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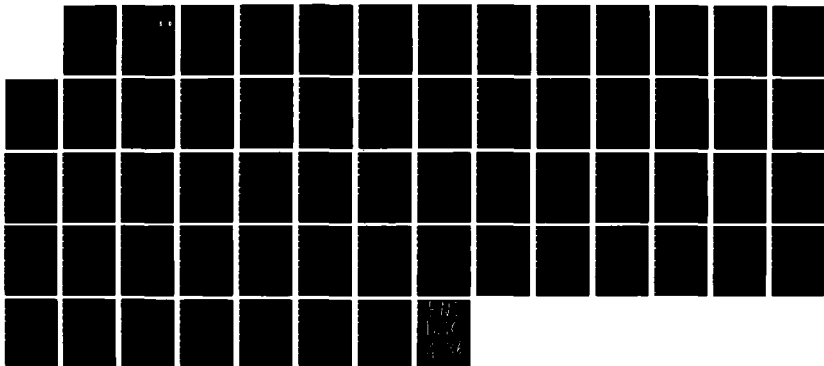
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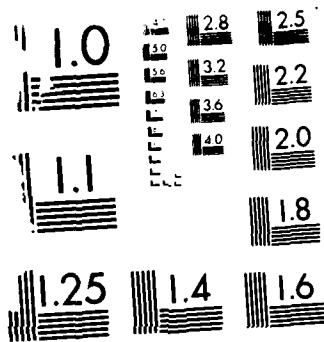
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NAME OF CANDIDATE: JO H. KINKAID, LtCol., USAF

PAPER APPROVED:

Joseph E. Goldberg  
JOSEPH GOLDBERG, PhD  
Adjunct Professor

Barbara J. Kuennecke  
BARBARA J. KUENNECKE, CAPT. USAF  
Assistant Dean For Graduate Programs

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THE USE OF TERRORIST TACTICS AS INSTRUMENTS FOR CAUSING  
CHANGE IN JAPAN: 1920-1936

by

Jo H. Kinkaid  
LtCol, USAF

Special Seminar Paper submitted to the Faculty of the  
Defense Intelligence College in partial fulfillment of  
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January 1986

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## INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, I will attempt to set the stage for, discuss the groups and methods used in and the results of the use of terrorist tactics in Japan during the 1920s and 1930s. This is not meant to be, nor could it be an exhaustive study. Events from the opening of Japan to the period of primary concern are summarized to provide the reader, who may not be familiar with Japanese history and the unique situation which pertained, adequate background information to understand what occurred in the period between the world wars. Internal and external events during the 20s and 30s are then examined as is the makeup and motivations of some of the groups who played roles in the various terrorist acts. The key acts themselves are outlined and finally conclusions are drawn about the meaning of the events.

When dealing with a country as different culturally as Japan is from the west, some consideration must be given to cultural disparity. While the material included here is not extensive, it does highlight the operant differences necessary to understand where culture impacts on the events discussed.

The use of Japanese names can cause some confusion. Here the Japanese method is used, i.e., the mane is written family name first then the given name, e.g., Smith John.

Transliteration of Japanese terms can be a problem. Whenever doubts arose, I resorted to the Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary for definitions. For example, the terms Bakufu and Shogun are important to understanding the historic role of the military in ruling Japan. Bakufu refers to the feudal military government. Shogun can be translated as generalissimo and is the title usually used to describe the individual who headed the Bakufu. If doubts existed about an individual or organization, I turned to the excellent glossary and bibliography provided by Maruyama Masao in his Modern Japanese Politics or The Bibliographic Dictionary of Japanese History edited by Iwao Suiichi.

A few words about sources needs to be included. No discussion of terrorism in Japan during the prewar period can be written without use of Hugh Byas's Government by Assassination. It is a first hand account written by the New York Times correspondent on the scene. However, it must be read with caution because it contains some inconsistencies and wartime biases but it also has more detail than any other source. The issue of fascism in Japan is avoided. Based on my readings it does not appear that the events described can or should be directly equated to the European experience. For those who wish to pursue this issue in depth, I would



recommend Maruyama, cited supra, or George Wilson's elegantly argued "A New Look at the Problem of 'Japanese Facsism'" in Turner's Reapprails of Fascism.

This paper covers the reigns of three Japanese Emperors. For the ease of the readers, the reign names, their meanings, and reign dates are listed below:

Meiji	(Enlightened Rule)	1868-1912
Taisho	(Great Righteousness)	1912-1926
Showa	(Enlightened Peace)	1926-Present

Finally, when discussing terrorism, you must face the definitional problem. This is the rock upon which many a discussion of terrorism and tactics has foundered. To keep the issue simple, I will use the loose definition I use when teaching the introduction to terrorism portion of my course here at the Defense Intelligence College, i.e., the threat or use of violence against a government or institution to cause change.

## BACKGROUND

### HISTORICAL

Japan's emergence into the world of the mid-nineteenth century was not entirely of its own choosing. Out of concern over growing western influence, particularly that of various missionary groups Shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu, in 1636, had banished the last of the foreigners from Japan; closed its borders to all foreigners, save for a few Dutch allowed to remain on an island in Nagasaki harbor; and proscribed all contact between Japanese and foreigners under pain of death.(1) Even though the closure edict was to remain in effect until 1854, some contact occurred between various groups of Japanese, often members of the aristocracy, and the Dutch, particularly when the traders made their annual trip to the Bakufu's court in Edo (now Tokyo). Out of these contacts developed a small group of officials with some understanding of the west and the progress being made there in all fields during the Industrial Revolution. These leaders also understood the impossibility of defeating the west should a confrontation occur. This concern was reinforced by China's defeat in the First Opium War (1839-1842).(2)

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the power of the house of Tokugawa was in decline. Famine, plague, rice riots, etc., all contributed to the weakening hold of the Bakufu.(3)

Admiral Perry's visit in 1853 and return in 1854 convinced the government that the time had come to deal with the west.

Other nations rapidly followed the US lead. The world of the 1850s was one of rapid growth of empires during the second great wave of European colonialization. The quest for markets initially provided the driving force for the expansion. The Industrial Revolution had created more goods than could be absorbed at home and in other traditional market places. Therefore, new outlets had to be found. Asia, China in particular, appeared ideal for such undertakings. China had a large population and land mass, it was ruled by a weak central government, and was not industrializing. Like Japan, the country, ruler and people, was strongly xenophobic. China was; however, unable to close its borders to outside influence and trade with the west was permitted in specified treaty ports. Merchantilism in its worst form triumphed in the Second Opium War (1856-1860).(4) China was forced to accept an "unequal treaty" after the British and French captured Peiching. The treaty, inter alia, required the legalization of the sale of opium in China.

The opening of Japan led to a conscious effort to learn as much as possible about the west as rapidly as possible. The opening also led to a struggle for control of the government. The Tokugawas had held power as Bakufu in Edo,

while the emperor had, in theory, ruled from Kyoto. In fact, the emperor had very little power to influence any thing in Japan. In 1867, the last Tokugawa resigned, the Emperor Meiji was "restored" to power in 1868, and the throne was moved to newly renamed Tokyo in 1869. The nature of this "restoration" assumes a large role in the events of the 1920s and 1930s. Basically restoration involved a reaction by some of the Samurai to the Bakufu's granting "unequal treaties" to western powers.(5) The exception taken was often violent, e.g., the Tokugawa minister responsible for the 1858 treaty with the US was assassinated in 1860.(6) Those opposed to the treaty and any dealings with the west "associated resistance to foreigners with the Imperial Will and invoked the sanction of the Sun Goddess to rebuke the Bakufu's first minister."(7) In clashes with the west, the Satsuma and Chosu clans had further illustrated Japan's inability to defend itself. The Bakufu responded to the western challenge by attempting to force radical reforms which alarmed a number of its supporters. The two clans who had clashed with the west united against the Tokugawas leading to civil war. They were soon joined by a third clan, Tosa. Even with the resignation of the last of the Tokugawas, friction between the supporters of the emperor and the Bakufu did not end immediately. Unrest in various forms continued into the 1870s. While the change

in governance appeared to be dramatic and to mark a major break with the past in response to a strong stimulus from the west, in reality, it was only a coup within the ruling class.(8)

Japan was faced with the formidable task of creating a modern state capable of taking a place in the existing world. The nature of the restoration helped the new leaders make the transition. Since the coup had been within the ruling elite, there was little pressure from below for change. In many parts of the country, local administration did not change appreciably. Therefore, the people responsible for developing the new government had time to consider various courses of action and their consequences. Changes did occur. Fuedalism was abolished. The old Han (fuedal fiefdoms) were reorganized and the number reduced. Legal class distinctions were abolished. Land surveys were introduced and land taxes established. The government of Emperor Meiji was making its power felt in matters where the Bafuku had had little influence.(9) The leadership around the emperor who were responsible for instituting the reforms and seeing them through were a select group of nobles, many of whom came from the clans which had supported the restoration (Satsuma, Chosu, and Tosa). During the Meiji Era, forty-four percent of the cabinet ministers came from these provinces.(10) These

advisors, called Genro, traveled extensively in the west and were instrumental in adapting western ideas and concepts to the Japanese situation. The constitution of 1868, drawn up to amplify the Charter Oath which had established the aims of the Meiji imperium, did not contain provisions for an elected parliament.(11) However, agitation soon developed for the creation of an elected body to represent the population. It was announced in 1881 that a "decision to grant a constitution had been taken in principle and would be implemented in 1890."(12) Ito Hirobumi, a member of the Genro was the head of the committee that created the new constitution. In 1882, Ito and his committee traveled to Europe where they spent eighteen months studying various forms of government. They were particularly impressed with the newly established Prussian Government. Prior to promulgating the constitution, Ito instituted other reforms as precursors. In 1884, a new peerage of five ranks was established and 500 members appointed. The following year, Ito replaced the Executive Council with a European style cabinet and he became premier. Both of these important steps were taken prior to the development of the constitution. Provisions for a House of Peers, to be equal to the elected house, were to be included. The creation of a cabinet established the precedent that the ministers were responsible

to the emperor, not the parliament. In 1888, the Privy Council was created as the highest advisory body of the state. Appointments to the Privy Council were to be made by the existing government and it was forbidden to receive petitions from the public.(13) The executive was all powerful. The Japanese Constitution was designed to preclude dissent. The rights to declare war, to conclude treaties, and of supreme command (giving the service chiefs direct access to the throne) were reserved to the emperor. If parliament did not pass a budget, the previous year's could be used. Suffrage was extremely limited. Only males over 25 who paid a fifteen yen a year direct tax were allowed to vote. This limited the electorate to 500,000 out of a population of forty million.(14) The tax limit was lowered in 1900 and 1920 and finally abolished in 1925. While not perfect or really very liberal, the constitution provided the Japanese with more freedom and protection under law than they had ever known.(15)

Japan's emergence as a modern state was basically complete with the promulgation of the constitution in 1889, and the new civil code coming into force in 1898. Progress on the civil code led to the renegotiation of the "unequal treaties" as early as 1894.(16) Japan had gained a degree of international equality.

Japan had long been aware of the conquer or be conquered international environment. During the 1870s, Japan started to look for areas where she might be able to expand as well as revived her historic interest in controlling Korea.(17) In 1874, China acquiesced to Japan's assertion of control over the Ryukyu Islands after several centuries of unofficial joint control. In 1875, she took over control of the northern Kurile chain from Russia.(18) Next, Japan demonstrated it had learned the lesson of 1854 well and forced Korea into negotiating a treaty of friendship and commerce. This effort was precipitated by concern over Russian expansion and Korea's role as a tributary to China.(19) China reacted strongly to the treaties claiming that Korea as a vassal state could not negotiate treaties. The disagreement continued until 1884 when Japanese and Chinese troops clashed in Seoul. Negotiations led to a withdrawal of the troops, but no lessening of tensions.(20) In 1888, Yamagata Aritomo, another Genro, produced a memorandum which reflected official (court) thinking on the international situation. The document noted:

That Asia seemed destined to be an arena for fierce conflict among western nations, particularly Russia and Britain. India, China and Korea would be involved in war. The involvement of Korea was especially to be feared as conflict in the peninsula could drag Japan into war. It was therefore



incumbent upon Japan to seek Korea's "independence" so that it would not come under the influence of a western power.(21)

In June 1894, a number of local anti-western disturbances broke out in Korea. The king acting as a vassal called for Chinese help. The Chinese sent troops and the Japanese responded by calling the Chinese action a violation of the 1885 convention. The situation deteriorated rapidly into the Sino-Japanese War. The war was short resulting in a decisive victory for Japan. In the Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) Japan gained the independence of Korea, control of Formosa and the Pescadores, the opening of additional ports to foreign trade and a cash indemnity large enough to pay for the war and to help Japan develop its heavy industry.(22) Japan emerged from the war with an empire, the only Asian nation to gain imperial status.

Above all, the Japanese viewed their country an imperialist, a member of the select group of strong powers. For them this meant that the nation could behave as a civilized power, as a respectable participant in the game of imperialistic politics.(23)

This feeling of having "arrived" was tempered just before the scheduled signing of the treaty. China had agreed to cede the Liaotung Peninsula to Japan as part of the settlement. On 23 April, the representatives of France, Germany and Russia "informed Tokyo that their governments viewed with concern

the prospects of the Liaotung Peninsula being transferred to Japan."(24) The ostensible reason was concern over China, but each had its own agenda. The Japanese acquiesced as they had no choice. However, the actions of the western powers caused great bitterness and led Japan to rapidly expand its armed forces to preclude being treated in a similar manner in the future.

Japan soon looked to China proper for further expansion. This was a long standing interest which was heightened by the actions of the other imperialists. In 1896, Russia secured the right of way for constructing a railway across Manchuria. Other western nations followed each gaining concessions. Russia gained control of the Liaotung Peninsula in 1898.

This rapid expansion of western influence in China led to the Boxer Rebellion. Japan gained some recognition of its place in China when its troops constituted a major portion of the relief column sent to Peiching in 1900 to rescue the besieged foreign legations. Japan's participation was conducted with punctilious adherence to all diplomatic and military niceties. It also gained for Japan a place in the negotiations that established the indemnity China had to pay.

Japan had gained a degree of international recognition. However, the situation vis-a-vis Russia began to deteriorate. The trouble was at least partially due to

Russian participation in the Triple Intervention of 1895 and then its taking control of territories Japan had won in the war with China. Russia had used the Boxer uprising to occupy the entirety of Manchuria. In January 1902, Great Britain and Japan signed a treaty dealing with their respective positions in China. Each had its own reasons for signing the treaty, but Japan viewed it as additional recognition and as an invitation to further aggression. Russian interest in Korea was still a problem. As a result of the alliance between Japan and Britain, Russia agreed to a gradual withdrawal of its troops from Manchuria. The first phase was completed. The second (April 1903) wasn't started and it appeared that Russia was preparing to move back into the territory it had vacated. After an exchange of notes between Japan and Russia, each making demands regarding issues in Manchuria and Korea that the other found unacceptable, Japan in January 1904, issued an ultimatum to Russia. This was followed by a declaration of war in February. Again the war was short and Japan emerged a decisive victor. The treaty was signed in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in August 1905. Japan now had gained equality and had set a chain of events in motion which would significantly influence the course of the twentieth century.

For the first time, in modern history an Asian country had defeated one of the Powers in a full scale war. By so doing, it secured both real advantages and symbols of prestige; a paramount position in Korea and valuable rights in South Manchuria, to be added to Formosa and a share in the China trade.(25)

The period after the Russo-Japanese War until WWI is of relatively little interest here. Japan continued to consolidate its position in Asia by annexing Korea in 1910. Meiji died in 1912. Japan's involvement in China grew rapidly. In 1894, China received approximately 5.2 million dollars (US) of Japan's export trade (8.4%). The volume in 1914 had increased to 88.8 million dollars (US) (25%). Japan's share of the the foreign investment in China had risen to 13.6 in 1914.(26)

#### CULTURAL

Before turning to the events that are the main interest of this paper, a bit more background needs to be established. It is difficult to discuss Japan without taking into account the significant cultural differences which exist between our culture and theirs.

The most basic is the role of the emperor. The Japanese believed him to be a direct descendent of the Sun Goddess in an unbroken lineage.(27) Whereas in the west we had divine right monarchs, in Japan you had a divine monarch. The emperor's divinity plays a role in the efforts of various

groups to bring about a restoration, particularly in the 1930s.

A closely related aspect is the Confucian ethics which had been used by the Tokugawas to ensure loyalty to the Bafuku. It is based on the five relationships:

The son owes obedience to his father; the younger brother must be loyal to the elder brother; the subject must be loyal to the emperor and to his lord; the wife to her husband; and a friend to a friend. The relationship of a vassal to his lord transcends all other loyalties and passes from father to son.(28)

These loyalties are still taken seriously in Japan. The greatest shame you can bring on yourself is to bring dishonor on you and your family.

The collectivist ideology (to which Japan doubtless owed a good deal of her military and economic strength) had transcendent moral authority in Japan which was not matched in any other contemporary industrialized nation. The family united and transcendent demanding the subordination of individual interests to the interests of "the house" was a paradigm for all social groups. The state was linked to the family, with the emperor as pater familias; the enterprise was a pseudo-family; family unity was the ideal state of the harmonious village; even army officers were spoken of as "mothers" to the other ranks who were called their "children." So all pervasive was this ideal that, even though Japan had acquired many of the political and economic reforms of an individualistic democracy, individualism remained a sin - kojin-shugi, the usual translation of "individualism" had just as pejorative overtones as did riko-shugi, the usual translation of "selfishness."(29)

There is an old saying in Japan that the nail that sticks up will be hammered down.(30) This illustrates the commonly held view of the need for conformity. Other aspects of the Confucian ethic which must be considered are the tendency to view all actions in a social context wherein intent is at least as important as the act. Certainly it is more important than the end result. Any society which can produce kamikaze who, to quote an army volunteer, were to be like, "The wild cherry blossom (who) spread their radiance and then scatter without any regret; just so must we be prepared to die, without regret for Yamato..."(31) certainly operates from a different set of values than does the Judeo-Christian west with its value on individual life. The precept that cause and intent must be considered, in a Japanese sense, surfaces in remarks General Araki, the War Minister, made about the young officers involved in the May 1932 assassination of Premier Inukai. He praised them saying, "...these pure and naive men...They were not actions for fame or personal gain nor are they traitorous...They were for the benefit of Imperial Japan"(32)

A common thread of selfless actions with pure motivations, dedicated to the lord or emperor is found throughout Japanese History. It is exemplified by the legend of the 47 ronin which is still celebrated in Japan on the

anniversary of the successful completion of their vendetta. (Ronin, i.e., masterless samurai. The 47 plotted revenge for the wrongful death of their master and their success is a famous story of selfless dedication and valor, see Byas 227-228). This concept was espoused by all who sought to use terrorist tactics to change the government. Asahi in 1921 used an anarachists view of "propaganda by deed" to call others to arms for a nationalist cause. The leaders of the February 1936 putsch cited the need for a Showa Restoration. Any act, carried out in the name of the emperor was by definition good.(33) The unique aspect of these interpretations of imperial will is that each individual or group (in a society where consensus is supreme) chose to divine the imperial will by him or themselves.(34)

Finally, the problem of rapid adaptation to the west needs attention. The Genro set out to bring Japan into the mainstream of the world. Whether from the need to negate a perceived inferiority or the desire to gain a prominent place in the international community, Japan did undergo a radical change. But was the change so radical or more importantly was it that complete?

In the course of modernization, Japan imported many western cultural elements, there were and are always partial and segmentary and are never in the form of an operating system. It is like a language with its basic indigenous

structure or grammar which has accumulated a heavy overlay of drastic changes over the past hundred years, the basic social grammar has hardly been affected. Here is an example of industrialization and the importation of western culture not effecting changes in the basic cultural structure.(35)

The incomplete adaptation of western ideas probably is best exemplified by the constitution of 1889 and the parliament it created. While on the outside it might appear to be liberal and western, it was not. It did not create a constitutional monarchy. While much of the power of day-to-day rule in Japan was vested in the Genro, the structure still had the emperor at its apex and party politics were looked down on.

The candidate must speak of himself as if he were the best person in the world and has to beg votes from people as a beggar would do or otherwise, he has to buy votes like a mean merchant. Is this really a thing for a gentlemen to do? Thoughtful Japanese would not prefer to join in politics and the Diet becomes a gathering place for scoundrels.(36)

The imperfect transfer of western ideas and the distrust of parliament are to become prominent features of the dogmas espoused by extremist groups of various political persuasions in the post WWI era.



## 1920-1936

The period of primary consideration in this paper can be divided into to easily discernable segments.(37) It is not possible to specifically identify a date, before which one set of descriptors apply and after which another should be used. However, the 1920s are usually referred to as a period of "Taisho Democracy." While the 1930s are viewed as the period where rightwing militarists emerge victorious and war becomes inevitable. While no single event marks the split, the series of incidents which span the time from the London Naval Conference through the 1932 assassinations is, in all probability, when the change occurs.

The domestic environment in Japan was one of rapid economic growth and general prosperity. From 1914 to 1919, industrial production expanded rapidly, nearly doubling.(38) The GNP rose by more than a third.(39) This was a result of the war in Europe which opened markets in European colonies which previously had been closed to the Japanese. The Japanese merchant fleet nearly doubled to handle the increased trade. The period was one of heady growth. Profits were high. Some firms declared dividends of 100 percent of par value of their stocks. Wages increased as did the demand for consumer goods.(40) Economic well being spread to the countryside. Rice and silkworm prices shot up. Farmers found

opportunities for off-season work away from the farm in the new factories.(41)

The end of the war saw the Europeans reclaim their markets from the Japanese, with predictable results. Growth slowed. During the 1920s, the GNP expanded at half the rate it had enjoyed during the war years.(42) Farmers suffered more than did city workers. Better than fifty percent of the Japanese were still employed in the agricultural sector of the economy at the start of the 1920s. During that decade, their economy stagnated resulting in an absolute decline in the rural standard of living. The Tokyo earthquake of 1923, a continually adverse balance of payments and a bank crisis in 1927 all contributed to the economic troubles that were exacerbated appreciably when the worldwide depression hit Japan in 1929.(43)

The twenties were a period of ferment. The farm situation caused concern for those still involved in agriculture or those with close ties to the countryside. That group included a large portion of the population. In 1930, three quarters of the politically active adults had been born in the villages.(44) While there was discontent in the rural sector, it did not manifest itself violently. "Even in 1930, the year when the largest number of violent incidents were reported, it was only 175, and total arrests involved 1,076 persons in

a year when police statistics recorded a total of 1,723 tenancy disputes."(45)

The industrial sector also experienced difficulties. The onset of a depression in 1920 resulted in layoffs and wage cuts. "Though still technically illegal, labor unions increased from a scant forty in 1911 to 107 in 1918, 187 in 1919, and to 273 in 1920."(46) However, the total membership never was significant. As late as 1936, after which unions rapidly disappeared from the Japanese scene, less than half a million Japanese workers were organized.(47) The impact of the unions exceeded their size. The Yawata Steel strike in 1920 and the Kawasaki Dockyard strike in 1921 caused considerable concern among political leaders, some of whom were shocked at the workers "selfish individualism." Others worried that strikes would effect output or prices. Hara Kei, who became prime minister in 1918, privately viewed capitalists who gave into workers demands as "fainthearted." The government often used police or troops to break up strikes, gave covert support to strike breaking organizations such as the Kokusuikai (National Essence Association) and encouraged employers to not reinstate workers or to fire them. Leaders of strike actions and union leaders were frequently subject to arrest, particularly those suspected of Marxist or communist leanings.(48)

The 1920s appeared to be a period of relative freedom where a democracy, as understood in the west, had an opportunity to develop. The rice riots of 1918 and resulting unrest caused the fall of the cabinet of Count Terauchi and the installation of the first cabinet headed by a party chief, Hara Kei.(49) As a party leader, Hara did replace some bureaucrats with members of his party, but did not make major structural changes. He was assassinated on 21 November 1921 by a political fanatic (see the brief discussion of the event, infra) and was replaced by his finance minister who in turn resigned the following June.(50) The Genro tried to reassert their control and appointed three non-party cabinets, the last of which had to resign when the opposition party in the lower house gained a majority as the result of an election victory. The Genro finally gave way. A new party led cabinet was formed and the short lived tradition of forming cabinets from the majority party in the parliament was established.

The development of cabinet government was not easy. The oligarchs who framed the constitution had made it clear they did not intend to share power with the popularly elected representatives. All, including Ito, espoused the principle of "transcendental cabinets," i.e., cabinets responsible to the emperor, not the Diet. Every premier through 1901 came

from the Genro as did most of the key cabinet members. Parties existed. There was competition for seats, frequently for the wrong reason. Candidates ran because these were official posts and as one candidate expressed it, "Were I to receive only one vote...I should want this for my family tree." (51) Initially, the parties existed, but did not function as a part of government. However, by, and partially as a result of, the Sino-Japanese War, the oligarchy started to share power through a series of party-oligarchic alliances. The parties often coopted Genro, making them party leaders; thereby, gaining an entry into the system, Bickering among politicians led to a return of Genro dictated cabinets. Constitutional, parliamentary democracy never really developed in Japan. The "Taisho Democracy" in reality was not all that democratic and certainly was very fragile as its trend was completely reversed as of 1936 when Prince Konoe was selected to head a new non-party coalition government after the February 26 coup attempt. (52)

The 1920s also provide a period of testing of various international "isms," particularly those of the left. Socialism was not new to Japan. There had been a number of groups and individuals active previously. They had caused sufficient concern that in 1900 police regulations were issued banning strikes. (53) In 1901, a Social Democratic

Party was suppressed within a day of its formation.(54) By 1906, two clear groups of leftists can be identified, one of reformers and the other revolutionaries.(55) Neither was destined to be a major influence in Japanese political developments. The more radical turned to anarcho-syndicalism. However, they were closely monitored by the police and were suppressed whenever they acted. Their suppression was virtually completed when in 1910, one of their leaders, Kotaka Shusui, and his followers were arrested and charged with plotting to assassinate Emperor Meiji, the members of his family and the ministers of state. They were quickly tried and convicted without right of appeal. Kotaka and eleven of his followers were executed within three days of the passing of the sentence. The last of the leaders was murdered by the police in the aftermath of the Tokyo earthquake in 1923.(56) The reformers had little influence prior to WWI. After the war, there was a surge of interest in socialist doctrines. The increase in rice prices and resulting riots of 1918; the recession of 1920; and the Russian Revolution all contributed to the increased interest.(57) Communism enjoyed some degree of popularity in the 1920s when a residue of internationalism still held an interest for Japanese intellectuals and political leaders. In the 1930s, militarism and statism came to dominate virtually

every aspect of Japanese life. The Communist Party had been suppressed in 1923, 1928, 1929, and even more regularly in the 1930s.(58) At least two problems contributed to the inability of the leftists to establish themselves in Japan. One was a failure to overcome the hostility to communism and socialism which existed in the rural community.(59) The other was the problem of the relationship of the party to the Comintern. The requirement to be loyal to an international body and the support including financing from that international body went against the Japanese trend toward nativist doctrines which was to be a dominant feature of the politics of the 1930s.(60) "In simplest terms, then, the very nature of Japanese society made it difficult, if not impossible, for a Communist movement to exist, let alone operate with any degree of effectiveness.(61)

The year 1925, marks something of a watershed in Japanese parliamentary government. On one hand liberalism seemed to triumph in the passage of the Universal Manpower Suffrage Act. However, many politicians were concerned about the extension of the suffrage. Kato, the Premier, said the country had taken "a leap in the dark" by creating a mass electorate.(62)

On the other hand, and as a direct corollary to the expansion of the right to vote, was the passage of the Peace

Prevention Law. "The new law outlawed political organizations advocating change in the Kokutai and attacking the system of private property, both of which were presumed to be a part of more extreme radical elements." (63) The penalty provided was 10 years imprisonment. In 1928, the penalty was raised, by Imperial Ordinance, to death. (64) The law "...was used primarily, if not almost exclusively, against communism or Communist influence." (65)

No discussion of the evolution of Japan during the 1920s and 1930s can deal only with the internal situation. Japan's relations with the rest of the world and how Japanese viewed these situations are an important aspect of Japan's shift to the right. China was a clearly established focal point of Japan's foreign policy. (66) Stung by actions of the Europeans in the Triple Intervention and subsequent Russian occupation of the Liaotung Peninsula, Japan used the Russo-Japanese war to expand its stake in China.

The Chinese Revolution in 1911 exacerbated the instability endemic in China. A number of Japanese had staked their hopes on Sun Yat-sen. His failure to gain control of the situation in China forced Japan to face a critical juncture in their foreign policy toward China. The outbreak of WWI gave Japan an opportunity to take aggressive action in China. Japan quickly annexed the German concessions on the



Shantung Peninsula. In late 1914, the Japanese government developed the Twenty-One Demands, a draft treaty designed to settle many of the outstanding issues between the two governments.

The first fourteen demands called on China to confirm Japan's position in Shantung, extend the leaseholds in Manchuria and grant Japanese new rights there, place the rich Hanyehping iron mines under monopoly control of a Sino-Japanese joint venture, and to guarantee no leaseholds be given to any other power in Fukien Province opposite Taiwan. All these measures were aimed at consolidating the existing Japanese foothold in China. But the last set of demands separately called requests, provided for placing Japanese advisors in key government agencies, compulsory purchase of arms from Japan, and granting of new residence rights and other privileges to Japanese Nationals. In effect, these demands, included largely as the result of army pressure on Foreign Minister Kato, would have made China a Japanese protectorate. Although Yuan (the Chinese leader) eventually agreed to the first set of demands he skillfully used Western indignation at Japan's unilateral actions to avoid agreement on the last set. (67)

In 1917, Japan signed a treaty with Great Britain which recognized Japan's demands for the German rights in Shantung and to the German island possessions in the Pacific north of the equator in exchange for Japanese support for British claims to the German islands south of the equator.(68)

Japan went to Versailles with great expectations. These involved three concepts. Japan assumed the results of the treaties negotiated during the war regarding its gaining

control of German concessions in China and of German islands in the Northern Pacific would be upheld. They would be free to negotiate bilaterally with China on all issues and that China would play a minor role in the overall discussions. And finally as a result of some of her political leaders accepting President Wilson's proposals for a League of Nations, Japan anticipated a chance for Asiatic countries to seek recognition of the principle of racial equality.(69)

All of these anticipations were thwarted. After protracted negotiations, complicated by Chinese propaganda efforts and sympathetic support from America and Great Britain for China's position against recognition of the planned disposition of German concessions, Japan's position on the former German territories were written into the treaty. However, China refused to sign the treaty.(70) Australia's adamant opposition, and political pressure on the US government by Californian politicians ensured the failure of the racial equality effort.(71) Japan was disillusioned with the results of the conference at Versailles and came to doubt Wilson's sincerity.(72) The US Exclusion Laws of 1924 exacerbated their feeling of being discriminated against and of having been insulted racially.(73) The drive to see the Open Door principle applied to China, but not to other colonies in Asia, was viewed as being aimed exclusively

against Japan and believed to be another example of discrimination.(74) The Washington Naval Conference 1921-1922, was convened to establish a new order in East Asia. The conference reaffirmed the Open Door policy, which Japan accepted for what it perceived to be western guarantees of naval security. Japan agreed to give up the Shantung territories gained from Germany and to withdraw its expeditionary force from Siberia. All powers agreed to end competition in China and to work for the establishment of a stable government there. The Conference established a ratio for battleships in the major navies of the world. Japan accepted a lower ratio of capital ships in exchange for a treaty prohibiting the US from improving fortifications west of Pearl Harbor and for British guarantees that they would not add to theirs east of Singapore.(75)

Japan accepted the temporarily balanced international situation and turned her attention back to China, but in the political and economic spheres.(76) Japan withdrew from Shantung in February 1922 and started to withdraw from Siberia in October. The architect of this cautious policy was Foreign Minister Shidehara Kijuro, who held that office for the periods June 1924 - April 1927 and July 1929 - December 1931. This peaceful policy was not firmly established, nor were Japan's gains in China renounced. More importantly the

army had developed its own views on what Japanese policy should be and gave evidence of the will to execute it.(77)

The period of diplomatic moderation marked a decline in the army's importance. In 1922, a series of cuts in military spending were initiated which saw the its portion of the budget decrease from thirty-nine percent in 1919 to about sixteen percent in the years 1923 to 1931. In 1924-1925, four divisions were cut from the army.(78)

The worldwide depression of 1929 devastated Japan. Hardest hit was the rural sector of the economy. The rice price index (1926=100) fell to 67.7 in late 1930 and to 49.2 in 1931.(79) In June of 1930, silk prices collapsed reaching the lowest level since 1897.(80) A serious crop failure in the northeast compounded the problem. Simultaneously, there was a drop in world demand for cotton goods, leading to widespread unemployment in the cotton industry. Laid off workers returned to their rural homes. These adverse conditions hit the north and northeast particularly hard. These areas, with Kyushu, were the armies favorite recruiting areas. Many junior officers also came from these regions. Therefore, the troubles at home were quickly became common knowledge throughout the army and was a cause for dissatisfaction in the ranks and junior officer corps.(81) The concern over the plight of the poor farmers served as a

stimulus for junior officer involvement in various violent acts in the 1930s. "The extreme poverty of the villages forms the positive background...especially for the acts of right-wing terrorism that occurred continuously after 1931." (82)

The London Naval Conference in 1930 is another major external event. As a result of the Reed-Matsutaira compromise on the ratio of heavy cruisers in the British, American, and Japanese Navies, a constitutional crisis arose. Prime Minister Hamaguchi took the treaty to the Privy Council and obtained its approval. The Naval Minister objected saying the prime minister had usurped the services right of direct access to the throne on what the navy viewed as an operational matter. The Emperor supported Hamaguchi. The Navy Chief of Staff was forced to resign. Public opinion was opposed to the restriction. (83) Hamaguchi was shot by a patriotic extremist in November 1930 who cited violations of the constitution as the cause for his actions.

China continued to be a major concern of many in Japan, particularly the army. In 1928, the Kwantung Army, which was responsible for guarding the railroads in Manchuria had attempted to create an incident that would have allowed them to intervene in and take control of Manchuria. Their effort reflected their concern over the growing authority of the

Kuomintang Army and the threat it posed to Japanese interests. By 1931, the situation was deemed appropriate for such an action. Wide spread flooding was occurring in the Yangtse Valley and Britain and the US were preoccupied with their own economic difficulties.(84) On 18 September, an incident was staged and used as an excuse for a rapid expansion in Southern Manchuria. In 1932, hostilities spread to China. In February of the same year, Pu Yi, the last of the Ching Emperors was installed on the throne of the newly created state of Manchukuo. The government in Tokyo had lost control of the situation. In 1933, Japan walked out of the League of Nations in protest over the criticism of Japan's actions in Manchuria. Japanese influence and military interference in China continued. However, it played a lesser role in the swing to the right in Japanese politics than did a series of internal events which peaked with the February 1936 coup attempt and set in place all the conditions necessary for the start of the war in China in 1937.

The organizations primarily responsible for turning the relatively liberal 20s into the militaristic 30s were a melange of small elitist organizations that were dedicated to saving the country from a variety of evils. They were all rightwing extremists. While creatures of the 30s some of the groups were founded much earlier, the oldest dated back to

1881. It is not possible to chronicle all the groups that played in the theater of the absurd in which their fantasies and frenzies were acted out. I will discuss some of the more important. However, it is essential to look first at their motivations. Not all organizations espoused every issue of the right, but certain general themes do dominate. Even though many groups expressed concern over the misery of the common people, their real concern was over effect these conditions had on weakening Japan vis-a-vis the outside world, particularly with regard to the condition of military recruits. Most of the membership of these groups did not come from rural areas, although their roots probably were in the countryside. According to police records, at the end of 1932, fifty-four percent of all known branches, with sixty-three percent of the total membership were located in five urban prefectures which contained only twenty-three percent of the population.(85) Most of the extremists groups were elitist and did not attempt to recruit large organizations. They resorted to terrorist tactics hoping to bring about a military coup d' etat.(86) All seemed to hold the system of parliamentary government and the oligarchy in disdain. Given the failure of the ruling clique to solve the problems of the country, they had lost the right to rule Japan in the Emperor's name. The views of one terrorist groups can be

summed up as follows:

The political parties, the Zaibatsu and a privileged group attached to the ruling class... pursue their own egotistic interests and desires, to the neglect of national defense and to the confusion of government. As a result national dignity is lost abroad, while at home the morale of the people collapses; the villages are exhausted and medium and small industry and commerce have been driven to the wall."(87)

The oldest of these groups, the Genyosha, (Dark Ocean Society) was formed in Fukuoka in 1881. This group survived until the end of WWII. They were involved in a variety of actions centered in the foreign policy arena. One of their members assassinated the Queen of Korea. They claimed to have been instrumental in creating disturbances responsible for the start of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars. They also provided strongarm men to support certain candidates in Diet elections. This group was not actively involved in the terrorist attacks of the 20s and 30s. However, it contributed to public agitation.(88)

Another long standing group which also played a major role in Japan's expansionist activities was the Kokuryukai (Black Dragon Society). The Kokuryukai centered their attention on Manchuria. They maintained liaison with various Chinese leaders such as Sun Yat-sen as well as other Asian nationalists. The Kokuryukai fostered relationships with various Asians with nationalistic aspirations for two



reasons. First, to oust western colonialists and then to have these leaders gain control of their country and to bring it into the Japanese sphere of influence. If the leadership of the newly independent Asian nations did not accept Japanese leadership willingly, the pattern of Japanese expansion into Korea could be repeated. Toyama, the leader of the Kokuryukai, may have provided a safe haven for one of the leaders of the 1932 assassination plot. The group was active until the end of WWII.(89)

There are a great many other groups who were mostly smaller than those just discussed. However, each had some impact if only to add to the cumulative weight from the right. One of these, the Kokuhonsha (National Foundation Society), was founded in 1924 to:

Nurture and revive our national spirit,  
make firm the foundation of the nation, promote  
intellectual knowledge and moral virtue with  
equal emphasis and so make shinningly manifest  
to the world the quistessential glory of our  
national polity.(90)

Founded by Baron Hiranuma, the group was primarily a stronghold for traditional conservatives, but also had a radical wing.(91) A similar group is the Kokusuikai which was formed in 1919 to protect Japan from the peril of socialism.(92) A military Group, the Sakurakai (Cherry Blossom Association), was founded in 1931 by LTC Hashimoto Kingoro. Membership was

limited to active duty officers with the rank of LTC or below. The group was active in both of the attempted coups in 1931 and as a result the army ordered it disbanded.(93)

Also active were groups which drew upon rural, agrarian roots for support and espoused various back to the land/our rural origins based philosophies. One of these was Ketsumeidan (Blood Brotherhood League). Founded by Inoue Nissho, the organization was dedicated to direct action to bring about the return to "the agrarian millenium, namely assassination of leading financiers and industrialist."(94) They were deeply involved in the 1932 assassination plots.(95)

One other group which doesn't fit neatly into this pattern, because it was quasi-governmental and because it relied on the pressure its large membership could generate to achieve its goals, was the Zaigogun Jinkai (The Reserve Officers Association). The group was founded in 1921 as a result of the reduction of the active armed forces. Their most important contribution to the swing to the right was the successful effort to have Minobe Tatsukichi, a member of the House of Peers and a Law Professor at Tokyo Imperial University removed from his positions and his books banned because he advocate a political theory that held the emperor to be an organ of the state.(96)

These organizations and numerous others having similar

structure and goals did have an impact on Japan. However, before turning to the major events they participated in or encouraged some final thought are in order. These small ultranationalist groups differ greatly when compared with the terrorist organizations extant today. The most obvious aspect is their ideological persuasion. They were nativists of the extreme right. They did not target the population at large, instead they were targeting the oligarchy. They hoped to sweep away the emperor's bad advisors and restore him to his proper place surrounded by "good" advisors (themselves). Actually, the aim of most groups was to lead or create a climate for a coup d' etat. Planning seldom went beyond that point. Financing was seldom a problem since most of the groups were small and self contained. However, as their influence grew, they did gain contributions from some large corporations. The degree of success they enjoyed is best illustrated by looking at the acts they perpetrated.

1921 saw two major assassinations. The most important occurred on 4 November 1921 when Prime Minister Hara was assassinated. The assassin is described as a young fanatic who was a railway worker. Borton imputes a leftist (labor) motive due to Hara's use of force to suppress strikes, socialist and communist organizations.(97) In September of the same year, Asahi Heigo a fanatic who headed the Shenshu

Gidan (Righteous Corps of the Divine Land) assassinated a leading Zaibatsu, (large conglomerate or big businessman) Yasuda Zenjiro. Asahi's call for a "Taisho Restoration" presaged the call for a "Showa Restoration" in the 1930s but the demands listed in his statement lack the phrases dealing with the emperor which are found in the later declarations. He does speak of the rapid westernization; however, the main thrust of his pronouncement is: to remove class inequality, nationalize land and big business and inaugurate universal suffrage.(98) Both of these acts were resorts to terrorist tactics, to publicize a cause and to bring about change through the use of violence. However, the target (Asahi proclaims in his statement) was not the masses but the hierarchy or the believers in the anarchist credo..(99)

One other terrorist incident of note occurred in the 1920s. On 27 December 1923, The Prince Regent Hirohito while enroute to the Diet, was shot at by an assassin who failed to hit his target.(100) The only result was the resignation of the cabinet. Little is known about the incident. However, it is striking that the heir to the throne would be a target. Virtually all groups, even some from the left, accepted the divinity and importance of retaining the imperial system.(101)

During the 30s events occurred with greater frequency and

are more clearly associated with nativist rightwing elements active in the military and civilian sectors of Japanese society. The first incident of note is the assassination of Prime Minister Hamaguchi as a direct result of the agitation against the results of the London Naval Conference, compounded by an announced decision to reduce the size of the army in 1932.(102)

1931 saw the first two of several attempted coups d' etat which various factions in the military would be involved with in the ensuing five years. The Sakurakai of LTC Hashimoto was deeply involved in both of these attempted coups. The plots were developed at least partially in response to a perceived weakness of the Shidehara foreign policy particularly vis-a-vis China. The first coup was to have taken place in March. The second was planned for October. In both attempts senior personnel on the army staff had foreknowledge. Working with the army dissidents was a civilian group headed by Okawa Shumei. In both instances, the conspirators hoped to create sufficient disruption by riots, bomb attacks, etc. to force the military to take control of the government. War Minister Ugaki was to be the leader of the new government in the first instance. He ultimately ordered the planning to cease. General Araki Sadao was to be the leader the government created as a result of the planned October coup. It was

discovered and planners arrested. As a result of these plots, the Sakurakai was disbanded and LTC Hashimoto was placed on the retired list. Those arrested received very light punishments. Both incidents were hushed up to preclude any damage to the army's prestige by adverse publicity.(103)

Terrorism reached a high watermark in 1932. In February, the Finance Minister was assassinated. In March, the Chief Director of a major Zaibastu, Baron Dan, was killed as part of the same plot. The group primarily responsible for the assassinations was the Ketsumei Dan of Inoue. They were assisted by junior naval officers from a base near their headquarters. A list of the oligarchy was drawn up and lots were drawn for the privilege of killing one of these "members of the privileged class." Only two attacks were carried out. A more serious situation developed in May when on the 15th Prime Minister Inukai was assassinated as part of a plot by young navy officers intent upon creating a crisis which would lead to martial law. Other intended targets included Count Makino, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, the Industrial Club, the Peer's Assembly Hall, political party headquarters, a bank and various power stations serving Tokyo. None of these targets suffered other than slight damage. The most important casualty was party cabinet government. As a result of the assassination of the Prime Minister, Prince Saionji

(the last of the Genro) decided to form a national cabinet under Admiral Saito. All of those arrested after the incidents were given light sentences and usually served only part of the term. The trial became a public forum for explaining the intent of their acts and gained wide spread sympathy for the cause.(104)

In 1933, a coup attempt was thwarted by the police. It was an overly ambitious, joint civilian-military attempt to carryout the objectives of the 15 May 1932 action. One of the leaders, a navy Commander, was the brother of Inoue who had been a leader of the 1932 efforts. The Commander had been assigned the mission of bombing the Prime Minister's official residence from the air.(105)

The 1935 murder of General Nagata by LTC Aizawa highlighted a growing split within the army over the direction Japanese policy should take. LTC Aizawa was a member of the Kodo (Imperial Way) which viewed the Soviets as the main enemy. While General Nagata was a member of the Tosei Ha (Control Faction) whose interests were centered on China and ultimately the west. General Nagata had been using his position to oust members of the Kodo from key positions in the army and exile them to provincial posts. Aizawa struck because he had been ordered to Formosa and because a leader

of his faction had experienced a severe loss of face as a result of political maneuvering by General Nagata.(106)

The final, and most successful coup attempt occurred on 26 February 1936. (See Shillony for a detailed discussion of the coup, its causes and results.)(107) This plot was the most ambitious and involved the most personnel. Junior officers in the First Division plotted, with at least the acquiescence of members of the War Ministry and the General Staff, to gain control of key government buildings and the emperor in order to produce a "Showa Restoration." The plotters were at least partially successful. They gained control of the metropolitan police headquarters, part of central Tokyo and a portion of the Imperial Palace compound. However, they did not gain the emperor's support and the coup foundered. It drug on for three days, but finally the soldiers returned to their barracks. All but one of the officers involved refused to commit seppuku. They all anticipated using their trial as a public forum as had the 1932 plotters. This was not to be. They were tried secretly and thirteen, including one of the most important right wing ideologues Kita Ikki, were secretly executed. Even though the coup failed, the swing to the right was completed. The Tosei Ha gained control of the army. Kodo members were banished from the capital. The junior officer ranks were purged of



dissidents. However, the most important result was the army and the navy regaining control over the appointment of the War Minister and Naval Minister, giving them veto power over the formation of cabinets and cabinet policy.(108)

The lurch to the right is hard to summarize in a few words. However, by using the words of one of the 1932 conspirators you gain a feeling for a key consideration, "We thought about destruction first. We never considered taking on the duty of construction. We foresaw, however, that once destruction was accomplished someone would have to take charge of the construction for us."(109) Maruyama may have summarized the characteristic of the movement best, "...is that until the very last its practical managers had no mass organization and showed no particular zeal for organizing the masses. Rather they made from the first to last a movement of a limited number of 'patriots.'"(110)

## CONCLUSION

What can be learned from the Japanese experience? One thing is that the Japanese solution to the challenge posed by the west was imperfect. "This solution was the 'different usage' classically expressed by Hashimoto Sanai (Acquire mechanical arts from others, retain righteousness, sympathy, and filial piety as our own)."(111) The inability to reconcile tradition with changes brought in from the west created a reaction which found expression in many of the rightwing groups.

Japan viewed itself as having an imperial mission to expand and to lead Asia to a dominant position in the world. These goals were expressed officially in Kokutai no Hongi (Fundamentals of Our National Polity) issued in 1937. This expression of Japanese destiny was to be discussed throughout the nation.(112) Other sources of explanation of Japan's role in Asia can be found in Kawai's The Goal of Japanese Expansion. Pan Asianism served to justify Japan's expansion in China.(113)

Japan felt discriminated against. The forced revision of the Treaty of Shimonoseki; Russia's refusal to pay reparations after the Russo-Japanese War; the whole series of problems they experienced in the Versailles Treaty

negotiations and the Washington Naval Conference; and the exclusion laws all contributed to this feeling. This allowed ultranationalists such as LTC Hashimoto to use the treatment Japan had received from the west as justification for military expansion.(114)

Terror was used almost exclusively by rightwing groups usually in conjunction with military complicity. The military was either the sponsor of or primary participant in each event starting with 1931 coup plots. The use of terror tactics paid off. Liberal, western style democracy failed. The use of terror did reduce the willingness of politicians to participate in government. "Six prewar Prime Ministers lost their lives at the hands of terrorists during or after their tenure in office, and attempts were made on the lives of others..."(115) As Beasley points out, "What is more, members of the cabinet now had every reason to fear for their safety, especially if they were unwise enough to give any hint of seeking a settlement with China."(116) The military may have been attempting to return to the tradition of the Bakufu in order to once more play the role of "good" advisor to the emperor.

The terrorist success in destroying whatever liberal institutions may have existed in Japan was a major factor in

the ultimate decision by the Japanese to go to war. It is difficult to determine if the terrorists could have succeeded without the external stimuli such as China to provide an excuse for pursuing their goals. This; however, raises a parallel question, i.e., could the China policy have led to the war without the success of the rightwing at home? On balance, it appears the courses of action were synergistic and the end result was greater than any player could have foreseen.

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