

**Japanese Students at Cambridge University  
in the Meiji Era, 1868-1912:  
Pioneers for the Modernization of Japan  
(FREE PREVIEW)**

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**With an Introduction by Sir John Boyd, K.C.M.G.**

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Kikuchi Dairoku (1855-1917) the 'hero' of this book  
(Cambridge Antiquarian Society)

Among many other honours bestowed on him, Baron Kikuchi was a Cambridge wrangler (first class mathematician); Professor (1877-98), Dean of the Faculty of Science (1881-93) and President of the Imperial University of Tokyo (1898-1901); Minister of Education (1901-03); Principal of *Gakushūin*, The Peers' School (1904-05) and third President of the Imperial University of Kyoto (1908-12).

## **Introduction by Sir John Boyd, KCMG**

**(Master of Churchill College, Cambridge and  
formerly British ambassador to Japan, 1992-96)**

I was delighted to be invited to contribute an introduction to this excellent study. Japan is a topic close to my heart. The fate of Japan can never be a matter of indifference to Britain. The Meiji Restoration remains a powerful theme for historians everywhere – and offers continuing lessons as Japan faces up to the need for extensive reform of her systems. And Cambridge, whether then or now, watches developments in Japan with particular interest and sympathy.

The challenge remains – ‘reform or die’. Mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Japan was resolute in grasping the challenge to her national and cultural survival posed by Western skills in firearms, infrastructure and, as then perceived, governance. The highly intelligent and motivated young Japanese who responded so enthusiastically remain heroes, as much in our culture as in Japan’s. No English reader can fail to be stirred, sometimes puzzled and often even a little embarrassed by Japan’s choice of Britain as a leading model for Meiji Japan’s reform – though Count Ōkuma’s reasons in his memoirs remain persuasive. At all events the personal persistence and ingenuity of those first young visitors to London, then Glasgow, Manchester, Newcastle and elsewhere, and their intense application in mastering British technology, building systems, engineering and navigation, still strike a chord.

But technology was not Britain’s only strength. This is where Cambridge comes in, with its particular leaning towards abstract ideas, underpinned by a distinct intellectual and collegiate style. The heart of the saga described so ably by Noboru Koyama unfolds beside the River Cam. Many of the Japanese students here in those years were remarkable, but it is no doubt right to focus on the outstandingly able, articulate, original and culturally confident Kikuchi Dairoku. The tribute such figures paid to late Victorian British society remains, to our eyes, something of a curiosity. But they certainly targeted the essential Cambridge – clear heads; skills in mathematics, physics and engineering; a free flow of ideas; a readiness to listen to others; and a high respect for evidence and proof. Through Kikuchi and his colleagues this essence passed effectively into the Japanese intellectual landscape.

The Cambridge link with Japan remains, I am glad to say, a major fact. Japan's standing in the University Library, in the Faculty, in the scientific laboratories, in artistic appreciation and social discourse continues to speak for itself. Cambridge these days offers a global rather than local platform, bringing value added for all concerned. Japan for its part has chosen to develop important professional partnerships in and around Cambridge, from advanced physics to cell-biology to cultural promotion. We see about us Japanese researchers, fellows of Colleges, visiting academics of all kinds, embedded laboratories, occasional Japanese orchestras and much else. At all levels Cambridge has confidence in Japan's long-term potential and welcomes signs of economic recovery.

It was a particular pleasure for the Cambridge community to be involved in the arrangements for Japan 2001. We were determined to express our strong and continuing interest in Japan and our support for new trends emerging from Japan. The 'photograph' that emerged was of a society still based on determination, vigour, subtlety and individual inspiration. Among many delights it was a particular satisfaction to host a touring exhibition of photographs of Anglo-Japanese contacts in the Meiji period. Behind the formal Victorian suits and top hats it was still easy to spot the curiosity, adaptability and courage – not to mention the youth – of those early visitors. They took up the British challenge with a will. One hundred or more years later they retain the capacity to impress.

April, 2004

John Boyd  
Churchill College, Cambridge

## Translator's Acknowledgements & Preface

The main purposes of this book are threefold: first, to promote Anglo-Japanese friendship; next, to enhance and increase mutual understanding between Japan and the United Kingdom; and lastly, to bind together even more closely and explicitly than hitherto two ancient entities, namely the University of Cambridge and the nation of Japan. Furthermore, this translation is dedicated respectfully to the Japanese students at the University – past, present and future – in the hope and expectation that the mutually beneficial process of academic and cultural exchanges which began with this story's central protagonist Kikuchi Dairoku in the mid-nineteenth century may be continued through the present 21<sup>st</sup> century – still in its infancy – and long beyond, in perpetuity.

The translator takes this opportunity to acknowledge the kindness of the author Mr. Noboru Koyama (or Koyama Noboru, to write his name in the Japanese order) for agreeing to the idea of an English translation which I first proposed to him in June 2002, and in various other matters, but especially his assistance with the trickier translations of classical Japanese (*kanbun*) to be found in Suematsu Kenchō's elegant letters to his powerful patron, the oligarch Itō Hirobumi (see Chapter Four); with some newspaper extracts of a similar level of difficulty in Chapter Five; and with the checking of names, facts and other data. He has also provided much additional material for the bibliography and most of the appendices, none of which were in the original Japanese book.

For his part, Mr. Koyama has asked that special mention be made here of the kind and helpful assistance he has received from Dr. Elisabeth Leedham-Green, a respected authority on the history of the University and the author of *A Concise History of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), both in the preparation of the original Japanese book and in the checking of this English version. The translator adds his thanks to her, to Sir John Boyd for his persuasive introduction and to the publishers for kindly agreeing to publish the book.

In addition the translator thanks his colleagues, Professors Gyōichi Nogami, Tetsutarō Yoshinaga and Robert Long of the Kyushu Institute of Technology, for their helpful ideas and professional comments; his friends Dr. Bert Edström, Mr. Martin J. Miles (M.A. Oxon.) and Mr. John. C. Evans (M.A., LL.M. Cantab.) for their objective views and encouragement; and as always his wife Asako for her support. Special thanks are also due to the St. John's College Archivist Mr. Malcolm Underwood for his comments (see Chapter

Three endnotes); the Assistant Librarian Jonathan Harrison for providing a photograph of the last Wooden Spoon; and the St. John's College Council for kindly permitting its reproduction in this book.

The Wooden Spoon is a quaint and venerable but now – since the publishing of tripos exam results alphabetically by class rather than score order began in 1910 – more or less defunct Cambridge custom. It apparently much impressed Kikuchi, whose account of it later allegedly influenced his students in Japan who alas misunderstood it, and not for the better (see Chapter Three). The term ‘wooden spoon’ survives in the English language, incidentally, to denote the position of the last-placed nation in what is now called the Six Nations Rugby Championship.

This book was first published in a paperback edition in October 1999, with the Japanese title *Hatenkō: 'Meiji Ryūgakusei' Retsuden – DaiEi Teikoku ni mananda Hitobito* (roughly translatable as “The Unprecedented Lives of Meiji Students Overseas: The people who learned from the British Empire”) by Kodansha Co. Ltd. of Tokyo (Kodansha Sensho Metier series no. 168). The present English title is considered to be a more accurate description of the contents of Mr. Koyama's research than the original Japanese one. All and any errors in this translation are the responsibility of the translator. Several endnotes, designated as translator's notes and intended to assist English readers, have been added to the endnotes in the original text.

This study has been translated into English by Ian C. Ruxton (M.A. Cantab.), who is an associate professor of English in the Department of Human Sciences, Kyushu Institute of Technology (K.I.T.), Kitakyushu, Japan. His main research interest is the career of the influential diplomat Sir Ernest Satow (1843-1929) who plays a not insignificant role in the intriguing story about to unfold in the following pages. (See Satow's recommendation in 1905 to Cambridge University regarding the examining of Chinese and Japanese students in classical Chinese in lieu of Latin and Greek, in Chapter Five and Appendices II and III; the extracts from Satow's diary at the beginning of Chapter Six; and the mention of his Japanese book collection in the Postscript.)

The translator respectfully wishes to remind readers that this book is in essence only a translation with added endnotes and appendices, and to record that he has attempted to achieve the delicate balance between preserving the essence of the Japanese original and paying due attention to readability in English. Wholesale rewriting for a Western audience would have turned the book into something quite new and different. It would no longer be a

translation in that case, and valuable data, of which there is a great deal, might have been lost in the process.

Japanese people frequently argue in an inductive way, e.g. the announcement of the judicial decision of the death penalty – subject to appeal – pronounced on the leader of the infamous Aum cult Shōkō Asahara (whose real name was Matsumoto Chizuo) on February 27, 2004 after a trial lasting almost eight years, was preceded by a lengthy exposition of the *reasons* for the death sentence. A similar tendency towards inductive reasoning may be found in this book. There is also a modest degree of self-acknowledged repetition, and in parts the text may read like a lecture transcript. But such is the nature of cultural differences, and the understanding and forbearance of readers is politely and humbly requested.

## **Preface**

The underlying, yet also overarching, theme of this precious and informative scholarly work is the way in which the modernization of Japan – essential to preserve the country's independence from the real threat of colonization by one or more of the European Powers, notably France and Britain – was achieved in what the author interestingly calls ‘the extended Meiji period’ (1850-1914). This extension includes the dramatic and intense period of the so-called *Bakumatsu* (the end of the Tokugawa shogunate, 1853-67). Japan's modernization (i.e. Westernization) was accomplished with a speed and energy entirely unprecedented in world history.

Why and how was Japan able to modernize so rapidly? Part of the answer lies in the remarkable efforts of the students overseas, at Cambridge and elsewhere in Europe and the United States. The other side of the coin was the employment by the government and private concerns, at great cost and throughout the period, of more than 3,000 foreign professors and experts of various kinds in Japan itself. These were the so-called ‘hired foreigners’, or *o-yatoi gaikokujin*. (See the role of Captain Nathan Algren, the military adviser played by Tom Cruise in the recent film *Last Samurai* – loosely based on the life of the iconic Saigō Takamori - for a good, if fictitious, example.)

During the Tokugawa or Edo period (1603-1867) Japan was deliberately prevented from almost all diplomatic and commercial contacts with the rest of the world by the Tokugawa shogunate's ruthlessly enforced policy of *sakoku* (national seclusion, literally ‘chained country’). From 1641 nobody could leave or enter on pain of death. The only pinhole of



light shed onto the relative obscurity of a Japan developing in its own way and at its own pace, was from the Dutch East India Company's 'factory', a trading outpost on a tiny fan-shaped artificial island called Dejima (sometimes Deshima) in Nagasaki on the western part of the island of Kyushu. Western enlightenment – mainly technology and science, including medicine – was imported to Japan through the translation and study of texts from the Dutch language obtained at Nagasaki. This vital process of technology transfer was called *Rangaku* ("Dutch Studies").

It was during the *Bakumatsu* period (1853-67) that translations from Dutch into Japanese became obsolete. The country began to open up after the visits of the Black Ships of the American commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (1794-1858) in 1853 and 1854, and the first students went overseas to study about a decade later, sent by the ambitious Satsuma and Chōshū clans, and also the *Bakufu* (shogunate) in 1866 (see Chapter Two). This new process accelerated after the proclamation at the start of the Meiji ('enlightened rule') era of the five-article Charter Oath (*Gokajō no Seimon*) on March 14, 1868, signed by the boy Emperor (1852-1912), the last article of which read: "Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundation of Imperial Rule." (*Chishiki wo sekai ni motome, dai ni kōki wo shinki subeshi.*)

The immediate consequence of this bold and dramatic declaration of policy was the despatch of the diplomatic (and perforce investigative) Iwakura Mission to the United States and Europe (1871-73), which has recently been the subject of much academic research and discussion (see e.g. *The Iwakura Mission in America & Europe: A New Assessment*, ed. Ian Nish, Japan Library, 1998). The long-term result, however, was the sending of many young students overseas, as described in part here. And where better to send them than to one of the leading universities of Britain, then the chief imperialist Power and the greatest potential threat to Japan's national sovereignty?

It may only be a secondary theme, but this book also provokes reflection on the true nature and value of a Cambridge education, from both British and Japanese perspectives (see especially Chapter Six). The foundations are shown to rest solidly on Christianity, which presented a particular and unfamiliar challenge to Japanese students chiefly accustomed to Buddhism and Shintō. In addition, the perception that great emphasis is placed on the education of gentlemen is perhaps surprising, but certainly not every student entering Cambridge aims for a first class degree. There are various benefits derived from a Cambridge degree, many of which are clearly non-academic (e.g. a start in journalism,

acting, politics or even a sporting career) and learning the ways of a gentleman – the chief and explicitly stated aim of Inagaki Manjirō’s Japanese Club (see Appendix VI) – may indeed be one of them.

Some profound questions, such as the following, remain. Did the consolatory Wooden Spoon in fact reflect a very British undergraduate scepticism about academic ‘prizes’, wisely and generously tolerated by the academics themselves as a kind of end-of-term frolic, a chance to let off steam after the toil of preparing for the tripos examinations? In Japan there have never been wooden spoons for low achievement, but silver watches for outstanding ones (see Appendix I). Secondly, does not the happy reputation of Britain among the Japanese people as the country of gentlemen (*Shinshi no Kuni*), which persists to the present day, stem at least in part from the Japanese students at Cambridge, and what they themselves believed they had learned there? And lastly, why does Cambridge precede Oxford in the “Cambridge & Oxford Society, Tokyo”, known in Japanese as the *Kengyūkai* and celebrating its centenary in 2005? This last matter may in part be a neat illustration of the way in which almost all Things Western are subjected to some minor modification (usually an improvement, though Oxford men may demur in this case!) when they reach the shores of the Japanese archipelago.

Finally, if this book contributes in even a very small way to promoting the further development and recognition of the importance of East Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge in these times of severe economies and closures of similar departments elsewhere in Britain (e.g. at Durham in 2003), and also to debunking the myth that the University is solely for a pampered and well-to-do minority, the translator will feel that all his aims have been achieved. For the truth is that, in the single-minded pursuit of academic excellence, the University nowadays makes great efforts to cast its net as widely as possible to embrace the most talented individuals from all social strata and all races, as it has always done in the past. This dedication has made Cambridge into a world-class university, and will keep it at the forefront of the academic world in the centuries to come.

August, 2004

Ian Ruxton  
Kyushu Institute of Technology

### **Translator's notes on conventions used in the text:**

- 1) Japanese names are presented in the Japanese way, i.e. family names first and given names second. Western names are presented in the Western (opposite) fashion.
- 2) Dates given according to Japanese imperial reign names (*nengō*) are as they appear in the original text, followed by the same dates according to the Western calendar, e.g. Meiji 16 (1883) or sometimes vice versa, e.g. 1883 (Meiji 16).
- 3) Further details not in the original text have occasionally been added in parentheses, e.g. the year of birth and death of certain well-known Japanese persons as given in the Kojien dictionary according to the Western calendar.
- 4) Romanization of Japanese words has been according to the Kenkyusha (modified Hepburn) form, e.g.. Shinbun (not Shimbun) for 'newspaper'; 'Monbushō' (not Mombushō) for the Japanese Ministry of Education etc.

## Brief conversion chart for the Japanese and Western calendars:

<u>Meiji</u>			<u>Taishō</u>	
1	1868		1	1912
2	1869		5	1916
3	1870		10	1921
5	1872		15	1926
8	1875			
10	1877		<u>Shōwa</u>	
13	1880		1	1926
15	1882		5	1930
18	1885		10	1935
20	1887		20	1945
23	1890		30	1955
25	1892		40	1965
28	1895		50	1975
30	1897		60	1985
33	1900		64	1989
35	1902			
38	1905		<u>Heisei</u>	
40	1907		1	1989
43	1910		2	1990
45	1912		7	1995
			12	2000
			17	2005

Note: Emperor Kōmei ruled 1846-1866. The *nengō* during his reign were as follows:

1844-48	Kōka	1860-61	Man'en	1865-68	Keiō
1848-54	Kaei	1861-64	Bun'kyū		
1854-60	Ansei	1864-65	Genji		

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## Prologue

### The Legend of the Top Student

In Shōwa 42 (1967) Minobe Ryōkichi (1904-84) of the reform camp was elected Tokyo prefectural governor for the first time. The noted critic and biographer Kimura Ki (1894-1979) wrote an article entitled *Minobe Ryōkichi no Idai na Sofu* which introduced the “glorious career” of Minobe’s distinguished grandfather Kikuchi Dairoku (1855-1917), and was published in the July 1967 edition of *Bungei Shunjū* magazine. Kimura described Kikuchi’s activities at Cambridge as follows:

#### Top Student at Cambridge

It is not necessarily rare for teachers and students to stare in wonder at the genius of a Japanese student overseas. The pioneer was Kikuchi Dairoku, who after sufficient preparation entered Cambridge University and majored in mathematics, in no time at all surpassing his fellow students, coming top in all the examinations and never once conceding pole position to anyone.

His patriotic British classmates found this a regrettable affront to their John Bull pride, and plotted to recapture this honour from him.

Second in the class was a student called Brown, also a young man of prodigious academic ability. All the other British students encouraged him, saying ‘We are unable to contain our anger at that Asian student. But you are the only one who can beat him. So do your best, and put him in his place.’ Brown tried his hardest, but still he could not outshine Kikuchi. Then a heaven-sent opportunity came one winter: Kikuchi caught a cold, was hospitalised and could not attend classes.

His classmates, seeing this as an excellent opportunity to install Brown at the top of the class if only once, agreed between them that none of them would lend his lecture notes to Kikuchi while he was absent.

In due course Kikuchi left hospital and the term examinations were held. The British students were secretly preparing their song of victory as they awaited the results, but amazingly Kikuchi had not budged an inch from the top of the

class. At this the British students admitted defeat. ‘That Japanese student is too much!’ they said. In fact while Kikuchi had been in hospital Brown had visited him frequently and lent him a clean copy of his notes so that he would not fall behind in his studies, and had thus secretly assisted him.

Until the end of his life Kikuchi never ceased to talk of Brown’s gentlemanly conduct. ‘I have never been so moved in my life. I owe deep debts of gratitude in my career to more people than my ten fingers can count, but it was Brown’s great and unstinting generosity which affected me the most.’

### **A Glittering Career**

So what kind of person was he, this Kikuchi Dairoku, this legendary man who achieved top marks at Cambridge? Kikuchi was active in the Meiji era as an overseas student in Britain, mathematician, university professor, educational administrator and politician. If we list the main posts he held, they amount to a glorious career: Professor and President of Tokyo Imperial University, Minister of Education, Baron, Principal of *Gakushūin* (the Peers’ School), President of Kyoto Imperial University, member of the House of Peers, Principal of the Imperial Academy, Privy Councillor, and first Head of the Science Research Institute.

Kikuchi’s degrees were as follows: B.A. and M.A. of Cambridge University, B.A. of London University, Doctor of Science (*Rigaku Hakase/Hakushi* awarded by Monbushō, the Japanese Ministry of Education), and in addition honorary law doctorates of Glasgow, Manchester and Rutgers universities. Kikuchi Dairoku was also at the centre of the most excellent family of scholars of modern Japan. His grandfather Mitsukuri Genpo (1799-1863) was a *rangakusha* (scholar of Dutch learning) at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate (*Bakumatsu*, 1853-67), and his father Mitsukuri Shūhei (1826-1889) was also famous as a scholar of Western learning and educator.

Mitsukuri Rinshō (1846-1897) the famous legal scholar of the Meiji era, was a cousin and elder brother-in-law of Kikuchi. The physicist and Tokyo Imperial University professor Nagaoka Hantarō (1865-1950) was Rinshō’s son-in-law. The renowned statistician Kure Bunsō (1851-1918) and the psychopathologist Kure Shūzō (1865-1932) were Kikuchi Dairoku’s cousins. The famous zoologist and professor of Tokyo Imperial University Mitsukuri Kakichi (1857-1909) and the scholar of Western history and professor of Tokyo



Imperial University Mitsukuri Genpachi (1862-1919) were Kikuchi's younger brothers.

The anthropologist and Tokyo Imperial University professor Tsuboi Shōgorō (1863-1913) was the husband of a half-sister by a different mother. Mitsukuri Keigo (1852-1871) was Kikuchi's elder brother who accompanied him to study in London at the end of the Tokugawa shogunate (*Bakumatsu*). Keigo was said to be an even greater genius than Kikuchi, but unfortunately he died of a heart attack and drowned while swimming in Tokyo's Sumida River in Meiji 4 (1871).

Kikuchi Dairoku's children numbered in total four sons and eight daughters, of whom the eldest son seems to have died young (see Appendix VII). As befits a family of scholars, each of his daughters married an eminent scholar. His third daughter married Minobe Tatsukichi (1873-1948), the legal scholar and professor of Tokyo Imperial University noted mainly for his theory of the Imperial role in the constitution (*Tennō kikanseisu*); his fourth daughter married Hatoyama Hideo (1884-1946), the authority on civil law and professor at Tokyo Imperial University; and the sixth daughter married Suehiro Izutarō (1888-1951), the authority on labour law and professor of Tokyo Imperial University. Minobe Ryōkichi who was the son of Tatsukichi was, as already stated above, the grandson of Kikuchi Dairoku and famous as the governor of Tokyo prefecture. Hatoyama Hideo was the younger brother of Hatoyama Ichirō, the former prime minister (1883-1959, prime minister 1954-56).

Kikuchi Dairoku's sons were also distinguished men. His second son Kikuchi Taiji, who became his heir, studied at Cambridge as his father had done after graduating top of the Physics course at Tokyo Imperial University. Kikuchi Dairoku's third son Kikuchi Kenzō was a professor of zoology at Tokyo Imperial University, and his fourth son Kikuchi Seishi (1902-1974) was a leading experimental physicist, whose achievements were recognised internationally as the person who discovered the "Kikuchi line". After the Second World War he became the first head of Tokyo University's atomic research institute, and also became chairman of the board of directors of the Japan Nuclear Power Institute and the President of Tokyo Science University (*Tōkyō Rika Daigaku*).

Kikuchi Dairoku, by virtue of his academic achievements, work and family connections became the very pivot of the university and educational systems in Meiji Japan. As befitted that position, his career was adorned with the highest honours which the academic world of the Meiji era could bestow. Probably few people could boast such a glittering career in the fields of university and other education as Kikuchi Dairoku.

## **The Realities and Meaning of Study in Britain**

It is no exaggeration to say that Japan's modernization began with study overseas, and in the Meiji era many young people in search of models for modernization boldly travelled to Europe and America. Not all of them studied at universities, but in fact most of the Meiji students aimed at universities. Many Japanese chose British universities because the British Empire at the time was at its zenith.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (created in 1800 and made up until 1922 of England, Scotland, Wales and the whole of Ireland) had the following universities at the start of the Meiji period in 1868: Scotland had four (St. Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh); England, the main part of the country, also had only four (Oxford and Cambridge - commonly conflated to "Oxbridge" - London and Durham). Ireland (now the Republic of Ireland) had Trinity College in Dublin (Dublin University) but there were still no universities in Wales and Northern Ireland.

Of the English universities, Durham was at the time just a small theological college in the country, so at the point when Japan began to modernize in the early Meiji years the representative universities of England were Oxford, Cambridge and London. As this book will show in detail, Cambridge was overwhelmingly more important to the Japanese students than Oxford. Also in the nineteenth century London University was a purely exam-based institution, and Kikuchi Dairoku was the only Japanese to graduate from London before the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This book will not attempt to be a general survey of all the Japanese students who studied in Britain, but will be centred on Kikuchi Dairoku, the first Japanese to graduate from Cambridge University and the only one to graduate from London University in the nineteenth century. The book will attempt to investigate the realities and meaning of study in Britain in the Meiji era, by focusing on Kikuchi Dairoku and the men who followed him (his *kōhai*), what they experienced and what kind of lives they lived.

--End of Preview--

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