

Samurai and Silk —A Japanese and American Heritage

By Haru Matsukata Reischauer
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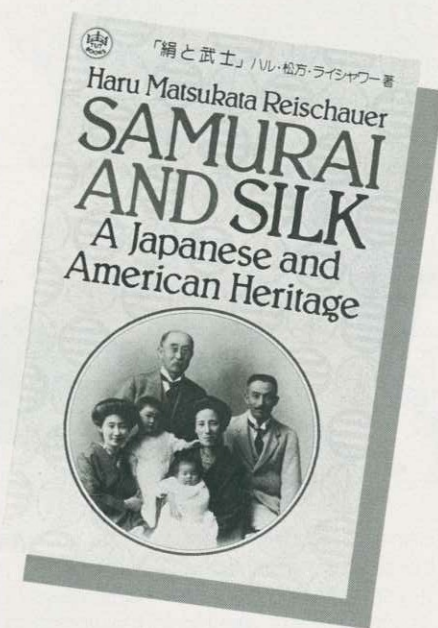
Haru Matsukata Reischauer has written a fascinating and highly readable book that brings to life the excitement of the Meiji period and two remarkable men who helped lay the groundwork for Japan's modern era. Anyone engaged in commerce or those simply interested in discovering to what extent innovation, ambition and courage can change individual lives as well as the history of a nation will enjoy the book tremendously and surely be inspired by the accounts of the lives of the author's two grandfathers.

Although Mrs. Reischauer's canvas is a large one—history, social change, relations between Japan and America and the story of two large and remarkable families—she handles it with a deft touch, her conversational style a delight to read. This lively and important book is filled with telling anecdotes and revealing details based on careful, wide-ranging research. It certainly deserves the widest possible readership.

Despite their very different lives, Masayoshi Matsukata (1835–1924), the financial reformer, and Rioichiro Arai (1855–1939), the businessman, both had careers that illustrate well the reasons for the economic success of Japan in modern times.

Matsukata, born 18 years before Commodore Perry knocked on the closed doors of Japan, came from impoverished samurai stock serving the Shimazu family in the Satsuma province of Kyushu but rose to become one of Japan's most brilliant finance ministers and able prime ministers, serving several terms. He died a respected reformer and honored prince.

Arai, born two years after "Perry's ships signaled the approaching end of the feudal age," was of peasant stock but of a family of considerable wealth and broad economic activities. As a 14-year-old who walked to Edo from his comfort-



able home in a silk-raising village in Gumma, he realized he would forever be an outsider to the new imperial government. He chose business and English as the roads to success, in contrast to Matsukata who was an insider from his youth and an important young member of the group that took over the new central government of the Meiji Restoration.

Arai was a true pioneer of Japanese commercial activity, starting in 1876 in the United States where he eventually attained financial success and won commercial and social respect. His struggles to convince Japanese silk dealers to provide uniformly fine thread for the American market eventually paid off.

Both Matsukata and Arai were men of strong moral principles and patriotism and endowed with unusual perspicacity about people and streaks of financial brilliance. Their two careers overlapped and complemented each other in areas of commerce and sericulture as Japanese silk became a vital commodity in prewar trade with the United States.

The stories of the almost rags-to-riches careers of Prince Matsukata and New York silk merchant Arai make the reader feel he is witnessing Japanese history at first hand. Many vignettes bring the amazing cast of characters to life and the rare photographs of the attractive people portrayed add great interest.

The strong character and skills of the samurai lad paying off family debts, witnessing assassinations, suicides and

plots and carrying out missions (1,700 miles on foot in 1862!) brought Masayoshi Matsukata to the attention of Shimazu, the Satsuma *daimyo*. Friendship with a Scot in Nagasaki, merchant Thomas Glover who smuggled samurai abroad, led to Matsukata's training in mathematics and naval affairs.

Going abroad in 1877, he learned about industry, commerce, agriculture and financial institutions by meeting and talking with European officials. He returned to squire his wife to the famous Rokumeikan balls of the 1880s.

Emperor Meiji is described visiting the Matsukatas, who had seven children in evidence, in Azabu in 1887. Asked how many children he had, Matsukata requested a day to reply: understandably, since his wife, Masako, brought up not only their own 10 children but also several born to her husband's three concubines (by whom he had eight recognized offspring).

In the Cabinet and as a senior adviser, Matsukata had a hand in government for seven decades, urging strong financial controls, good relations with China and cooperation on equal terms with the West. He was active until just before his death in 1924, less than a year after being pinned to the ground in the Great Earthquake and four years after the death of his wife of 70 years.

Tax and banking reform, nurseries, schools, dictionaries, farming, sericulture, transportation, harbor construction, railroad construction, tea production, cotton spinning, sugar production, libraries, reforestation, livestock, horse-breeding, increased exports and decreased imports were some of this statesman's myriad concerns and accomplishments.

Arai's half century in the New York silk trade succeeded because he guaranteed quality and lived up to his word. By 1879, both Matsukata and Arai were engaged in improving the quality of Japanese silk, increasing Japanese exports and modernizing commerce.

During Arai's 53 years in America, raw-silk exports financed more than 40% of Japan's imports that later made it a leading industrial nation.

The last section of the book tells some-

thing of the descendants of the Matsukatas and Arais, including businessman and art collector Kojiro Matsukata; Saburo Matsukata, a newspaperman and mountaineer; Shigeharu Matsumoto and Nobuhiko Ushiba, leading diplomats; and Haru's sister, Tane, founder of Nishimachi International School.

As one of the five daughters and one son born to Miyo Arai, Rioichiro's only daughter, and Matsukata's son Shokuma, Haru Matsukata Reischauer tells in her introduction something about her life as one labeled "different" because of her mother's American upbringing and her own American education. It touches on problems of adjustment and internation-

alization, the buzzword of this decade. The difficult war years, a career as a correspondent and a second career as the wife and important help-mate of Edwin O. Reischauer, professor, ambassador and academic are also briefly noted.

Samurai and Silk is a volume of outstanding interest for anyone concerned with Japan, history, commerce and statesmanship. Japanese and foreign businessmen will be inspired by the foresight, tenacity, innovation and dedication to quality and honesty that made Matsukata and Arai important forces in Japan and America.

I can think of no better book that teaches, without preaching, the lessons of inter-

nationalization. The great progress Japan has made as a nation since the time of Matsukata's birth just over 150 years ago has not been paralleled in equal measure by changes in attitude on the part of the average Japanese toward non-Japanese. Tolerance, inventiveness, knowledge of history and receptiveness to new ideas rather than the mere acceptance of fads: these Matsukata and Arai epitomized. Will the leaders of tomorrow's Japan in the century following its "economic miracle" learn from people like Matsukata and Arai and their wives? Let us hope so.

Barbara C. Adachi
Tokyo-based writer

Table Talk

Tenzan

In accordance with the maxim that a person who cannot manage his own body should not be entrusted with managing an organization, leaders in their respective fields around the world pay careful attention to their health, and particularly to preventing obesity. Alas, reality and our ideals are often far apart. Many executives fight an uphill battle in the face of the many tempting delicacies that come their way.

Obesity is also a problem for the less exalted. In the industrially advanced countries it is spreading among the younger generation, softened by years of peace and prosperity. Since Japanese now enjoy the longest life spans in the world—81 for women and 75 for men—it is not surprising that Japanese cuisine has attracted global attention. *Gohan* (unflavored boiled rice) and *sashimi* (sliced raw fish) have become popular as health foods the world over.

The fact is, however, that China is a far more advanced country than Japan when it comes to healthy food. As an ancient Chinese saying has it, "food and

medicine spring from the same source." In other words, the key to good health is good food, not medicine. This belief in the beneficial power of food is thoroughly ingrained in the Chinese, who believe the best way to delay aging and prolong life is careful eating.

"Tenzan" is rare among Tokyo's many Chinese restaurants for its total commitment to this philosophy. The cuisine at Tenzan is mainly Sichuan and Jiangnan. Sichuan province was named for the four (si) rivers (*chuan*) that flow through it, eventually merging into the mighty Yangtse River, winding its way to Shanghai. Blessed with abundant water, Sichuan is a treasure trove of farm produce, aquatic products and Chinese herbal medicine. Whereas the Chinese usually say there are five tastes—sour, bitter, sweet, spicy, salty—In Sichuan they add two more: *xiang wei* (aromatic taste) and *ma wei* (numbing taste).

The cuisine of Jiangnan, as the region along the lower reaches of the Yangtse is known, needs no explanation. Suffice it to say that its representative cuisine, *man han chuan*, was created by no less a person than the Ching dynasty Emperor Kan Long, one of China's most famous epicureans.

The best way to choose your dishes at Tenzan is to consult the waiter—and your

pocketbook. The menu is long and varied, and an average meal runs to about ¥10,000 (about \$77 at the rate of ¥130/\$) per head, including wine, service charge and tax. On Sundays and national holidays there is a 20% discount.

Tenzan's Peking duck is superb. And to set it and other dishes off, the restaurant management recommends a glass of warmed *lao jiu* with floating hibiscus petals. This is Tenzan's own concoction, and it not only enhances the wine's taste, it makes you feel years younger and transported to Shangri-la. Indeed, food and medicine spring from the same source! (Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

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