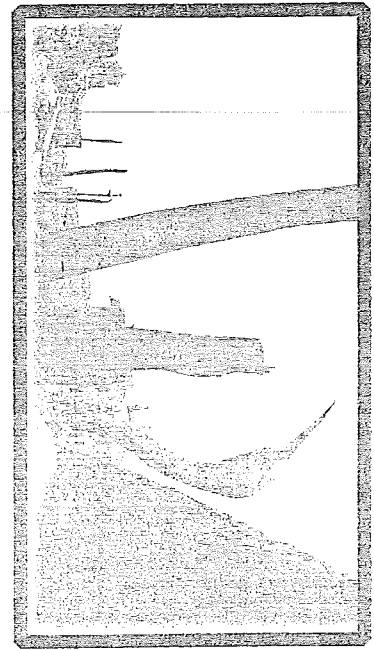


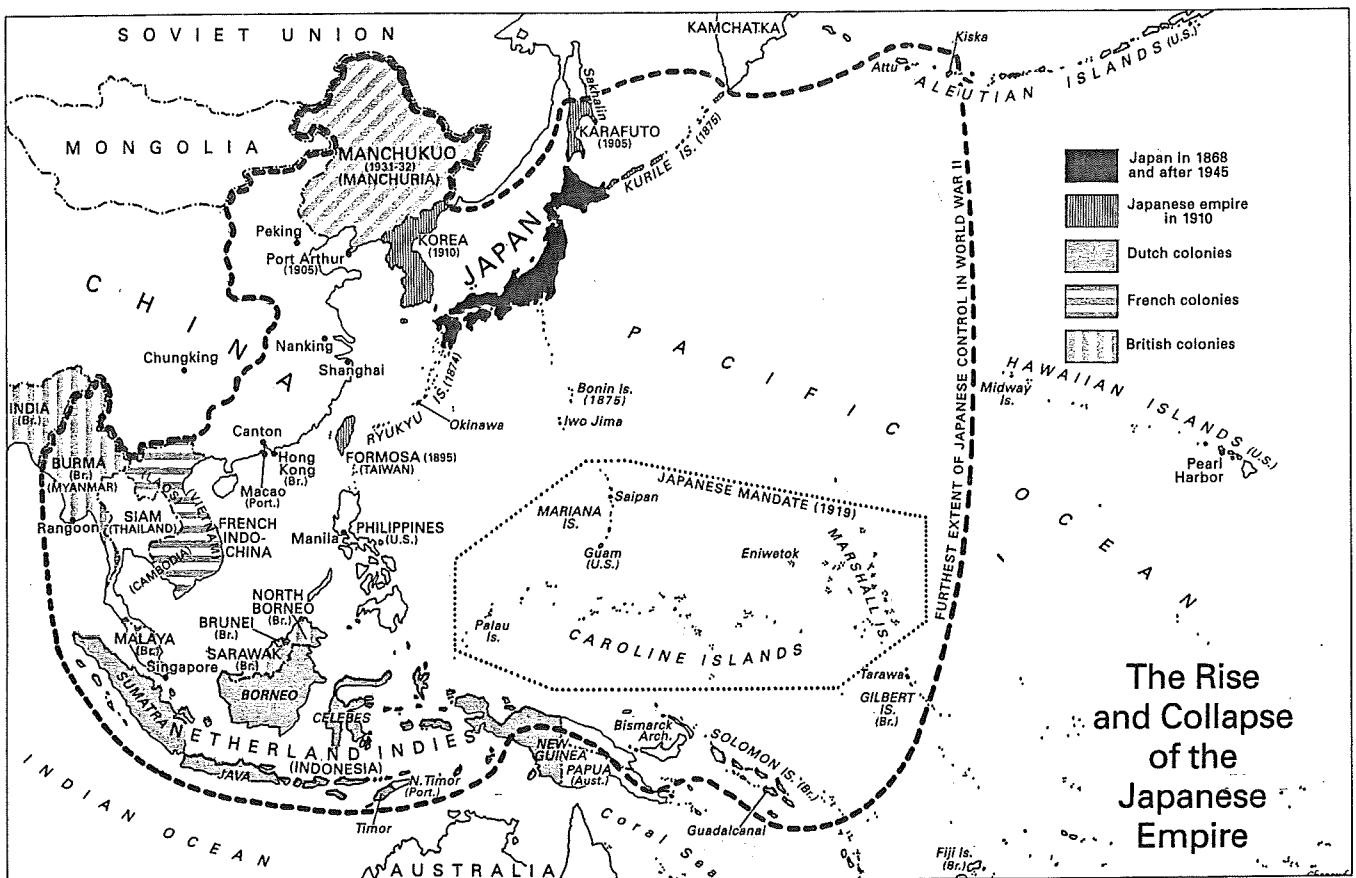


## INTRODUCTION

Japan's emergence as a modern nation was stunning to behold: swifter, more audacious, more successful, and ultimately more crazed, murderous, and self-destructive than anyone had imagined possible. In retrospect, it seemed almost an illusion—a ninety-three-year dream become nightmare that began and ended with American warships. In 1853, a modest fleet of four vessels, two of them coal-burning "black ships," had arrived to force the country open. In 1945, a huge, glistening armada came back to close it.

When all this began with the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry, Japan was a small country with few obvious resources. For over two centuries, intercourse with foreigners had been largely prohibited by its feudal shoguns. Although the economy had become commercialized in those long years of seclusion, no industrial revolution had taken place, nor had there been any striking advances in science. If Americans and Europeans found these island people capable and clever as well as exotic, no one thought to say of them, as Napoleon had of neighboring China with its vast territories, its awesome population, and its millennia of high civilization, that here was a sleeping giant.

In 1868, dissident samurai drove out the shogun and established a government in the name of the emperor, hitherto a remote, powerless figure.



Their new nation-state proved a quick study, learning the modern arts of war as well as peace and showing itself particularly adept at understanding how to survive in an imperialist world. As a line in a popular Japanese song of the 1880s put it, "There is a Law of Nations, it is true, / but when the moment comes, remember, / the Strong eat up the Weak."<sup>1</sup> While most of the rest of the world fell under the control of the Western powers, Japan emulated them and joined their banquet. In 1895, the imperial army and navy brought China to its knees; this decisive victory on the Asian mainland, capped by an enormous indemnity, precipitated a scramble for international concessionary areas torn from the very body of the sleeping giant. "Slicing the Chinese melon" was the pleasant way westerners came to speak of this.

The war brought imperial Japan its first colony, the island of Formosa. Triumph over czarist Russia ten years later, after costly battles on land and a sensational victory at sea, gave the nation an internationally recognized foothold in Manchuria and paved the way for taking Korea as a second colony. Loans raised in New York and London helped to finance this war, and the Western powers turned a deaf ear to the appeals of Korean patriots. In World War I, Japan joined the hostilities on the Allied side, moving against German holdings in China, and was rewarded by being seated as one of the "Big Five" nations at the Versailles peace conference, where the victors met to punish Germany and rearrange the world. No other nonwhite, non-Christian people at that time could have imagined playing the great game of global power and influence at this level; nor could anyone anticipate the disastrous breakdown of security that lay ahead. World War I, after all, had been the war to end all wars.

In the 1920s and 1930s, as the world plunged into depression and instability, the country's leaders responded (and contributed) to this disorder with an increasingly frantic quest for control over the markets and resources of Asia. *Dai Nippon Teikoku*—the "Great Empire of Japan"—spread like a monstrous stain. (On Japanese maps, the empire was always colored red.) Nineteen thirty-one saw the takeover of Manchuria; 1937, the launching of all-out aggression against China; 1941, the attack on Pearl Harbor as part of a strategy of seizing control of the southern reaches of Asia and the Pacific. At the peak of its expansion in early 1942, Japan bestrode Asia like a colossus, one foot planted in the mid-Pacific, the other deep in the interior of China, its ambitious grasp reaching north to the Aleutian Islands and south to the Western colonial enclaves of Southeast Asia. Japan's "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" briefly embraced the Netherlands East Indies, French Indochina, the British colonial pos-

sessions of Burma, Malaya, and Hong Kong, and America's Philippine colony. There was talk of reaching further to take India, Australia, possibly even Hawaii. *Banzai* cries to the glory of the emperor's holy war and the invincibility of his loyal soldiers and sailors pierced the heavens in myriad places at home and overseas. Poets, priests, and propagandists alike extolled the superiority of the "Yamato race" and the sublime destiny of the Imperial Way.

The Co-Prosperity Sphere was but a chimera; the euphoria of the first half-year of the Pacific War but a dream within a dream, soon dismissed by Japanese themselves as the "victory disease." They had run amok, badly miscalculating both the resilience of Chinese resistance and the resources, psychological as well as material, that the United States could bring to a protracted conflict. They had, at the same time, become prisoners of their own war rhetoric—of holy war, death before dishonor, blood debts to their war dead, the inviolability of the emperor-centered "national polity," the imminence of a decisive battle that would turn the tide against the "Chinese bandits" and stay the "demonic Anglo-Americans." Long after it had become obvious that Japan was doomed, its leaders all the way up to the emperor remained unable to contemplate surrender. They were psychologically blocked, capable only of stumbling forward.

Perry, said the Americans (with their charming habit of neglecting such historical inconveniences as imperialism, colonialism, and the breakdown of the global economy) had let the genie out of the bottle—and that genie had become a blood-soaked monster. From the rape of Nanking in the opening months of the war against China to the rape of Manila in the final stages of the Pacific War, the emperor's soldiers and sailors left a trail of unspeakable cruelty and rapacity. As it turned out, they also devoured themselves. Japanese died in hopeless suicide charges, starved to death in the field, killed their own wounded rather than let them fall into enemy hands, and murdered their civilian compatriots in places such as Saipan and Okinawa. They watched helplessly as fire bombs destroyed their cities—all the while listening to their leaders natter on about how it might be necessary for the "hundred million" all to die "like shattered jewels." The most obvious legacy of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere was death and destruction. In China alone, perhaps 15 million people died. The Japanese lost nearly 3 million—and their entire empire as well.

After this terrible fury, Japan entered a strange seclusion.

It withdrew from the world again—not willingly, but under orders from the victors; and not alone, as in the centuries before Perry, but

locked in an almost sensual embrace with its American conquerors. And soon enough, it became apparent that the Americans could not or would not let go. Beginning with Pearl Harbor and ending with the emperor's capitulation after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the war between Japan and the Allied powers lasted three years and eight months; the occupation of the defeated nation began in August 1945 and ended in April 1952, six years and eight months later, almost twice as long as the war itself. In those years, Japan had no sovereignty and accordingly no diplomatic relations. No Japanese were allowed to travel abroad until the occupation was almost over; no major political, administrative, or economic decisions were possible without the conquerors' approval; no public criticism of the American regime was permissible, although in the end dissident voices were irrepressible.

Initially, the Americans imposed a root-and-branch agenda of "demilitarization and democratization" that was in every sense a remarkable display of arrogant idealism—both self-righteous and genuinely visionary. Then, well before their departure, they reversed course and began rearming their erstwhile enemy as a subordinate Cold War partner in cooperation with the less liberal elements of the society. Yet despite the ultimate emergence of a conservative postwar state, the ideals of peace and democracy took root in Japan—not as a borrowed ideology or imposed vision, but as a lived experience and a seized opportunity. They found expression through a great and often discordant diversity of voices.

There was no historical precedent for this sort of relationship, nor anything truly comparable elsewhere in the wake of the war. Responsibility for occupied Germany, Japan's former Axis partner, divided as it was among the United States, England, France, and the Soviet Union, lacked the focused intensity that came with America's unilateral control over Japan. Germany also escaped the messianic fervor of General Douglas MacArthur, the post-surrender potentate in Tokyo. For the victors, occupying defeated Germany had none of the *exoticism* of what took place in Japan: the total control over a pagan, "Oriental" society by white men who were (unequivocally, in General MacArthur's view) engaged in a Christian mission. The occupation of Japan was the last immodest exercise in the colonial conceit known as "the white man's burden."<sup>2</sup>

It would be difficult to find another cross-cultural moment more intense, unpredictable, ambiguous, confusing, and *electric* than this one. The Americans arrived anticipating, many of them, a traumatic confrontation with fanatical emperor worshippers. They were accosted instead by women who called "yoo hoo" to the first troops landing on the beaches

in full battle gear, and men who bowed and asked what it was the conquerors wished. They found themselves seduced (far more than they realized) by polite manners as well as by elegant presents and entertainments. Most of all, they encountered a populace sick of war, contemptuous of the militarists who had led them to disaster, and all but overwhelmed by the difficulties of their present circumstances in a ruined land. More than anything else, it turned out, the losers wished both to forget the past and to transcend it.

Understandably, these early postwar years have been described positively as Japan's "American interlude" or, more negatively, as an epoch of unusually crude and forced "Americanization." In either case, what has usually been emphasized is the imposition of America's will on an alien land. Winning, more than losing, has defined the moment. It is the victors who capture attention, just as they took command of the war itself. The occupiers and their agenda hold pride of place in most accounts, whereas the vanquished country itself is located in the postwar context of a world falling into antagonistic Cold War camps and discussed in terms of a vision of that moment which was distinctly American. The once-formidable Japanese enemy becomes miniaturized, the conquered people but shadow figures on the margins of a new global drama.

Such story lines are hardly surprising. The Allied triumph was stupendous, and where Japan was concerned it was in the fruits of this victory that the story seemed so clearly to lie. At the end of August 1945—in the still-inaugural years of what had been proclaimed as the "American century"—history in the form of a unique occupation with a compellingly visionary agenda approached a ruined, shrunken land in a world careering in alarming new directions. What else of remotely comparable import remained to be said about that thoroughly defeated and demoralized nation? For journalists, and later for historians as well, what the Americans would do to the Japanese was the story of most compelling interest. Until recently, it has been difficult to imagine the occupation as an "embrace," or to consider what effect the losers might have had on the victors and their agendas, or how that "American interlude" might have reinforced rather than altered tendencies within the defeated country. It has been difficult, certainly for outsiders, to grasp the defeat and occupation as a lived *Japanese* experience.

Half a century later, however, we can begin to see things differently. Shattered lands, shattered peoples, shattered empires, and shattered dreams have been one of the central stories of our times. Certainly, there is much to be learned from the world as viewed through the eyes of the

defeated—not only about misery, disorientation, cynicism, and resentment, but also about hope, resilience, visions, and dreams. In the chapters that follow, I have tried to convey “from within” some sense of the Japanese experience of defeat by focusing on social and cultural developments as well as on that most elusive of phenomena, “popular consciousness”—departing, in the process, from the approach taken in most historical accounts, including my own earlier writings.<sup>3</sup> To put it a little differently, I have tried to capture a sense of what it meant to start over in a ruined world by recovering the voices of people at all levels of society. World War II did not really end for the Japanese until 1952, and the years of war, defeat, and occupation left an indelible mark on those who lived through them. No matter how affluent the country later became, these remained the touchstone years for thinking about national identity and personal values.

Much as we may desire to simplify peoples and problems, there was no single or singular “Japanese” response to the defeat apart from a widespread abhorrence of war. On the contrary, what is fascinating is how kaleidoscopic such responses were. This was a far cry from what many of the “old Asia hands” in Washington and London had predicted, fixated as they were on the idea that Orientals were, at their essence, an “obedient herd.” The victors arrived with briefing papers outlining salient features of “the Japanese personality,” some of which were perceptive but many of which were cartoons. (Japanese intelligence agencies, in turn, were waiting with their own lists of “American characteristics.”)<sup>4</sup> No one on either side, however, predicted how diverse and spirited would be the responses to defeat—and to liberation from war and wartime regimentation. Because the defeat was so shattering, the surrender so unconditional, the disgrace of the militarists so complete, the misery the “holy war” had brought home so personal, starting over involved not merely reconstructing buildings but also rethinking what it meant to speak of a good life and good society.

In the immediate wake of defeat, a great many individuals at the highest levels displayed no concern at all for the good of society. They concentrated instead on enriching themselves by the wholesale plunder of military stockpiles and public resources. The mystique of racial and social solidarity that had saturated wartime propaganda and behavior seemed to disappear overnight. Police operatives tore their hair at the spectacle of such rampant personal aggrandizement (when not themselves looting and hoarding), and ordinary men and women expressed disgust at the venality of yesterday’s respected leaders and compatriots. Before the victors

ever set foot in Japan, defeat had profoundly altered how people thought and behaved.

It was in this atmosphere of flux and uncertainty that the Americans proceeded to dismantle the oppressive controls of the imperial state. It remained for the vanquished themselves to fill this new space, however, and they did so in often unexpected ways. Support for socialist and communist agendas exceeded anything the Americans had anticipated, as did the explosive energy of the nascent labor movement. Mid-level bureaucrats emerged as initiators of serious reform. Prostitutes and black-market operatives created distinctive, iconoclastic cultures of defeat. Publishers responded to a huge hunger for words with publications that ran the gamut from sleazy pulp magazines to incisive critical journals and books as well as wide-ranging translations of Western writings. Portmanteau concepts such as “love” and “culture” were discussed obsessively, and the adjective “new” was coupled with promiscuous abandon to almost every noun in sight. Private attachments supplanted the old state-enforced dictates of public morality. Connoisseurs of decadence emerged as popular critics of the unsavory wartime cult of “wholesomeness.” New heroes and heroines were discovered and idolized, new celebrities rocketed to pop-culture fame. Messianic religions flourished, and pretenders to the throne emerged. Millions of ordinary people spoke out in community meetings and in letters to the press as well as in a small avalanche of communications to the occupation authorities. Tens of millions found themselves longing for material affluence of the sort their American overlords so conspicuously enjoyed.

This was untidy. It was also energetic and emancipating, and for the first few years even the Communists found it easy to speak of the occupation forces as an “army of liberation.” Just as the dynamism of the Japanese in defeat has been underestimated, however, so too the nature of the “Americanism” of the occupiers has generally been oversimplified. The reforms that the victors introduced were unique to both moment and place. They reflected an agenda inspired by heavy doses of liberal New Deal attitudes, labor reformism, and Bill of Rights idealism of a sort that was in the process of being repudiated (or ignored) in the United States. This agenda was never introduced to other American-occupied areas in Asia such as the southern half of Korea and the southern reaches of Japan itself—Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands—where harsh strategic considerations held sway. Even in its most idealistic early phases, moreover, the occupation’s “Americanism” was schizophrenic. Visions of “democratiza-

tion" that would have seemed extreme if proposed within the United States went hand in hand with severe authoritarian rule.

We normally see August 1945 as a great divide between militarist Japan and a new democratic nation. This *was* a watershed moment, but it is also true that Japan remained under the control of fundamentally military regimes from the early 1930s straight through to 1952. However high minded they may have been, General MacArthur and his command ruled their new domain as neocolonial overlords, beyond challenge or criticism, as inviolate as the emperor and his officials had ever been. They epitomized hierarchy—not merely *vis-à-vis* the defeated enemy, but within their own rigidly layered ranks as well as by their white-men's rule. One of the most pernicious aspects of the occupation was that the Asian peoples who had suffered most from imperial Japan's depredations—the Chinese, Koreans, Indonesians, and Filipinos—had no serious role, no influential presence at all in the defeated land. They became invisible. Asian contributions to defeating the emperor's soldiers and sailors were displaced by an all-consuming focus on the American victory in the "Pacific War." By this same process of vaporization, the crimes that had been committed against Asian peoples through colonization as well as war were all the more easily put out of mind.

Because the victors had no linguistic or cultural entrée to the losers' society, they had little choice but to govern "indirectly," through existing organs of government. This was unavoidable. As actually put into practice, however, this indirect rule led to several incongruous developments. For all practical purposes, General MacArthur's supergovernment relied on the Japanese bureaucracy to carry out its directives, creating in effect a two-tiered mandarinat. When the Americans departed, the native mandarins carried on, stronger than they had been even during the war. For ideological purposes, MacArthur also chose to rely on Emperor Hirohito, in whose name all of Asia had been savaged. He went so far as to secretly discourage queries about Hirohito's abdication that came from the emperor's own entourage while publicly praising him as the leader of the new democracy.

This American royalism would have been inconceivable without the determination of the general and his closest aides to exonerate the emperor of all war responsibility, even of moral responsibility for allowing the atrocious war to be waged in his name. The emperor's active contribution to his country's aggression had not been negligible, although serious investigation of this was thwarted by the occupiers. His moral responsibility,

ity, in any case, was transparent; and in choosing not merely to ignore this but to deny it, the Americans came close to turning the entire issue of "war responsibility" into a joke. If the man in whose name imperial Japan had conducted foreign and military policy for twenty years was not held accountable for the initiation or conduct of the war, why should anyone expect ordinary people to dwell on such matters, or to think seriously about their own personal responsibility?

The ramifications of such decisions and practices were enormous. The victor's own *modus operandi* contributed to the institutionalization, as it were, of oxymorons: "bureaucratic democracy" and "imperial democracy." At the same time, the obsequious treatment of the emperor, coupled with the peculiar way in which a handful of top military and civilian leaders were found guilty of war crimes in a showcase trial convened by the victors in Tokyo, reinforced a strong popular inclination to ignore what the men of Yamato had done to others in their frantic quest for empire and security. After the occupation, foreigners seized on such developments as evidence of distinctive Japanese inclinations—areas where, it was suggested, the victor's idealistic vision had failed to take hold. In fact, such phenomena were, if peculiar at all, then binationally so. Much that lies at the heart of contemporary Japanese society—the nature of its democracy, the intensity of popular feelings about pacifism and remilitarization, the manner in which the war is remembered (and forgotten)—derives from the complexity of the interplay between the victors and the vanquished.

To many Japanese, looking back, the few years that followed defeat constitute a period of unusually chaotic vitality when the adoption of political models other than a state-led capitalism seemed possible, and one could at least dream of an international role other than creeping remilitarization under America's nuclear umbrella. Hardship often has its retrospective attractions, and nostalgia sometimes sweetens the recollections of that time. Personal memories have, in recent years, been buttressed by an outpouring of publications in Japan that shows little sign of abating. Books, articles, and special issues of magazines continue to address the experience of defeat and occupation from every conceivable perspective—ranging from policy documents and exhaustively researched scholarly studies to diaries and reminiscences, letters and journalistic pieces, photographs and day-by-day chronologies. Many celebrities who made their names in the wake of defeat are only now passing away; and each such departure is usually accompanied by a piercing and poignant evocation of those years, so long ago and yet still so palpably connected to the present. It has been a daunting task to try to grasp and share this, in no little part

because there is always so much more that could be told, and of course so much more to be learned.

Something about Japan invites people to view it hermetically, and the sealed space of the years following defeat can all too easily come to seem but an exaggerated version of "typical" Japanese uniqueness. It is not just outsiders who tend to isolate and insulate the Japanese experience; no one makes more of a fetish of the supposed singularity of the national character and the national experience than the country's own cultural essentialists and neonationalists. Even during that passing moment in the 1980s when Japan seemed to have emerged as the master of global capitalism, it was the peculiarly "Japanese" dimension of its practices that drew greatest attention at home as well as abroad. Although all peoples and cultures set themselves apart (and are set apart by others) by stressing differences, this tends to be carried to an extreme where Japan is concerned.

The years following defeat certainly did comprise an exaggerated moment. As William James once wrote about the religious experience, however, it is such moments of extremity that often best reveal the essence of things. I myself find the concrete details and textures of this extraordinary experience of a whole country starting over absorbing, but they do not strike me as alien, exotic, or even mainly instructive as an episode in the history of Japan or U.S.-Japanese relations. On the contrary, what is most compelling from my own perspective is that defeat and occupation forced Japanese in every walk of life to struggle, in exceptionally naked ways, with the most fundamental of life's issues—and that they responded in recognizably human, fallible, and often contradictory ways that can tell us a great deal about ourselves and our world in general.

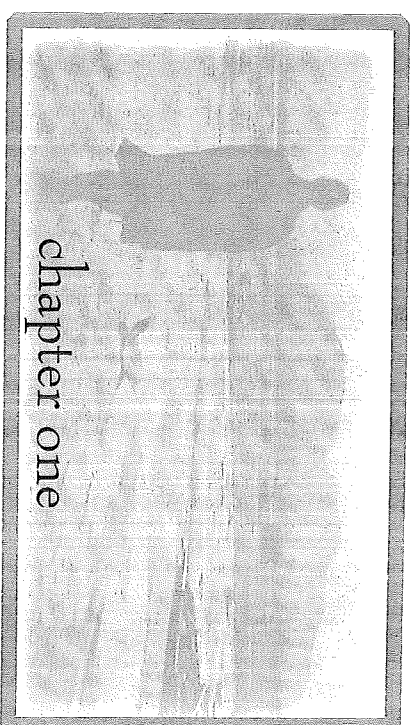
The ease with which the great majority of Japanese were able to throw off a decade and a half of the most intense militaristic indoctrination, for instance, offers lessons in the limits of socialization and the fragility of ideology that we have seen elsewhere in this century in the collapse of totalitarian regimes. (That Japan's monarchy was propped up while so many other imperial houses were toppled offers, in itself, a suggestive comparative story in politics and ideology.) Or again, American veterans of the Vietnam War will surely experience a shock of recognition on learning how the emperor's soldiers and sailors struggled to come to terms with the contempt with which they were commonly greeted upon returning from their lost war. Similarly, the preoccupation with their own misery that led most Japanese to ignore the suffering they had inflicted on others helps illuminate the ways in which victim consciousness colors the identities that all groups and peoples construct for themselves. Historical amnesia con-

cerning war crimes has naturally taken particular forms in Japan, but the patterns of remembering and forgetting are most meaningful when seen in the broader context of public memory and myth-making generally, issues that have deservedly come to attract great attention in recent years. "Responsibility," addressed in many contexts in the cauldron of defeat and reconstruction, is hardly an insular concern.

When the Japanese ransacked their national history for precedents pertinent to their "new" circumstances—for the roots of a native democracy, examples of principled resistance to militarism, or indigenous formulations of repentance and atonement—the examples they came up with were naturally specific to their past. What they were doing, however, was what all people do in moments of traumatic change; they were finding—inventing, if need be—something familiar to hold on to. Everyday language was itself a bridge that enabled many men and women to cross from war to peace without experiencing complete psychological disorientation—for many totemic words, catchphrases, even texts that had been popular during the war proved perfectly adaptable to radically altered interpretations and objectives in the postwar years. Again, giving familiar language new meaning is one of the ways people everywhere rationalize and legitimize substantive change.

One can, of course, recross such "bridges" and head back in directions presumably left behind. Neonationalistic voices are strong in contemporary Japan, and some of the loudest of these have zeroed in on precisely the years discussed here, depicting the period of defeat and occupation as an overwhelmingly humiliating epoch when genuinely free choice was repressed and alien models were imposed. My own assessment of the vitality of the period and dynamism of the Japanese role in shaping postwar consciousness is (however qualified) more positive. What matters is what the Japanese themselves made of their experience of defeat, then and thereafter; and, for a half century now, most of them have consistently made it the touchstone for affirming a commitment to "peace and democracy." This is the great mantra of postwar Japan. These are the talismanic words that individuals filled with their own often disparate meanings and continue to debate today; and neither the concepts, nor the debates, nor the weight of historical memory in these struggles are peculiar to Japan.

*Part I*  
VICTOR  
and  
VANQUISHED



SHATTERED LIVES

It was August 15, 1945, shortly before noon. What followed would never be forgotten.

Aihara Yū was twenty-eight years old then, a farmer's wife in rural Shizuoka prefecture. Through the decades to come, the day would replay itself in her memory like an old filmstrip, a staccato newsreel in black and white.

She was working outdoors when a messenger arrived breathless from the village. It had been announced that the emperor would be making a personal broadcast at noon, he exclaimed before rushing off. Everyone was to come and listen.

The news that America, the land of the enemy, had disappeared into the sea would hardly have been more startling. The emperor was to speak! In the two decades since he had ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne, Emperor Hirohito had never once spoken directly to all his subjects. Until now the sovereign's words had been handed down in the form of imperial rescripts—as printed texts, pronouncements humbly read by others.

Half a century later, Aihara could still recall every detail. She rushed to the village, repeating over and over to herself a line from the Imperial Rescript on Education, which everyone knew by heart from daily recitation during their school years. "Should any emergency arise," it went,

"offer yourselves courageously to the State." She knew the country's situation was desperate and could only imagine that the emperor was going to exhort every Japanese to make even greater efforts to support the war—to be prepared, indeed, to fight to the bitter end.

The villagers had gathered around the single local radio over which the single state-run station was received. Reception was poor. Static crackled around the emperor's words, and the words themselves were difficult to grasp. The emperor's voice was high pitched and his enunciation stilted. He did not speak in colloquial Japanese, but in a highly formal language strudded with ornamental classical phrases. Aihara was just exchanging puzzled glances with others in the crowd when a man who had recently arrived from bombed-out Tokyo spoke up—almost, she recalled, as if to himself. "This means," he whispered, "that Japan has lost."

Aihara felt all strength drain from her body. Before she knew what happened she found herself lying face down on the ground. Others who collapsed around her—as she later pictured the scene—lay on their backs. The emperor's voice was gone, but the radio droned on. An announcer was speaking. One of his sentences burned itself into her mind, where it would remain for the rest of her life: "The Japanese military will be disarmed and allowed to return to Japan."

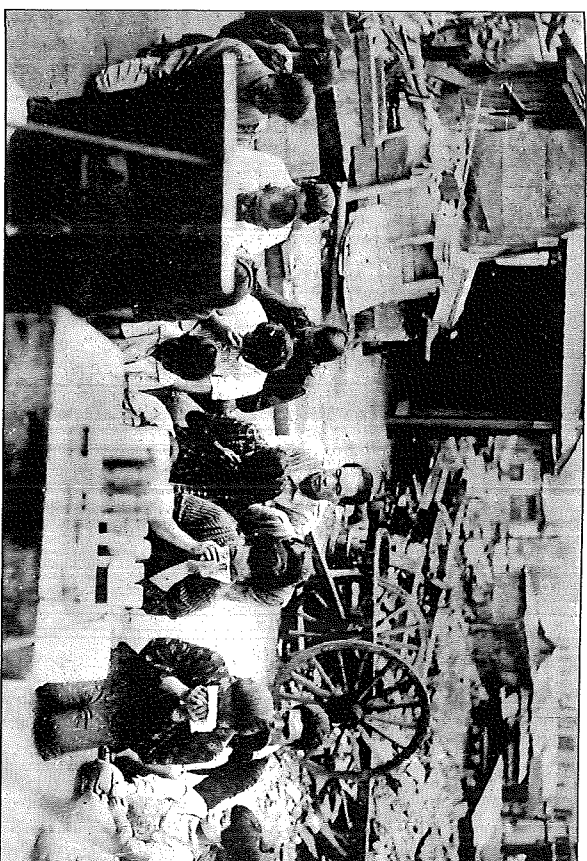
With this, Aihara Yū experienced a flood of hope. Her husband, who had been drafted into the army and sent to Manchuria, might soon return! All that day and through the night, she prayed, "Please, my husband, don't commit suicide." Japanese fighting men had been indoctrinated to chose death over surrender, a path Aihara feared her husband might take as a proper and moral response to this extraordinary moment.

For three years, Aihara continued to pray for her husband's return. Only then did she learn that he had been killed in a battle with Soviet forces five days before she was summoned from the fields to hear her sovereign's voice. The war had, after all, permanently shattered her life.<sup>1</sup>

### Euphemistic Surrender

The millions of Japanese who gathered around neighborhood radios to hear that broadcast were not "citizens" but the emperor's *subjects*, and it was in his name that they had supported their country's long war against China and the Allied Powers. In Japanese parlance, it had been a "holy war"; in announcing Japan's capitulation, the forty-four-year-old sovereign faced the challenge of replacing such rhetoric with new language.

This was a formidable challenge. Fourteen years earlier, in the sixth



Emperor Hirohito's subjects hear his voice for the first time, in the unforgettable radio broadcast of August 15, 1945, in which he announced Japan's capitulation and exhorted the populace to "endure the unendurable."

year of his reign, Emperor Hirohito had acquiesced in the imperial army's takeover of the three Chinese provinces known collectively as Manchuria. Eight years previously, Japan had initiated open war against China in the emperor's name. From that time on, Hirohito had appeared in public only in the benedicted military garb of commander in chief. In December 1941, he issued the rescript that initiated hostilities against the United States and various European powers. Now, three years and eight months later, his task was not merely to call a halt to a lost war, but to do so without disavowing Japan's war aims or acknowledging the nation's atrocities—and in a manner that divorced him from any personal responsibility for these many years of aggression.

It was Hirohito himself who first broached the idea of breaking precedent and using the airwaves to speak directly to his subjects. The text of his announcement, not finalized until close to midnight the previous night, had been composed and delivered under great pressure. Much intrigue was involved in recording and then hiding it from military officers opposed to a surrender. Despite its chaotic genesis, the rescript emerged as a polished ideological gem.<sup>2</sup>

Although many shared Aihara Yū's difficulty in comprehending the em-

peror's words, his message (which was simultaneously transmitted to Japanese overseas by shortwave radio) was quickly understood by everyone. Sophisticated listeners such as the Tokyo man in her village explained the broadcast to their puzzled compatriots. Radio announcers immediately summarized the rescript and its import in everyday language. Newspapers rushed out special editions reproducing the emperor's text accompanied by editorial commentary.

Like insects in amber, lines and phrases from the broadcast soon became locked in popular consciousness. The emperor never spoke explicitly of either "surrender" or "defeat." He simply observed that the war "did not turn in Japan's favor, and trends of the world were not advantageous to us." He enjoined his subjects to "endure the unendurable and bear the unbearable"—words that would be quoted times beyond counting in the months to come.

With this rescript, the emperor endeavored to accomplish the impossible: to turn the announcement of humiliating defeat into yet another affirmation of Japan's war conduct and of his own transcendent morality. He began by reiterating what he had told his subjects in 1941 when Japan declared war on the United States—that the war had been begun to ensure the survival of Japan and the stability of Asia, not out of any aggressive intent to interfere with the sovereign integrity of other countries. In this spirit, Hirohito now expressed deep regret to those countries that had cooperated with Japan "for the liberation of East Asia." With reference to the recent atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the emperor went on to present Japan's decision to capitulate as nothing less than a magnanimous act that might save humanity itself from annihilation by an atrocious adversary. "The enemy has for the first time used cruel bombs to kill and maim extremely large numbers of the innocent," he declared, "and the heavy casualties are beyond measure. To continue the war further could lead in the end not only to the extermination of our race, but also to the destruction of all human civilization." By accepting Allied demands to end the war, the emperor declared it was his purpose to "open the way for a great peace for thousands of generations to come."

He then proceeded to offer himself as the embodiment of the nation's suffering, its ultimate victim, transforming the sacrifices of his people into his own agony with a classical turn of phrase. When he contemplated those of his subjects who had died in the war, the betrayed kin they left behind, and the extraordinary difficulties all Japanese now faced, he exclaimed, "my vital organs are torn asunder." For many of his listeners, this was the most moving part of the broadcast. Some confessed to being overcome by



American sailors at Pearl Harbor celebrate the news of Japan's capitulation.

a sense of shame and guilt that, in failing to live up to their sovereign's expectations, they had caused him grief.

To evoke such emotions in August 1945 was an impressive accomplishment. Close to 3 million Japanese were dead, many more wounded or seriously ill, and the country in ruins as a consequence of the war waged in the emperor's name, yet it was his agony on which his loyal subjects were expected to dwell. That this was the first time the emperor had spoken directly to the public made the appeal all the more effective. Perhaps he was indeed not just a symbol of their suffering, but the most conspicuous victim of the lost war. Certainly his subjects could imagine that previous imperial exhortations to fight and sacrifice had not reflected his true intentions, but had been extracted by evil advisers. Only now, as sentimental royalists would soon put it, were people actually hearing the sovereign's *true* voice. It was "as if the sun had at long last emerged from behind dark clouds."<sup>3</sup>

Although the emperor reaffirmed his faith in "the sincerity of my good and loyal subjects" and assured them that he would "always be with"

them, he also admonished them not to fall out among themselves in the chaos and misery of defeat. It was essential to remain united as a great family, firmly believing in "the invincibility of the divine country" and devoting every effort to the reconstruction of a nation that would preserve its traditional identity while keeping pace with "the progress and fortune of the world."

Behind these brave but nervous words lay a gnawing fear of future revolutionary upheaval in defeated Japan—a dire prospect the emperor had been warned about for months. This was, then, not merely the official closing statement of a lost war, but the opening pronouncement of an urgent campaign to maintain imperial control as well as social and political stability in a shattered nation.<sup>4</sup>

Responses to the emperor's broadcast varied greatly. Some residents of Tokyo did make their way to the imperial palace, still standing amid a ruined cityscape. (U.S. policy makers had excluded this as a bombing target, although part of it had been inadvertently destroyed anyway). Photographs of them kneeling on the gravel in front of the palace, bowing in sorrow for having failed to live up to the emperor's hopes and expectations, later were offered as a defining image for the moment of capitulation.

This was, in fact, a misleading image. The number of people who gathered before the imperial residence was relatively small, and the tears that ordinary people everywhere did shed reflected a multitude of sentiments apart from emperor-centered grief: anguish, regret, bereavement, anger at having been deceived, sudden emptiness and loss of purpose—or simple joy at the unexpected surcease of misery and death. Kido Kōichi, the lord keeper of the privy seal and Emperor Hirohito's closest confidant, captured the palpable sense of relief in a diary entry in which he noted that some people were actually cheering in front of the palace. It was clear, he observed with some ambivalence, that they felt a great burden had been lifted.<sup>5</sup>

As Aihara Yū's prayers indicated, it did not seem unreasonable to anticipate that great numbers of Japanese might chose death over the dishonor of defeat. Through the long years of war, fighting men had been forbidden to surrender. There was no greater shame than this, they were told. As the war drew closer home, civilians had also been indoctrinated to fight to the bitter end and die "like-shattered jewels," as the saying went. In the wake of the emperor's words, however, the number who actually chose the jeweled path was fewer than had been imagined. Several hundred individuals, most of them military officers, committed suicide—just



Word of the victory reaches enlisted men in the U.S. Navy's Special Construction Battalion in the Pacific theater.

as many Nazi officers did on the capitulation of Germany, where there never had existed a comparable cult of patriotic suicide.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, at the official level, the most notable immediate response to the momentous broadcast of August 15 was pragmatic and self-serving. Military officers and civilian bureaucrats throughout the country threw themselves frenetically into the tasks of destroying their files and disbursing vast hoards of military supplies in illicit ways. Although the emperor's broadcast put an end to the American air raids, it was said, with a fine touch of hyperbole, that the skies over Tokyo remained black with smoke for days to come. Bonfires of documents replaced napalm's hellfires as the wartime elites followed the lead of their sovereign and devoted themselves to obscuring their wartime deeds.

### Unconditional Surrender

The victors did not witness these bonfires, for the first major contingents of Allied occupation forces did not arrive in Japan until two weeks

## INTRODUCTION

1. Quoted in George Sansom, *The Western World and Japan* (New York: Knopf, 1965), p. 407.
2. Nominally, the occupation was supervised by all the victors. Two international bodies exercised advisory powers—an eleven-nation Far Eastern Commission that met in Washington and a four-nation Allied Council convened in Tokyo. General MacArthur's formal title was Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. In practice, the United States dictated policy.
3. I have tried here, as best as possible, to avoid repeating topics discussed in my earlier writings, which include the following related publications: *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shōgen and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1979); *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon, 1986); and *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays* (New York: The New Press, 1993). In the last collection, see especially the treatment of wartime legacies in "The Useful War", of top-level U.S. strategic planning in "Occupied Japan and the Cold War in Asia", of racial and psychological dimensions of the U.S.-Japan relationship in "Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures" as well as "Fear and Prejudice in U.S.-Japan Relations"; of cartoons in "Graphic Selves/Graphic Others", and of the Japanese conservative tradition in "Yoshida in the Scales of History." Occupation legacies are addressed in "Peace and Democracy in Two Systems: External Policy and Internal Conflict" in *Postwar Japan As History*, ed. Andrew Gordon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 3-33.
4. A confidential Home Ministry intelligence report dated September 4, 1945, emphasized the following American characteristics (using English for the key words themselves): (1) Practical, businesslike; (2) Straightforwardness; (3) Speedy action; (4) Self-conceited mind; (5) Adventurous spirit; (6) Punctuality; and (7) Vulgarity. The report is reprinted in *Haisen Chokugo no Seiji to Shakai*, 1, ed. Awaya Kentarō, vol. 2 in the documentary series *Shiryō: Nihon Gendai Shi* (Tokyo: Ōtsuki Shoten, 1980), pp. 313-17. "Presurrender planning" was virtually nonexistent in Japan, where it was treasonous even to speak of the possibility of defeat until the very last moment. On the American side, in contrast, such planning was carried out in great detail for several years prior to the surrender. Participants such as Hugh Borton and scholars led by Marlene Mayo, Akira Irye, and Robert Ward have published valuable studies of this fascinating baseline to the years addressed in the present study.

## CHAPTER 1. SHATTERED LIVES

1. Letter by Aihara Yū in *Asahi Shinbun*, August 14, 1994. Technically, this was not the first time the emperor's voice had been carried over the airwaves. In December 1928, a small scandal ensued when broadcasters covering a military review inadvertently picked up and transmitted his words as he read a rescript to the assembled troops, *Asahi Shinbun*, May 16, 1995.
2. As a general rule, confidential Japanese accounts of the emperor's activities must be treated with great caution in that they rely on notions and recollections by close aides devoted to burnishing his image. The earliest official account of high-level activities leading up to the emperor's broadcast was conveyed to U.S. occupation authorities in November 1945 by Sakomizu Hisatsune, chief secretary to the cabinet at the time of surrender and personally involved in drafting the rescript. Sakomizu emphasized that the emperor made the decision to broadcast the capitulation message personally; see U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945*, 6:702-8. (Henceforth this basic documentary series is cited as *FRUS*.) The most convenient compilation of Japanese sources on this matter—and on Emperor Hirohito generally—is a thick, two-volume collection edited by Tsurumi Shunsuke and Nakagawa Roppai; see *Tamē Hyakumura* (Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko, 1989), esp. vol. 1, pp. 683-99, which includes the full text of the rescript (697-99) as well as corroborative testimony regarding the emperor's initiatory role (690). The text itself passed through several hands, including review by two academic specialists in classical Chinese who not only checked for proper cadence and grammar, but also suggested apt classical phrases; *ibid.*, pp. 684-87. For many decades, the basic accounts of the surrender in English remained two early publications: U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, *Japan's Struggle to End the War* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), and Robert J. C. Butow's *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954). These accounts have been critically revised in Herbert Bix, "Japan's Delayed Surrender: A Reinterpretation," *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (spring 1995): 197-225.
3. For samples of this familiar argument, see the editorial in *Asahi Shinbun*, August 16, 1945; letter to *Asahi Shinbun*, October 21, 1945; and Hidaka Rokurō, *Gendai Itōrogii* (Tokyo: Keisō Shobō, 1960), pp. 230-31.
4. The fear that revolutionary upheaval would accompany defeat was conveyed to the emperor in the famous "Kono'e Memorial" in February 1945. On these fears, see John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shōgen and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1979), chs. 7 and 8; also "Sensational Rumors, Seditious Graffiti, and the Nightmares of the Thought Police," in *Japan in War and Peace: Selected Essays*, by John W. Dower (New York: The New Press, 1993), pp. 101-54.
5. Kido Kōichi, *Kido Kōichi kankei Bunsisho* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1966), p. 137.