


The roots and rootlessness of Masayoshi Ohira

by Richard Katz



 Masayoshi Ohira stands today as the leading representative of the faction which for more than 100 years has fought the modernizing tradition in Japan every step of the way. The Mitsui-Shibusawa political faction from which Ohira springs never accepted the humanist purpose of the Meiji Restoration. They early on tried to overthrow the Meiji regime, with British support. Failing that, they funded nationalist cults aimed at keeping Japan tied to a feudalist ideology.

By 1902, the Mitsui faction had gained enough political power to force through a military alliance with Britain. From that point on the Mitsui faction strove to keep Japan culturally isolated, limited in its economic development and passive in international politics—content to serve as the Asian handmaiden to the British Empire.

Britain's Mitsui faction

The Mitsui faction's undermining of the Meiji humanist tradition began with the activities of the Sonno-joi Shinto movement, a racist, emperor-worshipping, sun-worshipping cult. In 1878, in large part instigated and supported by British Ambassador Harry Parkes, the Sonno-joi cult organized displaced feudal lords into the infamous Satsuma Rebellion in an attempt to overthrow the young Meiji regime. Though the rebellion failed, the cult's Black Dragon terrorist network succeeded in murdering the head of the Meiji government, Toshimichi Okubo. The cult argued that the Meiji Restoration's modernization drive was eliminating "unique Japanese values" which they defined in feudal, actually Chinese, terms. To this day, the leader of the rebellion, Saigo, is romanticized in public schools as a tragic hero who had tried to preserve "unique Japanese culture."

With British aid, the most prominent members of the Sonno-joi cult, such as Eishi Shibusawa and Kaoru Inoue, took over Mitsui, a pre-Meiji usurious merchant

house. With further British aid, Shibusawa and Inoue built up Mitsui to counter the Mitsubishi group's political and economic organizing activities. The Mitsui group's daily political and business life was closely directed by Rothschild agents from Europe such as Allan Shand.

Mitsui guided its political activities according to the dictates of its own cultish ideology and British geopolitical needs. The Mitsui faction tried to bankrupt Mitsubishi and to murder the leading humanists during the 1880s and 1890s. They failed to wipe out the Mitsubishi faction but succeeded in dulling the humanist thrust of the Meiji Restoration movement. In 1898, the Mitsui faction helped save British control over China by aiding in the defeat of the Hundred Days Reform, the alliance of the Mitsubishi faction and Russia's Count Witte to liberate China from British colonialism and Confucian backwardness. In the demoralization that swept the humanist faction in the wake of that defeat, Mitsui's arch-militarist General Aritomo Yamagata took over Japan and led it into the 1902 Anglo-Japanese military alliance. Three years after, armed with British-built ships, financed by British banks and trained by British officers—Japan launched a successful war against Britain's enemy and Mitsubishi's former ally, Russia. That action was Mitsui Japan's contribution to the much broader British destabilization of Russia, culminating in the "1905 revolution" that toppled Witte.

From that point on, despite rearguard resistance by the Mitsubishi faction, Mitsui successfully kept Japan tied to the bonds of British geopolitics, and tried to redirect Japan's economic growth into a process aimed at turning her into the Prussia of the East.

More fundamentally, the Mitsui group tried to impose cultural isolation on Japan and reverse the humanist political organizing of the Meiji Restoration. Meiji leader Fukuzawa had set out to transform Japan in order to make it fit to act as a transmission belt to modernize all

of Asia. He had defined Japanese identity in those terms. Mitsui leader Shibusawa set up Tokyo Imperial University specifically to counter Fukusawa's message and to impose a Shinto cult identity. Under the guidance of such German-based British agents as sociologist Max Weber, who pointed out appropriate Teutonic parallels, Shibusawa's networks successfully spread the lie that deep down it was really impossible to be both modern and "Japanese" at the same time. The individual Japanese could either adopt a modern persona to meet the needs of surviving in a Western-dominated world, in which case the personality was a mere facade without a soul. Or the individual could revert to a Japanese identity, which the Mitsui faction defined as a feudal, Shintoist one.

Ohira today best personifies the way this cult ideology permeates leading Japanese officials even now:

Though the heavy emphasis on Western learning had produced solid success in the material modernization of Japan, I cannot rid myself of the discouraging feeling that the substance of Western thought has not been absorbed into the Japanese bloodstream or that it has proved all that useful in the conduct of everyday life.

. . . The light of Chinese learning has never been extinguished in Japan. On the contrary many of the guiding principles that govern our daily life undeniably have their origin in Chinese thought. . .

Unable to discover their own unique identity, unable to choose between East and West, growing old wandering blindly in the limbo between the two—isn't this the plight of many Japanese today?

The cult of Japaneseness

Out of those who accepted the cultish definition of "unique Japanese culture," the so-called National Foundation Society led by Tokyo University and Mitsui Bank chief Sehin Ikeda spawned scores of Nazi-like groups during the 1920s. With names like Blood Pledge Brotherhood, Society of the Cherry, and Death-Defying Farmers Band as well as the traditional Black Dragon Society, the fascist bands were all indoctrinated in the Sonno-Joi Shinto cult and all identified with the anti-Meiji Satsuma Rebellion.

Like the Nazis with whom they identified, the fascists hated capitalism for eradicating their "unique Japaneseness." And like the Nazis, the fascist bands were organized into a "strike north" movement to invade the Soviet Union in alliance with Britain. Not surprisingly, the geopolitician Karl Haushofer, who had helped create the Nazis in Germany, showed up in Japan to help the Mitsui faction organize Japanese Nazism.

The organizers of the cults, on the other hand, men like Mitsui's Sehin Ikeda, "strike north" General Sadao

Araki and Tokyo University head and later Prime Minister Kiichiro Hiranuma, were no more sword-waving crazies than Nazi Finance Minister Hjalmar Schacht was a goose-stepper. They were urbane, sophisticated, liberal, accustomed to discussing world affairs with visiting British dignitaries over brandy and cigars. Sehin Ikeda regarded himself as the Hjalmar Schacht of Japan. These were the men who had decided to become "facades" by their own definition, to identify with the more powerful British without being able to be British, in other words, total agents. They manipulated the lower level and despised "Japanese." This is Ohira today.

As the depression hit Japan with full force, Mitsui's "strike north" fascists made their move. They began with the assassination of Mitsubishi-Menseito Prime Minister in November 1930 and then followed up with the infamous Manchukuo coup a year later. The leaders of the Manchukuo affair, whom Sehin Ikeda had met shortly before the coup, declared that the target of the coup was Japan itself where they intended to abolish parties and set up National Socialism. Throughout this period the British Foreign Office and Morgan-backed U.S. President Herbert Hoover privately urged support of Mitsui's international adventures since they provided a "bulwark against Soviet Communism."

The "strike north" fascists never succeeded in completely taking over Japan despite many assassinations and attempted coups. Yet, Mitsui did succeed in imposing fascist economics on depression-struck Japan and on its colonies. Most of Japan's international adventures in the 1930s from Manchukuo up until the invasion of China in 1937 were initiated by the strike north faction and tolerated by others. The process Mitsui set in motion eventually led Japan down the path to war, not with the U.S.S.R. as Britain intended, but with America.

Ohira is the product of Mitsui's operations just as much as Miki is the heir and participant in the fight against it. Ohira's public career began when the networks of Sehin Ikeda patronized his entrance into the Finance Ministry in 1936. During the early part of World War II, Ohira served with the misnamed Asian Development Board helping to implement Mitsui's looting of China. Why had Ohira been so patronized? Because, as a young high school student, Ohira had decided to become a Christian through the YMCA networks. These networks played the same role in Japan then as the YMCA and World Council of Churches networks play in destabilizing South Korea today, organizing against industrial development. The leader of the YMCA movement in Japan was the same Shibusawa who had created the Mitsui faction and the fascist cults in the 1920s. Ohira had simply chosen a "facade."

Today, Ohira fully supports Washington's China card strategy to encircle the Soviet Union militarily. It is just the 1980s version of the 1930s "strike north."