

Men in Metal: Representations of the Nation in Public Space in Meiji Japan, 1868–1912

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RESÜMEE

Die Gründung der „Nation“ im Japan der Meiji-Zeit (1868–1912) erforderte neue Methoden des „social engineering“ und führte zu neuartigen Inszenierungen politischer Macht, Autorität und Legitimität im öffentlichen Raum. In diesem Beitrag soll skizziert werden, wie die junge Meiji-Regierung überhaupt erst einen öffentlichen Raum schuf und diesen dann zum Zwecke einer national-integrativen Politik nutzte, indem sie ihn mit personalisierten nationalen Symbolen besetzte. Im Vordergrund steht dabei das Medium der Bronzestatue. Fast eintausend Statuen von historischen Persönlichkeiten wurden in Japan bis zum Beginn des japanisch-chinesischen Krieges im Jahre 1937 im öffentlichen Raum errichtet. Das Medium der Statue spielte damit eine wichtige Rolle im Rahmen der nationalen Indoktrinationspolitik und der Schaffung eines nationalen Bewusstseins in der japanischen Bevölkerung.

1. The *Meiji-ishin* and the Issue of National Integration in Modern Japan

The Meiji Restoration (*Meiji-ishin*) of 1868 brought about revolutionary changes in Japan's political, social and economic systems and was accompanied by gradual changes in everyday life and culture. The extent to which these changes amounted to a “revolution” depends on the definition of revolution adopted and on the aspects given emphasis in any analysis. At any rate, as part of a general trend in historiography, recent writings have increasingly tended to characterize the changes that followed the *coup d'état* of 1868 as a revolution¹ – though with this revolution being variously emphasized as an

1 Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising. The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose*, New York 2007, p. 24; Andrew

“aristocratic revolution”,² a “nationalist revolution”,³ a “samurai revolution”,⁴ a “revolution from above”,⁵ or the prototype of an “Asian revolution”.⁶ In this context, the Meiji Revolution or Meiji Renovation⁷ is increasingly defined not exclusively as the *coup d'état* of 1868, but more broadly as an era that lasted until the suppression of the last violent uprisings against the new government in 1877–78, or even until the new state took its final form with the proclamation of the Meiji Constitution in 1890.

The most important change in this context of a “long revolution” was the transformation of the Japanese archipelago from a politically decentralized system of 260 mainly independent feudal domains (*han*), usually called “countries” (*kuni*), featuring a politically irrelevant and alienated majority population – the peasants – into a strongly centralized nation-state (*kuni* or *kokka*) with a populace that could be mobilized by the state authorities. “Prior to 1853, there was no Japan,” as Kevin Doak puts it rather provocatively in his recent work *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan*.⁸ And further: “Japan’, as the national signifier we understand it today, was for all practical purposes irrelevant to the dominant forms of politics and to everyday life in the archipelago.”⁹ While the process of political centralization was achieved within one or two decades after 1868, the creation of the “nation” from a population consisting overwhelmingly of peasants proved much more difficult to achieve and remained the most pressing task of the new government. To mobilize the population for the purposes of the nation-state – modernization, industrialization and war – it was necessary to generate a new type of loyalty to the newly created nation-state. Out of the sum of individuals inhabiting the Japanese islands there thus evolved the Japanese “nation” through the ubiquitous elements of the nationalization process identified by Antony Smith: “the growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history (...); the formation of a shared public culture based on an indigenous resource (...); the growth of common codes and institutions of a single legal order,” as well as “the unification of local economic units into a single socio-economic

Gordon: *A Modern History of Japan. From Tokugawa Times to the Present*, New York / Oxford 2003, p. 61; James McClain, *Japan. A Modern History*, New York 2002; Marius B. Jansen, *The Making of Modern Japan*, Cambridge, Mass. / London 2000, pp. 333 f.; Peter Duus, *Modern Japan*, Boston 1998, p. 85 (Duus, however, like many historians of modern Japan, continues to use the established term “Meiji Restoration”, notwithstanding his characterization of this event as “revolutionary”).

2 Thomas C. Smith, *Japan's Aristocratic Revolution*, in: *The Yale Review* 50 (1961) 370–383.

3 William G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration*, Stanford 1972, p. 424; Pyle, *Japan Rising* (footnote 1), p. 27.

4 Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan* (footnote 1).

5 Duus, *Modern Japan* (footnote 1).

6 Mitani, Hiroshi: *Meiji-ishin to Nashonarizumu. Bakumatsu no gaikō to seiji hendō* [The Meiji Restoration and Nationalism. Changes in Diplomacy and Politics at the End of the Edo Period], Tokyo 1997; Nakamura, Tetsu: *Meiji-ishin* [The Meiji Restoration], Tokyo: Shūeisha (Shūeisha Nihon no Rekishi 16), 1992, p. 14; cf. also Sven Saaler, *Die Bedeutung der Epochenmarke 1868 in der Japanischen Geschichte: Restauration, Revolution, Reform*, in: *Saeculum. Jahrbuch fuer Universalgeschichte* 56 (1 / 2005), pp. 69–104.

7 Richard Sims prefers the term “renovation” (Richard Sims, *Japanese Political History since the Meiji Renovation, 1868–2000*, New York 2001).

8 Kevin M. Doak, *A History of Nationalism in Modern Japan. Placing the People*, Leiden 2007, p. 36.

9 *Ibid.*

unit.”¹⁰ Such developments, naturally, took time. However, the Meiji elite was aware of the urgency of the task and actively promoted “the growth of myths and memories of common ancestry and history” as well as the “formation of a shared public culture” through various strategies of social engineering and diverse forms of social education.¹¹ Modern Japan since the Meiji period imported and, in part, developed an array of new techniques of social education and social engineering – new ways of constructing national myths, national history and national symbols and displaying them in public space using, above all, visual strategies. As part of these efforts, a particularly strong emphasis was placed on the creation and the commemoration and memorialization of *personalized* representations of the nation. For most Japanese at the end of the nineteenth century (and probably long afterwards), the idea of “the nation” was highly abstract and remote. By presenting newly constructed national heroes – but also popular (or popularized) figures from Japanese history and ancestors of the nation derived from Japanese mythology as well as the founding figures of modern Japan – in powerful visual terms to serve the politics of national integration, the otherwise highly abstract and remote idea of the “nation” could be rendered more concrete. By displaying popular national heroes and founding figures in public space, the nation was given “a face” and thus popular identification with the nation – in the form of personalized symbols which evoked feelings of proximity, kinship¹² and a personal bond – was facilitated.

While personified representations of the nation are found in a wide array of media in modern Japan – such as school textbooks, lithographs, woodblock prints and illustrated newspapers and journals – they are especially noticeable in the form of prominently located visual representations in public space. Particularly conspicuous are the large number of *statues*, mostly bronze (*dōzō*), of historical figures, which were erected from the Meiji period (1868 – Japan, bronze statues of *historical* (and pseudo-historical) figures appeared for the first time in the 1880s and were erected in large numbers in the Meiji and Taishō (1912–1926) periods. Between 1880 and 1928, more than 800 of these statues were erected throughout Japan.¹³ They must be seen as part of the policy of social engineering adopted by the Meiji government, aiming at the creation of a nation and strengthening of Japanese national consciousness. We will see how this was achieved by examining the context of the statue-building trend and reviewing several case studies that reveal the forces – both ideological and personal – behind the building of bronze statues in this period.

10 Antony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford 1999, p. 104.

11 On the concepts of “social engineering” and “social education” in the context of modern Japanese history and the multiple objectives of these policies cf. McClain (footnote 1), ch. 8; Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the State, 1868–1988*, Princeton 1989; Sheldon Garon, *Molding Japanese Minds. The State in Everyday Life*, Princeton 1997 (Garon uses the concept of “social management”). On “social engineering” in modern nation-states in general cf. Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, *Die Vielfalt der Moderne*, Weilerswist 2000, p. 29 f.

12 On the importance of kinship as a basis of national consciousness, see Antony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, London/New York 1998, p. 46; Smith, *Myths and Memories* (footnote 10), ch. 4; Connor Walker, *The Nation and its Myth*, in: *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 33/1–2, 1992, pp. 48–57.

13 Arai, Fusatō: *Ijin no omokage* [The Countenance of Great Men], Tokyo 1929.

2. Statue-Building in the Context of the Nation-Building Process

Before analyzing the process leading to the erection of the first statues, a few remarks seem necessary on the reasons why there were no statues of historical personalities in public space *before* 1880. First of all, the issue of whether public space even existed in pre-Meiji Japan is obviously open to question. Certainly, the typical locations for the erection of statues – public parks, squares and stations – did *not* exist. Public buildings were rather remote from the eye of the general public, and there was no sense of statue-building for reasons of political propaganda. Some wooden statues of historical figures were found in burial grounds in premodern Japan, such as statues of Shoguns from the Ashikaga and Tokugawa families and of the sixteenth-century warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi. However, these statues were ill-fated.¹⁴ But with the advent of the Meiji era, we can observe an increase in statue-building. The nation now needed an outlet to display its glory to the general public. Above all, however, the exigencies of modern warfare – mobilization of the entire population and almost all the country's economic resources – contributed to an acceleration of social policies strengthening an attachment to the nation and readiness for sacrifice. To this end, the display of national heroes who had devoted their lives to “the nation” came to be considered an important method of social engineering from the 1880s onwards.

The first thoughts of building a statue for a historical figure in Meiji Japan can be dated to 1878. In April of that year, the national newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun* for the first time reported rumours that a statue was to be built in Tokyo.¹⁵ The statue was to be built in Ueno park and would depict Kido Takayoshi (or Kōin), one of the most important and influential statesmen of the early Meiji period who had died only one year previously. We do not know how substantial these plans were, but they were never realized. This may have had to do with the fact that it was of course difficult to display a “normal” politician in public space while the imperial house and the Japanese emperor, the Tennō – *the* symbol of national unity in the ideology of the Meiji state – were still largely invisible. As is well known, in the 1870s and 1880s the emperor undertook several trips throughout Japan during which he appeared in person in front of his subjects, but clearly few of these subjects would have actually seen the emperor at close distance. The emperor's trips through Japan remained limited in time and space. Equally, the portrait of the emperor which had been distributed to official institutions since the 1880s was unable to compensate for the lack of *permanent* visual representations of the emperor in public space, since it was usually shown only on special occasions and so was not constantly visible in public space.¹⁶ Some reproductions of the emperor's portrait were sold on the black

14 On the fate of the statues of Ashikaga Shoguns see Ann Walthall, *Off With Their Heads! The Hirata Disciples and the Ashikaga Shoguns*, in: *Monumenta Nipponica* 50/2, 1995, pp. 137-170; and on that of the memorial institutions commemorating of Toyotomi Hideyoshi see Kitai, Toshio: *Shinkokuron no keifu* [Discourses on the Land of the Gods], Tokyo 2006, p. 155.

15 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 2 April 1878, p. 3.

16 On the portrait of the emperor and the regulations regarding its display and distribution see the standard work

market and used for decorative purposes in private space but, strictly speaking, sale of the emperor's portrait was banned throughout most of the Meiji period. Bronze statues of historical figures therefore filled a vacuum in public space, where the emperor's invisibility had become an obstacle to policies of social integration. Before it was deemed possible to depict a "normal" politician in public space, a number of statues of figures from the imperial house were built. The first bronze statue to be built in Japan was of Yamato Takeru, an imperial prince and mythic hero from the ancient Japanese myths recorded in the eighth-century chronicles *Nihon Shoki* and *Kojiki*. Of course, these myths are no longer regarded as history, their authenticity is very much contested and it is debatable whether Yamato Takeru can be considered an historical personality in any real sense. However, in the Meiji era these myths were considered historical fact¹⁷ and Yamato Takeru an historical personality. For the establishment of nationhood in modern Japan – just as in other nations – a connection to these myths was extremely important, as they made a strong contribution to the creation of a sense of kinship and consanguinity¹⁸ – notwithstanding the unhistoricity of modern nations' supposed links with prehistoric mythology (such as European nations' connections to the "history" of Troy, one of the "ten lost tribes of Israel" and even Atlantis).¹⁹

The statue of Yamato Takeru was built in 1880 in Kenrokuen, a park in the city of Kanazawa, which was then one of the five largest cities in Japan. Up until the 1860s, this park was attached to Kanazawa castle and only the castle's residents were allowed to use it – in particular, the feudal lord (*daimyō*) provided by the Maeda family. It was not until 1873 that a government decree mandated the creation of public parks and that Kenrokuen became one of the first of these public parks in Japan.²⁰ This new "public space", which was also being created in other cities around this time, has remained the main theatre for statue-building in Japan right up to the present day. More than a third of all statues built in Japan both before and after the war were erected in parks.²¹ The statue of Yamato Takeru in Kenrokuen was erected at the initiative of the imperial army, one of the central institutions of a then still young and fragile nation-state whose unity had been shaken by a civil war in 1877, the Satsuma Rebellion or Southwestern War (*seinan sensō*).²² The commander of the units of the imperial army stationed in Kanazawa first applied to build a statue of the Meiji emperor, but this was rejected by

by Taki, Kōji: Tennō no shōzō [The Portrait of the Emperor], Tokyo 2002 (Iwanami Gendai Bunko vol. 76; 1st edition 1988) as well as the article by Suzuki Shin'ichi and Yamaki Kazuhiko in this volume.

17 Cf. John S. Brownlee, *Japanese Historians and the National Myths, 1600–1945. The Age of the Gods and Emperor Jinmu*, Vancouver/Tokyo 1997.

18 Connor (footnote 12), pp. 51–55; Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (footnote 12), p. 46; Smith, *Myths and Memories* (footnote 10), ch. 4.

19 Connor (footnote 12), pp. 48 f; Smith, *Myths and Memories* (footnote 10), pp. 71–82.

20 The foundation for the creation of the first park was the Dajōkan government's decree no. 16 in 1873 which required the establishment of public parks and assembly places for the people; cf. Shirahata, Yōzaburō: *Kindai toshi kōen no kenkyū* [Studies on Parks in the Modern City], Kyoto 1995, pp. 178–81.

21 According to the author's database of bronze statues in modern Japan.

22 James Buck, *The Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. From Kagoshima through the Siege of Kumamoto Castle*, in: *Monumenta Nipponica* 28/4 (1973), pp. 427–446.

the imperial household ministry, the Kunaishō. Obviously, the Meiji emperor was considered too sacred for depiction in *public* space in the form of a statue. Notwithstanding several attempts by a number of individuals and institutions, *not one statue* of the Meiji emperor was erected in public space in prewar Japan. However, the Kunaishō approved the request to build a statue of Yamato Takeru (and later also for the erection of further statues of various figures of the imperial house, as we shall see below) and even donated a considerable sum from the emperor's private treasury to finance this statue.²³



Figure 1:
Statue of Yamato Takeru in
Kanazawa (author's photograph)

The statue showed Yamato Takeru as an ancient *progenitor* of the Japanese nation and also, sword in hand, as a symbol of the “tradition” of the imperial house's *supreme command of the military* (Figure 1).

As a forefather of the Japanese nation, Yamato Takeru represented the unity of the nation – which had been challenged during the Satsuma Rebellion – while as a symbol of the emperor's supreme command of the military he also contributed to a reaffirmation of the army's unity. This goal was further promoted through the commemoration – in the form of various memorial stones placed next to the statue (see Figure 1) – of the soldiers of the Kanazawa region who had lost their lives during the suppression of the Satsuma Rebellion. This commemoration of civil-war dead sought to provide comfort to the de-

23 Motoyasu, Hiroshi: *Gunto no irei kūkan. Kokumin tōgō to senshishatachi* [The Commemorative Space in the Military City. The People and the War Dead], Tokyo 2002, ch. 2.

scendents of these young soldiers by giving retrospective meaning to their deaths, which were remembered as honourable deaths “for the unity of the nation”.²⁴

The process leading to the erection of the statue of Yamato Takeru clearly demonstrates the desire of various groups to strengthen Japan’s national unity after the civil war of 1877. Besides the emperor, the former lord of the feudal domain of Kaga, Maeda Yoshiasu, donated a considerable sum towards the statue’s construction, thus demonstrating his commitment to the new political and social order after the abolition of feudalism. Various religious associations also contributed to the project. A fundraising campaign, which was mainly organized by the imperial army, obtained donations from commoners not only in the prefecture of Ishikawa itself, but also in neighbouring prefectures as well as in the capital city, Tokyo. The statue was constructed in the traditional bronze-casting centre of Takaoka, a small city close to Kanazawa famous for its tea-ceremony kettles.²⁵ Along with representatives from politics and the military, members of religious organisations attended the unveiling ceremony – including representatives of the Buddhist *Jōdo Shinshū* (literally “True Pure Land School”) which is particularly strong in Ishikawa prefecture. Large numbers of commoners also attended, giving the ceremony a highly festive character as contemporary illustrations attest.²⁶

The construction of the statue of Yamato Takeru in Kanazawa was the starting point of a boom in statue-building during the late Meiji and the Taishō eras. Dozens – later hundreds – of monuments of historical or mythical figures were erected, amounting to more than 800 statues throughout the country by around 1928.²⁷ In 1894 the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (*Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō*) – with which many of the sculptors and casters of statues were affiliated – was said to have received orders for 78 statues from various parts of the country.²⁸

The next statues after that of Yamato Takeru (of whom a second statue was built in 1890 in Gunma) were of Keitai Tennō, a sixth-century emperor (a stone statue was erected in 1883 near his birthplace in Fukui); Oda Nobunaga (1888 in Gifu); Ōmura Masujirō (1893 at the Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo); war god Uma Shimade (1894 in Tokyo); the legendary first emperor Jimmu (1896 in Tokushima and 1898 in Toyohashi); entrepreneurs Kawada Shōichirō (1896 in Tokyo), Motoki Shōzō (1898 in Osaka) and Hirose Saihei (1898 in Ehime); Meiji Revolution hero Saigō Takamori (1898 in Ueno park in Tokyo); politicians and army officers Yamada Akiyoshi (1898 in Tokyo) and Yamagata Aritomo (1898 in his hometown of Hagi) and imperial house advisor and Nishōgakusha

24 This, of course, is a very common function of memorials, as the studies of Reinhard Koselleck and others have demonstrated (cf., for example, Reinhard Koselleck/Michael Jeismann (eds.), *Der Politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*, Munich 1994; Reinhard Koselleck, *Die Transformation der politischen Totenmale im 20. Jahrhundert*, in: Martin Sabrow/Ralph Jessen/Klaus Große Kracht (eds.): *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Große Kontroversen seit 1945*, Munich 2003, pp. 205–228.

25 Motoyasu, *Gunto no irei kūkan* (footnote 23), p. 134.

26 See the 1880 woodblock print on the author’s homepage: <http://www.japanesehistory.de/fotos/Holz-drucke-Douzou/>.

27 According to the publication by Arai: Ijin no omokage (footnote 13).

28 Yomiuri Shinbun, 6 September 1894, p. 3.

University founder Mishima Takeshi (1899 in Tokyo). As we can see, several of these statues depict figures from or closely linked with the imperial house. Statues of historical figures from the imperial house were a means of emphasizing the new regime's sense of continuity with the ancientness of Japanese history and thus strengthen the legitimacy of the new government, whose authority was heavily reliant on the emperor and the imperial house.

Not everybody in Japan welcomed the new fashion of statue-building, as we can see, for example, in the discussion between the conservative court noble Higashikuze Michitomi (1834–1912) – who criticized and opposed “the imitation of the Western custom of building bronze statues of historical figures” – and Kuki Ryūichi (1850–1931), director of the imperial museum (Teishitsu Hakubutsukan), who stressed the significance of statue-building as an important means of “public education”.²⁹ There was also hostility from national newspapers: the daily *Yomiuri Shinbun* (though this was not then the leading media organ it is today) warned as early as 1893 in an editorial of the practical dangers inherent in obsessive and thoughtless statue-building:

The statue to Ōmura Masujirō stands boldly at the Shōkon Shrine;³⁰ the statue of Lord Kusunoki (Nankō) stands outside the entrance to the imperial palace; a statue for Lord Mōri is being planned; we hear that the disciples of the venerable Fukuzawa [Yūkichi] plan a statue for their teacher; previously cancelled plans for a statue to Saigō Takamori have been revived; and recently plans have emerged to build a statue of the imperial forefather Jimmu Tennō. The recent bronze-statue fever (dōzō-netsu) is indeed tremendous! Statues of saints, wise ministers, famous generals and great men (ījin) are being built in large numbers throughout the country. (...) Is the objective of those who commission such statues really commemoration (kinen) (...) or is it worship (sūhai) of that [deceased] person? Such a medium may very well have the opposite effect from that intended. (...)

The wooden pillow beneath the head of Taira no Kiyomori was, during his lifetime, kicked by his sworn enemies, and the wooden statue of Ashikaga Takauchi was decapitated and the head displayed next to the Yonjō bridge [in Kyoto].³¹ If the person depicted in a statue is guilty of wrongdoing, there will be people in the future who will desecrate the statue or even destroy it”.³²

Notwithstanding such warnings, Japan's statue-building boom had not yet reached its peak. This came in the late Meiji and early Taishō periods, i.e. in the 1910s and 1920s. How should we account for the popularity of bronze statues in the context of national integration policies in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan?

29 Haga, Shōji, *Dōzō kinenhi kō* [Some Thoughts on Bronze Statue Memorials], in: IS 82 (1999), pp. 45–49.

30 Actually Yasukuni Shrine, whose name until 1879 was Shōkonsha.

31 See Walthall, *Off With Their Heads!* (footnote 14) on this incident.

32 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 9 May 1893, p. 1.

3. Mitigating Social Tensions: The Statues of Kusunoki Masashige, Ii Naosuke, Saigō Takamori and the Feudal Lords of the Mōri Family

We started this article with the assumption that most statues of historical figures in Japan were created within a context of intensified nation-building and were accordingly conceived as a means of social education with the objective of strengthening national consciousness and, ultimately, loyalty to the nation-state. These statues were indeed able to fulfil this objective since they were an ideal means of mitigating social tensions and connecting *national* identity with *local* or *regional* identities which remained strong in Japan long after the foundation of the unified and centralized nation-state. Even clearly local figures such as lords of regional feudal domains were not exclusively presented as “hometown heroes” (*kyōdō no eiyū*) but were also framed in a national context when they appeared in public space in form of a statue. In almost every instance of statue-building the objective of strengthening national consciousness is explicitly mentioned – even in prospectuses for statues of persons with somewhat local profiles.

This does not mean that every statue implied an *acknowledgement* or affirmation of the current state of political affairs. Some are intended more or less overtly in contrast to the current political situation and express a national consciousness removed from the state and from state-sanctioned versions of nationalism (*kokkashugi*). But almost all affirm the nation and the values which its representatives were said to embody – above all, loyalty to the nation and emperor and, often, self-sacrifice. Particularly during the era of Taishō democracy (usually defined as the period from 1905 to 1932, in contradistinction to the reign of emperor Taishō), when conservative circles feared the influx of “new ideologies” into Japan, building of statues was explicitly undertaken not just to commemorate the person depicted but to venerate the values he or she³³ embodied, to strengthen “healthy thought” and to prevent the spread of “dangerous ideologies”, i.e. communism, socialism and, in some cases, liberalism. Almost all of the statues which I have analysed to date demonstrate a positive, affirmative connection between the person depicted and the Japanese nation; and certainly, with not one of these statues is there any sense of criticism, let alone rejection, of the idea of the nation.

The broad variety of approaches to the “nation” which were realized in statue-building also explains why state agencies never saw a need for tight control over statue-building. Instead of a grand scheme for a network of statues of national heroes all over Japan, mechanisms of approval existed which were loose and decentralized. In many cases, ministries such as the imperial household ministry (*Kunaishō*), the army ministry (*Rikugunshō*) and the home ministry (*Naimushō*) were involved, but often approval at a local level was deemed sufficient in the absence of intervention by a higher-level authority. Conflicts only arose in rare cases such as statues of historical or pseudo-historical personalities related to the imperial family and where statues of foreigners were planned.

33 The vast majority of statues built in Japan (in the prewar and postwar periods) depict men. According to the author’s database, only five percent of Japanese bronze statuary is dedicated to female figures.

While there was no central control over statue-building a strong social dynamic evolved, with increasing numbers of social groups and institutions engaging in individualized forms of memory politics with the objective of pursuing social integration – frequently, integration of their individual group (family, locality or former social class) into the new community of the nation. In such cases, statue-building could be seen more as a *symptom* of the increasing importance of national consciousness than as an *effect* of the intention to strengthen this consciousness. However, once erected these statues helped to promote national consciousness and to strengthen national identity. The famous statue of Kusunoki Masashige, a medieval example of a warrior loyal to the emperor, is a case in point. This statue – which still can be seen today outside the main gate of the imperial palace – was one of the best-known statues in prewar Japan.³⁴ The initiative for its erection had come from an industrial conglomerate (*zaibatsu*) that, above all, aimed to consolidate its own position in Meiji society – the Sumitomo *zaibatsu*. Sumitomo wished to demonstrate loyalty to the imperial house at a time of increasing criticism of the “selfishness” and “greediness” of industrialists.³⁵ For Sumitomo, strengthening national consciousness was, at best, of secondary significance. But a statue of an imperial loyalist from the Japanese middle ages – who had been of central significance in the establishment of the cult of loyalty to the emperor and patriotic education since the first years of Meiji – could hardly fail to impress the public of Meiji Japan.

Statues were made of an ever-growing multitude of “heroes” and “idols” in the late Meiji period and the Taishō era and they were all displayed in an affirmative national context. This is true even in the case of figures who before the Meiji Restoration of 1868 – i.e. before the foundation of the nation-state – had numbered among the *fiercest adversaries* of the later Meiji oligarchy. In 1909, for example, a statue of Ii Naosuke was erected in Yokohama. Ii had been appointed Shogunate regent (*tairō*) in 1858 and had enforced the signing of the so-called Unequal Treaties – treaties of “Friendship and Commerce” concluded between Japan and the Euro-American powers – in the same year. For decades afterwards these Unequal Treaties were considered a national disgrace for which Ii was considered responsible. Moreover, not only had Ii ignored the imperial court when enforcing the signing of these treaties, in the Ansei purges of the same year he had also brutally suppressed the adversaries of his policy. Yet these people were the very same figures who later became the leaders of Meiji-era Japan. Accordingly, in the Meiji state the reputation of Ii Naosuke was naturally unfavourable and he was remembered, above all,³⁶ as the villain who had signed the shameful Unequal Treaties of 1858 and been responsible for suppressing the anti-Shogunate movement. It therefore comes as no

34 See the author's homepage for a number of historical and contemporary photographs of this and other statues: <http://statues.japanesehistory.de>.

35 Conveniently, one of the central activities of Sumitomo was the mining of copper, whose uses include that of an alloy for casting bronze. Accordingly, the statue did not represent a significant financial burden for Sumitomo.

36 Interestingly, Ii's image as a supreme master of the tea ceremony did not suffer on account of his political activities; he is still today considered one of the greatest ever “tea masters”.

surprise that plans for the erection of a monument to Ii provoked heated debates in the Meiji era and were bitterly opposed by the Meiji leadership.

Initial plans in the 1880s for a monument to Ii excited little enthusiasm among the authorities and came to nothing. Renewed preparations for a statue of Ii were made on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Unequal Treaties – which had been gradually revised since 1894 – but these were apparently obstructed by the central government³⁷ and were ultimately realized only in 1909, when a statue of Ii was erected in Yokohama – Japan's gateway to the world which owed its very existence to the treaties which Ii had signed. As a consequence of the 1858 treaties Yokohama became the main port for intercourse with the Western powers. Approval for the erection of the statue was given by local authorities: the prefecture of Kanagawa and the city of Yokohama.³⁸ The central authorities maintained a low profile and failed to attend the opening ceremony in July 1909 – as the statue-builders' report made sure to mention.³⁹



Figure 2:
Unveiling ceremony (jomakushiki) of the statue for Ii Naosuke in Yokohama in 1909. Source: The weekly journal *Taiyō* [The Sun], vol. 15/11, 1 August 1909.

37 Ōtorii, Masahi (ed.): *Ko Ii Naosuke chōjin dōzō jomakushiki no ki* [Record of the Unveiling Ceremony of the Bronze Statue of the Late Ii Naosuke], Tokyo 1909, pp. 40–45.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

This absence of representatives of the central authorities at the unveiling ceremony is in stark contrast to the unveiling ceremony of the statue of Saigō Takamori in 1898, which was attended by a large number of aristocrats as well as high-ranking politicians.⁴⁰

Faced with strong criticism of the plans to erect a statue of Ii, the statue's supporters tirelessly emphasized during the preparations and at the unveiling ceremony (Figure 2) that Ii had taken the right decision for the Japanese *nation* in the historical situation in which he acted. Though it was unpopular in Ii's day, without the regent's decision present-day Japan (i.e. Japan in 1909) would not be among the so-called first-rate powers (*ittōkoku*), a status granted to Japan after her victory over Russia in 1904-05. It was Ōkuma Shigenobu – originally a member of the anti-Shogunate movement but by 1909 a strong critic of the Meiji oligarchy – who gave the first speech at the unveiling ceremony on 11 July 1909. Ōkuma had been an ardent critic of the oligarchy following his exclusion from the government in 1880 and was a leader of the opposition in the imperial Diet. Ii's suppression of the anti-Shogunate movement in 1858 now seemed forgotten; Ōkuma presented Ii as the representative of the “true Japan” and a patriot:

It is an honour for me to speak on the occasion of the unveiling of the statue of this great man who did so much for this country. [...] Japan had always been open towards foreign countries, it was not until the introduction of Chinese ideology⁴¹ to Japan that foreigners were despised and labelled as non-humans. [...] By contrast] Ii Naosuke demanded the opening-up of the country; he thereby proved himself as a patriot (aikokusha). He did not strive for peace at the price of vilification [of Japan by other countries], but rather acted in a responsible manner as was appropriate for his position.⁴²

Throughout the ceremony, Ii was praised for his “merits” in “having opened Japan up to the world” and was presented as a “patriot”. Of course, the construction of Ii's statue also meant an at least partial rehabilitation of the Shogunal politician who had been previously branded an “enemy of the imperial court” (*chōteki*). But due to the absence of his former opponents, the representatives at the ceremony did not see the erection of the statue as representing a truly successful reconciliation.⁴³ All the same, the statue's erection is evidence of a social dynamic that led to the presentation of representatives of various political groups, parties and figures from different social backgrounds as *representatives of the nation* in public space in Meiji Japan, with the objective of their integration into the new social order. This is particularly true in relation to the founding event of modern Japan: the Meiji Revolution. Not only were the revolutionary samurai who strived to bring about the fall of the Shogunate presented as founding figures of the Japanese nation-state, their former adversaries were depicted as “true patriots” wherever possible and

40 Yomiuri Shinbun, 19 December 1898, p. 3.

41 Ōkuma alludes here to the Sinocentric world order whereby all states wishing to trade with China had to offer a tribute to the Chinese emperor. China banned trade and contact with other peoples and states.

42 Ōtori, Ko Ii Naosuke (footnote 37), pp. 4-8.

43 Ibid., pp. 40-45.

were thus rehabilitated and exploited as a vehicle for social integration. Only very rarely was a statue *not* built due to state intervention.⁴⁴

The statue of Saigō Takamori, who had been a revolutionary hero but was later a rebel against the Meiji regime during the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877,⁴⁵ remains one of the most intriguing cases of statue-building. As an opponent of the Meiji state, Saigō hardly seems predestined to become a focal point or symbol of devotion or loyalty to the nation or the emperor. Yet in the aftermath of Saigō's imperial pardon in 1889 he evolved into a leading national hero. Saigō's statue, built in 1898 in Ueno park, became one of the most popular and best-known statues in prewar Japan.⁴⁶ Plans to build a statue of Saigō were initially mooted in 1889 by Yoshii Tomozane, an old comrade-in-arms, following his political rehabilitation in the form of an imperial pardon:

*The venerable Saigō (Saigō-ō) at all times worked with the men of purpose (shishi), leading to the major achievement of the restoration of imperial rule (ōsei fukko). He then humbly worked for the imperial court and was appointed an army general. (...) As a token of its appreciation, the imperial court has now restored [Saigō's] court rank and titles (shakui). (...) Furthermore, to commemorate the great man's contribution to national affairs (...) a number of influential personalities now wish to build a statue in Ueno park or in the vicinity of the imperial palace.*⁴⁷

Nevertheless, these plans met with heated discussions and widespread resistance in Japanese politics and society. While applauding the erection of a memorial in Fukuoka commemorating Japan's successful defence against the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, in an editorial in 1892 the newspaper *Yomiuri Shinbun* criticized the erection of a statue of Saigō close to the imperial palace:

What is the relationship between the Mongol Invasion Memorial (genkō kinen-hi) and the statue of Saigō Takamori? (...) In an era of frequent negotiations with the [Western imperialist] powers, in a time of weakening morale (shiki suijaku), the Mongol Invasion Memorial is not only an adequate means of strengthening the people's spirits (jin'i), it also stimulates the fighting spirit of our Yamato Race (yamato minzoku). [...] The building of a statue of Saigō Takamori certainly has many advantages and disadvantages. But if the statue is erected where the persons commissioning it now envisage, it will undoubt-

44 A statue was even built for a figure who was probably the fiercest enemy of the later Meiji elite, Oguri Tadamasa (also Kōzukenosuke), in Gumma in 1922 (i.e. after the end of the Meiji era, which is an important difference in relation to Ii's case). Oguri belonged to the last defenders of the Shogunate until the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and was decapitated as "enemy of the imperial court" (*chōteki*) in April 1868 in the final days of the civil war. His symbolic power as a former adversary of the Meiji elites is even stronger than that of Ii because of his resistance until death.

45 See Buck, "The Satsuma Rebellion" (footnote 22).

46 See Sven Saaler, *Personenkult im Modernen Japan: Repräsentationen der Nation im Öffentlichen Raum, 1880 bis 2007*, in: Verena Blechinger (ed.): *Grenzgänge. Festschrift für Irmela Hijiya-Kirschner*, Frankfurt am Main / New York (forthcoming).

47 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 5 December 1889.

*edly not only have grave effects on public morals (sedō jinshin). [...] [Having already been cancelled once,] the plans to erect a statue of Saigō outside the imperial palace are now once again being pursued. But differences of opinions (iron) have emerged among the supporters of the statue, as we have heard, and, without discussing these opinions in detail here, we hope for the victory of the statue's opponents and for the suspension of the plans.*⁴⁸

As the main reason for its opposition to the statue of Saigō, *Yomiuri* emphasized that despite his imperial pardon Saigō's "historic guilt" (*zaiseki*) – namely "allowing himself to be overcome by emotion and rush into incorrect actions", i.e. rebellion – had not been erased.⁴⁹ "We do not know what kind of feelings will be aroused among the people (*kokumin*) when they see [the statue] standing outside the imperial palace."⁵⁰ One year later, *Yomiuri* stated even more directly that Saigō had "been mistaken in his direction [when he rushed to rebellion] and was branded a traitor. As such, he is not a figure who should be displayed for all time as a model (*mohan*) for the subjects of our country (*waga-kuni shinmin*)."⁵¹ Since a large number of politicians and officials supported the idea of a statue, the plans were eventually realized in spite of the delay. The profile of the statue's supporters was certainly impressive – it was a near-comprehensive list of influential aristocrats, military officers and government members.⁵² All these persons were former prime ministers, foreign ministers, home ministers, other cabinet members and high-ranking military officers. The imperial court had also signalled its support for a Saigō statue and eventually donated 500 yen towards its construction.⁵³

However, due to criticism in the media realization of the Saigō statue had to wait almost ten years, until 1898. Before Saigō a statue of a "real" (and undisputed) symbol of loyalty to the imperial house – that of Kusunoki Masashige – was first necessary (it was completed in 1898 but was not erected until 1900). This statue was erected at the main entrance to the imperial palace, where it still stands today. The Saigō statue, which was initially to be placed at that very same spot, was erected in Ueno Park – a public space which was administered by the imperial household ministry but was still at a safe distance from the palace. Moreover, unlike Kusunoki Saigō "lost his horse" as a daily newspaper put it:⁵⁴ initial plans envisaged a statue of Saigō in parade uniform on horseback, but he was ultimately depicted walking his dog, dressed in a *yukata* (a casual summer garment). With

48 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 24 April 1892, p. 1.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 1 July 1893, p. 1.

52 *Yomiuri Shinbun* (5 December 1889, p. 2) lists as supporters: Sanjō Sanetomi; Itō Hirobumi; Inoue Kaoru; Itagaki Taisuke; Ōkuma Shigenobu; Kuroda Kiyotaka; Hijikata Hisamoto; Yamada Akiyoshi; Yamagata Aritomo; Matsukata Masayoshi; Enomoto Takeaki; Gotō Shōjirō; Katsu Kaishū; Ōgi Takatō; Kabayama Sukenori; Tani Tateki; Takashima Tomonosuke; Yoshii Tomozane; Soejima Taneomi; Terashima Munenori; Kuki Ryūichi; Nozu Michitsura; Nire Kagenori; Iwakura Koresada; Nagaoka Moriyoshi; Sasaki Takayuki; Shimazu Tadayoshi; Shinagawa Yajirō; Mōri Motonori and others.

53 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 19 December 1898, p. 3.

54 *Yomiuri Shinbun*, 1 July 1893, p. 1.

the building of the Saigō statue in 1898, Saigō Takamori was finally re-established as a symbol of *loyalty* and unblemished devotion to the imperial cause, and Saigō became one of the central figures of national identification in prewar Japan. Even today, his popularity as a national hero is hardly diminished.

While former opponents of the Meiji state's elite such as Ii and Saigō also came to be represented in the form of statues in public space, and sometimes as the nation's most glorious representatives in order to reduce *social* tensions, most statues functioned, above all, as a means of mitigating tensions between *localities and the nation*. In the case of many figures represented in the form of bronze statues in public space in Meiji Japan, it is difficult to tell whether these figures are shown in a national context or a local one. However, on examining the prospectuses of statues built for clearly "local heroes" or the "heroes of the home village" (*furusato no ijin*) and their inscriptions, we usually find references (with varying degrees of emphasis) to these figures' service to the *nation*. In general, local heroes were always presented as national heroes too.⁵⁵

A salient example is the erection of five statues of regional feudal rulers from the Mōri clan which had controlled western Japan since the sixteenth century and whose feudal domain of Chōshū had played a key role in the Meiji Revolution of 1868. The erection of these statues in a park in the city of Yamaguchi in 1899 clearly had a national objective, as indicated by the numerous national flags at the unveiling ceremony.⁵⁶ These statues were built to praise the Chōshū feudal lords' devotion to the emperor and the unification of "the nation". The prospectus for the statues – signed by such important figures as the former prime minister Itō Hirobumi and privy council member Hayashi Tomoyuki,⁵⁷ both natives of Chōshū and key figures within the Meiji oligarchy – also emphasizes the national context. The feudal lords who were clearly *local* in origin were re-interpreted within the framework of national Meiji-era politics:

*In a time of chaos (dōran), [the feudal rulers] were the only ones to prove themselves as loyalists [to the emperor] and they pacified (heitei) more than ten provinces in the regions of San'yō and San'in. [...] Later they proved their loyalty to the imperial family again and contributed considerably to the successful restoration of imperial power.*⁵⁸

It is hardly surprising that this depiction of these rulers from the era of (premodern) feudalism as defenders of imperial power, and thus as national heroes, omits any mention of the fact that in the "Time of Chaos" – i.e. the "period of the warring states" (*sengoku jidai*) in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – these feudal lords hardly cared about the

55 Ichinose, Shun'ya: "Nichiro sengo – Taiheiyō sensō-ki ni okeru senshisha kenshō to chiiki. 'Kyōdo no gunshin' Ōgoshi Kenkichi rikugun hohei chūsa no jirei kara" [Commemoration of War Dead between the Russo-Japanese War and the Pacific War. The Example of the 'War God of the Home Village' Lt. Colonel Ōgoshi Kenkichi], in: Nihonshi Kenkyū 501, 2004, pp. 149–175.

56 See the photograph of the unveiling ceremony in the monthly journal *Taiyō* [The Sun], 1 August 1899.

57 Itō, Hirobumi & Hayashi, Tomoyuki: Shuisho [Prospectus]. Unpublished document, 1891, author's collection; accessible at statues.japanesehistory.de/sources.html.

58 Ibid.

imperial court and the emperor (who lived in obscurity) and were mainly interested in strengthening their *local* autonomy and enlarging their feudal domains and lands. But the image of the Mōri daimyō as national heroes and imperial loyalists became known all over Japan, not only to visitors to Kameyama park in Yamaguchi: the national press⁵⁹ and journals and illustrated magazines⁶⁰ reported the erection of new statues and their unveiling ceremonies, providing illustrations, and thus raised awareness of the “historical achievements” of the Mōri lords as well as awareness of the statues at a national level. The Mōri lords became more than an object of merely local hero-worship; they became part of the national personality cult of modern Japan.

4. Conclusion

In the modern era Japan engaged intensively in the politics of national integration using, among other techniques, statue-based visual staging (*mise-en-scène*) in public space of national heroes, popular figures from Japanese history, the ancient ancestors of the nation and the founding fathers of modern Japan. Such statues constituted a visual expression of the four elements defined by Antony Smith as central to the construction of modern national identities:⁶¹ (a) the (cultural) *memory* of the nation (above all, idealized memories of a “golden age” of virtue, heroism, beauty, learning, holiness, power and wealth); (b) national *myths* and related religious beliefs; (c) national *symbols* and rituals, and (d) national *values* (or traditions) connected to the “ancestral homeland”. But Japanese statuary developed into more than a mere *expression* of national identity or a means of commemorating dead heroes in the context of the politics of collective memory. It evolved into an important visual strategy in the effort to *strengthen* the general population’s national consciousness through social education, and to establish awareness, above all, of the Japanese nation’s actual existence. While there was no centralized control over statue-building, central authorities and institutions were deeply involved in commissioning and financing public statues – particularly in the approval process – and therefore exerted indirect control over this form of visualization of the nation.

Previous research has emphasized the role of the print media (newspapers in particular) in generating a feeling of nationhood and in the development of nationalism in territories encompassing people who are not tied to one another through direct contact and social interaction.⁶² However, apart from the fact that newspapers were inaccessible to most of

59 Yomiuri Shinbun, 23 and 28 September 1891, p. 2; 26 July 1892, p. 2.

60 Taiyō [The Sun], 1 August 1899; Fūzoku Gahō [Illustrated Customs], 15 May 1899.

61 Antony D. Smith, LSE Centennial Lecture. The resurgence of nationalism? Myth and memory in the renewal of nations, in: The British Journal of Sociology 47/4, 1996, pp. 575–598, here 583–591; Smith, Nationalism and Modernism (footnote 12), pp. 41, 45f.

62 Lucian Pye (ed.), Communication and Political Development, Princeton 1963; Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities, London 1983; Yamamuro, Shin’ichi: Kokumin kokka keisei-ki no genron to media [Public Opinion and Media in the Formative Period of the Nation-State], in: Matsumoto, Sannosuke/Yamamuro, Shin’ichi (eds.), Genron to media [Public Opinion and Media], Tokyo 1990, pp. 477–540.

the population of prewar Japan, in the print media the idea of the nation remained vague and remote. It was therefore essential to utilize *visual media* such as the bronze statue – a medium that was reproducible, of course, in two-dimensional form in the *illustrated print* media (woodblock prints or *nishikie*, lithographs or *sekihanga* and early illustrated newspapers and journals) – so that a more personal and tangible idea of the nation could be conveyed to a larger segment of the population and create an emotional attachment. The new public monuments literally “gave a face” to the abstract and remote concept of the nation. As a consequence, they also facilitated the identification of “Japanese” with the nation: with *their* nation.

These representative symbols of the nation and the associated historical memory evoked a sense of proximity and identity, and thus their staging in public space as a means of public education strengthened *loyalty* to the nation-state and its institutions. Through the medium of the statue in public space, segments of the population could be reached which did not read newspapers and were beyond the reach of the national education offered by the newly created school system. Thus the bronze statue played an important role in the process of consolidating national consciousness. To adapt Eugene Weber’s famous phrase,⁶³ the expansion of public statuary into the countryside and, eventually, to every corner of Japanese territory – including the colonial territories⁶⁴ – made a strong contribution to the process of turning “peasants into Japanese”, of creating the Japanese nation and fostering awareness of its actual existence among its members.

63 Eugen Joseph Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: the Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*, Stanford 1976.

64 Sven Saaler, *Shokuminchi tôchi to ningen sùhai. Nihon to Doitsu no shokuminchi ni okeru dôzô* [Colonial Rule and Personality Cult. Statues in Japanese and German Colonial Territories], in: Gotô Shinpei no kai kaihō, no. 2 (2006), pp. 51–59.