BEFORE IMPERIALISM: KISHIDA GINKŌ PIONEERS THE CHINA MARKET FOR JAPAN

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"Who is Japan's outstanding pioneer of modern Sino-Japanese relations?" This question, posed to a group of leading Japanese China-experts in the early 1940s, was answered resoundingly with the names of Prince Konoe Atsumaro (1863-1904), representing relations at the official level, and Kishida Ginkō (1833-1905), representing non-official relations.[1] The present essay focuses on Kishida Ginkō, a man for whom non-governmental service to his country was so important that he refused all offers of official posts, including governorships.[2]

Most of Kishida Ginkō's adult life was spent in the Meiji period (1868-1912) which, like the American revolution period of a hundred years earlier, was an age of giants. In an age of giants, Kishida emerges as merely a "minor giant." He has consequently been relatively neglected by Western scholarship. His story is fascinating, nonetheless, not only for what it says about Sino-Japanese relations "before imperialism," that is, before Japan's successful penetration of China in the early 1900s[3], but for what it says about "the new Meiji entrepreneur" -- that breed of businessman so instrumental in Japan's transformation from a decentralized feudal state before 1868 to a centralized industrialized state after 1868, and who along with the new government paved the way for Japanese expansion overseas.[4] This essay, then, examines Kishida, the entrepreneur in Japan, and Kishida the pioneer promoter of Japanese trade and interests in China. So successful was he in his China role that even today a leading Japanese authority on China calls him "the father of the tairiku rōnin (China adventurers)" of prewar Japan.[5]

Kishida was the eldest of eight children of a declining Okayama farm and sake-brewing family. From ages 15 to 22, by serving as a live-in houseboy at the home of a nearby wealthy village headman, the young Kishida was able to arrange a good education for himself at a village school. But he was restless. One day at age seventeen or eighteen, while relieving himself in the local river, he is said to have pondered the thought: "The waters under the Nihon Bridge in Edo [present-day Tokyo] reach as far as the Thames..." These words, made famous the previous century by a writer similarly relieving himself in the river in the shogunal capital of Edo, suggest a growing Japanese curiosity about the outside world, after several centuries of self-imposed isolation. Local tradition also credits Kishida with saying, "A big fish can't swim in a little pond." A graffito still legible in 1974 on the walls of a local shrine reads, "Until claimed by fame, I shall not return -- Kishida." Interestingly, just next to that is a cryptic note dated August 17, 1900, signed simply Tōyō ("The Orient"). Local people say that Kishida, having achieved fame, had returned.[6]

The age of Kishida was one of expanding opportunities for the ambitous. In fact, by the 1870s, the runaway best-seller Self-Help, by Samuel Smiles, and such expressions as "Boys, be ambitious!" had made Kishida-style ambition fully respectable.[7] But as a peasant boy, Kishida, ahead of his time by a decade or more, had had to struggle for parental permission to go to Osaka in 1855 at age 22 to further his education. Before going to Osaka, Kishida had recalled admiring the samurai, that privileged hereditary group of warrior administrators who alone wore swords and enjoyed access to high office. But daily contact with the real thing at school in Osaka cured him of his early infatuation, and indeed produced a hearty dislike of samurai swagger and pretense, a dislike that grew with time. Kishida further found offensive the anti-government agitation beginning to be heard among samurai, which led ultimately to the toppling of the Tokugawa government (1603-1868). Such agitation did not suit his character.[8]

In 1856, Kishida moved on to Edo, the administrative heart of Japan and his original objective. There, he set out to become famous through study. But after four years of struggle, he concluded that he would never be more than a mediocre scholar and dropped out. Assuming the name "Give-a-damn Gen," he lived an anonymous floating life of odd jobs and pleasure from 1860 to 1864.[9] Coming out of this period, he pioneered the publication of Japan's first daily newspaper in 1864, but the venture failed after only two months.[10]

An eye ailment earlier that year had brought Kishida to the doorstep of Dr. James Hepburn of Yokohama. Cured in a mere seven days, the grateful and unattached Kishida attached himself to the good doctor and indeed, moved right in with him. At Hepburn's home, Kishida assisted on a dictionary project, handmaiden to the Hepburn romanization system which became and remains the standard system today. Ready for printing in 1866, Hepburn and his young assistant carried the dictionary to the modern presses of Shanghai, fulfilling coincidentally Kishida's dream to go to China. Kishida's eight-month stay in Shanghai, from August 1866, provided him his first taste of the real China -- a China virtually unknown to Japanese since travel outside of Japan had been proscribed by law under the Tokugawa policy of _sakoku_ or isolation.[11]

What did Kishida think of China? He hated it -- or at least he hated major parts of it by the time he left. China was dirty, its government incompetent, and its people devious and deficient in basic human relationships, reports his diary.[12] Moreover, his pride as a Japanese would not permit him to wear Chinese attire. And not wanting to ape the samurai he detested back home, who were taking up western styles of dress, the tall Kishida stuck to his Japanese drawers and workman's waistcoat, inviting merciless stares. He grew impatient with "this damn country" (_baka na kuni_), and dreadfully homesick.[13]

Personal feelings did not blind Kishida to a good opportunity, however. In fact, he was back in Shanghai the following year to procure a cheap steamship for the second of his pioneering ventures, Japan's first shipping line with regular runs between Yokohama and Edo. Meanwhile Hepburn had rewarded Kishida for his services from 1864 to 1866 by giving him the formula to his miracle eyewash. On Kishida's second trip to China, January-March 1868, he carried with him a supply of this eyewash, called _seikisui_ (spirit-pot waters). Sales of _seikisui_ that trip are said to have been modern Japan's first direct private sales to China, another "first."[14]

Soon after Kishida's return from his China trip of 1868, which was the first year of the new Meiji government, he submitted a memorandum to that government.[15] This admirably explains Kishida's persistent interest in "that damn country," as well as suggests his philosophy of business, around the universal Japanese commitment to fukoku-kyōhei (enrich the country, strengthen the military.)[16]

> Lately, everyone has been advocating a policy of fukoku-kyōhei, but most of what they call for goes way overboard, and is impractical. Of ways to enrich the country, agriculture and trade are most important. Of the two, our agriculture was perfected long ago. We have no set methods for trade, however, which Western countries have perfected. Establishing set methods will not be easy, but we can move ahead gradually until our trade is no less inferior to that of Britain, France, and the U.S. There is a spot convenient to Japan -- China -- which is a treasure chest for the Europeans. For Japan to go into trade with Europe and America while neglecting our best money-maker, China, is against all common sense. Our products are, moreover, what the Chinese like best: ginseng, lacquerware, copper, tin, lead, ceramicware, dried beche-de-mer, sea tangle, dried fish, etc. The Chinese love all these goods; and we produce great quantities of them. Put them on a steamship for Shanghai, and we can make a fortune. It would be best to conduct this trade with China by setting up a company. We could then get people to invest in that company, in strict accord with contractual agreements.[17]

That this proposal for a "company" went to the government rather than to private interests is indicative of the weak position of private enterprise, in terms of capitalization and organization, at this juncture of Meiji history. What is more surprising is that a full two decades later, Kishida's chief "disciple," Arao Sei (1859-96), formulated a far broader proposal for a Japan-China Trade Association with branch offices all over China which, because of the still weak position of Japanese capital, also had to go to government agencies for action.[18]

Over the next eight years, Kishida became well-known in Japan for a wide variety of ventures. He began to publish his second newspaper in 1868; he pioneered a successful ice business, bringing ice from distant Hokkaido, and founded an unsuccessful oil business; in 1874 he served as Japan's first "war correspondent," reporting from the Taiwan front for Tōkyō Nichi Nichi Shimbun during Japan's brief punitive expedition of that year, for which he was "recognized as the country's foremost reporter"[19]; he opened a drugstore, Rakuzendō, on the Ginza in 1875, which became the cornerstone of his fortune; and he was cofounder in 1876 of one of Japan's first schools for the blind, deaf and dumb.[20] These activities made him justly famous; but what is interesting is that his creative restless energies and compulsive entrepreneurial drive were not unique.[21]

Kishida's third China trip, in 1878, was to open a Shanghai branch of his Ginza Rakuzendō.[22] He sought profit, of course, but more importantly he viewed this as part of his patriotic duty to open the China market to Japanese goods.[23] Ever the entrepreneur, while in China Kishida detected a peculiarly Chinese opportunity. He began to publish "sleeve books" (xiuzhenben) or pocket editions of the Chinese classics that candidates for the demanding Chinese civil service examinations could sneak into their examination halls. These sold like hotcakes, over 150,000 copies a year, and launched Kishida on his publishing and bookstore business in China and, through that, on to friendship with Chinese scholars.[24] It also provided Kishida the resources to accommodate and feed Japanese students and travelers in Shanghai, eventually as many as fifty to seventy at a time.[25]

The year 1880 saw Kishida traveling around China in search of sites for additional branch stores to open up China's interior to Japan. Legend has it that nothing came of this search, although primary source materials in Japan's Foreign Ministry Archives indicate that Kishida established branches in at least Foochow (November 1884) and Hankow (December 1884).[26] The legend of inaction serves to highlight the critical importance of 1st Lt. Arao Sei, who came to China in 1886 on a spy mission for the army General Staff Headquarters, arranged with Kishida to use (rather than "open") the Hankow Rakuzendō branch as a "cover" and base, and then, in 1889, after three years in China, resigned his military commission to concentrate on training Japanese for trade with China, arguing Japan's urgent need to "enrich and strengthen" herself through trade.[27] Arao's success at Hankow was so great that the prior existence of the Hankow or other branch stores is immaterial to the question of his importance and success.[28] What must be remembered, however, is Kishida's crucial support of Arao and other intelligence gatherers and Japanese adventurers in China.

With the outbreak of war between China and Japan in 1894, the aging Kishida, who had shuttled between Tokyo and Shanghai some twenty to thirty times over the previous fifteen years, cut back his direct involvement with China to give more time to his now struggling Tokyo store, as well as to his neglected wife and their seven sons and seven daughters.[29] By that time, Kishida had pioneered the China market, had planted ideas that bore rich fruit in the minds of men like Arao Sei[30], and, as an elder statesman of Chinese affairs, continued from home to promote Japanese cultural activities relating to China.[31]

Having before the war sheltered and encouraged all manner of Japanese in China -- students, drifters, adventurers, and spies -- Kishida was decorated and granted a large 500 yen cash award from the emperor for his contribution to the Japanese military victory.[32] Without a doubt, he had earned his posthumous reputation as outstanding pioneer of Sino-Japanese relations, and "father of the tairiku rōnin." And, so too, had he justly won the "fame" he so subtly acknowledged on the walls of the village shrine near his old hometown.

One measure of the importance of a man in any society, but particularly in Japan, is the roster of those in attendance at his funeral. At Kishida's funeral in 1905 were, among others, Itō Hirobumi, Itagaki Taisuke, Katsura Tarō, and Shibusawa Eiichi.[33] These were some of the "true giants" of the early Meiji transformation in politics, the military, and business. By this measure, Kishida Ginkō -- pioneering entrepreneur, pioneering journalist, pioneering promoter of Japanese involvements in China, pioneering founder of schools for the handicapped -- was indeed an important man, and perhaps more than just the "minor giant" claimed at the outset of this essay.

NOTES

[1]The results were published in 1943, in a study cited in Etō Shinkichi, "Chūgoku kakumei to Nihonjin, Kishida Ginkō no baai" (Japanese and the Chinese revolution, the case of Kishida Ginkō), in vol. 7, Nihon no shakai bunkashi (A social cultural history of Japan) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1974), p. 214. For an engaging article on Prince Konoe, see Marius B. Jansen, "Konoe Atsumaro," in Akira Iriye, ed., The Chinese and the Japanese: Essays in Political and Cultural Interactions (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 107-23.

[2]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., Tai-Shi kaikoroku (A record looking back on China) (2 vols.; Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1936, 1968), 2: 2 and 8.

[3]Yoda Yoshiie, Senzen no Nihon to Chūgoku (Japan and China before the war) (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1976), argues convincingly that Japan lacked both the organization and the capital for sustained expansion into China until after 1900. See also Peter Duus, "Economic Aspects of Meiji Imperialism," Social and Economic Research on Modern Japan: Occasional papers, No. 7 (Berlin: East Asian Institute, Free University of Berlin, 1980).

[4]Among the enormous literature on entrepreneurship in modern Japan, focusing primarily on the period of transition after 1868, see Johannes Hirschmeier, The Origins of Entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964); Yasuzo Horie, "Modern Entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan," in William W. Lockwood, ed., The State and Economic Enterprise in Japan: Essays in the Political Economy of Growth (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 183-208; Keiichiro Nakagawa, ed., Social Order and Entrepreneurship; Proceedings of the Second Fuji Conference (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1977); Henry Rosovsky and Kozo Yamamura, "Entrepreneurial Studies in Japan: An Introduction," Business History Review, 44:(Spring 1970), 1-12; Kozo Yamamura, "A Re-examination of Entrepreneurship in Meiji Japan (1868-1912)," Economic History Review, 21:(April 1968), 144-58; and Kozo Yamamura, A Study of Samurai Incomes and Entrepreneurship; Quantitative Analyses of Economic and Social Aspects of the Samurai in Tokugawa and Meiji Japan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974).

[5]Etō, p. 216. Professor Etō's article is an extremely sensitive, well crafted portrait of the private Kishida. Kishida's formative influence on modern Japan-China relations was so well recognized in the 1930s that it secured for him the first twelve pages of the extensive biographical collection, compiled by Tōa Dōbunkai, 2:1-12.

[6]Etō, 222-30.

[7]Self-Help (1857), first published in Japanese translation in 1871, was an instant best-seller. Its influence was enormous, and it ran through numerous printings and even a new translation as late as 1938. See Earl H.

Kinmouth, The Self-Made Man In Meiji Japanese Thought: From Samurai to Salary Man (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), p. 10. Kinmouth's chapter titles are themselves revealing, among them, "Self-Help," "Study for Wealth and Honor," and "Success!"

[8]Etō, pp. 231-33.

[9]Ibid., pp. 235, 241.

[10]James L. Huffman, Politics of the Meiji Press: The life of Fukuchi Gen'ichirō (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, and 213, n. 13.

[11]Etō, p. 242; Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:3; and Ronald P. Toby, State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[12]Kishida Ginkō, Wusong nikki (Wusong diary), in Shakai oyobi kokka (Society and State) (Tokyo: Ikkyōsha, n.d.). Excerpts appear in Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:9-12.

[13]Etō, pp. 243-58, passim.

[14]Ibid., p. 258.

[15]The date of this memorandum was May 1868. Toa Dobunkai, comp., 2:4. A later source gives the year as 1873. Koyukai, comp., Tōa Dōbun Shoin Daigaku shi (History of Tōa Dōbun Shoin University) (Tokyo: Koyukai, 1955), p. 3.

[16]This slogan was the most enduring and widely known slogan of the Meiji period and after.

[17]Quoted in Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:1. Translated with reference to Ken'ichiro Hirano, "Arao Sei and the Process of the Establishment of the Tōa Dōbun Kai: An early advocacy of the promotion of Sino-Japanese trade," unpublished paper for Seminar in Modern Japanese History (History 285), Regional Studies—East Asia, Harvard University, 1964, pp. 23-24. Hirano's superb study has been invaluable to the author's current research.

[18]For Arao's unsuccessful attempts to interest business elements in his proposal, see ibid., 33-43. For the proposal itself, see the relevant portions of Arao's May 10, 1889 report on China to army General Staff Headquarters, in Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:471-96; and Arao's speech later that year to a group of potential student recruits in Hakata, southwest Japan, in Inoue Masaji, Kyojin Arao Sei den (Biography of a giant, Arao Sei) (Tokyo: Sakuma shobō, 1910, 1936), pp. 38-47.

[19]Huffmann, pp. 82-83.

[20]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:3-4.

[21]The best known example of Meiji entrepreneurship is Shibusawa Eiichi, whose drive and sense of mission to help build up the country through profitable investment far exceeded even Kishida's. See Johannes Hirschmeier, "Shibusawa Eiichi: Industrial pioneer," in Lockwood, ed., pp. 209-47.

[22]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2: 4. This trip may have only been exploratory. A generally reliable primary source gives the founding date of the Shanghai store as April 1880. Machida Saneichi, "Shokyō oyobi iken" (Japan's China

Trade: What is to be done?), detailed report by the Japanese consul at Hankow, December 1889, 115 pp., in the Japanese Foreign Ministry Archives, 3.2.1.2.

[23]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2: 5 and 8.

[24]Ibid., pp. 6 and 8.

[25]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., Zoku tai-Shi kaikoroku (A record looking back on China, supplement) 2 vols. (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1941-42, 1973), 2:428 and 429-30.

[26]Machida Saneichi report, December 1889.

[27]See references in fn. 18, and Arao's inaugural address to the 150 students of his Shanghai Nisshin Bōeki Kenkyūjo (Japan-China Trade Research Institute), 20 September 1890, in Inoue, pp. 50-56.

[28]For the full extent of Arao's achievements relating to trade, see Hirano, passim.

[29]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:7 and 9. One of Kishida's sons, Ryūsei (1891-1929) became a prominent early Western-style artist, whose painting of his daughter, in long straight hair with squared bangs and a haunting Mona Lisa look, graces a recent postage stamp.

[30]The most important single result was Arao's Nisshin Bōeki Kenkyūjo (see fn. 27) founded in Shanghai in 1890 and which, after three years, graduated 89 of an initial 150 students. This Institute was the direct inspiration for the even more important Tōa Dōbun Shoin (East Asia Common Culture Academy or, after 1939, University), also in Shanghai, 1900-1945. In its 45 year history, Toa Dobun Shoin graduated some 3600 China trade specialists who played an important enabling role in Japan's twentieth century imperialism in China. For comprehensive histories of both institutions, with a focus on the latter, see two studies with identical titles, the first cited in fn. 15, and the second Koyūkai, Daigakushi hensan iinkai, comp., Tōa Dōbun Shoin Daigaku shi (History of Tōa Dōbun Shoin University) (Tokyo: Koyūkai, 1982).

[31]Tōa Dōbunkai, comp., 2:7. The same source lists Kishida as "an influential backer" of the five China-related organizations Kōakai, Nisshin Bōeki Kenkyūjo of Arao Sei, Tōhō Kyōkai, Tōa Dōbunkai (parent organization of Tōa Dōbun Shoin mentioned in fn. 30), and Dōjinkai, an important Japanese medical mission to China. Ibid., p. 2.

[32]Ibid., p. 6.

[33]Hirano, 80, n. 71, citing Sugiyama Sakae, "Kishida Ginkō," in Sandai genronjin shū (Collected works of social and political commentators of the Meiji, Taishō, and Shōwa eras) (Tokyo, 1962), p. 281.