

# The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and Japanese Nationalism

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This paper is an exercise in what might be called the social history of international relations. It examines Japanese reactions to the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance.<sup>1)</sup> Instead of machinations of the elite, the fights between Itō Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo, and the political maneuverings of Katsura Tarō and Komura Jutarō, my concern is with popular understandings of Japan's arrival at the threshold of equality with the West. How did the treaty change the way people thought about their country and their understanding of its role in the international arena? I am especially interested in the role played by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in the construction of Japanese nationalism. As is well known, the years just before and after the turn of the twentieth century witnessed a surge of patriotic thought and behavior. Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95) was certainly one element. As Tokutomi Sohō remarked after Japan pounded China into submission: "We are no longer ashamed to stand before the world as Japanese. The name Japan now signifies honor, glory, courage, triumph, and victory. ... Now that we have tested our strength, we know ourselves and we are known by the world."<sup>2)</sup>

But Japanese nationalism was also the product of more peaceful diplomatic and economic achievements. Indeed there were multiple strands of nationalism developing in Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. One was liberal and culturally inclusive, what some scholars have termed "Sleeping Beauty" nationalism; another was Frankenstein's monster, an illiberal, culturally exclusive brand of nationalism. But perhaps the overriding urge behind the development of nationalism in modern Japan was the desire to "catch up with the West." The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was an event universally celebrated; it offered significant diplomatic and commercial gain, but for many people it was the first clear sign of Japan's admission into "great power" status. People were assured that finally Japan had achieved equality with the West.

News of the alliance came as a shock. As diplomatic historians well know, negotiations behind the scenes had been going on for years. But most politicians and certainly the general populace had little hint of the events that were about to take place. On the morning of February 12, 1902, Prime Minister Katsura Tarō approached the rostrum of the House of Peers and in the midst of profound silence, announced the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which had been signed in London on January 30. After reading the text of the convention, the floor went wild: "a demonstration of great and universal enthusiasm and satisfaction in the shape of almost frantic and prolonged applause such as been seldom witnessed in the Upper House." (JT 2/13/02) *The Japan Times* went on to predict that the convention would be hailed with approval "not only by the press but by the public at large. For Japan has entered into an alliance with the greatest power in the world." (ibid)

The press was highly pleased with the sudden revelation of Japan's entry to the "comity of civilized nations."<sup>3)</sup> The *Jiji shinpō*, founded by Fukuzawa Yukichi, had long advocated stronger economic and political ties with Great Britain. The editors declared that the dream of equality with the West had been realized. "Japan, despite being in the East, has in fact achieved equality with the great powers. At the time of the Sino-Japanese war, some 40 years after the opening of the country, Japan was able, for the first time, to demonstrate its national strength. Now, a mere five or six years later, for our country's standing in the world to be thus elevated and be aligned, in both name and fact, with the great powers of the world seems like an idle dream. But this is no dream; this is reality." (JS 2/14/02) The *Jiji* went on to stress the prospects for peace that would mark the new twentieth century: "It is indeed a signal event that the leading power of the world in civilization, wealth and strength should have joined with Japan for the purpose of preserving the peace of the East." Other papers, such as the *Asahi shinbun*, basked in the honor conferred upon Japan through an alliance with the British superpower. "Everyone solicitous for the preservation of peace must welcome it." (AS 2/14/02) The editors of the *Kokumin shinbun* also saw 1902 as a momentous event in Japanese history: "Our long dream has become a reality. ... the agreement constitutes full recognition of Japan's place in the comity of nations." (KS 2/14/02). The *Yubin hōchi* concurred: "Japan may now be said to have received practical recognition as a strong power." (YH 2/14/02) The *Japan Times* summed up the near universal feeling of Japan's coming of age as a nation-state: "We imagine that by this time every subject of His Most August Majesty the Emperor who can read and think is filled with the sensation of one who has suddenly awakened from dreams of youthful ambitions and vague aspirations to the consciousness of the fact that he has become a grown-up person of high position, of great reputation, and with a consequential burden of onerous responsibilities. It is well that there should occur such an awakening in the career of every adolescent, for it can never fail to make thenceforth a real man of him. So it is in the career of a nation and such an awakening has come upon Japan in a manner as Japan has never before experienced." (JT 2/13/02) The Anglo-Japanese was the occasion for Japan's metamorphosis as a "real nation."

And if the press was happy by this "complete and most pleasant surprise," the people were ecstatic. Celebration parties and demonstrations were organized immediately. British subjects residing in Japan announced plans to present a pair of flower vases to the Emperor of Japan and King Edward of England "made entirely of silver with the flags of the two countries inlaid in gold and platinum over the maps of England, Japan, China and Korea." The various political parties vied with one another in holding parties in honor of the occasion. On February 14, for example, the Kensei Hontō (Progressive Party) held a banquet in which Count Okuma Shigenobu delivered a speech praising the "combination of immense power" that was certain to guarantee "a period of peace in the East and the preservation of China and Korea." (JT 2/15/02). The more conservative Kokumin Dōmeikai held its banquet at the Sanentai Restaurant in Shiba Park on February 18. Prince Konoe Atsumaro was the guest of honor.<sup>4)</sup>

Perhaps the most impressive demonstration in commemoration of the alliance was the torchlight procession organized by students at Keiō Gijiku on February 16. Around 5 o'clock that evening, some 1,500 students gathered at the Mita campus; the procession

began precisely at six as the student began their march to the imperial palace. First came a large square *mando* lantern which had inscribed on it in bold letters the words “To Celebrate Anglo-Japanese Alliance.” On the lantern were figures of two women, one Japanese and the other English bowing to each other. The great lantern was followed by the national flags of Great Britain and Japan. Then came a body of cadet trumpeters closely followed by Fukuzawa Ichitarō, the son of the founder of the school, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and Yamamichi Umetarō, the headmaster. They were on horseback. The student band came next and behind it the rank and file, each boy with torches formed of kerosene tin lamps fastened to poles. (Figure 1)

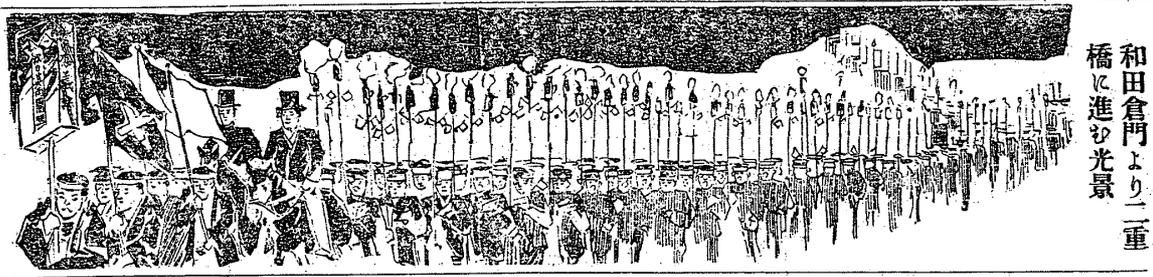


Figure 1: The Torchlight Procession Organized by Students at Keio Gijuku University

The procession marched through Shiba Park and then through the main streets of Shiba, Kyōbashi and Nihonbashi, amid the incessant applause of a vast crowd of spectators assembled on both sides of the streets. According to newspaper reports, “Here and there the Banzais broke forth from within the houses and they were each time responded to by the students.” “Keiō Gijuku Banzai!” “NichEi Dōmei Banzai!” The procession halted in front of the Nijūbashi where the band played the Japanese national anthem, *Kimigayo* and a series of “lusty” Banzais for Their Majesties were cried aloud from thousands of enthusiastic throats. The same shouts were given next at the British Legation where the band struck up “Rule Britannia” and Sir Claude Macdonald received the greetings of the students. The same thing was repeated at the Foreign Office in the presence of the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. As they marched, the students sang a song composed especially for the occasion.

Hurrah the day! Hurrah the day!  
 The East and West stand side by side,  
 The land where shines the rising sun  
 And the land that knows no setting sun  
 In alliance their hands have joined.  
 Alliance this day we celebrate,  
 ‘Tis a flag of peace raised for the world.  
 Hands have they joined and hearts  
 By thoughts noble and gallant urged,  
 China and Korea to help  
 A garden of peace the East to make.  
 Heaven and earth witness the alliance  
 Which with swelling hearts we hail.

Nation old is our Hinomoto,  
 But happy we were born  
 In this great reign of Meiji.  
 Joyous we hail the Emperor  
 We that with better luck than our ancestors  
 This glorious event behold.  
 Empires of *dokuritsu jisen* (independence and self respect)  
 Covenant of alliance have proclaimed  
 To the world of great Powers,  
 Unhesitating, not reluctantly.  
 Such manliness, such fearlessness  
 Call ye [forth the] spirit of *dokuritsu jisen* (independence and self respect).<sup>5)</sup>

The Keiō student march set the stage for a succession of processions, firework displays, banquets, speech meetings, and general celebrations throughout Japan. Commemorative coins and medals were struck, commemorative postcards were issued (Figure 2), photographs of Emperor and King Edward VII were everywhere on display, and even the grave of Will Adams, the English advisor to Tokugawa Ieyasu, was refurbished in honor of the ties struck anew between the two nations. Indeed, the bequeathal upon Japan of great power status was feted from one end of Japan to the other. Between February 15 and March 2, celebrations were held in Nagasaki (2/15), Naoetsu (2/18), Matsumoto (2/18), Takasaki (2/19), Hakodate (2/21), Gifu (2/22), Yokkaichi (2/23), Aizu (2/23), Takayama (2/23), Kōfu (2/23), Fukuoka (2/23), Nagoya (2/23), Akita (2/23) Matsue (2/23), Osaka (2/24), Otsu (2/24), Tottori (2/24), Kōchi (2/24), Tokushima (2/24) (where spontaneous dancing *teodori* took place), Kagoshima (2/24), Kōbe (2/25), Kyoto (2/25), Maebashi (2/25), Yokohama (2/25), Moji (3/2), Mito (3/2) and Nagasaki (3/8).<sup>6)</sup>

In many cases the city council declared a holiday so that all could partake in the festivities. In Osaka on February 24, the crossed flags of the two countries were raised at the corners of major streets, special lanterns were distributed decorated with the Hinomaru and the Union Jack, and two giant archways were constructed, bearing mottos in English, “In Commemoration of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance” and “Unity is Strength.” Nishinoshima Park, the site of the festivities, was awash in red and white bunting, the



**Figure 2:** Postcard Commemorating the Anglo-Japanese Alliance

colors of the national flags of the two countries. The national anthems were played and over 2,000 people listened to a series of congratulatory speeches from a specially-erected platform. Afterward they joined in a deafening chorus of *banzais* to the royalty of Japan and England, followed by loud and systematic clapping. Refreshments were served and various amusements were provided, including day

fireworks and a magic show. (JS 2/24/02)

Celebrations in Yokohama followed a similar routine. The Rising Sun and the Union Jack were exhibited everywhere in honor of the occasion. Fireworks were the signal for the start of a lantern procession of some 2,500 townsmen; the *mando* featured an Englishman and a Japanese shaking hands. The procession divided into three groups and marched through the streets, each group heralded by a brass band; they gathered in front of the Kanagawa governor's office, sang the Kimigayo, and then engaged in three loud banzai to the Japanese empire (Nihon teikoku banzai!!), three cheers for Great Britain (Gureeto Buriten banzai!!). The procession then proceeded along the harbor, in front of the Grand Hotel, through Chinatown (Nankin machi) and down Honcho dōri. Along the way many people joined in, including many foreigners. (JS 2/26/02)

Kōbe was host to festivities celebrating the new alliance on February 25. Again the foreign port city was bedecked with the crossed flags of Japan and Great Britain. Festoons of flags lined the road to the front entrance to grounds of Nankōji, where the celebrations were to take place. A great green arch was erected in front of the temple, decorated again with the flags of the two countries. Around 2,000 people assembled in the enclosure, including 150 Europeans and a large number of Chinese. The mayor of Kōbe was greeted with loud cheers. "Gentlemen," said the mayor, "by the virtue and glory of the rulers of Japan and of Great Britain an alliance has been accomplished between the two countries. This guarantees the peace of the Orient and must assist and reassure commerce. There can be no doubt that Kōbe, one of the most important trade centers in the Far East, will share in the great benefits from the Alliance. Nothing can be more felicitous! We have assembled here to commemorate the event, and I ask every one to raise his cup and drink to the success of this great event, which will, I hope, advance the prosperity of Kōbe and the welfare and happiness of all present." The band played *Kimigayo*, followed by the British national anthem. The mayor then proposed three banzai cheers for the rulers of the two nations, which were given with great enthusiasm. Refreshments were served. Cups were distributed, especially made for the occasion, with the British and Japanese flags painted on them. High winds forced the cancellation of a balloon ascent and parachute descent by Okuda, the famed daredevil. In the evening a lantern procession passed through the city streets. (JWC 3/5/02)

On February 27 court honors were conferred on Katsura, Komura, and Hayashi Senjūrō for their role in bringing about the grand alliance. Viscount Katsura was promoted to Count; Komura made a Baron of the First Order of Merit, and Baron Hayashi was promoted to Viscount. While not everyone was convinced (Figure 3), the awards proved another occasion for banquets and celebrations. As *The Japan Times* noted, these men were responsible for "raising inestimably the status of the country" and assuring "a long period of peace and prosperity" in Asia. (JT 3/1/02)

The national euphoria or "alliance craze," as the press put it, continued well into March. Some papers expressed their concern that "country people, who are very probably not the best persons in the world to grasp the meaning and intent of the alliance, should go mad over that event just because some one set them an example of rejoice." They were afraid that the "childish" behavior of the people was not becoming



**Figure 3:** “Not only are the people drunk on Alliance wine, but the Count is helping himself to food and drink.” Political cartoon, *Maru Chinbun*, March 8, 1902.

“the inhabitants of a wealthy nation.” (JT 3/4/02) The *Yorozu chōhō*, for example, chided the people for thinking that Japan was as strong, as prosperous, and as civilized as Great Britain. The Alliance had intoxicated people with delusions of grandeur. (YC 2/23/02) *The Japan Times* countered these arguments by equating the festive spirit that went into celebrating the Anglo-Japanese Alliance with a war spirit that would result if Japanese were called to the colors. “We sometimes think it childish when we see our soldiers marching down the streets singing war songs in broad daylight and going through similar exercises in the morning and in the evening at their barracks; but we cease to think so when we remember that they are the very soldiers who have established for Japan the reputation she now enjoys in the two campaigns in China. Besides, if the alliance is such an important event that those concerned in its conclusion should be rewarded with unusual marks of honour, the country it appears to us has good reason to rejoice over it. Childish or not childish, the ‘alliance craze’ that has seized on the heart of the country is at least a sign of the universal good will with which the nation welcomes it. It is also a sign of the united

backing which the now joyful and feasting country would give the alliance if called upon, just as our singing and romping soldiers become one of the best fighting armies of the world at a bugle's sound." (JT 3/4/02)

Now, what does all of this have to do with Japanese nationalism? Recently there has been much scholarly debate on the origin of and different forms nationalism takes and the various roles these nationalisms play in the modernizing process. Mitani Hiroshi, for example, contends that Japanese nationalism began with the development of a self-conscious national community predating the arrival of Commodore Perry.<sup>7)</sup> Accordingly, nationalism reached a mature stage in the period between the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese wars. Certainly the Japanese people in 1902, wanting to see their country strong, prosperous, and playing a pro-active role in world affairs, were heirs to this long process of identity formation.

Makihara Norio is another creative scholar of Japanese nationalism.<sup>8)</sup> He looks more to changes taking place in the Meiji period, particularly the development of a mass media, which helped to transform the people of Japan from "guests" to an active citizenry, identifying themselves with the fate of their country. Makihara notes the interplay between nationalizing forces from above – what Benedict Anderson calls "official nationalism" – and the urge to achieve a satisfying sense of national identity that came from below. One chapter of his book highlights the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people as seen in holidays, victory parades, and other national celebrations.<sup>9)</sup> His "four points" that symbolized the formation of a popular national identity were clearly in evidence at the time of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: the national anthem (*Kimigayo*), the cries of *banzai*, the imperial portrait (*goshin'ei*), and the national flag, the Hinomaru.<sup>10)</sup>

A study of popular responses to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance can thus be used as grist for the mills of scholarly debate. We can relate 1902 to Anderson's "imagined communities," to Ernest Gellner's question "do nations have navels?" and to the nationalizing projects of Anthony Smith's "political archaeologists."<sup>11)</sup> Was the Japanese experience marked more by civil nationalism or ethnic nationalism, by inclusive, rational, or "Sleeping Beauty" nationalism, or by exclusive, irrational, "Frankenstein monster" nationalism? Jason Karlin's recent essay on the "gender of nationalism" invites us to contrast a gentlemanly form of nationalism, associated with the West and England in particular, with a more vigorous masculinity that rejected Western materialism and instead extolled notions of primitivism, national spirit, and imperialism.<sup>12)</sup> Indeed it would be revealing to contrast the popular response to the 1902 treaty with the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, and again with the behavior of the Hibiya crowd in 1905.<sup>13)</sup> Many competing, but also intermeshing nationalisms are involved.

The "alliance craze" of 1902 is a good example of the messy nature of Japanese nationalism; it does not easily fill expected molds. It is easy to explain euphoria over victory in war, but in 1902 the near-universal understanding of the alliance was as a prelude to peace. Nearly all major newspapers, with the interesting exception of the *Niroku shinpō* (which said that the object of the alliance was to involve Japan and Russia in hostilities; NS 2/14/02), touted the alliance as guaranteeing peace in the Orient if not throughout the world. As the Keiō students sang out, the alliance promised to make the East into a "garden of peace" (*Tōhō heiwa no rakuen*). While indeed the politicians

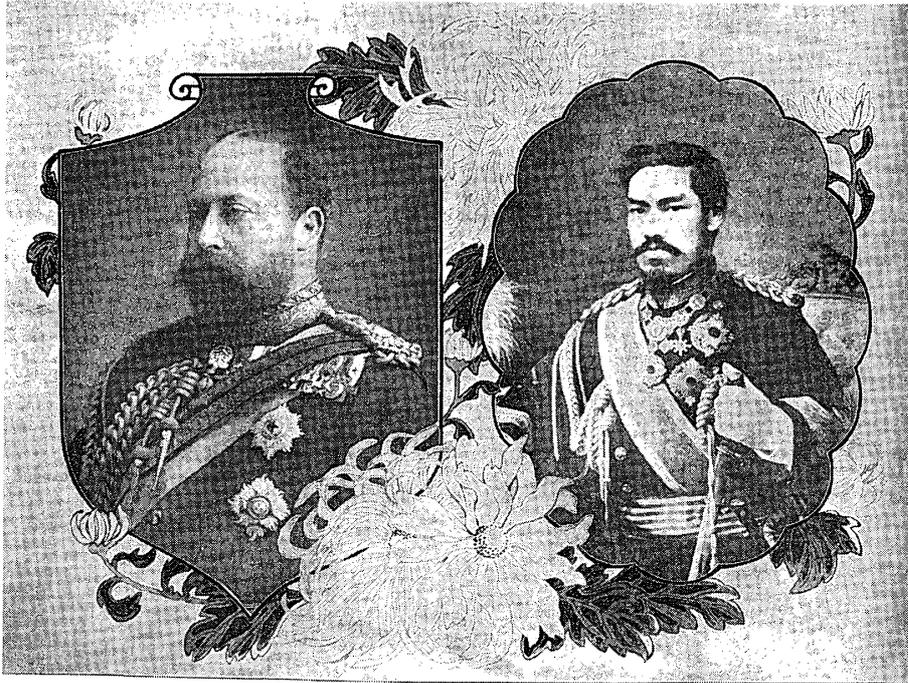


Figure 4: The Royal Portraits of King George VII and Emperor Meiji. *Taiyō*, March 1, 1902



Figure 5: The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: Britannia and Yamato-hime, *Jiji shinpō*, February 18, 1902

may have plotted war and territorial aggrandizement, the people celebrated the alliance for its promise of peace and prosperity. Moreover, it is easy to explain popular support for Japanese unilateral action, of glories that are due to Japan and Japan alone, but in 1902 the banzais went up for both Japan and Great Britain, the flags of the two countries were crossed in union, the portraits of Japanese and English royalty were displayed side by side, and people sang the national anthems of both members of the alliance.

What was being celebrated in 1902 was the achievement of equality with Great Britain, and by extension, equality with the West in general. Editorials and speeches harped on this theme. Thus, Katō Tadaaki, the former foreign minister, praised the alliance, saying that it was impossible to over-estimate the importance of the event for Japan, which “having been a few years ago an insignificant, ‘half-civilized’ country, has now been placed on the same lotus-blossom with Great Britain.” (JWM 2/15/02) A young student, Kumoura Tōgan, used this same theme to win second prize in an essay contest sponsored by *Shōnen sekai*: “Now that our country is allied with England, known as the greatest power in the world, we are recognized as equals to the European countries. Is this not the most wonderful event in recent times? Before the Sino-Japanese war the European countries did not even know our country’s name, and so now when we are so suddenly arm and arm in alliance with Great Britain, known throughout the world as the leader of the civilized countries in Europe, I can only express my superabundant joy!” (*Shōnen sekai*, 4/1/02)

Visual sources also were used to reinforce the idea of equality. Look, for example, at the portraits of Emperor Meiji and King Edward VII. (Figure 4) They are presented as equals, two modern monarchs of two powerful countries, both committed to world peace and the spread of civilization. This conclusion is even more forcefully presented in cartoon form. An illustration in the *Jiji shinpō* shows Britannia and Yamato-hime, hand in hand, looking down, with benevolence and concern, on the tiny figures of China and Korea. (Figure 5) The personage representing Japan, Yamato-hime, is based on a legendary figure from Japan’s ancient past. One of her achievements was to pass on a magical sword to Yamato Takeru no mikoto to help him subdue the Ebisu barbarians. Japan is thus characterized by military power and its role in spreading civilization. But the most obvious message is that the two figures stand before the world as towering equals. The illustration is also a perfect example of Japan’s success in escaping from Asia (*datsu-A*), a policy long advocated by Fukuzawa Yukichi, the founding father the *Jiji shinpō* and one of the most powerful advocates of nationalism (and Westernization) in the Meiji period.<sup>14)</sup>

The popular response to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance involves what we may call “catch-up” nationalism. Just as catching up with China was a motive force in pre-Perry times, catching up with the West (*bankoku o taiji*), or even overcoming the West, provided the energy behind Japan’s rapid modernization. England replaced China as the central flower – as the most powerful and civilized country in the world. Drawing abreast of English became a national dream. And thus, 1902, when the dream came true and Japan and English stood hand in hand, allied with responsibilities to work together for the advancement of world peace and civilization, there was cause for celebration. For some, perhaps even more so than victory in war, the Anglo-Japanese

Alliance seemed the crowing achievement of the new age. Japan had become the “England of the East” and a full-fledged member of the civilized community of nations. At the same time, however, others could see in the alliance Japan’s advance into Asia and the possibility of unflinching patriotism and willingness on the part of the masses to sacrifice themselves in advancing Japan’s national cause.

## Notes

- 1) A version of this paper was presented to a symposium held on May 25, 2002 at the International House in Tokyo to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: “Historical Impacts of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Centenary,” sponsored by the Anglo-Japanese History Research Association. I thank Todd Munson for his help in locating some of the newspaper items used in this article.
- 2) John Pierson, *Tokutomi Sohō, 1863-1957: A Journalist for Modern Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p. 236.
- 3) Ian Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: The Diplomacy of Two Island Empires 1894-1907*, London: The Athlone Press, 1966, pp. 226-27.
- 4) See the February 24, 1902 issue of *Nihon* for a transcription of Konoe’s speech.
- 5) This translation of the commemorative song follows the text included in the February 15, 1902 issue of *Japan Times*. A more poetic version of the song was published in the February 16 issue of *Japan Times*. The Japanese original is given in the February 22, 1902 issue of the *Japan Weekly Mail*. The reference to “independence and self respect” refers to some of the Keiō slogans made famous by Fukuzawa Yukichi.
- 6) Based on a survey of advertisements and news items in major Japanese newspapers published during February and March, 1902.
- 7) Mitani Hiroshi, *Meiji ishin to nashonarizumu*, Tokyo: Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1997.
- 8) Makihara Norio, *Kyakubun to kokumin no aida*, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1998.
- 9) See also T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy, Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- 10) Makihara, pp. 167-74.
- 11) See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, and “The Warwick Debates on Nationalism” between Gellner and Anthony Smith, included in *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 3, 1996, pp. 357-70.
- 12) Jason Karlin, “The Gender of Nationalism: Competing Masculinities in Meiji Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies*, 28.1, Winter 2002 pp. 41-44
- 13) Andrew Gordon, *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. See also Matsuyama, Iwao, *Gunshū: kiki no naka no nanmin*, Tokyo: Yomiuri Shinbunsha, 1996.
- 14) See Albert Craig, “Fukuzawa Yukichi: The Philosophical Foundation of Meiji Nationalism,” in Robert Ward, ed., *Political Development in Modern Japan*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, pp. 99-148.

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*Maru maru chinbun*

*Nihon*

*Nihonjin*

*Niroku shinpō* (NS)

*Shōnen sekai*  
*Taiyō*  
*Yorozu chōhō* (YC)  
*Yūbin hōchi shinbun* (YH)

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