

Ulysses S. Grant and the Governors: Local Politics on Display in early Meiji Japan

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By the time Ulysses S. Grant arrived in Japan in the summer of 1879, he had been traveling for more than two years on his famed world tour, accompanied by his wife Julia and an entourage of assistants and journalists. Befitting his stature as conquering general and former president, Grant had easy access to monarchs and national political leaders, but his tour was also remarkable for the vast number of regional and local officials he encountered along the way. They had a somewhat ambiguous role in facilitating Grant's voyage; while they often worked as agents of more powerful national interests, his visit represented an unprecedented opportunity to advance their own agenda and standing. In an era of global political turmoil, Grant's dual figure as military and political leader, combined with his unassuming manner, inspired a range of political and social visions among the people he encountered. Benjamin Scott, the Chamberlain of London, clearly recognized Grant's visit as a moment to promote local as well as national priorities; he welcomed Grant by "conferring upon you the honorary freedom of their ancient city--a freedom which had existence more than eight centuries before your first ancestors set foot on Plymouth Rock." Noting Grant's accomplishments during his presidency in "binding up the bleeding frame of society, which had been rent asunder when the demon of Slavery was cast out," Scott concluded his speech by calling for "the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon family" to engage in an "honest, if spirited rivalry... [on] how best to promote the well-being and to develop the industry of nations, how to govern them for the largest good to the greatest numbers, and for the advancement of peace, liberty, morality, and the consequent happiness of mankind."¹

As Grant proceeded on his tour, he continued to meet local officials as he made his way through various nations and territories; in the Ottoman empire he was greeted by a number of local *pasha* who used the moment to demonstrate their own influence; John Russell Young, in his detailed account of Grant's travels, noted during their tour of Jerusalem that the "pacha gave a state dinner, to which we all went--a dinner marked with the kindest hospitality."² Upon his arrival in Izmir on his way to Istanbul, Grant was greeted by Ahmed Hamdi Pasha, the Governor of Izmir province, who escorted him on a tour of the ruins of Ephesus. When Grant arrived in China, he was welcomed by Liu Kunyi, the Viceroy of Liangguang province; in Young's detailed account of the encounter, he described Liu as "the perfection of courtesy and cordiality" who personally helped Grant with his chopsticks as they ate an eighty-course dinner.³

This pattern continued in Japan, Grant's final stop before returning across the Pacific to the west coast of the United States. Even before his arrival, Grant was being solicited by local officials, particularly Japan's new class of prefectural governors (*kenrei*), seeking to persuade him

¹ "General Grant At The Guildhall." *Times*, 16 June 1877, p. 13. The Times Digital Archive, link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS219461840/TTDA?u=uiuc_ncclrc&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=6192322c. Accessed 24 Nov. 2021.

² John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 1 (New York: The American News Co., 1879), p. 336.

³ John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2 (New York: The American News Co., 1879), p. 321-323.

to visit their prefectures.⁴ Grant noted in Shanghai that he had received a “telegram of the 14th of May saying that the Governor of the province requests us to occupy at Hiogo [Hyōgo] the house specially prepared for myself & party, by order of his Imperial Majesty.”⁵ In keeping with the spontaneous and improvised nature of much of Grant’s global travels, Grant’s itinerary in Japan was continuously modified to suit Grant’s interests—a sign of his enormous prestige and the still-tentative nature of Japan’s state authority and structure. He and his party proved remarkably accommodating to a constant stream of invitations Grant received while in Japan from both national elites and local officials, many of whom recognized the value an audience with Grant might yield. While this had been a common response to Grant wherever he visited, his arrival in Japan came at a moment when much about the country’s political future, and place in the world, was open to interpretation. While there was little doubt that Japan was seeking recognition as a modern nation as a result of its ambitious program of political and social reform, the first decade of the Meiji period had also been marked by rebellion, assassination, and ongoing uncertainty over Japan’s new approach to governance. Grant’s visit inevitably prompted questions about Japanese identity that Japanese officials at all levels sought to answer; among the more notable of these efforts were those by prefectural governors, whose place within Japan’s political culture and new governing structures remained ambiguous.

While prefectural governors have received some attention as part of the scholarship on early Meiji politics, this has generally come as part of studies of individual prefectures, the emergence of the local government systems, or the development of the central bureaucracy, namely the Home Ministry (*Naimushō*). Scholars such as Ōshima Mitsuko and Watanabe Takaki provided important contributions in their comprehensive treatments of the rise of “local society” (*chiiki shakai*) in the early Meiji period as it was consciously shaped by the Meiji state, noting the particular role of national figures like Ōkubo Toshimichi and Matsuda Michiyuki in articulating bureaucratic and ideological visions for the state-society relationship.⁶ Matsuda’s role is particularly notable since he rose through the ranks of local governance before becoming a leading figure in the Home Ministry, serving as prefectural governor in Ōtsu, and ending his career as Governor of Tokyo prefecture. As discussed below, however, he was only one of several prominent figures to recognize the particular role the prefectural governor played in promoting new “modern” rules and sensibilities at the local level, and mediating relations between localities and the central government. Subsequent scholarship has further complicated the role of governors in early Meiji public life, noting that they operated within complex local political and economic networks that did not necessarily align with state priorities. As recent works by Matsuzawa Yūsaku, Yuan Jiaxing, and Christopher Craig make clear, prefectural governors never became simple agents of the state, but were constantly challenged to interpret and reconcile local and national interests. They could, for instance, become ardent champions of local infrastructure projects in ways the central government could not or would not support, either because of lack of

⁴ The term “kenrei” (県令) was used from 1871 to 1886 to refer to governors of the non-metropolitan prefectures (*ken*: 県). The term “chiji” (知事), which had been in usage only for metropolitan districts (*fu*: 府), then came to refer to governors of all types of prefectures.

⁵ Ulysses S. Grant and John Y. Simon, *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, Vol. 29 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), p. 133.

⁶ See Ōshima Mitsuko, *Meiji kokka to chiiki shakai* (Iwanami Shoten, 1994), and Watanabe Takaki, *Meiji kokka keisei to chihō jichi* (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 2001).

funds, or out of concern such expenditures would inspire grievances among local communities over this added financial burden.⁷

These uncertainties surrounding the role of the prefectural governor were particularly acute in the early Meiji period, when so much about Japan's politics, economy, and diplomacy were up in the air. Little has been written, however, of the broader collective cultural place of prefectural governors in early Meiji public life, or of the ideas and ideologies that shaped their actions and identities. Grant's visit to Japan presents an excellent opportunity to explore these issues since it provided prefectural governors an unprecedented public platform to assert their role in Japanese politics. Grant's varied interactions with governors illustrate their uncertain position within the early Meiji Japanese political order, a sign of the still tenuous nature of political ideologies that sought to centralize power in state ministries. Grant's party could be dismissive of governors as curious and sometimes comical figures whose pretensions were at odds with their relatively minor status, but the eagerness of prefectural governors to meet with Grant, and to advocate on behalf of their prefectures, reflected many of the ambiguities and tensions that surrounded the governor's place in Meiji Japanese society as they sought to fulfill their dual roles as central bureaucrats and local politicians.

This full-throated advocacy of prefectural interests is notable given that these men were typically outsiders to the regions they administered, appointed by the central government and increasingly encouraged to identify themselves with the state rather than localities. One can also sense a distinct air of political striving in these efforts to capitalize on Grant's visit as governors tested the limits of their authority—in speaking forcefully on behalf of local interests they were fulfilling a number of political and ethical agendas that could be seen as both “traditional” and “modern.” Through their efforts to bridge the divide between the Tokugawa and Meiji eras, governors sought to promote local reform and modernization while drawing heavily on Confucian ideologies of benevolence to explain and defend a prominent place for themselves in the political process.⁸ Political uncertainties encouraged forms of political experimentation and entrepreneurship distinct to the early Meiji period, and Japan's government officials and politicians tried out new political language, and advanced new political identities, that were not necessarily consistent with the bureaucratic visions that Japan's national elites and Grant himself came to

⁷ See, for instance, Matsuzawa Yūsaku's *Meiji chihō jichi taisei no kigen* (Tokyo daigaku shuppankai, 2009); Yuan's “Sanshinpō seiritsu made no ‘fukēn’ no ichizuke-fukēn no chōsha eizen o tegakari ni”, *Waseda daigakuin bungaku kenkyūka kiyō*, v. 63 (2018), pp. 850-868; and Christopher Craig's *Middlemen of Modernity* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2021). Yuan's article provides a fascinating examination of the debates that surrounded the construction of new prefectural offices in the early Meiji period, as local and national officials struggled to balance the offices' importance in symbolizing Meiji “modernity” (through the use of brick, for instance) with concerns over cost, and whether these would be borne by “officials” or the “people.” Governors often took leading roles in advocating expensive construction projects that were ultimately rejected by the central government.

⁸ As will be discussed in more detail below, the term *bokumin* (“shepherding the people”), deriving from classical Chinese sources, became an important part of the ideologies of early Meiji governors, and an increasingly popular way of envisioning prewar bureaucratic ethics and identities. For a consideration of the Tokugawa-era, locally-based precedents of the *bokumin* ideology, see Ogawa Kazunari's *Bokumin no shisō: Edo no chisha ishiki* (Heibonsha, 2008). Regarding the continued popularity of *bokumin* in the prewar bureaucracy, see Uematsu Tadahiro, “Naimushō no shisō to seisaku: bokuminkan ishiki to shakai jigyō gyōsei o chūshin ni,” *Kokumin keizai zasshi* 174, no. 3 (1996): pp. 1-16; and Roger H. Brown, “Shepherds of the People: Yasuoka Masahiro and the New Bureaucrats in Early Showa Japan,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2009), p. 288.

emphasize. This paper will explore some of these efforts by local figures, animated by the idea that prefectural governors, and the localities they represented, still warranted attention, even from one of the most famous foreigners in the world.

The Prefecture's Voice: The Governors Greet Grant

Grant was greeted upon his arrival in Japan by Nagasaki governor Utsumi Tadakatsu, who assumed a prominent role in Grant's reception as "the first Kenrei to receive you," despite the presence of powerful members of Japan's diplomatic corps such as Yoshida Kiyonari and Date Munenari.⁹ During Grant's stay in the port city, Utsumi led a ceremony in which the General and his wife planted commemorative trees; the accompanying inscription written by Grant and placed at the site mentioned only Utsumi, with no word given to the Emperor or other government ministers.¹⁰ Utsumi sought to maintain correspondence after Grant had left Nagasaki, writing to him twice later that year, in which he lamented that was unable to again visit Grant in Tokyo as they had originally discussed, and updating him on the health of the trees and the erection of the accompanying plaque.¹¹

Utsumi was representative of the young, accomplished, and well-connected men who had begun to fill the gubernatorial ranks by the late 1870s—a process that would accelerate as the first generation of Meiji leaders gave way to a "second generation" of officials who were more defined by their academic status than their political passions and activism. Born in 1843, he was only 36 at the time of Grant's visit and would go on to have a storied career as governor in Nagasaki and six other prefectures over a 23-year period (Mie, Hyōgo, Nagano, Kanagawa, Osaka, Kyoto) before being appointed Home Minister in the first Katsura cabinet in 1901. A native of the Chōshū domain, Utsumi was close to many of the leading figures in the Restoration movement, including Itō Hirobumi, who brought him into his administration when he assumed the governorship of Hyōgo prefecture in 1868. As home to the treaty port city of Kobe, the Hyōgo governorship was tasked with managing the influx of foreign residents and trade; Utsumi's improving English language skills as a result of his work led him to be reassigned to the Foreign Ministry in 1869. There he worked as Japanese representative to the special consular courts serving foreigners in the treaty port concessions and gained insight into the nature of Japan's position vis-à-vis the Western powers. Utsumi's experience and connections allowed him to accompany the Iwakura mission to the United States and Europe in 1871, and after his return to Japan in 1873 he reentered prefectural government as a mid-ranking official, ascending to the position of Chief Secretary. In 1877 he gained his first gubernatorial appointment in Nagasaki and remained there until 1883. While Utsumi recalled in his memoirs a sense of outrage during his time in Hyōgo over the unfairness of the treaty port system that would bring him into conflict with both foreign officials and with Ito's

⁹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 173.

¹⁰ The full inscription, written in both Japanese and English, read: "At the request of Governor Utsumi Tadakatsu, Mrs. Grant and I have each planted a tree in the Nagasaki Park. I hope that both trees may prosper, grow large, live long, and in their growth, prosperity, and long life be emblematic of the future Japan." For the discussion of the tradition of planting commemorative trees in Japan that traces back to Grant, see Okamoto Kikuko, "A Cultural History of Planting Memorial Trees in Modern Japan," *Sokendai bunka kagaku kenkyu*, no. 9 (2013), pp. 81-97.

¹¹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 175.

more pragmatic approach, over the course of his career he developed a reputation as an effective governor of Japan's more cosmopolitan prefectures, including Kanagawa, Osaka, and Kyoto.¹²

Grant's next encounter with a governor was, in fact, in Hyōgo, where Utsumi had begun his career; because of a cholera outbreak that had placed the entire Kansai region off limits to Grant's group, Governor Morioka Masazumi, whose invitation had reached Grant before he arrived in Japan, traveled out to Grant's ship to pay his respects. Young described him as a "courteous Japanese official in blazing court dress of an English official at a queen's drawing room."¹³ Such "eagerness with which Chinese and Japanese vie with the Europeans in their desire to do honor to an ex-President of the United States" was "the contribution which General Grant's journey around the world makes to the politics of the East." Young observed that the idea of Grant's travels as "merely an idle party, sailing over the summer seas" disguised the true significance of Grant's role as arbiter of national rivalries:

However the General may desire to make this journey personal, however much he may shrink from the honors, the ceremony, the pageantry, however earnestly he may waive any claim to other considerations that which a private gentleman should receive in his journeys, the authorities insist upon regarding the visit as official, as the coming of a ruler, as an embassy of the highest rank. China invoked his good offices as mediator between Japan and herself in the Loochoo question. Japan is anxious for his good offices to secure the revision of the treaties which cripple her revenues in the interest of British trade. General Grant, while never giving indication of any power to affect one way or the other these important questions, appreciates the honor paid him, and has used his influence to impress upon the statesmen and rulers of these people the fact that their true interest lies in the fullest and freest intercourse with the younger nations; that they have nothing to fear from European civilization; that the good things we have given to the world are good for Japanese and Chinamen, as well as for Britons and Americans; that international law will secure them as many rights as other nations enjoy; that they will not always appeal in vain to the sympathy and justice of the aggressive war-making powers; and that profitable development will only come when their own people are educated so as to appreciate and extend the lessons of Western civilization.

Whatever the effect of this advice, it is worthy of note that the General has lost no opportunity of giving it. He has given it to men who have gone out of their way to do him honor, and to ask his advice and aid.¹⁴

While both Grant and Young viewed the elaborate receptions they had received throughout their travels as part of a coordinated campaign in the ongoing contest of nations, for Japan's lower-level officials Grant's attentions provided a unique opportunity to elevate both their local and national profiles. Morioka's career had followed a mirror path to Utsumi's, beginning in Nagasaki before his appointment as Hyōgo governor in 1876. As a native of the Satsuma domain, he was like Utsumi connected to the southwestern "Sat-Chō" cliques then controlling government and had

¹² Naganuma Hideaki, "Nagasaki kenrei Utsumi Tadakatsu: bōdan kara kyōkō shugi e," *Hōshigaku kenkyūkai kaihō* 3, no. 27-29 (March 1998), p. 12.

¹³ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, p. 510.

¹⁴ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, pp. 512-514. Failures to pay Grant proper "respect" were carefully noted; John Bingham, U.S. minister in Tokyo, reported to Secretary of State William Evarts that a British naval ship declined to salute him as he arrived in Yokohama harbor since he was traveling as "but a private gentleman." Grant fumed about this in his travel diary, writing that "The English were conspicuous for their lack of courtesy." [sic] *Papers*, Vol. 29, pp. 90, 179.

quickly risen through the ranks as a prefectural official. At the time of his meeting with Grant, Morioka was at the high point of his career as governor; he had overseen the first elections and sessions of the Hyōgo prefectural assembly earlier that year, but his relations with that body deteriorated over the next few years with the emergence of opposition political parties, leading to Morioka's subsequent efforts to suppress political activity in the prefecture during the early 1880s. Morioka had assumed the Hyōgo governorship from Kanda Takahira, the famed early Meiji liberal intellectual who had taken a leading role in establishing the basis for representative government in the prefecture, and Morioka continued to promote the development of Hyōgo's representative institutions in the first few years as governor.

Morioka was broadly supportive of representative government, establishing representative councils to manage land reform and elected advisory bodies to advise him during his earlier tenure as governor of Shikama Prefecture (later to be absorbed by Hyōgo Prefecture in 1876), and had taken a leading role in shaping educational reforms that gained the support of local liberal political activists. Morioka's public image dramatically shifted, however, with the 1881 split among the national oligarchs over the constitutional question and Morioka's efforts to suppress liberal political politics within the prefecture.¹⁵ When Morioka left office in 1885, he was already being unfavorably compared to his predecessor Kanda, and did not hold another governorship, instead choosing a career in the economic bureaucracy and private business. He used his knowledge of international shipping at Kobe to become the first President of Nippon Yūsen Kaisha (NYK), formed out of the merger of Mitsubishi and Japanese government steamship lines.¹⁶ In keeping with the parallel nature of Morioka and Utsumi's careers, Utsumi succeeded Morioka as governor of Hyōgo prefecture.

While Utsumi and Morioka represented an emerging group of cosmopolitan officials responsible for overseeing and controlling Japan's internationalization, the scope and duration of Grant's travels brought him into contact with a variety of other governors who were instead desperately seeking international attention for their regions, and greater access to foreign markets for locally-produced goods. As Grant and his party continued their journey northward toward Tokyo, they were invited by Governor Ōsako Sadakyo of Shizuoka prefecture for a day-long tour of the port of Shimizu and the city of Shizuoka. As Young notes in his account, this represented an opportunity for Grant's party to visit a closed port, and, with Mt. Fuji looming in the distance, to "see Japan untouched by the foreigner. We have a glimpse of the land as it must have been before the deluge."¹⁷ While the tour visited Shizuoka's fisheries and tea packing facilities—the traditional foundations of the area's economy, and, in the case of tea, an increasingly important component of its international trade—Young's account suggests that Grant and his party were far more captivated by the opportunity to see a "pure Japanese town, without a tint of European civilization."¹⁸ Young described it as remarkably ordered and peaceful, with "roads that were much better than I have seen in the suburbs of New York," and where "policemen seemed quite out of place in smiling, happy, amiable Japan...we saw no beggary, no misery, no poverty, only a bright contented people who loved the sunshine."¹⁹

¹⁵ Imai Shuhei et al., *Hyōgo-ken no rekishi* (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 2004), p. 307.

¹⁶ Kokaze Hidemasa, "Morioka Masazumi to Nihon Yūsen," *Nihon rekishi*, no. 500 (January 1990), pp. 54-57.

¹⁷ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, p. 516.

¹⁸ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, p. 516.

¹⁹ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, 517-518.

Grant's time in Tokyo was dominated by meetings with the Emperor and with state officials, although the governors of Tokyo and Kanagawa extended invitations to Grant for receptions in his honor. Grant also received solicitations from representatives of more distant regions; Kuroda Kiyotaka, whose role as Minister of Colonization in Hokkaido made him the effective governor there, wrote to invite Grant to a luncheon "prepared of Hokkaido products," and invited Grant to visit Hokkaido "to show you some progress we made there in industry, mining & agriculture," sending along with the invitation "two rolls of Japanese silks (Kohaku-ori & Kaiki) & 3 doz. of Handkerchiefs, which were all made in Hokkaido...."²⁰ In some cases these efforts by state officials were complemented by appeals from other political and commercial interests; representatives of Tochigi prefecture wrote of Grant's visit as "the highest honor that we have ever received," and presented Grant with "some specimens of hemsps cultivated in this part of the country."²¹ Representatives of Ashikaga town's "Kogiokai" industrial society, also in Tochigi, sought to draw Grant's attention to their textile tradition; "Ashikaga, in the county of Ashikaga, where we inhabit, and places in its vicinity, are noted in Japan for the woven goods which amount in value to more than three millions and five thousand yens every year."²² Seeking to promote "growth and manufacture," Grant was presented with "one volume containing specimens of the woven goods manufactured by that society & of requesting you to look it through...."²³

One of the most elaborate efforts to capitalize on Grant's visit came from Saitama Governor Shirane Tasuke, who appealed to Grant to visit him in Saitama when he returned to Tokyo from Nikko at the end of July. "During my nine years service in the local government, I have never been honored by the visit of a foreign distinguished guest, although I have already twice received His Majesty the Emperor...I avail myself of this opportunity of your return from Nikko to confer on me such a great honor as personally appearing before your presence on behalf of a million of inhabitants under the jurisdiction of Saitama Ken. This honor is so great that it can never be obtained for many centuries."²⁴ Grant accepted the invitation, but his papers make no mention of the visit. Young's account suggests that he and Grant were not impressed: "we continued on our way, and stopped for the night at a frowsy, dirty village. The governor came to wait upon us, and we spent the evening conversing with him. On the 31st of July, tired and worn with travel, we returned to our pleasant quarters at Enriokwan."²⁵

While the encounter drew little further note from Grant and Young, the view from Saitama was quite different. Following their meeting on July 30, Shirane produced a pamphlet in which he recounted his discussions with Grant and cultivated an image of himself as an accomplished official whose status was affirmed through Grant's attentions, yet who still remained mindful of his duties to local populations.²⁶ He and Grant receive equal billing in the pamphlet's frontispiece,

²⁰ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 182.

²¹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 191.

²² Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 192.

²³ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 192.

²⁴ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 192.

²⁵ Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, Vol. 2, p. 564.

²⁶ Shirane Tasuke, *Tsūzoku kankō yoji* (Kawagoe-machi: Meibundō, 1879). The precise meaning of the pamphlet's title, "Tsūzoku kankō yoji" (通俗觀光余事), is unclear, given the double meaning "kankō" (觀光) holds here in its reference both to Shirane and Grant. Now commonly translated as "tourism," the term actually has its roots in the Chinese Confucian classic "Book of Changes" (I-Ching), and was used throughout the Tokugawa and early Meiji

(fig. 1) and, in the description of the meeting that followed, Shirane is shown actively asking Grant for his advice, particularly on local issues. In response to Shirane’s request for advice on “governing the people,” (*chimin*: 治民) Grant noted the progress he had already seen while passing through the prefecture, including the industriousness of the people and the opening of schools. He noted, however, an absence of capital equipment and the prevalence of manual labor power in agriculture (身手の勞力); machinery “would reduce the need for labor...and increase productivity up to ten times.”²⁷

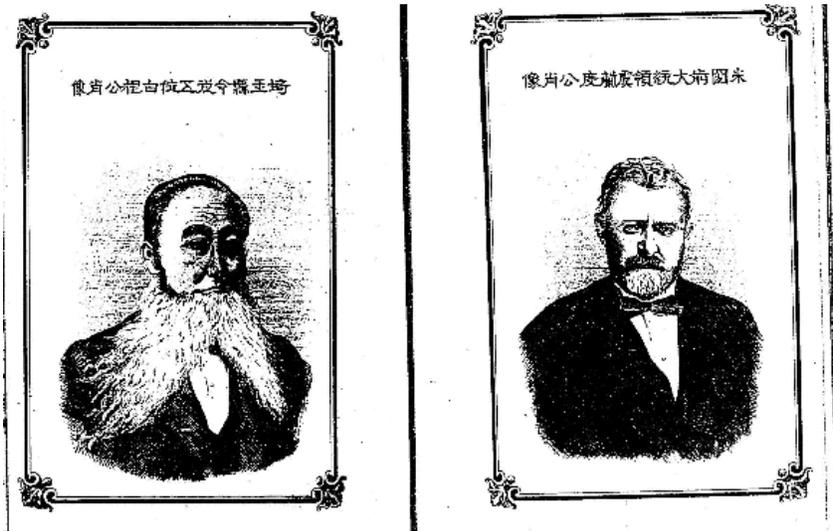


Figure 1: Saitama Governor Shirane Tasuke on left, and Grant on right

Promising to “deeply bear this in mind,” Shirane took the opportunity to promote Saitama’s local industry to Grant and his party, providing Grant 22 cylinders (筒) of Sayama green tea, one of Saitama’s leading products and, along with teas from Uji and Shizuoka, known as one of Japan’s “three great teas.” Shirane noted that the tea was already being exported to the United States; Shirane’s talk of tea inspired Grant’s wife, Julia, to observe that before arriving in Japan she had only taken black tea, but now having come to appreciate the “natural flavor” (天成の風味) of green tea, would continue serving it in her household when she returned to America. Julia continued to play an active role in the conversation, promising to bring fruit and vegetable seeds to Shirane if she ever made a return trip to Japan to promote Saitama’s local agricultural development. Grant himself spoke of mobilizing popular “will power” (*shinryoku*) in service of satisfying “the people’s desires”; through the encouragement of these popular energies exports could be expanded, “enriching the country and benefiting the people.”²⁸

As no one from Grant’s party left detailed records of this meeting, Shirane’s account is the only source of information available on their discussions and must be taken with a grain of salt given its clearly self-serving nature. That said, Shirane’s representation of Grant is consistent with

Period as an abbreviation to indicate a ruler’s responsibility to survey his lands and ensure the wellbeing of his people (觀國之光, 利用賓于王). Given the text’s content, and the passages from the *Doctrine of the Mean* that accompany the images of Shirane and Grant, there is strong reason to believe that this text is as much an assertion of Shirane’s Confucian-inspired approach to governance as it is about his receiving advice from Grant.

²⁷ Shirane, *Tsūzoku kankō yoji*, n.p.

²⁸ Shirane, *Tsūzoku kankō yoji*, n.p.

statements Grant made elsewhere on Japan's development and future prospects, namely in his high regard for Japanese educational reforms and the importance of capital investment. Notably absent in Grant's comments was any explicit discussion of political reforms, including the expansion of representative institutions then underway at the local level and actively being debated as part of Japan's constitutional movements. Popular empowerment, as expressed elsewhere in Grant's writings on Japan, was almost exclusively economic—a view consistent with views being promoted by Japanese national and local officials at the time. In later meetings with the Emperor, Grant famously hedged on the topic of elective assemblies; while noting that “all the European countries including even Russia have Elective Assemblies for legislative purposes,” he cautioned that “privileges like this, can never be recalled. When you give suffrage and representation you give them forever. Consequently in establishing such assembly too great caution cannot be taken. It is exceedingly dangerous to launch out too suddenly. You do not want to see anarchy as the result of any premature creation of an assembly.”²⁹

Shirane's account is also consistent with his lengthy record in Saitama, and his close identification with what he came to understand as the prefecture's interests. Like many of the other governors Grant met during his travels, Shirane was a native of a leading domain (Chōshū), yet, at the age 60, was considerably older than many of the leading figures in central and prefectural administration and represented an earlier generation that more closely identified itself with Tokugawa-era ethical and political traditions. Shirane joined the ranks of early Meiji officialdom, assuming the position of councilor (参事) in the Saitama prefectural administration in 1871, rising to the position of Vice Governor (権令) in 1873 and finally Governor (県令) in 1875, where he remained until his death in 1882. Shirane was one of the longest serving governors at the time of Grant's visit, and representative of the new class of governors that had emerged during the 1870s—ambitious middle and lower-level samurai who had taken over prefectural administrations from the former domainal lords. While this group typically identified strongly with the new imperial government, they brought with them conceptions of leadership and governance that were often drawn directly from Tokugawa traditions. Shirane had developed a strong reputation as a forceful advocate for his prefecture, leading on occasion to friction with the central government. Ōkubo Toshimichi noted that Shirane could create “unhappiness among his listeners” when he spoke of the “feelings of Saitama people,” and “refused to back down even if his ideas were not accepted.” “It is fair to say,” Ōkubo concluded, “that he is a representative of the people.”³⁰

Shirane's view of Saitama was an amalgam of traditional and modern assertions of local autonomy, particularly in his disdain for the efforts by younger central bureaucrats to subordinate governors and prefectures within its administrative structures. Shirane, however, seized opportunities to communicate directly with the Emperor; during an Imperial Progress through Saitama in 1877, Shirane pressed the Emperor to be more directly engaged with local populations.

²⁹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 201. Grant's views on democracy are famously difficult to discern; while during his lifetime he was widely viewed by the public as a champion of the “common man,” success revealed some elitist tendencies as well. He visited his hometown of Galena, Illinois infrequently after his ascent as General and President, preferring instead Philadelphia and New York, and Reconstruction policies meant to protect Southern blacks were rolled back during his time as President. For discussion of this, and treatment of the larger scholarly debate surrounding Grant, see Brooks D. Simpson, “Ulysses S. Grant and the Failure of Reconciliation,” *Illinois Historical Journal*, 81, no. 4 (Winter, 1988), pp. 269-282.

³⁰ Oyama Hironari, *Saitama kensei to chiji no rekishiteki kenkyū* (Tokyo: Shinkō shuppansha, 1996), p. 41.

At times, Shirane was blunt: “Are not even the remotest places still part of the realm (邦土)? It has been the custom since ancient times to extend comfort to the furthest reaches of the nation and the humblest man and woman. This is not a good time for the court to stand idly by.”³¹ He also appealed directly to the Emperor to visit the newly repaired Gongendō levee, which had been completed through “the people’s labor” and under the direction of local officials. The Emperor, in fact, did so the following June. In August 1878, Shirane again wrote the Emperor about the poverty he had witnessed in Saitama’s Chichibu district in a surprisingly direct critique of Japan’s modernization policies; the people of Chichibu “do not know cotton cloth, do not know the value of education, in sickness and death do not have access to medical care, and have no temple at which to worship.” Shirane noted the irony that “development was being pursued in Hokkaido, while just 40 *ri* (approximately 100 miles) from the capital there is such a place.”³²

Shirane lamented this “source of shame to the Emperor,” and urged him to demonstrate his “Imperial benevolence” (*seitoku*; 聖徳).³³ Oyama notes that a copy of Shirane’s appeal to the Emperor also appeared in local newspapers, a sign of Shirane’s efforts to court local public opinion to strengthen his position vis-a-vis local elites, central government bureaucrats, and the Emperor and his advisors—a strategy that Shirane later employed in publicizing his meeting with Grant. Shirane’s urgent and paternalistic tone in his communications with the Emperor reflected the considerable differences in their age, (the Emperor was only 26 at the time of Grant’s visit), as well as Shirane’s presumption that the Emperor should be actively engaged in ensuring the integrity of Meiji governance. In Shirane’s vision, governors served a crucial role as the Emperor’s eyes and ears on the ground, a function that was increasingly threatened by the meddling of state bureaucratic intermediaries.

Shirane’s advice did prove to be prescient, as events in both Hokkaido and Chichibu became major challenges to Meiji state authority. Corruption in transfer of state properties in Hokkaido brought about a major split in the national leadership in 1881, prompting the promise of a constitution in response to popular criticism, and in 1884 Chichibu was the site of the largest peasant rebellion, spurred on by the government’s deflationary policies. Shirane died in 1882, and the actions of his successor, Yoshida Kiyohide, in mobilizing the army to suppress the uprising served to illustrate the crucial role of the governor in mediating relations between the government and its critics.

In contrast to Yoshida and Mishima Michitsune, who had gained the moniker “devil governor” (鬼知事) through his ruthless responses to popular political movements in Japan’s rural northeast throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s, Shirane’s talents for balancing the competing political and economic demands of the state and local populations were increasingly noted. Shirane had overseen the establishment of a popularly elected prefectural assembly in Saitama in 1879, and at times his relationship with the body grew contentious over its insistence on reducing local expenditures, including those for policing, education, and medical care that Shirane viewed as crucial for the prefecture’s future development. Shirane, however, generally deferred to the

³¹ “Furthest reaches of the nation” is my translation of the far more elegant and succinct Japanese classical compound 四裔 (*shiei*); referring to the four cardinal directions. Oyama, *Saitama kensei to chiji no rekishiteki kenkyū*, 41.

³² Oyama, *Saitama kensei to chiji no rekishiteki kenkyū*, 42.

³³ Oyama, *Saitama kensei to chiji no rekishiteki kenkyū*, 42.

assembly's authority in budgetary matters, even when this came at the cost of his development agenda. As Oyama notes, this can be seen as one of the reasons the beginning of representative politics in Saitama was relatively peaceable, but also a reason that the development of Saitama's public health infrastructure proceeded more slowly than in other prefectures.³⁴

Shirane's death disrupted the working relationship between the prefectural government and the prefectural assembly, and Saitama governors over the next decade became more known for their antagonistic attitudes toward local politicians than their willingness to work with them. Over the remainder of the Meiji period Shirane became memorialized nationwide as a "good governor"; one 1902 publication used the Han-dynasty Chinese term that had, in Tokugawa parlance, come to designate skilled local officials—"competent [man] of 2000 koku" (*ryō nisen koku*: 良二千石).³⁵ Shirane's legacy lived on in far more tangible ways as well; he was the founding father of a veritable dynasty of prefectural governors and Home Ministry bureaucrats that continued until the end of World War II. One of his sons, Shirane Sen'ichi, served as governor of Ehime and Aichi prefectures in the late 1880s before moving to become Vice Minister of the Home Ministry in the early 1890s, and then Minister of Post and Communications under the second Ito cabinet in 1896.³⁶ Another son, Kōno Chūzō (adopted by the Kōno family of the Chōshū domain) served as governor of four different prefectures (Okayama, Shimane, Ibaraki, and Nara) from 1894 to 1906, and his grandson, Shirane Takesuke, held the governorship of seven different prefectures between 1924 and 1935, including a brief tenure as governor of Saitama in 1929. Collectively, these three served as governors in more than one-quarter of all of Japan's pre-war prefectures.

As the frequent movement of Shirane's descendants suggests, the career of prefectural governors changed significantly in the later Meiji decades and beyond, first in response to state efforts to bring them more fully under central control, and later through the increasing success of political parties to control gubernatorial appointments. At the time of Grant's visit, however, it seemed likely that governors would continue to play a prominent role in local and national-level politics; with the death of Saigō Takamori and other samurai leaders in the Satsuma Rebellion in 1877, and the death of Ōkubo a year later, prefectural governors were among the most charismatic and compelling public figures remaining in Japan.

Early Meiji Visions of Prefectural Governance

By the time Grant arrived in Japan in June of 1879, prefectural governors had become some of the most recognizable personalities in Japanese public life, due to their power and prestige as state officials, but also because of the significant gulf that still separated Japan's provincial populations from those controlling the central government in Tokyo. The early years of the Meiji period were a period of intense experimentation in local governance; the absence of a strong central state, and the contested nature of the Meiji Restoration's political significance, meant that a variety

³⁴ Oyama, *Saitama kensei to chiji no rekishiteki kenkyū*, 56.

³⁵ Oyama Hironari et al, *Saitama-ken seijishi danshō* (Urawa: Saitama shinbunsha, 1999), p. 164.

³⁶ Sen'ichi's career within the Home Ministry was not without controversy; he was implicated, along with Home Minister (and fellow Chōshū samurai) Shinagawa Yajirō, of acting to suppress party political activity during the infamous 1892 parliamentary election, leading to the collapse of the first Matsukata cabinet and the resignation of Shinagawa from office. Shirane, however, was not forced out, and continued his ascent within the bureaucracy. See Sasaki Takashi, "Naimusho jidai no Shirane Sen'ichi," in *Yamagata Aritomo to kindai Nihon*, Itō Takashi, ed. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2008), pp. 74-127.

of views emerged on the conduct of local politics and local-state relations. Early government efforts to establish new political institutions hardly brought clarity to crucial political questions; laws such as the *Seitaisho* (known in English as either the “1868 Constitution” or the “Organic Act”), the Meiji state’s initial effort to outline a framework for local and national government that kept Japan’s feudal domains intact were quickly made obsolete by the government’s subsequent effort in 1871 to abolish feudal *han* for directly administered prefectures.

While the Meiji state typically justified these changes as a necessary part of establishing rational and efficient administration at the sub-national level, this period of turmoil reflected the deep uncertainties that had been unleashed with the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the particular form of governance it represented. While the Meiji state had, through the imperial institution, begun to assert its own primacy in Japanese politics, calls for the “restoration” of imperial rule and a return to an earlier, Emperor-centered mode of government provided little practical guidance on local administration of regions dramatically altered by centuries of localized *daimyo* rule and the evolution of economic and social relations; nor did it satisfy the state’s own desire to establish new governing institutions comparable to those of the leading Western powers. There began a search for the new basis upon which local government was to be organized; early proposals issued by the Finance Ministry proposed the preservation of the larger *han* territories as prefectures while merging smaller *han* into new prefectures. There was also an effort to create these new prefectures in the shape of Japan’s former provinces (*kuni*) as a gesture to the Restoration ideals of the Meiji government.³⁷ The influence of these traditional territorial divisions, however, was tempered by the wish to establish the “modern” function of the new prefectures.

As W.G. Beasley has noted, the abolition of the domains represented a radical turning point, and an important precedent for the future development of Japanese governance and administration: it would “now be organized on entirely fresh principles” that required an entirely new approach to local governance.³⁸ The Meiji government’s early gestures to Japanese and Chinese classical precedent quickly proved inadequate in meeting the enormity of the challenge represented by the Western powers and their economic and military might; as a consequence, Japan looked to Western models for guidance in establishing its own national principles. The new realities of state power and the lessons of Western rational administration were quickly expressed following the establishment of the prefectures. There was an effort to create prefectures of roughly equal productive capacity, with the new regional divisions averaging around thirty to forty thousand *koku*, a conscious effort by the Meiji state to ensure the prefecture’s economic self-sufficiency and capability of supporting an extensive governing bureaucracy.³⁹ As the state continued to pursue the consolidation of prefectures into ever larger units throughout the 1870s, it also carried out an extensive program of renaming; many of the traditional *han* names that had been carried over into the early prefectural system were abolished, and replaced with other place names within its territories. Takamatsu *ken*, for instance, became Kagawa *ken*, symbolically breaking the ties between the prefecture and the former Takamatsu *han* upon which it was based. Other changes reinforced the prefecture’s break with the past, including a new personnel system that required the

³⁷ Ōshima, *Meiji kokka to chiiki shakai*, pp. 15-16.

³⁸ W.G. Beasley, “Meiji Political Institutions,” in *Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 5: The Nineteenth Century, Marius B. Jansen, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 634.

³⁹ Ōshima, *Meiji kokka to chiiki shakai*, p. 16.

appointment of governors and other high prefectural officials directly by the central government, and prohibited their posting to their home prefecture.

While the broad outline of the emerging prefectural system did suggest an underlying logic to the government's reform program, inconsistencies in the way in which these policies were carried out revealed the continued importance of traditional regional identities and affiliations at all levels of society. The Meiji Restoration may have appealed to the "equality of all under the Emperor," but Japanese society and politics remained marked by sharp regional and status divisions, and the national government by the dominance of a few powerful leaders from the southwestern domains that had led the Imperial Restoration movement. The implementation of the prefectural system revealed the imbalance of power quite explicitly; Japan's eastern territories, which had been the fiercest defenders of the Tokugawa shogunate during the Restoration wars, were the targets of the most thorough application of state reforms, while many of the southwestern territories managed to preserve a greater degree of autonomy. In the early years of Meiji, the state remained essentially a coalition of the leading southern powers, and thus chose to proceed carefully in its policies toward those regions. Whereas by 1872 most of the northern prefectures' highest officials were government-appointed outsiders, the officials of the most influential southern prefectures remained largely homegrown. Many of these same territories also succeeded in preserving their *han* designations as their new prefectural name and their traditional territorial boundaries; Saga and Kumamoto prefectures, for instance, both maintained their traditional *han* names and had prefectural offices staffed almost entirely by local residents.⁴⁰ While local control over prefectural administration decreased rapidly during the first decade of Meiji, officials from Japan's southwestern regions continued to occupy top positions in other prefectures, representing the substantial influence regional cliques played at the national and regional levels throughout the Meiji period.⁴¹

In addition to providing the venues for competition among Meiji's leading regional cliques, the early prefectures also attracted the interests of a variety of political activists and entrepreneurs eager to experiment with new forms of government at the local level. The men who occupied the highest levels of early Meiji prefectural leadership reflected the broad spectrum of political beliefs that had emerged out of the Restoration. Figures such as Mishima Michitsune, a Satsuma samurai who served as governor in a number of prefectures throughout the 1870s and 1880s and came to be known for his brutal suppression of popular protests in the regions under his control, served alongside leading liberal activists such as Kanda Takahira [Kōhei] and Nakajima Nobuyuki who held governorships during the first decade of the Meiji period and actively promoted the development of representative political institutions. The movement to establish "councils" (*kaigi*) at both the prefectural and local levels expressed a broad popular interest in liberal democratic institutions, and claimed legitimacy based upon some of the government's own pronouncements. The 1868 Charter Oath had famously declared that "deliberative assemblies shall be widely convoked and all matters decided by public discussion" (*hiraku kaigi o okoshi, banki kōron ni kessubeshi*), suggesting to some that Meiji politics would necessarily become increasingly open

⁴⁰ Ōshima, *Meiji kokka to chiiki shakai*, pp. 18-29.

⁴¹ Ōshima, *Meiji kokka to chiiki shakai*, 18-29. The case of Okinawa prefecture demonstrates an instance of increasing influence of regional cliques in prefectural administration in the early Meiji period; officials from Kagoshima prefecture (formerly known as Satsuma domain) occupied less than 10% of positions in the Okinawan government following its establishment in 1879, but this percentage had increased to almost 30% by 1887. See Okinawa-ken kyōiku iinkai, *Okinawa kenshi*, Vol. 1 (Naha: Kokusho Kankōkai, 1989), p. 238.

and democratic. According to such views, governors were seen as the leading edge of democratic reform, rather than as agents of state power; at the first meeting of what was called the “Conference of Governors” (*Chihōkan kaidō*), state and regional officials gathered to discuss problems surrounding taxation and administrative affairs in what was described at the time as a council “equivalent to England’s lower house of parliament.”⁴² Besides being an early example of the representative function governors would more formally assume in later Governor’s Assemblies (*Chihōkan kaigi*), this meeting also illustrated the wide interest in local representative institutions that predated the start of the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement. As Watanabe Takaki has observed, the period from 1871 to 1873, which was marked by the absence of Japan’s senior leaders as they departed for a worldwide tour and campaign to revise trade treaties, saw a surge of interest in popular assemblies (*minkai*) and a nascent interest in forming a “national council” (*kokkai giin*) comprised of representatives of “prefectural peoples” (*fuken minjin*).⁴³

Amidst the increasing disputes among governors over the relations of state power (*kokken*) to popular rights (*minken*), some attempted to bring clarity to the governor’s role in mediating local politics of reform. Matsuda Michiyuki, who emerged as one of the most influential figures in prefectural governance during the 1870s and early 1880s, provided one of the earliest and most comprehensive efforts to identify principles of local politics during his tenure as governor of Ōtsu (later renamed Shiga) prefecture. While Matsuda came to be known as a proponent of strong state-led governance in his later roles in the Home Ministry and as Chief of the Ryukyu Annexation, as Ōtsu governor during the early 1870s he struggled to articulate the principles of local government as they were to be understood in the rapidly changing conditions of early Meiji. Writing in 1874, Matsuda argued that good local governance depended upon the ability of local officials to identify their core administrative duties in a rapidly changing social and political environment. They were the crucial intermediaries between the state and the people; they had a responsibility to “follow the directives of the council of state and the various ministries,” yet also were responsible for communicating to the state the “desires of those below.” Matsuda emphasized the importance of the governor’s relationship to his people, noting that, even in matters that appeared well within the scope of the governor’s authority, he “must not go against the principles of the current political order (*tōji seitai no shui ni motoru o ezu*). In other words, they are to rule the people below and protect their rights, and to act as the representative of their prefecture’s people, to consider all [his actions] as on behalf of the people.” Matsuda described this mindful disposition of local affairs according to regulation and law as “the basic responsibilities of the governor; there is no greater duty.”⁴⁴

What, then, was the proper way forward, and what were the practical implications of Matsuda’s political philosophy for prefectural policy? Matsuda outlined what he considered to be the most pressing matters for government action, including the opening of popular assemblies, the reform of the land tax, the rectification and modernization of the tax system, the improvement of physical infrastructure, the improvement of policing, economic improvement, education, and assistance to the poor. With regard to popular assemblies, Matsuda provided his own view on the proper development of representative institutions within the prefecture, stating his preference for

⁴² Watanabe, *Meiji kokka keisei to chihō jichi*, p. 150.

⁴³ Watanabe, *Meiji kokka keisei to chihō jichi*, p. 128.

⁴⁴ Matsuda Michiyuki, “Kenchi shoken,” in Shiga-ken, ed. *Shiga kenshi: Shiga-ken hen*: Vol. 5. Osaka: Seibundō, pp. 467-477.

a top-down, rather than bottom-up, approach. Noting that some believed that popular assemblies should begin with town and village assemblies, leading eventually to district (*ku*) and prefectural councils, Matsuda argued that “the level of enlightenment among the prefectural people” and careful attention to “the proper order of what is urgent and what is not” suggested that the establishment of assemblies begin at the prefectural level, with later expansions to districts and municipalities based upon the prefectural assembly’s “appearance” (*teisai*) and “standards” (*shōtei*). Matsuda warned, however, that should the assemblies “prove incompatible to the political order of our nation and the level of popular enlightenment, and turn their backs on compromise, it will become necessary to do away with the obstructions presented by the deliberative councils.”⁴⁵

Matsuda’s wariness of popular representative institutions reflected an understanding of politics in which the integration and reconciliation of regional and class tensions was best engineered instead through economic development, improvements in education, and better mutual understanding between officials and people. In fact, Matsuda’s document can be seen as a direct response to the rising challenge of popular politics, and an effort to present an alternative political model in which people could count upon the governor and his officials to competently and thoughtfully manage the affairs of the prefecture. Taxes were to be reformed, leveled, and standardized; roads, rivers, and canals improved; land cleared and made more productive; services and aid provided to the poor; schools established; and communication between officials and local populations promoted.

Governors as Icons

Popular representations of governors began to appear with greater frequency during the early 1880s, including an illustrated guide, *Tales of Prefectural Governors* (府県長官銘々伝), featuring images and biographical sketches of governors then in office. These guides included portraits of many of the men Grant had met during his tour, including Shirane, Uchimi, Morioka, and Osako; published by journalist and author of popular *gesaku* fiction Itō Kyōtō (Senzō), the book’s representations of governors had clear similarities to those of heroic samurai popularized in the late Tokugawa period by artists such as Utagawa Kuniyoshi. The volume’s portrait of Shirane, for instance, bears a striking resemblance with Utagawa’s woodblock print of late Heian samurai Sanada Yoshitada (see figures 2 and 3). Reflecting the cultural eclecticism of early Meiji and governors’ particular roles in straddling Tokugawa and Meiji political ideologies, others appeared as agents of Western-inspired modernization and progress, faithful servants of the state, and, in the case of Hokkaido chief administrator Kuroda Kiyotaka, enforcers of the Meiji state’s colonization policies over native ethnic minorities like the *Ainu*.

⁴⁵ Matsuda, “Kenchi shoken,” p. 470.



Figures 2 and 3: Late Edo portrait of Sanada Yoshitada by Utagawa Kuniyoshi on left, Shirane Tasuke on right



Figures 4 and 5: Nagasaki Governor Utsumi Tadakatsu (left), and Hokkaido chief administrator Kuroda Kiyotaka seated in front of a supplicating *Ainu* indigene (right)

In the preface to the work, Ito noted that he sought to contribute something of value through these portraits of governors; this was no mere "fairy tale book" (*togizōshi*: 伽草紙), but one that offered him the opportunity to share with “30 million of my countrymen the achievements and the

⁴⁶ Source image for Sanada portrait: <https://www.city.odawara.kanagawa.jp/encycl/ukiyoe/02/02-02d.html>. Image of Shirane taken from Itō Kyōtō, ed., *Fuken chōkan meimeiden* (Tokyo: Kōeidō, 1881).

tender care (*buiku*: 撫育) offered by the governors.”⁴⁷ While many of the accompanying narratives provide rather bland overviews of the governors and their ascent within the bureaucratic ranks to reach their position, some contain glimpses of an emerging popular consensus on what it meant to be a successful governor; Hyōgo Governor Morioka Masazumi was “skilled in the practice of shepherding the people (*bokumin*: 牧民), and sensitive to the feelings of those below him.”⁴⁸ Other governors received similar acclaim for their good relations with local populations; Yamanashi governor Fujimura Shirō, who along with Shirane was one of the longest serving governors of the early Meiji period, was recognized for endearing himself to a local population known for their “stubbornness,” and had made his prefecture “the first out of 37⁴⁹ in enlightenment (*kaika*: 開化).”⁵⁰ Through the construction of “roads that cut through mountains,” the encouragement of industry, and the promotion of education, he had “led the people to understand the spirit of the times,” and “had become like a mother to them through his wisdom.”⁵¹ In what is perhaps a reference to his advanced age in comparison to other governors, Shirane’s description portrays him as a talented samurai youth who nevertheless was “inclined toward solitary pursuits” and not necessarily inclined to government service. He, however, had “poured himself” into service to Saitama since his arrival, becoming known for his advancement of the prefecture.⁵²

The assembled portraits of the governors reflect a sense of optimism that still prevailed about the new Meiji order and the role of prefectural governors within it—a view that had begun to dim in some circles as the economic and political crises of the early and mid-1880s dramatically increased tensions between local political activists and prefectural administrations. Describing the period of the late 1870s, James Huffman noted the widespread, yet nervous optimism that prevailed: “it would have been hard to find a single leader who was not hopeful, or an official who did not see the blend of progress and challenge as invigorating.”⁵³ By happenstance Grant arrived at this moment when Japan’s worst days appeared behind it, and both national and local leaders were free to voice their visions of Japan’s future. With the establishment of prefectural assemblies in 1879 governors could appear as benevolent agents of popular political reform and local economic development; in their bearing they confidently presented themselves as officials worthy even of the attentions of a dignitary like Grant.

Their attempts to engage Grant also suggests the seriousness with which governors viewed their responsibilities for promoting local interests and economic development; while this was in line with overall national economic policies, governors such as Shirane explicitly tied this to the welfare of his prefecture’s population—the success of economic policies could not simply be measured in terms of its benefits to the state, but also in terms of its effects at the grassroots. Such ideas reflected the blend of old and new political ideologies governors drew upon for legitimacy; the rising challenge of popular politics encouraged them to take active public roles advocating on

⁴⁷ Itō Kyōtō, ed., *Fuken chōkan meimeiden* (Tokyo: Kōeidō, 1881), p. 1.

⁴⁸ Itō, p. 4.

⁴⁹ The number “37” here likely refers to all of Japan’s regional prefectures (*ken*: 県), and excludes Japan’s three metropolitan prefectures (Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto *fu*: 府), as well as chief administrator of Hokkaido, then known as “Director of Colonization” (*kaitaku ri*: 開拓吏).

⁵⁰ Itō, p. 7.

⁵¹ Itō, p. 7.

⁵² Itō, p. 6.

⁵³ James Huffman, *A Yankee in Meiji Japan* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), p. 115.

behalf of their prefectures, but so also did the legacy of Confucian political ethics that governors had inherited from Tokugawa intellectual traditions. Terms such as *bokumin*, which had become popular in the late Tokugawa period to signify ties of benevolence between a lord and his people, survived into the modern era through the increasingly common compound *bokuminkan* (牧民官), which specifically sought to associate the ideals of competence and benevolence with Japan's new bureaucracy.⁵⁴ Such intellectual continuity across the Tokugawa-Meiji divide was a product of an early Meiji leadership that had in many cases previously occupied positions within Tokugawa-era local administrations, as well as the efforts by the young Meiji imperial institution to articulate its own legitimacy through Tokugawa ethical concepts. Paternalistic ideas such as *bokuminkan* continued to play an important role in official bureaucratic ideologies throughout the prewar period, and inspired Showa-era intellectuals like Yasuoka Masahiro in their efforts to legitimize a "transcendental" role for bureaucrats within Japan's Meiji constitutional order.⁵⁵

Conclusion

Grant, who expressed little interest in the intricacies of foreign local politics throughout his travels, left Japan impressed by what he had seen. In contrast to his travels elsewhere in the non-Western world, including India and China, Grant declared that "Japan is different...the country is beautiful beyond description. Every street and every house is as clean as they can be made. Good water prevails everywhere and it is freely used. The progress that has been made in the last dozen years is almost inconceivable."⁵⁶ Grant maintained his high regard for Japan and its people throughout his time there; writing to his daughter Nellie, he effused that "all in all Japan & the Japanese are worth all the trouble, time and expense of visiting,"⁵⁷ and in a later letter written to his close friend and former Civil War veteran Adam Badeau, Grant commented that "my visit to Japan has been the most pleasant of all my travels...my reception and entertainment has been the most extravagant I have ever known, or even read, of."⁵⁸ In his final speech before leaving Japan, Grant again compared Japan favorably to his previous destinations; "everywhere there seems to be the greatest contentment among the people and while no signs of great individual wealth exist, no absolute poverty is visible. This is in striking and pleasing contrast with almost every other country I have visited."⁵⁹

Grant's praise, coming at a crucial moment when Japan had been confronting profound domestic political upheavals and diplomatic crises both with the West and with China, represented a strong vote of confidence with a worldwide audience.⁶⁰ The most prominent foreigner to visit

⁵⁴ *Bokuminkan*, or "official who shepherds the people," appears in early Meiji dictionaries, but there is little evidence of its widespread use until it becomes closely associated with governors and the wider Home Ministry bureaucracy in the mid-Meiji period. While the reasons for this are unclear, it could be that the association of benevolence with specific members of the government only became meaningful with increasing bureaucratic hierarchies and specialization.

⁵⁵ Brown, "Shepherds of the People: Yasuoka Masahiro and the New Bureaucrats in Early Showa Japan," p. 288.

⁵⁶ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 181.

⁵⁷ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 181.

⁵⁸ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 193.

⁵⁹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 29, p. 229.

⁶⁰ During his stay in China the Qing government sought Grant's help in mediating its dispute over the Ryukyu islands, which had been forcibly annexed by the Japanese government shortly before to Grant's arrival in China. The status of the Ryukyu islands had been historically ambiguous, with both countries having political and cultural ties to the kingdom. While Grant did raise the issue with the Meiji government during his time in Japan, the two

Japan since the 1868 Meiji Restoration, Grant affirmed the new Meiji state's modernizing and Westernizing policies, noting with approval the progress the country had made in areas of education, commerce, and diplomacy. Even after Grant's return to the U.S. he continued to advance American industrial leadership in East Asia until the eve of his death in July 1885. In a November 1884 letter to the journalist John Russell Young, who had accompanied Grant on the world tour, he recommends "the firm of Frazer Wetmore & Co. of Shanghai and Yokohama...for the purpose of supplying locomotives, machinery of all kinds, passenger and freight cars &c. for China and Japan."⁶¹ As a U.S. company with strong ties to East Asia, Frazer Wetmore could lead a broader American fight against European interests for leadership in East Asian economic development. "The United States is prepared now to compete with England in the matter of steel rails, and in locomotives and many kinds of machinery, and in firearms, can best the world, taking into consideration quality and price." According to Grant, it was also in the best interests of East Asia for the U.S. to supply its industrial products: "I believe that it is to the advantage of both China and Japan to look to the United States for any thing which they must go abroad for. We have no designs in the East inimical to those countries, and, from our geographical position and institutions, can not have. This is not the case with the strong European powers."⁶²

As events surrounding Grant's 1879 visit to Japan remind us, however, there were political and cultural undercurrents at work that remained largely invisible to him and those foreigners documenting his travels. Grant was focused on national and imperial concerns; the World Tour positioned Grant for reentry into American political life by constructing a narrative in which he remained a key arbiter of the forces and discourses then shaping the late 19th century world. His was a distinctly American voice that could express wariness of the inequities inherent in European imperialist ideologies, yet reinforce some of these same inequities through alternative visions of progress and civilization.⁶³ Grant presciently recognized the challenge that Japan's successful political and economic modernization would represent to racist hierarchies of development and acknowledged the potential for development elsewhere,⁶⁴ yet this did not lead him to develop a

governments did not reach agreement and the islands remained under Japanese control. In a sign of Japan's efforts to downplay the diplomatic dimensions of this issue, Home Ministry official Matsuda Michiyuki served as the Meiji government's chief agent in the annexation. For more detailed discussion of Grant's efforts in this issues, see Richard T. Chang, "General Grant's 1879 Visit to Japan," *Monumenta Nipponica*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1969), pp. 373-392.

⁶¹ Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 31, p. 241.

⁶² Grant, *Papers*, Vol. 31, p. 241.

⁶³ Sharon Kennedy-Nolle, "Reconstruction on the Imperial Road: John Russell Young's 'Around the World with General Grant,'" *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 43, no. 2 (Fall 2010), p. 77. Kennedy-Nolle has noted the contradictions inherent in Grant's efforts to distinguish American global leadership from that of the Europeans, leading him to take positions that sought a middle ground "between European imperialism and one anticipating Hardt and Negri's modern ideal of democratically impelled "Empire."

⁶⁴ Grant had an abiding interest in Mexico since first being stationed there during the Mexican-American War in 1846, and became deeply involved in promoting American commercial interests there following his return to America in 1879. Similar to his efforts toward China and Japan, Grant lobbied the Mexican government for U.S. leadership in its railway development, even becoming President of the Mexican Southern Railroad from its formation in 1881 until its collapse in 1884. For a detailed account of this period of Grant's life, see Osgood Hardy, "Ulysses S. Grant, President of the Mexican Southern Railroad," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (May 1955), pp. 111-120. For a more recent perspective on how this competition over railroads played out in Japan during this period, see Steven J. Ericson, "Importing Locomotives in Meiji Japan: International Business and Technology Transfer in the Railroad Industry," *Osiris* 13 (1998), pp. 129-153.

broader critique of the intellectual foundations of colonialism as seen in his comments on India.⁶⁵ Japan was instead the exception that proved the general rule of Western political and economic supremacy—a view that was constantly reinforced as Grant was repeatedly pressed for advice and assistance in economic, political, and diplomatic matters as he traveled through South and East Asia. Such views were not Grant’s alone but were shared by a larger group of American defenders who similarly saw in a modernizing Japan an opportunity to challenge European hegemony in world affairs, and to advance American values and interests globally.⁶⁶

While for Grant Japan represented a crucial element in his efforts to construct a less Eurocentric and racially-determined world vision more in line with his own postbellum American ideals, for Japanese leaders Grant offered a unique opportunity to promote new, Emperor-centered narratives of the nation. They were thus working to common ends, as both Grant and the new Meiji government were mutually invested in the idea of a stable Japanese political order with strong and competent leadership. As Edward Said has noted, the success of modern states and empires depended upon their “power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging.”⁶⁷ Joined by their shared concern with the disruptive potential of regionalism, both Grant’s and the Meiji state’s narratives left little room for alternative national stories that instead emphasized the primacy of popular politics, or the importance of more regionally- and locally-based understandings of Japanese governance and development.⁶⁸

Even as governors came to identify themselves more closely with the central government than with the prefecture, local populations retained the “right” to judge governors based upon the political ideals and principles popularized in the first decade of the Meiji period. Famed satirist and scholar Miyatake Gaikotsu, reflecting in 1941 upon the modern evolution of prefectures, compiled a list of governors in the style of a sumo *banzuke* ranking sheet based on early Meiji sources; representing the “East” were 36 “good governors” (*yoroshi kata*) ranging in rank from the the champion “Ōzeki” to the more junior “Maegashira,” and representing the “West” were the “bad governors” (*waruki kata*) ranked in the same fashion. The leader of the “good governors” was Iwamura Takatoshi, who had held the governorship in six different prefectures during the Meiji Period, and had distinguished himself through his suppression of the Saga Rebellion early in his career and later as a supporter of the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement while Governor of Aichi Prefecture.⁶⁹ Utsumi Tadakatsu, who had met Grant upon his arrival in Nagasaki,

⁶⁵ In the case of India, Grant was generally supportive of British colonialism for the benefits it had brought to a “benighted and downtrodden” country, particularly its promotion of railroads, schools, farms, and factories. See Ron Chernow, *Grant* (New York: Penguin, 2017), pp. 877-878.

⁶⁶ One leading proponent of this view was the American Japan-based journalist Edward House, who wrote extensively on Japanese and international affairs throughout the 1870s and became a leading critic of the punitive and exploitative treatment of Japan by the West. By the time Grant visited Japan, House’s views had become influential within Japan and widely known abroad, Grant and House met privately during Grant’s Japan tour. For further information on House, see James L. Huffman, *A Yankee in Meiji Japan*.

⁶⁷ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. xiii.

⁶⁸ Given his experience in the Civil War and as President, it is not surprising that Grant would be generally supportive of Japan’s centralization of political authority, and the idea of state-led development and reform. For a more detailed discussion of Grant’s evolving political ideas during this period, see William S. McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1981).

⁶⁹ Miyatake Gaikotsu, *Fu-han-ken seishi* (Tokyo: Natori shoten, 1941), pp. 260-261. Like the Shirane clan, the Iwamura family emerged as a powerful force in prefectural politics; one of Iwamura’s brothers, Hayashi Yūzō, was

appeared just behind Iwamura in rank, while both Shirane and Fujimura appeared on the list of “good governors” at the rank of Maegashira. Leading the list of “bad governors” was Mishima Michitsune, who had violently suppressed popular political activity in Japan’s northeastern prefectures during the late 1870s and 1880s, yet at number three was the same Morioka Masazumi who had been heralded by Itō for his skill of “shepherding the people.” By the mid-1880s, Miyatake notes, Morioka was identified in the Japanese press as one of the five governors most opposing popular rights—likely a reflection of his increasing impatience with local politics in the early 1880s.

Miyatake’s list is a reminder of the complex calculations that faced both governors and local populations as they confronted the problem of bureaucratic politics. Caught between the demands of the state and localities, governors aspired to satisfy both sides, although this was exceedingly difficult. Miyatake noted the unpredictability of a governor’s success; Shibahara Yawara enjoyed high regard as Chiba prefecture’s first governor but struggled in his subsequent appointments to Yamagata and Kagawa prefectures. Likewise, Nabeshima Miki was heralded as a skilled official during his tenure in Tochigi (using the same Tokugawa-era term, *ryō nisen koku*, applied to other “good governors” like Shirane), but later came under severe criticism during his time as Aomori governor.⁷⁰ The desire to be respected, and even embraced, by the people they ruled, so evident among early Meiji governors, remained an important motivation for governors throughout the prewar period as they put their increasingly bureaucratic training to practice. This often prevented their interests from aligning perfectly with the state’s, and provided one important, albeit imperfect means by which local populations could hope to hold their government accountable.

a prominent liberal politician, while another brother Iwamura Michitoshi, served as governor in several prefectures before serving as Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, and as a member of the House of Peers in the early 1890s.

⁷⁰ Miyatake, p. 260.