display as well and the camera was there to capture it. Commodore Perry was impressed by Japanese technology which he and his squadron observed and subsequently recorded with impressive precision in their official report, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan* (1856).¹³ Perry himself realised that the thousand or so junks which he saw at the port of Hakodate, on the southwestern tip of the northern island of Hokkaidō, were constrained in design and size not due to any lack of Japanese ingenuity, but rather because of the strict laws created to ensure that most Japanese sailing vessels could not venture far from land. *The Narrative of the Expedition* indicates grudging praise of the Japanese:

We saw nothing remarkable in the manner or workmanship of the Japanese shipbuilders. It is doubtful whether they have any scientific rules for drafting or modelling, or for ascertaining the displacement of their vessels; nor perhaps has it been necessary, as the law confined them all to one model and size.¹⁴

The illustrations which accompany this statement tell a different story, however, for they are among the most handsome in the report, and their visual detail suggests they were the subject of some considerable degree of admiration at the time. What is not immediately apparent is that some of the illustrations were based on daguerreotypes that had been taken in Japan. Thus, the camera was important in the production of evidence, a way of collecting data, and displaying it. Photography helped to convey some of the first impressions that many in the West had of Japan.

Acting Master's Mate Eliphalet Brown took photographs while Perry spent many months negotiating with the Japanese. The images, the first photographs to be taken in Japan, were daguerreotypes. They were produced by using silver or silver-coated copper plates to register an image in a camera obscura. These were unique images. As the process did not involve separate negatives, it was not possible to make multiple copies. In order to produce copies, the daguerreotypes were published as engravings and lithographs in the official expedition report.¹⁵ Although it appears that Brown took 400 to 500 photographs, most of the daguerreotypes were destroyed when there was a fire at the lithographic firm in Philadelphia that produced plates based on them for the report.¹⁶

Rear Admiral George Preble, who accompanied Perry on his expedition, noted how his fellow crewmen 'praised the finished workmanship' of the Japanese matchlocks they saw in Uraga, as well as the rice wine sake which some of the officers found 'quite palatable'. Furthermore, Preble admired some of the textiles and lacquerware given to the Americans, which in his opinion were 'far superior' to those produced by the Chinese. All these items involved technologies which were quite complex, but the Japanese excelled in them. It is no surprise that swordsmiths sometimes had backgrounds in gunmaking. Sake breweries were quite mechanised and were not unlike factories. Similarly, the manufacture of silk cloth involved the development of sophisticated looms such as the treadle-operated tall loom (*takahata*), first brought into Japan from China in the late sixteenth century. From this it is evident that accounts which portray the Meiji Restoration as a crucial watershed in the technological development of Japan have seriously underestimated the status and extent of prior indigenous technological capabilities.

Perry's expedition can, in some ways be considered a voyage of discovery. *A Scientist with Perry in Japan*¹⁷ gives an account of an agriculturist, Dr. James Morrow, who accompanied the Perry expedition. Cole, in his introduction, writes:

The spreading of scientific methods and the benefits derived there from were integral in the cultural extroversion of Americans and may be regarded as missionary in nature. The Americans had theories, inventions, machines and techniques which they were anxious to demonstrate to the Japanese and others in exchange for scientific data which would add to various departments of knowledge.¹⁸

Morrow's task was to collect specimens of plants and seeds which were likely to be of benefit to agriculture and of interest to Western scholars and American museums. Upon their return to the United States, Perry and Morrow made a point of quickly publishing their discovery of many new species from among the 1,500 to 2,000 varieties of specimens, which they had taken back with them.¹⁹ The specimens helped give the Americans not only a sense of the climate and agricultural potential of Japan but also served as a message to others that they were interested in Japan's natural resources, and had a stake in the region.

Perry's expedition can also be viewed as bringing an American culture of imitation to Japan.²⁰ Although the Japanese had long borrowed from other cultures, Perry introduced technology that enhanced the ability of the Japanese to imitate. The expedition itself can be likened to a well-staged drama, a show of force designed to intimidate the Japanese.²¹ Among the gifts to the Japanese was a working, quarter-scale model of a steam locomotive built by Richard Norris and Co. of Philadelphia.²² A somewhat alarmed samurai rode around the circular track sitting on top of the passenger car. Other 'performers' included sailors dressed as black 'Ethiopian' minstrels who provided live after-dinner entertainment for the Japanese.²³ They were surrogates for things that Perry could not bring the Japanese. He tantalised them with what trade could potentially offer: access to Western technology and culture. And to show what Japan could offer, a camera captured images for a ready audience back home and reproduction in a published report.

The mimetic capacity of photography to capture a likeness was feared. Some Japanese women were ordered by Japanese government officials to be photographed at Daienji temple in Shimoda. Like a portrait painting (of which there was a long tradition among the elite) but deemed worse, the women were worried that their souls would leave and reside in the photograph. A rumour circulated that anyone who was photographed would die within three years. There continued to be an association of photography with death.²⁴ This reflects how the power of mimesis is the way it draws on 'the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power'.²⁵

This book is about how the state in Japan has often employed visual techniques to promote an emperor-centred sense of national identity. In the late nineteenth century, the Japanese embarked on a program of Westernisation which can be interpreted as the caucasianisation of the Japanese. It served to distance the Japanese from their Asian neighbours, and showed European nations that Japan was a world power worthy of respect. Images of the emperor were used to promote progress and national cohesion. It can be argued that representations of the emperor played an integral part in the production of modernity in Japan; and an important aspect of that modernity was the resurgence of mimesis. The reproduction of the emperor's image helped establish a connection between the viewer and the imperial personage. In his portrait we see tradition, modernity, and national culture coming together. Photographic technologies also made it possible to represent natural phenomena discovered during scientific expeditions,

throwing further glory on the emperor and the growing empire, and giving viewers a sense of participation. Notions of god-given whiteness and brightness linked the body of the emperor to the lives and bodies of Japanese soldiers.

Early Japanese photography

Ozawa Takeshi and Richard Lane have written about the origins of Japanese photography. The camera obscura was used early on by artists and scholars of Western science such as Hiraga Gennai (1728–79)²⁶ and Shiba Kōkan (1747–1818) to project an image onto a surface which they then traced.²⁷ The first portable box-type camera obscura is said to have been constructed in around 1665 by Robert Boyle (1627–91). The device was introduced into China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and from there imported to Nagasaki in 1718.

Early ‘photographers’ were often *samurai* scholars of Dutch studies (known as *rangaku*) who incorporated the study of photography into their research.²⁸ Although *rangaku* was mainly concerned with medicine, *rangaku* scholars translated and studied Western works in other fields such as physics, chemistry, astronomy, mathematics, geography, metallurgy, navigation, ballistics and military tactics.²⁹ In the 1850s and 1860s, these *samurai* scientists were leaders in studying daguerreotype and wet-plate photography. In terms of subject matter, they began with portraits, training their cameras on to fellow *samurai*.

Even before Perry’s visit, a daguerreotype set had been brought to Nagasaki in 1843, the only Japanese port through which Dutch traders were permitted to enter. It appears that the equipment was mistakenly not unloaded at the time, but when it was brought to Nagasaki a second time in 1848, the merchant and sometime-scientist Ueno Toshinojō purchased it and delivered it to the Satsuma domain in southern Kyūshū. The Satsuma clan were keen to learn about Western science and technology and eager to use it to their military and economic advantage. Shimazu Noriakira, Lord of Satsuma, and clan scientists experimented with the daguerreotype camera in 1849. It appears that the camera was slightly damaged and photographs were unsatisfactory.³⁰ These experiments aside, it appears that it was not until Perry’s second visit in 1854 that the first successful photographs were taken in Japan.

In 1858, Ueno’s son Ueno Hikoma began studying chemistry at the naval training school in Nagasaki. His teacher was the physician Johannes L.C. Pompe van Meerdervoort who was based at the Dutch Factory from 1857–62. The Factory was a trading post of the Dutch East India Company. Ueno started experimenting with photography with help from Pompe van Meerdervoort, who happened to be an amateur photographer. With the arrival of the professional French photographer P. Rossier in Nagasaki in 1859, Ueno learnt the wet-collodion process which was a considerable improvement over the daguerreotype. He would later become famous as a portrait photographer.³¹ Although Ueno’s clients were mainly foreign residents, in the years leading up to and during the Meiji Restoration, there were young *samurai* who had photographs taken by Ueno for their families, in case they were killed during the conflict.³²

What is fascinating is that the study of photography was seen as very much part of the efforts to master Western science and technology, with all its potential military, political and economic ramifications. The Satsuma clan promoted photography and Lord Shimazu used it as a way to persuade other *samurai* families that Japan should change its isolationist policies.³³ The Satsuma clan played a major role in what is known as the Meiji Restoration. It ushered in a period of great change in Japan.

The Meiji Restoration

Some scholars view the Meiji Restoration (1867–8) as a ‘transition’ between the Tokugawa and Meiji periods rather than a ‘revolution’ in the sense of the great world revolutions, or a ‘Restoration’.³⁴ Shogunates (a type of military dictatorship) had long existed in Japan since the establishment of a feudal government by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–99) in the twelfth century. The emperor and his court were relegated to an obscure life in Kyoto, unable to wield political power, but a sovereign nonetheless. Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) established the last such shogunate in the early seventeenth century and began what is known as the Tokugawa period (or Edo period because of the location of the *shōgun*’s capital at Edo, present-day Tokyo). The Meiji Restoration would later restore the emperor as both sovereign and ruler.³⁵

Commodore Matthew Perry was sent to Japan to ensure protection of American seamen, to gain access to Japanese ports for provisions and coal, and to seek rights of trade. Perry reached Uraga on 8 July 1853, accompanied by two steam frigates and two sailing ships. He warned the Japanese that he would return in 1854 with a much larger force if no reply could be given immediately to his proposals. A reply was promised by the following spring. Perry returned to Uraga accompanied by eight ships, and entered into a series of meetings which began on 8 March 1854. A treaty was signed on 31 March at Kanagawa, in which the Japanese agreed to open up the port of Shimoda immediately, and the port of Hakodate in a year’s time. Similar agreements were soon signed with Russia and Britain.³⁶

In 1866, a *bakufu* (feudal government) force was sent to the borders of the Chōshū domain and engaged in a conflict which is known as the Four-Sided War. The Chōshū forces were victorious. On 10 January 1867, Hitotsubashi Keiki (1837–1913) became *shōgun*, the fifteenth and the last in the Tokugawa line. Shortly after, Emperor Kōmei passed away and his 15 year old heir succeeded him to reign for 45 years. Anti-*bakufu* domains feared a *bakufu* resurgence, assisted by Western powers such as France.

The feudal government was overthrown by lower *samurai* and *rōnin* (masterless *samurai*) from the western clans of Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa and Hizen, supported by merchants especially from Osaka such as Mitsui, in whom 70 per cent of the nation’s wealth had come to be concentrated. The Restoration was a shift of governmental power from the upper to the lower *samurai*, facilitated by the merchants.³⁷

On 8 November 1867, Keiki announced his decision to surrender his administrative functions, but not his title, to the throne. On 19 November Keiki submitted his resignation as *shōgun*. By the morning of 3 January 1868, the Kyoto palace was in the hands of loyalists, and a *coup d'état* had occurred. An announcement was made which accepted Keiki's resignation and stated that the emperor would resume responsibilities for government. Senior offices of the court and the *bakufu* would be abolished and a new structure of offices established.³⁸

The historian Harold Bolitho has written that the coup did not involve a large number of loyalists, and that 'any combination of *daimyo* and *samurai*, if determined to save the *bakufu*, could have done so. They did not bother, however, simply because they did not feel they had anything to fear from its passing'.³⁹ On 26 January 1868, Keiki's troops moved towards Kyoto, and were defeated by a Satsuma-Chōshū force. Keiki withdrew to Edo. In case the opposite were to occur and the forces loyal to the emperor were defeated, there were contingency plans for the emperor to be disguised as a court lady and, together with the empress dowager, be escorted to safety.⁴⁰ Fortunately for the emperor, this masquerade did not eventuate, but it would not be long before he would be required to change his appearance again.

In early February, Osaka Castle surrendered. At the end of February, a military force under Prince Arisugawa marched towards Edo. On 6 April a truce was arranged whereby Keiki would resign as the head of the Tokugawa house and this was agreed to by Keiki on 3 May. On 1 November 1869 Keiki was pardoned in the interests of national unity, as were others who had served him. Some of the latter actually gained high office in the Meiji bureaucracy. Even in this 'revolution', 'men of talent' were valued for their potential contribution to national strength.⁴¹

In April 1868, a Charter Oath was issued by the emperor which provided a framework for the policy of the new government. In 1869 the feudal lords became imperial governors. The court nobles and feudal lords would be categorised as nobility (*kizoku* and changed two years later to *kazoku*⁴²), and *samurai* divided into gentry (*shizoku*) and footsoldiers. *Samurai* stipends were severely cut. In 1871, the domains were abolished and replaced by prefectures which were governed by the emperor's appointees. Edo, present-day Tokyo, became the imperial capital.⁴³ In 1880, the court titles of the *shōgun* were returned to him and he was given the highest rank in the new peerage.⁴⁴

Many historians agree that the Restoration was a result of the efforts of *samurai*, and that there was no major contribution from the commoners. The Restoration resulted in the abolition of *samurai* status and security, in effect, by the *samurai* themselves.⁴⁵ The greater government power was not dissimilar to that urged by *bakufu* reformers and the policies which were followed were likely to have been followed by a reformed Tokugawa *bakufu*.⁴⁶

The Meiji Restoration was as E.H. Norman put it:

a race to overtake the advanced Western nations with their machine technology and armaments, and Japanese economic and even political

independence were at stake; Japan had to enter the race with the handicap of a tariff fixed by the unequal treaty system which lasted for half a century.⁴⁷

It is thus not surprising that the Meiji Government would devote its energy to centralisation and modernisation of the army and police force. A modern army and navy required strategic industries such as: heavy industries, engineering, mining and shipbuilding. But we should note that military industries had already been introduced by the Satsuma, Hizen and Chōshū clans before the Restoration. The Meiji Government took the lead in mining and heavy industrial production. Engineering, technical and naval schools were established with the assistance of foreign instructors and students were also sent abroad to master technology in key industries. Transportation and communication were developed as well. Paradoxically, the modern army and police force, telegraph, railways and improved access of village leaders to those in power, deprived the peasants of rebellion and put them under centralised control.⁴⁸

It is notable that in Japan's transition, state reforms were a primary force in change. There was a deliberate borrowing of Western models to 'catch up' and the transition was compressed. There was a reassertion, not overthrow, of traditional authority. In terms of social and political upheaval, the Tokugawa-Meiji transition was very smooth.⁴⁹ The young Emperor Meiji was 'restored' to sovereign power, but few Japanese had much sense of what he looked like.

For those close to the young emperor such as the leading Chōshū statesman Kido Takayoshi (1833–77), going to a photography studio seemed as much as part of social life as collecting swords, writing poetry, collecting paintings, and enjoying the tea ceremony. Kido's diary for the years immediately after the Restoration reveals how he spent his leisure time in such pursuits. Kido owned from 25–30 scroll paintings of landscapes in the *Nanga* style by Tanomura Chikuden (1777–1835). While these traditional paintings of idealised mountains and valleys in Chinese style appealed greatly to Kido, he is also recorded as often having had his photograph taken. For example, on 7 July 1869, Kido and his friends went to a studio to be photographed. Less than six months later on 13 December, Kido visited a photographic studio yet again, after having viewed some paintings and calligraphy the day before. On 28 May 1870, he and a friend had a photographer visit them in the inn where they were staying. That evening, Kido purchased some antiques from a nearby shop. For Kido, having his photograph taken was part of his social life, just as collecting art and antiques were. He embraced both tradition and modernity in the Meiji era.⁵⁰

The visualisation of the emperor

While Kido was eager to be photographed, what of the emperor? The German doctor Engelbert Kaempfer, who served as physician to the Dutch Factory in Nagasaki in the late seventeenth century, imagined the emperor at the time as a being so holy that his feet could not touch the ground, and whose person could not be exposed to the open air or sun. His hair, beard and nails could not be cut,

and his body only cleaned while asleep. Folklore had it that in ancient times he was obliged to sit on the throne for hours on end each morning, without moving, so as to preserve the peace and harmony of his empire. So Kaempfer reported in his *The History of Japan*. As Carmen Blacker has argued, little evidence can actually be found to corroborate such beliefs about the emperor's person, but such descriptions apparently were typical of taboos imposed on sacral kings, and it is said that the emperor did not leave the confines of the Kyoto palace in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And even when citizens were allowed limited access to the palace grounds, they were not able to view the emperor's face. His body constituted a vessel for a sacred spirit.⁵¹ With a two-layered system of authority in place, consisting of the emperor and *shōgun*, it suited the feudal government that the emperor was an unknown quantity.

The arrival in 1853–4 of Commodore Matthew C. Perry showed the Japanese that an ostentatious display of military strength and masculinity were important in imposing one's authority on others. His visits were a calculated form of public performance. The increasing threat of foreign invasion signalled to the Japanese that there was an urgent need for such display. With the Meiji Restoration in 1868, it became necessary to communicate the change in the structure of power. The British diplomat Ernest Satow had an audience with the young emperor that year. On meeting him, Satow noted that:

His complexion was white, perhaps artificially so rendered, his mouth badly formed, what a doctor would call prognathous, but the general contour was good. His eyebrows were shaven off, and painted in an inch higher up. His costume consisted of a long black loose cape hanging backwards, a white upper garment or mantle and voluminous purple trousers.⁵²

It appears that it was also usual for his teeth to be blackened. However by 1870, this and the shaving of the eyebrows by noblemen were banned. In 1871, the emperor started wearing Western clothing for some official ceremonies.⁵³

In the 1870s and 1880s, imperial visits were a way of making visible the connection between the new centralised government and the emperor, through a form of theatre.⁵⁴ What is often forgotten is that photographers accompanied the emperor on these visits to the provinces.⁵⁵ In 1872, the photographer Uchida Kuichi produced a lavish, two-album set of photographs of places visited by Emperor Meiji during his first imperial tour of western Japan. Each photograph was accompanied by handwritten captions in Japanese.⁵⁶ The photographs traced the journey of the emperor through space and time.

In later years, the authority of the Meiji emperor would be conveyed more through images rather than in the flesh. The initial motivation appears to have been international relations and the need to represent the emperor abroad. In May 1872, the emperor posed for Uchida Kuichi, in traditional court dress. Uchida had worked under Ueno Hikoma and was considered the best portrait photographer in Tokyo at the time. The photographs were intended to be given to foreign dignitaries in exchange for photographs of monarchs of other countries,

but this plan did not eventuate. The image was deemed to be not sufficiently modern.⁵⁷

In 1872, the emperor visited the Imperial Dockyard and Arsenal at Yokosuka, as well as a science laboratory and the opening of a railway line, dressed in traditional costume (see Figure 1.1). William Elliot Griffis, who had worked in Japan as a foreign government employee, reminisced about meeting the Emperor Meiji (Mutsuhito) at the opening:

Mutsuhito was arrayed in flowing crimson and white robes and wore a black cap with a lofty ribbon or upright feather of fluted gold. When Ito [Hirobumi] and Okubo [Shigenobu] had rushed to complete the railway from Tokyo to Yokohama ... the Emperor again, but for the last time in public, wore the ancient costume. After that event Mutsuhito donned modern dress.⁵⁸

It was clear to those who were there that the juxtaposition of the past with the future was rather jarring, and in November there was a proclamation that Western dress would be worn for all such official, government occasions. Thus, after 1872, the emperor was portrayed in Western military uniform.⁵⁹

In October 1873, Uchida took another photograph of the emperor, this time dressed in Western military uniform, with hair parted down the middle and the beginnings of a moustache and beard.⁶⁰ This photograph was not initially intended for wide distribution and there were prohibitions on selling the emperor's portrait. It was, however, eventually circulated to government offices and schools, and photographic copies were distributed commercially.⁶¹ While selling the emperor's photograph was frowned on, the circulation and copying of the image did provide a sense of continuity for a nation in evolution. The portrait also provided an opportunity for the state to define the emperor in conformity with what was considered to be the norms of appearance and taste in the West.

The photograph appeared in the English-language newspaper *The Far East* in 1873 (see Figure 1.2). The newspaper catered to the foreign community in Yokohama, where it was published. The introduction of albumen paper enabled ready reproduction of photographs. These images were laboriously pasted into the pages of the newspaper, with some 600 photographs appearing in the newspaper during its five year life from May 1870–August 1875.⁶²

In this way, photographs of the emperor helped make the invisible visible, what has been referred to as the visualisation of the emperor.⁶³ The photograph signalled that it was permissible to gaze on the imperial countenance, with due respect. It was a communicative act that signalled how the emperor (and the photographer) wished to represent him. Within the space of a few years, his face and style of dress had been transformed. We can view the framed window of the photograph as a proscenium arch presenting us with a drama of sorts, a theatrical event, or as the frame around a painting that we are privileged to see.

The introduction of photography changed the popular conception of what constituted an adequate representation of reality. For Westerners, it was a means of extending pre-existing realist tendencies, but for the Japanese, it was

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