

President Ulysses S. Grant and Meiji Emperor Mutsuhito: A Study of Their Shared Dialogue on Finance and Capital and Its Long-Term Influence on Trade and Business Development

Dr Ian Patrick Austin

Senior Lecturer in International Business

School of Business and Law

Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA, Australia.

i.austin@ecu.edu.au

Tel 61 8 6304 5284

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Abstract:

The Meiji regime's faced constant banking and financial crises throughout its duration, 1868 to 1912, including the absence of trust in the Meiji currency by the domestic population; a severe deficit in the currency's capacity to fund modernity and the resulting pressing desire to print more capital; matched in turn by the fear of rampant inflation and how this would undermine the very legitimacy of the new regime. The Meiji regime in coming to office and for its first decades faced the very same fiscal challenges that confronted President Ulysses S. Grant and his secretary of the Treasury George S. Boutwell upon Grant's inauguration in March 1869. The pressed financial position of the regime led directly to domestic reforms such as the abolition of the domains in favor of the modern prefectures system. During the time of the Iwakura Embassy visit to the United States of America (1872) and Grant's visit to Japan (1879) and the decades after the Meiji regime's most significant public policy battle would be to maintain domestic and international trust in their capacity to manage the nation's finances, particularly as their drive to modernity required them to conduct deficit-financing to fund the new internal improvement and industrial assets (from rail to ports to agricultural infrastructure to rapid expansion of education) that would take decades to prove their full worth. Both the Meiji men and Grant knew that such an investment would secure the nation a more strategically secure and prosperous future, as it had for the American nation, but this in no way alleviated the domestic pressures the regime came under over the rising debt levels. As a result money, financial and capital was the subject of broad and deep dialogue between the President and the Emperor, including the men who governed in his name.

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Dr Ian Patrick Austin
Senior Lecturer in International Business
School of Business and Law
Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.
Email: i.austin@ecu.edu.au
Telephone: 61 8 63045284

Introduction

At the conclusion of his presidency (March 4th, 1877) Ulysses S. Grant had racked up 22 years in total as an officer, senior officer, General-in-Chief of the Union Army and two terms as President. Free from economic hardship, or the hardships of war, or of high office, he and Julia would spend over two years conducting a grand tour of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia from May 1877 (departing from Philadelphia to arriving in Liverpool, England) to September of 1879 (arriving in San Francisco from Yokohama before embarking on a trans-continental tour via the very rail system Lincoln had started and Grant had seen finished and arriving in Philadelphia in December 1879)¹. The world tour had no agenda but Grant was intent on focusing upon the sciences, industry, trades and the arts defining modernity, but he was inevitably called upon for his views on the governance (in this paper the term governance will refer primarily to central government fiscal policy) and the international diplomacy of states². After many hard years of graft it was designed to be Grant's and Julia's time to fulfil their respective curiosities. However, whilst the world tour was a private venture, Grant's position as the most famous American globally, a soldier without peer in a world that revered successful military men above all others, and the first President (current or former) to visit so many nations, meant that he, Julia, and his entourage were universally treated as visiting royalty. At this time (1870s) Americans, including Grant, proudly referred to themselves as a nation of citizens (despite the continuing exclusion of too many from enjoying full citizenship including women, most African Americans, Native Indians, Asians and others from full citizenship), the rest of the world held tightly to the hierarchy of monarchs/emperors.

A clear sign of the tours primary purpose, Grant's deep knowledge and personal interest in technology and engineering was the former President spending a full day at the Paris Exposition (May 1-November 10 1878). Grant during his military career and then presidency had been highly activist in efforts to advance his nation's building of ground-breaking internal improvements (steel bridges, deep water port, canals, rail and permanent stone federal government buildings and others. His day spent examining

¹Campbell, 2016, Grant, 1975.

²The two-and-a-half world-wide trip was funded with \$25,000 from his own investment, and a further \$60,000 from a successful investment made by this son Buck on his behalf.

state-of-the-art engineering and machinery at the Exposition, his active engagement with their maker, and his touring of engineering and industrial projects throughout Europe and later Japan, reflected not only his, but America's, full adoption of an industrial future. A future that required financing through effective state capacities. Grant the man, the leader, and now the world-touring citizen-diplomat, fully reflected the spirit and drive of the age and this made him a magnet to all who sought to advance it through the very same intellectual vehicles Grant had mastered and applied to his soldiering-then-presidency: mathematics, the sciences, and engineering.

Having travelled Britain and continental Europe throughout the remainder of 1877 and into 1878, Grant would move onto Egypt, Turkey, Palestine and Syria throughout the remainder of 1878. He then moved through the Suez Canal (completed in the same year, 1869, as the transcontinental railway and in doing so transforming global trade) spent the first-half of 1879 moving through Bombay India (Mumbai), Delhi, the Straits of Malacca, Singapore, Siam (Thailand), Hong Kong, Canton, Shanghai, Tientsin and Peking (now Beijing) before arriving in Japan. Throughout the entire journey, Grant's general policy was to not seek out formal interaction. He was only partially successful, but the key point was that Grant did not seek out active formal engagement with the world's monarchy or political elite. In Japan, however, Grant would take on a formal diplomatic role.

In Tientsin China Grant would be met by the Chinese Viceroy, Li Hung-Chang (Li Hongzhang: 1823-1901), and in Peking the first Secretary, Prince Kung, as representative of the Imperial Highness, members of his Cabinet, along with the military and civil governors of the city. At the time of Grant's China visit the Guangxu Emperor was a 7 year old boy under the direct care of the two Empresses³. As a result the Viceroy and Kung directed state affairs. During discussions Prince Kung asked Grant to mediate over a dispute between China and Japan relating to the question of the sovereignty over the Loo-choo Islands (now known as the Ryukyu Islands). Grant responded that despite having no official United States government role, that "in the interest of peace [it] would be a pleasure to him"⁴. In coming to Japan then, Grant held a formal role as an international arbiter between the two Asian powers, China and Japan, over a key territorial dispute. Further, for the Meiji men, seeking to restore their own nation's full sovereignty in the face of the unequal treaties, and to do so through comprehensive national political, economic and social reforms, the presence of a global giant like Grant in their own underdeveloped country was an opportunity to obtain thinking insights in the national interests. This meant they would ensure Grant and the young Emperor Mutsuhito (1852-1912) would be placed in the same space on a number of occasions. Indeed, Grant interaction with the inner-elite of Meiji governance throughout his Japan visit would, in fact be, be near-daily.

³Hardly surprisingly neither Grant nor the Chinese leadership ever expressed any desire for the former President to meet the seven year old Emperor.

⁴Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol II: 411.

Arrival in Japan

Ulysses, Julia and their entourage from the time they arrived into Nagasaki (June 21st 1879)⁵ to their departure from Edo Bay (September 3, 1879) would be treated as visiting American royalty. Japanese culture and society places great store in respect and hospitality towards ones host⁶. But as a direct response to the level of diplomatic and humanistic courtesy extended to the Iwakura Embassy⁷ members and other Meiji representations throughout the eight years of the Grant's time in the White House (1869-1877), President-now-citizen Grant and First-Lady-now-citizen Julia, were to be extended the highest level of diplomatic recognition and hospitality. Many of the young men that made up the ranks of the Iwakura Embassy now held the very upper-most ranks within the Meiji regime. None more so that Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883) himself who as a result of his noble status now held the prominent role of the Emperor's closest adviser, and Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909) who now counted amongst the most senior of cabinet-rank-equivalent officials within the regime.

Most significantly, however, would be the fact that during their extended stay Grant would strike up a mutual level of personal friendship with the Japanese Emperor, the young Mutsuhito was still developing his own thoughts on governance. This seemingly unexpected outcome was the result of a combination of the two men's strikingly similar personal characteristics and their respective world views which meant that:

None of the many foreign visitors to whom Emperor Meiji gave an audience produced as strong an impression on him as did the former American general and president Ulysses S. Grant⁸:

Grant's impression on the Emperor Mutsuhito would in fact be formative and long lasting, as this paper will show.

Up until this time (1879) only fellow royalty, such as the duke of Edinburgh, the second son of Queen Victoria, who met the young Emperor on September 4, 1869, spoke to Mutsuhito as an equal as at this time all royalty globally were considered to be effectively part of a singular extended family. They were effectively considered cousins in status⁹. The result was that a 'commoner' diplomat did not enjoy anything remotely like meaningful and sustained access to the Emperor. Up until Grant, only the British

⁵Young (1877, 1878, 1879 Vol II: 476) observed that: "Nagasaki was still held as a foothold of the merchant. It was only a foothold. You can see the small, fan-shaped concessions where the Dutch merchants were kept in seclusion, and whence their trade trickled into Japan. A flag floats over one of the bazaars, and by the arms of Holland, which it bears, you can trace out the memorable spot".

⁶Miyoshi, 2005.

⁷The Iwakura Embassy visit to the United States in 1872, led by two of the Meiji Japanese regimes future inner leadership group, Embassy leader and Prime Minister Iwakura Tomomi (1825-1883) and deputy embassy leader Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909).

⁸Keene, 2002: 309.

⁹September 14 1869: "Sir Harry Parkes, received word that the duke of Edinburgh, the second son of Queen Victoria, planned to visit Japan in command of the worship *Galatea*" (Keene, 2002: 183)... "In the Europeans' eyes, Meiji had acquired a new set of relatives – all the reigning monarchs of the world". Keene, 2002: 187.

foreign representative, because of the power of the Royal Navy, and deriving from it Great Britain's increasing dominance of trade with Japan, could expect an audience of any limited substance. During their extended stay Grant and Julia were to meet the Emperor and Empress Haruko on a number of public occasions, and each time the Emperor according to Young (1877, 1878, 1879) became more engaged and at ease in the presence of the former President (as reflected in his physical and verbal demeanor). Further, the Grants would welcome daily guests from senior government and military officials, to leading engineers and scientists at a sprawling residence, Enriokwan (also spelt Enryokan), in Edo Bay provided to them by the Meiji government¹⁰. They, in turn, visited these senior officials own residences. Just as Grant had opened the doors of the United States federal government and Washington establishments to the Iwakura Embassy members; Grant, Julia, and their entourage, also had Tokyo's public offices, art galleries, museums, universities, centres of technology, engineering, design, philosophy, and the arts thrown open to them for visits and often extensive questioning¹¹. The open enthusiasm the Grants would show for interacting with the Japanese people, their art, their culture, their society, throughout their stay in Japan, would result in Tokyo embracing them in a manner not extended to any foreigner previously. As a result both the former president and the former first lady and their extended party would come to openly consider their stay in Japan to have been the most profound personal experience of their extensive world journey.

Grant-Meiji Emperor Engagement and Dialogue on Japan's Domestic Governance

Reflecting the significance Grant placed on his dialogue with the Meiji Emperor and his inner circle, he called upon the American Minister to Japan Bingham and the British Ambassador Parkes to assist him in preparation for the most significant diplomatic interaction of his visit: the Meiji Emperor's visit to the Grants' guest residency, Enriokwan, which would also include the entire inner circle of the Japanese government and military (the prime minister, members of cabinet, senior military officers) along with the two men who had welcomed him to Japan at Nagasaki, Prince Date and Japanese Minister to America Yoshida. The Emperor's exiting of the Royal Palace on October 4th, 1879 to formally visit a foreign guest, and in particular one that was not part of the global monarchical family, was immediately recognized as a seismic shift in Japanese diplomatic conduct:

In this palace there took place one of the most important events in the modern history of Japan – a long personal interview between General Grant and the Emperor. The circumstances that an ex-President of the United States should converse with the chief of a friendly nation is not in itself an important event. But when you consider the position of the emperor among his subjects, the traditions of his house and his throne, you will see the value of this meeting, and the revolution it makes in the history of Japan”¹².

¹⁰The residence was originally erected by the shogunate as a training school for naval cadets. Keene, 2002: 391.

¹¹Campbell, 2016.

¹²Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol II: 540.

As stated, the Emperor had hosted members of foreign royalty since his 1868 ascendancy to the Japanese Imperial throne, and he had done so in the strictest manners of internationally defined protocols¹³. But his visit to Grant was of an entirely different nature. The Emperor was acknowledging a foreign visitor for the first time not as a consequence of any shared birth-right status, but for the individuals, Grant's, personally developed and secured merits and achievements. None of the Emperor's royal visitors to Japan had achieved anything other than be born into royalty; none had executed a continental-scale war, or governed a continental-scale nation. Grant had. The General-President could offer unparalleled governance and strategic knowledge and insights, matched only by the master of Europe, Bismarck, that Mutsuhito and his inner circle most valued above all else. This man was a truly rare specimen, indeed, and further he and his wife had always treated Meiji men visiting Washington D.C. as the Emperor's representatives with the utmost personal respect and hospitality. They had now come to the Meiji men's homeland; so new diplomatic ground would be broken; a foreigner given the highest honor known to the Japanese people bestowed upon them; a personal visit to their 'home-in-Japan' by the Emperor himself.

Fortunately, through Young's work (1877, 1878, 1879) we learn that the Enriokwan meeting would be even more astonishing for the fact that the Emperor-Grant openly engaged in a lengthy two hours of dialogue covering a wide-range of governance, strategic and international affairs issues. Prior to this the young Emperor most substantive non-royalty diplomacy was with the British representative Parkes due to the power his nation wielded over Japan through the unequal treaty system, but even then it was measured in sentences and minutes, not hours. Grant's ability to effortlessly place young men at ease in his presence was once again on full display to all

Grant-Emperor Mutsuhito Personal Relations: The Importance of Trust

The Mikado had never failed in courtesy to the princes of other royal families who have visited him. But while he treated English, Russian, and German princes as princes, he has treated General Grant as a friend¹⁴.

As Keene's (2002) unmatched biography on the Meiji Emperor Mutsuhito (Titled: *Emperor of Japan Meiji and His World 1852-1912*) makes abundantly clear the arena that most fascinated the young man holding the throne and upon which he would spend countless hours absorbing over documents and maps studying was grand military strategy. In this, Mutsuhito was a student of both Grant and Bismarck and it would be no accident that the two masters-of-the-field would most influenced the Meiji regime. That here before him in Tokyo, the new capital of his regime, was before him the very man Bismarck himself

¹³Keene, 2002: 321.

¹⁴Young, 1877,1878, 1879 Vol II: 567. Keene, 2002: 183-187.

had a year earlier engaged with and openly acknowledged in Berlin as very much an equal must have been deemed nothing short of divine intervention. Mutsuhito and his governing Meiji elite members recognized that none of the previous European and American visitors to Japan could hold a candle to the achievement of this man. For as Chernow (2017) makes clear in his equally substantive biography on Grant; upon being appointed by Lincoln as the General-in-Chief of the Union Army in 1864:

After that, he did not simply direct the Army of the Potomac, but masterminded the coordinated movements of all federal forces. A far-seeing general, he adopted a comprehensive policy for all theatres of war, treating them as an interrelated whole. However brilliant Lee was a tactician, Grant surpassed him in grand strategy, crafting the plan that defeated the Confederacy¹⁵

By 1879 Mutsuhito and the leading men of Japan through extensive translated works on the Civil War possessed more than enough knowledge of both the individual battles and the strategic whole to make the very same assessment. For the young Emperor Mutsuhito and his governing Meiji men the presence of a military-national leader of the stature of Grant, one who had endeared himself further to them by acknowledging the injustice of the unequal treaties and sought revisions, was so unprecedented that they willingly ventured beyond their own centuries long rule-book on Imperial engagement with foreigners.

In the nineteenth century world of foreign relations, no other knowledge, the strategic enactment of war, was of greater importance. And this very much included managing the financing of such an exercise, as the Meiji regime had found to its considerable distress in managing the huge cost of quelling the 1877 Satsuma Rebellion. Grant had not only led the Union Army to victory; as President he had managed to ensure that the massive federal debt incurred to achieve this goal did not imperil his country. Such knowledge was simply invaluable to the Meiji elite in 1879 as they struggled to contain inflation and its corrosive effect upon regime legitimacy.

After the formal Army review the Emperor hosted Grant, Julia and entourage at his Shiba Detached Palace overlooking the ocean for a formal reception consisting of foreign dignitaries. Grant and young Mutsuhito engaged in an animated discussion, through the translation work of Yoshida on a wide-range of domestic, world and military affairs. It was a triumph not only of Grant's standing, but also of his own personal style, as Young (1877,1878,1879) makes clear:

The Emperor is not what you would call a graceful man, and his manners are those of an anxious person not precisely at ease – wishing to please and make no mistake¹⁶.

This was hardly surprising; he was forging new state precedents by his every action:

¹⁵Chernow, 2017: xxi.

¹⁶Young, 1877,1878, 1879 Vol II: 602.

At first the emperor had been reluctant to eat dinner with foreigners, and it took persuasion by the imperial household minister, Tokudaiji Sanetsune, to change his mind, but he now seems to have enjoyed the occasion [despite the searing heat and his full dress uniform]¹⁷.

Even more transformative than Ulysses engagement with the Emperor was the mere presence of Julia which represented a truly social transformation:

Not so long before, members of Japanese delegations to the West had been astonished (and even dismayed) by the presence of women at dignified state occasions, but now the prime minister did not hesitate to take a foreign lady by the hand and politely lead her to the table¹⁸.

It was in fact the Iwakura Embassy 1872 observations of Julia's role in the White House, including as active hostess at the formal state reception, that went a long way to convincing a majority of the Embassy (but not the older Iwakura himself) that the continued exclusion of Japanese women from diplomatic life would be detrimental to effort by the regime to be defined by the Western powers as being a 'modern' nation. So Iwakura, an aristocrat who continued to see no legitimate role for Japanese women within the state realm, formally acknowledged western norms and Julia's rights within those norms by taking her hand. No doubt Julia's own impeccable conduct towards the Meiji men at all times within Washington D.C, and now Japan itself, a masterful display of what is now called 'soft' diplomacy, made the case for those advocating change easier and those formerly 'dismayed' like Iwakura see the need to adjust for the greater good of Meiji foreign relations.

Young (1877,1878,1879) makes clear that the young Emperor's questioning of Grant at the Shiba Palace was inquisitive and incisive and showed an increasing personal ease of engagement with the General; with the young Emperor's (in 1879 27 years of age, whilst Grant was 57 years of age) expressed a desire for a further meeting after Grant's journey to Nikko most reflecting this ease¹⁹. Grant's ability to bring calm and ease to young men under his charge throughout his command over the Union Army and during his Presidency has been well documented²⁰. It was not a feat limited to his own compatriots as he executed this feat in 1872 Washington D.C. with the Iwakura Embassy men's arrival. He would repeat this characteristic with the young Emperor and many of the same Iwakura men and others who now made up the inner government in the presence of Young Japan in 1879. Grant throughout his time in Japan extensively engaged the leading men of the nation on questions of domestic governance (in the case of this study fiscal policy/debt management) and international affairs. Beyond the shared policy interests and questions, however, something unquestionably personal, significant and long-lasting happened.

¹⁷Keene, 2002: 313.

¹⁸Keene, 2002: 313.

¹⁹Having been unable to tour Osaka-Kyoto due to the cholera outbreak, the Meiji leadership arranged for Grant, Julia and their entourage to enjoy a break from Tokyo-Yokohama the natural setting of Nikko whilst Grant would also undertake discussion on the Loo-choo Islands Japan-China arbitration process. Otte, 2014: 131.

²⁰Perret, 1999: 292. Also see Brands 2012 and White 2016.

The most striking observation in the conduct of this study through biographical and other readings of Grant (Brands 2012, Young 2016, and others) and Mutsuhito (Jansen 1995, Keene 2002, and others) was the extent of the shared personal characteristics between Grant and Mutsuhito. Indeed, the two men from very different backgrounds: Grant being born in a one room shack along the Ohio River (1822), whilst Mutsuhito was delivered in Kyoto as heir to the Imperial Family of Japan thirty years later (1852): came to recognize that they in fact shared a striking number of very similar personal sensibilities and a similar world view of many significant policy positions. Both men shared characteristics of personal shyness, simplicity of taste, horsemanship and societal standing/trust, travelling as a vehicle for intellectual curiosity, personal work ethic, openness to ‘the foreign, commitment to practical self-advancement. Grant gained his shyness, simplicity in taste in all things, moral compass, and care and devotion for horses that meant he recoiled against any brutality towards them and other animals, from his mother Hannah through her commitment to a form of Protestantism that rejected any display of personal aggrandizement. Mutsuhito would also come to reject any signs of extravagance in expenditure towards him or his household due to his lifelong adherence to a form of Shinto personal austerity. He would insist his own clothing be repaired rather than replaced and for the first two decades of his regime refused to build a new palace in Tokyo until his acquired residency began to fail structurally.

Added to these shared personal traits was a shared personal vulnerability that manifest at times in a form of deep melancholy that could be defined as depression (which at times during their respective lives did result in excessive consumption of alcohol). Most significantly, whilst at times it did (for Grant) and would (for Mutsuhito) lead to near self-destruction, both proved they possessed the self-will and drive to ensure it did not²¹. Here were two individuals whose minds and personal energy needed to be highly engaged and active, to be focused, daily, upon higher goal beyond their personal selves. The need to channel their respective relentless mental energy and divert it from the personal vulnerability they both possessed would lead to both actively seeking to personally engage the other to achieve the very same sought objective: namely the acquisition of knowledge that would advance their respective nation’s governance, modernity, and international strategy. These shared characteristics would enable the two men to gain an equilibrium within their personal relations that was advantageous to both being able to gain much more from each other than either could have originally expected.

Another crucial area in which they shared very similar world views was their respective personal commitments to embracing the “Age of Discovery”. Grant had grown up under the roof of a parent committed to modernity, his father Jesse being an unabashed Whig supporter who did everything he could to educate his children to the highest level possible. The result was Grant possessing a life-long

²¹Brands, 2012. Keene, 2002.

interest in self-improvement, mathematics, the sciences and engineering. Mutsuhito's early life in Japan, in stark contrast, was defined by a societal hostility towards modernity as it was directly associated by the Tokugawa regime with Western immoral influence²². However, as one event in the future Emperor's life clearly shows Japan was unable to isolate itself from the modernity spreading across the world and which Grant had embraced. Mutsuhito had been vaccinated against smallpox by his grandfather, Nakayam Tadayasu (1809-1888), with whom he lived as an infant. Nakayam had asked a doctor of Dutch medicine to vaccinate the future Emperor²³. Mutsuhito's father, Emperor Komei, who as a fierce opponent to 'the foreign', would die suddenly of smallpox in 1867 (there was in fact a worldwide pandemic occurring at the time). As a result Mutsuhito was left in no doubt that Western medicine had secured his life from a disease traditional Japanese medicine had failed to tame, and consequently to blindly turn ones back on the Western-driven 'Age of Discovery' would only destine Japan to perpetual backwardness and the resulting subjugation at the powerful hands of others.

Throughout his life the Meiji Emperor would show a deep personal interest, through his multiple trips across the nation, an ending within Japan of those diseases that afflicted death, like his own fathers, and pain upon the health and wellbeing of his subjects²⁴. Approximately two decades after the vaccination of Mutsuhito as a youth action would forever reshape the Japanese people's relations with Western medicine:

In February [1875] there was a smallpox epidemic. The emperor and empress were vaccinated, which served to give Japanese, who might have otherwise feared an injection of foreign medicine, the courage to have themselves inculcated as well²⁵.

His grandfather's action and the young Meiji Emperors openness to 'the foreign' would permanently improving the mortality rate within Japan. This in turn, would compel the Meiji state to activate ever-comprehensive agrarian reform and industrialisation to absorb a now rapidly growing domestic population as a result of the infant mortality decline coming from the wider use of western medicines.

One significant area in which division could have arisen, the two men's very different personal approach to militarism. Grant, unquestionable a general without-superior across the world, recognized by Lincoln as a peer of George Washington, was repulsed by militaristic displays having witnessed more than enough wars horrors during two wars. In contrast the young Japanese Emperor had never witnessed such atrocity first-hand. For this reason Grant strongly advocated for Japan avoid armed conflict with other Asian nations, particularly China, at all cost. Mutsuhito in stark contrast relished reviewing his

²²"In the slogan "revere the emperor, drive out the barbarian!" (soono-joi), loyalism wedded to antforeignism became the most powerful emotion of mid-century Japan". Jansen, 1995: 148.

²³Keene, 2002: 97. Jansen, 1995: 148.

²⁴Keene, 2002. For example Mutsuhito witnessed numerous people suffering from diseases like trachoma when he reached Niigata and impressed upon his government to move to introduce a mass public health program to eliminate it.

²⁵Keene, 2002: 250.

military, constantly took a personal interest in seeing its capacities enhanced, and extensively studied the military exploits of not only Grant in defeating the South, but even more so Germany's dismantling of the French military in 1870-1871 under the political direction of Bismarck and executed by German officers informed either by extensive studies of, or indeed in many cases their own service in, Grant's army. Grant knew full well that the military efforts of his hosts were designed for only one thing, future use to advance Japan's regional sphere of influence, and he exercised deft diplomatic touch, including use of personal engagement, to ensure he advocated for peace without being seen as impinging on the Meiji Emperor's and his government's prerogative. Grant through deft personal diplomacy challenged his hosts on the need for war to expand their regional influence, advocating diplomacy, trade and commerce above all else. Grant also highlighted the sheer fiscal strain of war upon a government and society, as upon his inauguration in March 1869 the single largest issue facing his presidency was management of the massive Civil War debt²⁶. Not least of all the simple fact that foreign power, most notably Great Britain through London banks, held a level of debt significant enough to derail the newly reunited nation's future prosperity if it defaulted. Grant managed to convey this message without being perceived by those same hosts as being condescending of their national sovereignty.

In the end, Grant influence only resulted in war delayed as Meiji regional colonial expansion through militarism was deferred by the Emperor and others in his government saw the wisdom of Grant's words that domestic strength was the long-term key to Japan restoring its full sovereignty in the face of European power. The actions of the European powers towards China would mean that Grant's words would simply be swamped by the realpolitik of late-nineteenth century colonial expansionism. This fact would in no way diminish the esteem held by the Emperor and his governing men for Grant.

Grant and Mutsuhito shared personal sensibilities of modesty and a rejection of extravagance, embrace of character-building activities (namely horse-riding and travel), their shared need to exercise their mental energy through understanding world around them and how they could shape it, led to the two men from seemingly worlds apart (but in fact nations being shaped by the very same technological advances) to strike-up a robust personal rapport in 1879 during Grant's time in the island nation. One that would see Grant held in the highest esteem by the Meiji regime until his passing (1885), and ultimately would have a lasting legacy upon Meiji, and therefore Japanese, public policy.

Grant-Meiji Emperor Dialogue on Fiancé and Debt

It is hard to measure how much influence the conversation exerted on the emperor or on Japanese policies. Grant's warning against foreign loans was probably the part of the conversation that exerted the

²⁶Boutwell, 1902. Vol. I and II.

greatest effect. When Okuma Shigenobu, the new finance minister, tried to find a way out of the government's financial difficulties by floating a foreign loan of 50 million yen, his proposal was defeated, and one reason cited was Grant's warning²⁷.

The Meiji regime's singular continuous crises throughout its full duration, 1868 to 1912, was financial distress: including the absence of trust in the Meiji currency by the domestic population; a severe deficit in the currency's capacity to fund modernity and the resulting pressure to print more capital; which in turn sparked the ever present fear of rampant inflation breaking out; and how this would undermine the very legitimacy of the new regime²⁸. The heavy financial costs of suppressing the remnants of the former Tokugawa regime (1867-1868)²⁹ and then outmuscling the Satsuma Rebels (1877) through superior arms and logistics (rail, steam vessel and the telegraph developments) meant that the Meiji men faced the very same unprecedented currency stabilization and war-debt management challenges confronting President Grant upon his inauguration (March 1869)³⁰. The dire financial position of the Meiji regime led directly to domestic reforms such as the abolition in the early-1870s of the domains in favor of the modern prefectures system. During the time of Grant's visit (1879) and the decade after (1880s) the Meiji regimes most significant public policy battle would be to maintain domestic and international trust in their capacity to manage the nation's finances, particularly as their drive to modernity required them to conduct deficit-financing on an unprecedented scale to fund the new internal improvement and industrial assets (from rail to ports to agricultural infrastructure to rapid expansion of education) that would take decades to prove their full worth. Grant knew that such an investment would secure the nation a more strategically secure and prosperous future, as it had for the American nation, as did the Meiji men of the Iwakura Embassy and other representative to the United States who had witnessed first-hand that nation's rapid progress. Such observation of a nation on the far-side of the Pacific, however, this in no way alleviated the domestic pressures the regime came under over the rising debt levels amongst the vast majority of the nation's elite who had never travelled abroad.

In his advice to the Japanese Emperor and his government on the issues of national finance and debt Grant showed the same consistency of thought and execution that he had displayed during his Presidency. For Grant as with the individual went the nation: debt was to be paid off in full as quickly as possible to rid the individual/nation of any dependency on domestic creditors/foreign banking and

²⁷Keene, 2002: 317.

²⁸"The measures and countermeasures adopted by the government were a sign of both inexperience and the continuing crisis". Keene, 2002: 181.

²⁹By "1871 no fewer than 210 of the 274 *han* had debts larger than their annual revenue. Of the major *han*, Choshu, Tosa and Hizen all owed more than twice their revenue; Satsuma's debts, at 89 percent, were relatively small... What particularly showed up the rottenness of the feudal system was a series of about forty uprisings which disturbed western Japan during the winter of 1870-1. Sims, 2001: 28-30.

³⁰The Meiji's financial position also reflected that of President George Washington and Secretary Alexander Hamilton as they grappled to stop the fledgling United States collapsing post-Independence (1780s-1790s). See Sylla, 2011.

financial sources. This was particularly so in relation to foreign debts when one understands that British private banks never extended loans to foreign sources without the explicit consent of the Bank of England, which in effect meant that the loans were effectively British state-backed funding with the international political and diplomatic machinations this entailed. The United States under Grant, Germany under Bismarck, and now Japan under the Meiji regime, had all at different times felt this raw power emanating through London and all responded to counter it.

Grant would state to the Emperor:

There is nothing a nation should avoid as much as owing money abroad... You are doubtless aware that some nations are very derisive to loan money to weaker nations whereby they might establish their supremacy and exercise undue influence over them. They lend money to gain political power. They are ever seeking the opportunity loan. They would be glad, therefore, to see Japan and China, which are the only nations in Asia that are even partially free from foreign rule or dictation, at war with each other so that they might loan them on their own terms and dictate to them the internal policy which they should pursue³¹.

Young (1877, 78, 79) would summarise further Grant's fiscal advice to the Meiji government:

General Grant said that there was nothing which Japan should avoid more strenuously than incurring debts to European nations. So long as the government borrowed from its own people it was well. But loans from foreign powers were always attended with danger and humiliation. Japan could not go into a European money market and make a loan that would be of an advantage to her. [Grant pointed to Egypt and Turkey as clear examples of this folly] A country like Japan has all the money she wants of her own affairs, and any attempt to bring her into indebtedness to foreign powers would only be to lead her into the abyss into which Egypt has fallen. The General spoke to the Emperor on this question with great earnestness³².

Grant's advice to the Meiji elite to pursue a prudent and conservative financial path was based on his eight years in the White House, which included a consistent paying down of debt and a commitment to hard money (with the aim of the United States eventual entry to the gold standard), but also a series of national financial crises (1869, 1873) with both domestic and international origins. It also unquestionably came from his own personal background; a lifetime of experience beholden to the vagaries of the economy including his family's struggles in the 1850s. From that very personal experience Grant developed a complete psychological aversion to holding debt of any kind, and this would display itself time-and-again throughout his life, including post-Japan³³. For Grant debt held in 'foreign' hands for either an individual, or a nation, ultimately meant a loss of full sovereignty: of control over one's own destiny.

³¹Keene, 2002: 316.

³²Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol II: 545.

³³Young 2016: Chapter 35.

There is no doubt that Grant's position on fiscal management and debt reinforcing the young man's own personal conservatism in this area that, in turn, resulted in a profound public policy impact upon the regime. In the very same month as Grant arrival into Japan (June 1879) the Meiji government found itself split over how to manage the continuing rolling fiscal shortage they faced as Okuma submitted a four-point proposal to remedy the growing financial crises. The first pressing need was to redeem a considerable part of the paper money that had been printed to pay for the Satsuma Rebellion (as stated above the very same position Grant faced upon inauguration in March 1869 in relation to civil war-debt). The Meiji government had responded with what today, in the wake of the 2007-2008 global financial crises is titled "quantitative easing", and with the flood of new money came a widespread loss of confidence in the currency which resulted in a silver 1 yen coin being judged by the market as being valued at 1 yen, 43 sen in paper money. Inflation would prove itself to be more threatening to the regime than the rebels themselves. Okuma's response centred on replacing nonconvertible notes with notes convertible into specie and do so through a combination of selling government factories, and most significantly seeking "a 50 million yen foreign loan to be repaid over twenty-five years. Measures aimed at redeeming 78 million in yen in nonconvertible notes. Further 27 million yen in paper money would be redeemed in exchange for convertible bills"³⁴. The cabinet split between Okuma and the Satsuma faction in favour, and, Ito Hirobumi, the Choshu faction and others opposed. One of the strongest opponents was the Minister for the Right, Iwakura Tomomi, and the influential Danshaku Motoda Nagazane (1818-1891)³⁵, both of whom recalled the warning put to the Emperor and the regime by Grant during his visit to Japan to avoid foreign financial entanglement. It was no coincidence that the two men within the Emperor's inner circle who had had extensive contact with Grant, Iwakura and Ito, both in the United States and in Japan itself, who had travelled extensively within the United States, Great Britain, and continental Europe, and in doing so had seen first-hand the heavy influence London's financial power had in determining foreign nation's public policy decision-making, both sided against Okuma's foreign loans proposal. Grant's position, its logic in thought, and in empirical observation, was in fact not a lone one: it was also being vocally expressed by the man that dominated Berlin and the continent, Bismarck, and his inner cabinet³⁶.

In a political battle between Iwakura and Okuma there was only ever going to be one winner, the former was a nobleman and had been at the centre of palace governance since 1854, the very same year that Perry's Mission came to Japan. The young Mutsuhito was only two years old at this time, so effectively he grew up with Iwakura being a constant presence, one he had come to trust more than any other until

³⁴Keene, 2002: 332.

³⁵Motoda was a tutor and councilor to the Meiji Emperor and emphasized the tradition of Confucian conservatism. IN 1877 he was elevated into the Privy Council.

³⁶This itself was no coincidence as Bismarck's cabinet consisted of men who were Listian advocates, which itself had its intellectual origins in Hamiltonian thought. See Sylla, 2011.

his chief-adviser death on July 20, 1883 (which was marked by the Emperor's ultimate sign of respect through an official visit to Iwakura's house in the hours before his passing). Iwakura's position on the threat of foreign interference, fiscal or otherwise, in the face of Japan's present position was well known through a long memorial released by him in February 1875. It focused upon Japan's weakness compared to the Western powers and relied on his extensive observations gained during the Embassy conducted in his name³⁷. As stated Ito had been at Iwakura's side throughout much these foreign travels, and the two were united in their political opposition to a foreign loan of such scale and duration. Grant words to the Emperor in 1879 in opposition to foreign loans were in fact the very same that he had expressed to both Iwakura and Ito at the White House in 1872, and clearly had had a direct policy impact upon Iwakura's 1875 long memorial. As a result the real question was not the rejection of Okuma's plan, once Iwakura sided against it was effectively dead, but how to do so without damaging the latter's reputation and dividing the government:

The emperor was aware of Okuma's plan and did not like it, but he was also anxious not to risk a permanent split in the cabinet, such as had occurred at the time of the dispute over Korea³⁸.

Mutsuhito did not publically reject the plan immediately, as he did not wish to see important and influential members of his government lose credibility and most likely resign in the face of such a rebuttal, particularly so during Grant's visit to his nation and the significance he attributed to this event in further legitimising his regime.

It would not be until June 3, 1880 that the Emperor released a rescript:

I have examined this [Okuma's] proposal. I have also been informed that there is no unanimity of opinion in the cabinet or in the various ministries. Although I am well aware that it is not easy to dispose of the financial problem, I am convinced that borrowing money from abroad is today an inadmissible solution. Last year Grant spoke at length concerning the advantages and disadvantages of foreign loans. His words are still in my ears. The financial crises looms before us today, and we must choose a goal for the future. Now is the time for putting thrift into practice. I call on you, my lord, to implement my wishes and, making strict economy your watchword, establish a course for economic recovery. Discuss this fully with the cabinet and ministries, then report back to me³⁹.

The young Mutushito, who had been identified by foreign visitors as shy and awkward in his manner and conduct right up until series of meeting with Grant, was in less than a year after those meetings delivered with great self-confidence his veto prerogative and establishing himself as the penultimate centre of power within the regime-in-his-name. The fact that he felt confident enough to proclaim the influence Grant, a foreigner, had on his thinking reflected not only the esteem in which he held the former General-President, but also proclaimed to those who had previously attacked his regime's inner

³⁷Keene, 2002: 251.

³⁸Keene, 2002: 332-333.

³⁹Keene, 2002: 333.

circle (both in words and through assassinations) for ‘poisoning’ his mind that in fact he not only knew the policy positions being taken by his regime, but was prepared to exercised final rights over them.

The Emperor would prove this point for all to see when Iwakura himself, the most senior member of the Emperor’s inner circle as Minister to the right, in August 1880 presented an eleven-point program to rescue Japan from it financial crisis. The Emperor vetoed it on September 18 for proposing to impose an intolerable impost upon the Japanese rice farmer (one-quarter of the rents to be paid in rice) and in doing so reveling just how detached from the reality of Japanese people’s lives the inner circle of ministers were. Mutushito now felt fully confident to state a clear view on the Japanese people and their livelihood because he had engaged Grant on this very topic. He found that Grant was acutely sensitive to the impact his public policies had had upon the American people, that he kept in touch with their lives through constant travel and engagement with them throughout his presidency, and yet also recognized the requirement of a leader, president or monarch, to when required place the long-term interest of the nation above even the immediate suffering of the populace (such as his decision to veto the 1874 Inflation Bill to the detriment of American farmers and their communities). These insights from Grant built upon the knowledge and experiences he himself had accumulated from the extensive travels he had taken across his nation between 1868 and 1880 during which he developed an appreciation of the multiple factors involved in rice production, broader agricultural development, education and the health and wellbeing of his subjects through improved medical care⁴⁰. In his vetoing of both the Okuma plan and then the Iwakura plan the young Emperor was making clear to his most senior advisers that he, not them, was more fully aware of the needs of his subjects. It was a none- too-subtle rebuke. Instead Mutsuhito impressed upon Iwakura and Ito to show state fiscal prudence and restrain the government’s expenditure to suit the nation’s productive capacity. The implicit and explicit message to his government and his people was every way echoing Grant’s fiscal philosophy and he now possessed the self-confidence to openly proclaim it so.

Mutsuhito’s rejection of both Okuma’s and Iwakura’s measures, above all else, centred on the fact that they went against the personal prudence of the Emperor as displayed in his desire for simplicity in his residence and living and held equally so in his views on national fiscal policy. A personal and public prudence he found that he very-much shared with Grant, and which provided him with the confidence to exercise this observation in his every policy action for the remainder of his regime. In direct correlation the two men from across the world would come to view their fiscal prudence as their finest respective acts of public policy they delivered for their nations precisely because it spoke strongly of their own share personal philosophy that embraced prudence over any signs of excess. In time, in both countries, the public policy of fiscal prudence that derived directly from Mutsuhito’s and Grant’s shared

⁴⁰Keene, 2002: 298.

personal philosophy would reveal itself to be the correct step for the respective nation's advancement. Just as Grant's actions saw him gain the lifelong admiration of his inner cabinet of Fish and Boutwell who in turn espoused the wisdom of Grant's decision-making to core political and business establishments within America, the Emperor's actions saw him gain the same respect from Iwakura, Ito, and others within the regime including those who initially supported Okuma's plan but who quickly came to acknowledge the correctness of their Emperor's actions.

Grant's Farewell Address and Departure

Whilst the Yokohama fete was the high point of events amongst many during the Japan visit, the esteem in which the Meiji regime held Grant continued with their highly orchestrated departure. This involved a final official audience (August 30th) with Emperor Mutsuhito and the Empress Haruko, and later a formal dinner that included the full upper echelons of the Japanese government, the military, and the foreign diplomatic core. Grant farewell address to the Japanese Emperor, as Young states the only one written in advance on his entire two-plus year world tour, focused on Japan's governance, the nation's need to secure peace within its own Asian sphere of influence, and the securing of its national sovereignty against efforts by European powers to extend their colonial spheres⁴¹. The Emperor's farewell address to President Grant was read in translation by Ishibashi and equally effuse in praising Grant for his engagement with himself, his government and with the Japanese people⁴². Even more important than the words spoken was the atmospherics Young describing how the socially awkward young Emperor he had observed during the first meeting between the President only months previously had been replaced by a man not only completely at ease in the presence of Grant, but welcoming of it. How the remainder of the entourages surrounding the two men, including Julia and the Empress Haruko, feed of this to create a positive disposition amongst all those in attendance⁴³.

On the day-of-departure, September 3, 1879, after two-and-a-half months in the country, the Grant's received a full military guard of honor in the form of the Emperor's own troops, the Imperial cavalry, as the street to Yokohama Bay were lined with waving people all the way to Grant's and his entourage's vessel, the *City of Tokio* (the largest steamer on the Pacific run). A series of formal departure salutes by the Japanese Naval Command, including 21 gun salutes from various naval vessels in the harbor reflecting the head-of-state status the ex-President was held to, and finally, an escort out to sea by a Japanese man-of-war with the entire Japanese cabinet on-board, ended the formal recognition of the Grant's as being within Japanese territory and therefore as official hosts of the Emperor of Japan⁴⁴.

⁴¹Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol. II: 603.

⁴²Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol. II: 603-604.

⁴³Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol. II: 603-604.

⁴⁴Young, 1877, 1878, 1879 Vol II: 609-610.

There can be no doubt as to the fact that both Grant's had been "won-over" by Japan, having been treated with the utmost respect both as individuals and as representatives of the United States of America. Grant the traveler had met his match. Japan, the nation governed by young, talented and unquestionably ambitious men, combined with a society, culture and peoples whose taste in practical modernity, simple but refined architecture and a theatre style (kabuki) he found to be very much aligned with his own, had fulfilled his every expectation and then more; much more. Grant deemed the nation to have a very bright future, and had determined not long into his visit to the nation to ensure that in whatever capacity possible he would continue to work on the progression of United States-Japan relations.

Conclusion

Grant's visit to Japan in 1879 was to be the high point of United States-Japan relations before missteps on both sides from the mid-1880s onwards led to growing mistrust of their respective strategic directions in the Pacific, all of which led to the eventual calamity of 1942-1945⁴⁵. Even the personal goodwill between Grant and the Meiji elite could not hide the different strategic and trading interests between the two nations. Grant's unwillingness to serve a third consecutive term (1877), his failure to secure a third presidential term (1880), and his premature death (1885), and most importantly the only increasing predominance of social Darwinism amongst white Americans and others of white-European heritage, all meant that the good will between the two nations generated by Grant and the Meiji leadership was never secured through institutional structures. There was to be no "Treaty of Washington-like agreement" between the United States and Japan and a truly historical opportunity was missed. Within a decade after Grant's visit to Japan the two nations relations were strained over the Hawaii islands (mid-1880s-1890s) and the Meiji regime, far less impressed by the post-Grant American political leadership (in this they were hardly alone, as Bismarck made the very same rational conclusion), increasingly moved to exercise their nation's growing strategic power to secure Japan's regional interests⁴⁶.

The significant legacy did remain of Grant's 1879 visit to Japan was the consolidation of the Meiji Emperor's belief in himself, and the wisdom of Grant's fiscal advice to the Emperor to as-much-as-practicably-possible to achieve internal improvement to the nation through self-financing. To, in effort to advance Japan's sovereignty and prosperity, to avoid crippling foreign debt that would subvert Japan's national sovereignty just as the unequal treaties had done. Grant had effectively made the point, through the utilisation of his own country and presidential administration's experiences, that British and continental European power came not only, or even primarily out of the barrel of a gun, but through

⁴⁵Hunt, 1994. LaFeber, 1997. Morgan, 2011.

⁴⁶Hunt, 1994. Giffard, 2004. Morgan, 2011.

fiscal power. Grant's words would be heeded by Mutsuhito and the regime in his name until such a time, twenty-five years hence, as it was determined Japan would secure its Asian sphere of influence by force (1904-1905) and secured extended loans from British and European financiers to secure the prize. By this time, Japan, much like the United States post-Civil War, had developed sufficient governance and industrial capacity to ensure that such loans could be managed effectively and in doing so avoided the dependency syndrome that has so detrimentally effective other developing nation since.

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