The bureaucratization of the state and the rise of Japan

ABSTRACT

The rise of Japan is explained in terms of the development of an exceptionally bureaucratic state. This resulted from the sixteenth-century emergence of a ruling salariat separated from the land, the eventual overthrow of the pre-modern state by a revolutionary section of this salariat, and its subsequent building of a modern state. The early military expansion of Japan was directed in a highly rational manner by these bureaucrats. In the 1930s, however, military expansion became irrational, in the sense that it became heedless of costs and consequences, and self-destructive, but this was not because of the resurgence of non-rational forces but rather because of the disintegration latent in the bureaucratic state. Defeat cleared the way for a resumption of economic expansion in a changed international situation. Economic growth did not happen automatically, however, but was directed by the economic bureaucracy, which used the institutions created by bureaucrats in the pre-war period. Economic expansion too has, arguably, become irrational and self-undermining but the parallel with military expansion should not be taken too far, for economic expansion has been much harder for the West to combat than military expansion. This analysis of the origins, development and expansion of the Japanese state is set in the context of the debate between Marxist and Weberian theory.

Explanations of the rise of Japan have made little reference to the development of the Japanese state. Apart from the work of Bendix and Barrington Moore, the sociological discussion of the development of the state has made little reference to Japan. The aim of this article is to bring these two fields of inquiry into a mutually profitable dialogue.

The theme of the article is that the modern Japanese state has been exceptionally bureaucratic in character. The explanation of this is sought in the development of Japan’s pre-modern bureaucracy,
which, in contrast with that of China, has received little attention in sociology. The bureaucratic state is then linked to Japan’s military and industrial expansion. All too often Japan’s expansion has been explained in terms of non-rational impulses stemming from Japanese national character or culture. It is argued here that both military and industrial expansion were consequences of the development of a bureaucratic state. Both were initially highly rational, though both, especially military expansion, became irrational later, not because non-rational forces in some way came to the surface but because of the dysfunctions of the bureaucratic state.

So far as theoretical issues are concerned, the article has a bearing on the debate between the Marxist and Weberian approaches to the development of the state. The approach taken here is Weberian, building on the insights of specialist writers on Japan, such as Huber and Silberman, who have explicitly used the ideas of Weber. It is argued that the expansion of Japan can be better understood in terms of the development of a bureaucratic state and its relations with other states than in terms of the development of capitalism and the dynamics of class conflict, as argued in the broadly Marxist accounts provided by Moore and Halliday.

1. JAPAN AS A BUREAUCRATIC STATE

It is first necessary to justify the assertion that Japan developed an exceptionally bureaucratic modern state.

The first ground for making this statement is the character of Meiji, Japan’s ruling group. During the Meiji period (1868–1912), when Japan established itself as a powerful modern state, it was controlled not by a ruling class, at least not a ruling class in the classic Marxian sense, but by bureaucrats. Japan was a bureaucracy in the true sense of the word, rule by state officials. The background to this was that the Meiji Restoration, Japan’s nineteenth-century revolution, was carried out not by a bourgeoisie but by samurai, who took control of the state and modernized it. The samurai were administrators not landowners and should not be confused with aristocracies of the European kind. Moore’s comparisons with Germany and references to Japan’s ‘landed aristocracy’ are here misleading. This is not to say that a politically influential landowning class did not exist or that there were no samurai landowners but that, as Smith and Bendix have argued, Japan was not ruled by a landed aristocracy. Neither bourgeoisie nor landowners controlled the state. It was ruled by an oligarchy of ex-samurai, from the feudal domains of Satsuma and Choshu, the domains that brought about the Meiji Restoration (Moore 1969:253; Bendix 1969:221–8; Smith 1961:370–83).

The second ground is the subsequent weakness of political parties
in Japan and the dominance of the bureaucracy in policy-making. The Sat-Chō oligarchy circumscribed the power of the political parties emerging in the late nineteenth century by introducing a constitution which made the armed forces and cabinet ministers responsible to the emperor not the legislature, by rejecting the principle of collective cabinet responsibility, and by insulating the bureaucracy from the political parties. The parties did eventually force their way into government but the constitution remained intact and the power of the parties was rolled back again in the 1930s. The formal democratization of Japan after 1945 substituted the legislature for the emperor as the sovereign body but this seems to have made little difference to the bureaucracy’s control of policy. Bureaucrats formed what Stockwin calls a ‘core élite’ within the ruling Liberal-Democratic party, while the struggle for political power has been dominated by conflict between the factions of this party rather than between parties offering policy choices (Pempel 1974; Silberman 1982:240; Stockwin 1982:10, 15–21, 148f).

The third ground is the exceptional development of bureaucratic norms within the Japanese civil service. Silberman has argued that there was an ‘unrestricted development of legal-rational norms’ (1974:214), that there was a ‘complete rationalization of a structure for recruitment, tenure, advancement, and retirement in the civil bureaucracy between 1884 and 1889’ (1982:236). Recruitment was now on the basis of educational qualifications. The bureaucrat was protected against dismissal by politicians. Promotion was according to seniority. Paradoxically, this exceptional development of bureaucratic norms opened the way, however, to corruption. The principle of seniority became so absolute in its sway that all members of a grade were promoted at the same time, which led to early retirement for those unable to secure higher positions as the hierarchy tapered towards the top, and a need for a second career in business or politics. This gave outside organizations a leverage which they badly needed, for the bureaucracy was so tightly insulated and the bureaucrat’s career was so protected that this was the only way that they could exert any influence on the civil service (Craig 1975:4, 11–15; Silberman 1974:208–15).

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BUREAUCRATIC STATE

a) Bureaucratization and the growth of a revolutionary service class Japanese society was bureaucratized during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868) and many of the key features of the modern bureaucratic state emerged during these years. The most crucial step in the bureaucratization process began a little earlier, however, during the ‘feudal anarchy’ of the sixteenth century and it is here that we must begin.
The process of turning samurai warriors into bureaucrats began then with the separation of the samurai from the land. The imperatives of civil war forced the competing daimyo barons to strengthen their authority and mobilize more effectively the resources of their domains by bringing the samurai under closer control. They were turned from feudal retainers allotted sub-fiefs into stipendiaries, living off a rice salary in the daimyo’s castle town. Their removal from the land also separated them from the peasantry, and was part of the process of stratifying Japanese society into hereditary status groups. The peasantry was disarmed and arms bearing was restricted to the samurai (Hall 1966:389–407 and 1981:207–10).

The samurai were warriors and their reduction to salaried status was only the first step in their transformation into a service class. Under the Tokugawa peace there was not the same need for warriors and the samurai largely became civil servants. The number of offices steadily increased, in part to provide employment for the samurai. The shogunal administration alone eventually comprised some 17,000 positions. Crucial to the ‘civilization’ of the samurai was their education in Confucianism, which was actively promoted, through the foundation of ‘fief’ schools, as an appropriate ideology for a more orderly society. The Confucianist values of obedience, respect for authority, self-restraint and education facilitated the bureaucratization of the samurai and legitimated the stratification of Tokugawa society (Dore 1965:68f; Dowdy 1973:67,129; Hall 1966:405–8).

The Tokugawa did not, however, construct a centralized bureaucratic state. There was, indeed, no national administrative structure under the Tokugawa. Each of Japan’s component feudal domains collected its own taxes, controlled its own armed forces and developed its own administration. The shogunate controlled the daimyo through edicts regulating their behaviour and surveillance to check their obedience. This was enforced through the rotation and confiscation of domains, and by the practice of ‘sankin-kotai’, a remarkable system of control through hostage, which required daimyo wives and heirs to be resident in Edo, the shogunal capital, and the daimyo themselves to live there every other year. The material basis of shogunal control was the size and wealth of the steadily expanding Tokugawa domains. The Tokugawa did not need to rule Japan directly, for their lands and wealth meant that they could live off their own resources and had military superiority. They could operate an economical system of indirect rule through control of the daimyo (Dowdy 1973:50–60).

The Tokugawa shogunate was a successful feudal monarchy rather than an absolute state. The daimyo were granted their lands in exchange for oaths of allegiance, obedience and service. The stability of the state depended upon the control of the daimyo. As in the feudal monarchies of Europe, the ruler’s power depended ultimately on the size and wealth of the ‘royal domain’, the Tokugawa lands.
This suggests that the emphasis placed by many writers, most recently Hall, on the significance of the competitive European multi-state system for the centralization of European states is confirmed by Japanese history — in two ways. The conflict between the mini-states, into which Japan had become divided during the period of ‘feudal anarchy’, set in motion a process of local state development. Japan was Europe in microcosm. On the other hand, Japan was a relatively isolated society, and became more so under the Tokugawa, who expelled foreigners, reduced trading contacts to a minimum and ‘secluded’ the country from foreign influence. There were no interstate pressures to stimulate centralization at national level. Thus, the imperatives of internal inter-state competition produced local absolute states but the international isolation of Japan made a national absolute state unnecessary. This throws doubt on the Marxist argument, as advanced by Anderson for example, that the European absolute state emerged from the class conflict of feudal society rather than inter-state conflict (Anderson 1975:18; Hall 1985:139).

If bureaucratization had taken place within the domains, the Tokugawa Shogunate remained aristocratic and feudal. Its persisting aristocratic and feudal features were, moreover, central to Japan’s nineteenth-century transformation, in part because of the tensions between bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic elements. Two main aspects of Tokugawa bureaucracy must here be considered, inherited rank and political loyalty.

Although there was an ideology of merit, recruitment to office became increasingly a matter of rank, and in the consequent tension between bureaucracy and aristocracy can be found, as Huber has argued, the social origins of the Meiji Restoration, Japan’s modernizing revolution. The samurai were highly stratified internally, above all into upper and lower groups, whose wealth, life-style and ideology were quite different. Only the aristocratic upper samurai had access to the senior and politically important positions, and these tended to become hereditary. The actual work of administration was carried out by a much more numerous lower samurai service class. Furthermore, it was not only the exclusion of the lower samurai that mattered but the increasing barriers to mobility as time went on, for, as Smith has argued, this generated a growing discontent and at a time when the shogunate’s intensifying social and financial problems, and the increasing pressure of foreign powers upon Japan, showed how necessary merit was and how lacking in merit those in high office apparently were. The result was the potent combination of deprivation, career frustration and idealism, which, according to Huber, motivated the lower samurai revolutionaries who carried out the Meiji Restoration, and then reformed Japanese society and created a new bureaucracy based on merit (Dore 1965:312; Huber 1981:Ch.9; Smith 1967:72–8, 81; Totman 1967:144–9).
The significance of political loyalty for the Meiji revolution was equally great. Here it is important to be aware of the difference between Chinese and Japanese Confucianism. As Bellah and Morishima have shown, political loyalty was the supreme virtue of Japanese Confucianism. This is not surprising, given Japan’s feudal past and the strength of the personal bond between a warrior leader and his followers. The importance of political loyalty in the Restoration movement was two-fold. As a national movement it was bound together by loyalty to the emperor (and hostility to foreigners). The Restoration itself was, however, carried out by the military forces of a small number of domains, above all those of Satsuma and Choshu. Domainal particularism was a crucial element in the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogunate. The dynamism of the samurai came from their political loyalties, as well as their social situation. These loyalties were then transferred to the larger unit and carried over into the subsequent modernization of Japan, which was as much politically as socially motivated, for it was only through building a modern industrial state that Japan could protect itself against the still expanding empires of the West (Bellah 1957:178–92; Morishima 1982:6f).

This all points to the importance of the contradictions of the Tokugawa administrative structure, to its combination of bureaucracy with feudal aristocracy and the tensions between the two, in explaining Japan’s nineteenth-century transformation. As Huber argues, a Weberian rather than a Marxist perspective would seem appropriate, for it was the superstructure rather than the economic base of Tokugawa Japan which produced the impetus for revolutionary change. This is not to deny that there were also contradictions stemming from economic change and class relations. The development of mercantile capitalism and the commercialization of agriculture did undermine the shogunate, but did not directly threaten it. Thus, the growing economic importance of the socially inferior merchants, who were at the bottom of the Tokugawa status hierarchy, generated the well-known tensions of status incongruity but the merchants were too busy making money out of the existing social order to become either economically or politically a revolutionary social force. Commercialization also produced conflict in the village and an increasing frequency of peasant revolts but these found expression in destructive or millenarian outbursts rather than movements to change the social order. These conflicts weakened the shogunate by diminishing its authority, its tax yields and its military strength but neither merchants nor peasants overthrew it. It was overthrown by a section of the lower samurai, who were motivated by a mixture of nationalism, social frustration and political loyalty (Huber 1981:4; Dower 1975:156–9).
b) The modernization of the bureaucracy. After the Meiji Restoration a new leadership of largely lower samurai origin began the task of building a modern state. By the 1880s power had been monopolized by ex-samurai from Satsuma and Choshu, the most prominent of the feudal domains that had overthrown the shogunate. The Sat-Cho oligarchy constituted an informal body of ‘genro’ or ‘elder statesmen’. As Silberman has described this body

All of the original seven members between them, at one time or another prior to 1900, held all the major posts in the civil and military bureaucracy and the government. The origins of this group in the bureaucracy and their continued influence over it made the dividing line between bureaucracy and government almost indistinguishable for the greater part of this period. (Silberman 1967:82)

This blurring of the lines between bureaucracy and political leadership had in fact been a feature of the Tokugawa shogunate, though the actual composition of the group of high officials had obviously changed (Hackett 1968:70,79; Inoki 1964:288,290; Totman 1967:256).

Although the new leadership of Japan was of samurai origin, it did not hesitate, as Lehmann has put it, to betray both its territorial and social origins. During the 1870s samurai status was abolished and samurai revolts in Choshu and Satsuma were crushed by Japan’s new peasant based army. The imperatives of inter-state conflict now ruled. Japan had to be modernized in order to stand up to the West and modernization required the abolition of the status categories of Tokugawa times (Lehmann 1982:184).

The bureaucracy was modernized and recruitment was now based not on status but on merit, as indicated by success in examinations, though this did not mean that the civil service was in practice equally open to all. The Imperial University was founded at Tokyo to supply the state with recruits, and the graduates of this university, especially those of its law faculty, were given privileged access and have subsequently dominated the upper ranks of the bureaucracy, which, as in Tokugawa times, were sharply separated by a promotion barrier from the lower ranks (Halliday 1975:34–8; Lehmann 1982:200–3).

The functional imperatives of modernization clearly made the development of a modern bureaucracy staffed by experts necessary but there was more to Meiji Japan’s bureaucratization than this. Bureaucratization was a means of maintaining the oligarchy’s power in the face of pressures to democratize the state. Emerging political parties, led by ‘outsiders’ excluded from office by the Sat-Cho oligarchy but with a popular basis in various discontented groups, called for democratization. There was also a need to impress the dominating Western powers with Japan’s developed and civilized
status, and this meant that Japan needed an at least formally
democratic constitution. The constitution of 1890 was indeed only
superficially democratic, since although it established an elected
parliamentary body, the vote was given to only one per cent of the
adult population, while both ministers and commanders of the armed
forces were made individually responsible to the emperor not the
parliament. To make doubly sure, however, that the political parties
could not gain control of the state apparatus a rule was introduced, in
1899, to require the filling of senior positions in the civil service by
promotion rather than ‘free appointment’ by the government.
Bureaucrats were ‘servants of the emperor’. The emperor was at the
centre of the constitutional web but he was a semi-divine figure above
politics, who intervened only rarely in situations of ultimate crisis. It
was the oligarchs who pulled all the strings (Beasley 1973:120;

3. MILITARY EXPANSION

Having survived the mid-nineteenth century impact of the West and
escaped colonial incorporation, Japan began its own imperial
expansion. This falls into two main periods. During the Meiji period
(1868–1912) Japan acquired Taiwan, Korea, the Liaotung peninsula
of Manchuria, the southern half of Sakhalin, and other minor
territories. Then in 1931 Japan occupied Manchuria and began the
headlong expansion that led to war with China in 1937, and the
Pacific war in 1941.

The argument of this section is that Japan’s expansion must be
understood in terms of inter-state relations and the bureaucratic
character of the Japanese state rather than the development of
capitalism and class relations, as argued by Marxist writers.

a) Rational expansion during the Meiji Period As advanced by Moore and
Halliday, Marxist explanations account for Japanese expansion in
terms of the class conflicts generated by modernization, and the
imperatives of capitalism. It is argued that an alliance of bourgeoisie
and landowners ruled Japan. This alliance coped with the conflicts
generated by an essentially conservative and repressive modernization
by indoctrinating the population with a nationalism which sub-
sequently got out of control. Internal discontent was in this way
displaced into external aggression. As Moore sees it, the expansion of
the 1930s was the external expression of the internal development of a
fascism rooted in class conflict, though Halliday argues against the
application of the fascist label to Japan. The second line of argument
is that the socially conservative and repressive character of moderni-
ization meant that there was insufficient domestic purchasing power,
and overseas expansion was necessary to create a market for Japanese goods. Japan was also extremely short of raw materials and needed to gain control of those available in neighbouring territories (Halliday 1975:100–2,133–40; Moore 1969:271,290f,305, 442).

So far as the first argument is concerned, the Japanese were undoubtedly indoctrinated with nationalism and the displacement mechanism certainly existed, but, at least during the Meiji period, Japanese foreign policy was under the firm control of the oligarchy, which resisted internally generated demands for expansion. The central principle of foreign policy was to build up Japan’s strength and avoid conflicts with the superior Western powers. This approach was established in the 1870s, when the plans of Saigo and the dissatisfied samurai of Satsuma to invade Korea were quashed by the returning members of the Iwakura mission, which had been on a world tour to learn from the West and seek the renegotiation of the ‘unequal’ treaties. The members of the mission were well aware of Japan’s weakness and the lee-way that Japan had to make up before it could engage in such expeditions and risk conflicts with major powers. A smaller and less dangerous expedition was undertaken to Taiwan in 1874, to relieve samurai frustrations. This does, admittedly, show the displacement mechanism operating but the key thing is that the demands for an invasion of Korea were contained, the rebellious Satsuma samurai were crushed in 1877, and foreign policy was henceforth in the hands of ‘realists’, as Conroy has called them (Conroy 1974:32,47–9, 54f,71).

It remained under their control during the Meiji period. Thus, at the end of the Sino-Japanese war of 1894–5, there were popular and military demands for an expedition into mainland China. Since this would bring Japan into conflict with the European powers, a less dangerous expedition was sent, once again, to Taiwan, which this time was annexed. When the European powers none the less intervened to force Japan out of Manchuria, where Japan had leased Port Arthur and the Liaotung peninsula from China, a realistic awareness of Japan’s relative strength resulted in a Japanese withdrawal and stimulated a renewed drive to build up Japan’s industrial and military power. The success of this drive enabled Japan to defeat Russia in 1905 but Japan then limited itself, initially, to the control of Korea rather than its annexation. An outburst of popular dissatisfaction followed and was expressed in the destructive Hibiya riots of 1905. Popular nationalism was out of control but this did not change Japanese policy. Korea was annexed in 1910 not because of popular pressure but because of the problems of controlling Korea through a puppet regime (Beasley 1987:86–90; Chen 1977:64; Conroy 1974:494ff).

It does not then seem plausible to argue that Japan’s Meiji expansion, with the possible exception of the acquisition of Taiwan,
can be explained by popular nationalism, however generated, or the displacement of the discontent created by a repressive modernization. Can the Meiji expansion be explained by the imperatives of capitalist industrialization? It is easy to argue that Japanese industry benefited from military expansion and, indeed, that it needed an overseas empire, but needs and consequences must not be confused with causes. The problems with ‘need’ arguments are well known and it is not necessary to go into them here, while the fact that colonies once acquired were economically exploited does not mean that they were acquired for economic reasons. Historians, such as Conroy, Duus and Peattie, have found little evidence to support the idea that foreign policy was shaped by economic needs. Peattie has concluded that no colonial empire of modern times was as clearly shaped by strategic considerations, carefully weighed and widely agreed upon by those in authority in the metropolitan homeland (Peattie 1984:8).

The rulers of Japan were certainly not averse to the acquisition of an overseas empire and Japan did participate in the scramble to divide up China but their main interest was in securing control of Korea, ‘the dagger pointed at the heart of Japan’, and the strategically important Port Arthur in Manchuria. The Meiji wars, with China in 1894–5 and Russia in 1904–5, were fought over these territories. Japan’s rulers were concerned primarily to construct a defensive perimeter against the still expanding European empires, above all that of Russia (Conroy 1974:Ch. 9; Duus 1984:131–7, 147, 161f; Jansen 1984:63, 67; Peattie 1984:11f).

Meiji military expansion bore all the hallmarks of bureaucratic rationality in policy-making. The goal was clear — to build a modern, industrial state able to stand up to the West. The most appropriate means were adopted, even if they conflicted with long established traditions and institutions, as the abolition of samurai status and the creation of a peasant based conscript army showed. There was a careful calculation of the costs and consequences of actions, and if a course of action appeared likely to result in conflict with superior powers it was abandoned or modified. Samurai frustrations and popular nationalism were taken into account but contained and controlled. The popular image of Japanese military expansion as the expression of deep-seated and non-rational impulses of aggression could not be further from the truth.

b) The irrational expansion of the 1930s If we now turn to the 1930s expansion, this was, in a sense, irrational but this does not mean that it was non-rational, that atavistic urges had come to the surface or that internal discontent had flowed into external aggression. Japanese
expansion had a clear geo-political rationale. It was irrational in that it took insufficient account of the costs and consequences of action, could not be sustained and was self-destructive. The sources of this irrationality lay not in national character nor in the stresses and strains caused by modernization but in the dysfunctions of bureaucracy.

i) The rationale of expansion and its irrationality  The rationale behind the 1930s expansion was similar to that of the Meiji period. Indeed, the 1930s expansion can be seen as the continued pursuit of Meiji goals in a changed international situation.

The critical event in the 1930s was the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931, which led to the gradual occupation of northern China and war with China in 1937, which in turn led towards conflict with the USA. Manchuria had been divided into Russian and Japanese spheres of influence after the Russo-Japanese war. Its occupation was a response to the threat posed by Chinese nationalism, and a growing Soviet military strength in the region, to Japan’s established interests there. As Crowley has observed, Japan was the first of the colonial powers in Asia to face the challenge of the now familiar combination of nationalism, communism and Soviet military power. There were also changes in the broader international order, as the international co-operation of the Versailles and Washington treaties gave way to international economic competition and the protectionist construction of economic blocs. This made Japan anxious to build its own East Asian bloc based on Manchuria and China. As war with China, and the anti-Russian alliance with the Axis powers, led to deteriorating relations with the USA, to American blockades on the export of war materials and, above all, oil to Japan, the need to achieve economic self-sufficiency became all the more pressing. On the other hand, the interwar weakness of the European empires, American isolationism and, later on, the German defeat of the European imperial powers, created a power vacuum in east Asia. In this changed international situation, which combined new threats and new opportunities, Japan’s 1930s expansion was consistent with the Meiji goal of building a strong, independent Japan, able to stand up to the great powers (Crowley 1966:350–60 and 1974:296; Iriye 1974:263; Kisaka 1983).

Japan’s 1930s expansion cannot, however, be explained simply in these terms. Firstly, it was initiated by the independent action of the army, which was responsible for the 1931 occupation of Manchuria. This action violated the government’s policy of settling international disputes through negotiation and of co-operating with the West. If the occupation of Manchuria had a rationale, it was not one accepted by the government.

Secondly, Japan’s subsequent expansion was irrational in that policies were pursued which Japan did not have the resources to
sustain and which resulted in conflict with superior powers. The cautious realism that had led Japan to give up its gains after its victory over China in 1895, when warned off by the European empires, was conspicuously absent in the 1930s. It could be said that the power vacuum in the Far East meant that the Japanese had no reason to anticipate that their actions in Manchuria and China would lead to war with superior powers. There is, however, evidence of an awareness in Japan of this danger. Initially the fear was that Japan would be unable to sustain a war with the Soviet Union, which appeared the main threat at the time. As Japan became more deeply involved in China, the Army General Staff sought to halt the field armies and negotiate a settlement, because Japan needed peace in order to build up its resources and prepare for an inevitable war with Russia (Barnhart 1987:42f; Peattie 1975:209,275). Prince Konoe voiced in 1936 his anxiety that the 'arbitrary formulation of national objectives in various and divergent directions' would create enemies for Japan throughout the world (Crowley 1966:244). Crowley reports that in February 1938, at the Liaison Conference, the emperor asked whether it was possible to plan for a long-term war with China, prepare for a possible war with the Soviet Union and expand the navy, but received no response (ibid.:378). Later, in 1940, the Navy General Staff predicted that a Japanese invasion of Indo-China would provoke an American oil blockade, which would force Japan to seize the Dutch East Indies, which would in turn lead to war with America. If such a war lasted more than a year, Japan would run out of resources and America would win. This did not stop the invasion and Japan followed the predicted path to self-destruction (Tsunoda 1980:246,255).

ii) The fragmentation of the Japanese state

Japan's 1930s expansion cannot then be explained simply in terms of the continued pursuit of Meiji policies in a changed international situation. It is the contention of this article that it was the fragmented structure of the Japanese state that allowed the uncontrolled expansion of the 1930s to take place. The fragmentation of the state is in turn explained by its uniquely bureaucratic character.

The most striking instance of this fragmentation was the inability of Japanese governments to control the military, as in the occupation of Manchuria. Action by the military of this sort was not, however, as unconstitutional as it might appear to be to Western eyes, for the independence of the military was itself enshrined in the constitution. In 1878 an army general staff was created and placed under the direct control of the emperor, a privileged position confirmed by the 1890 constitution, which clearly separated the prerogative of 'supreme command', to be exercised by the general staffs, from the other imperial prerogatives, to be carried out by other branches of the state.
The service ministers became a means by which the armed forces influenced government rather than a means of government control of the armed forces. The emerging political parties sought to increase their influence on government and the government's control of the military, and had some successes during the period 1913–1930, but the constitution was not amended. The government's negotiation of the 1930 London Naval Treaty, against intense naval opposition, was seen as an infringement of the 'right of supreme command' and provoked a counter-attack by the military in defence of their rights. The army did find it necessary to stage an incident to justify the occupation of Manchuria but, once military operations were under way, the 'right of supreme command' operated and the government could not bring the military under civil control. The occupation of Manchuria was not an aberration so much as an instance of the malintegration built into the Japanese state (Hackett 1964:343–6; Maxon 1957:25,44,85; Nish 1977:166–72; Shinobu 1967:666f,671–4).

The independence of the military did not just produce a problem of political control but also one of overall military co-ordination. This was not just a matter of operational co-ordination either but of competing strategies advocated by different sections of the armed forces. There was the northern strategy of the Army General Staff, a strategy aimed at war with the Soviet Union. There were the demands of the field armies in China, ever seeking more resources in order to deliver a final knockout blow against the nationalist forces. There was the southern strategy, advanced by the navy, of seeking access to the raw materials, especially the oil, of the islands to the south. Interestingly, Barnhart argues that the fateful decision to invade Indo-China in 1941, the move which precipitated the American oil embargo, was the result of inter-service rivalry. The navy was wary of the consequences of this action but it was a means of preventing the proponents of the northern strategy directing forces and resources northwards against the Soviet Union, in the wake of the 1941 German attack on Russia. The army was willing to carry out a limited operation in the south, which the field armies in China had anyway been pressing for, before moving north. This operation did not, of course, turn out to be a limited one. The independence of the military made it difficult to adjudicate between the demands of the various strategies, and the result was a tendency to expand in all directions, exhausting Japan's limited resources and creating enemies everywhere (Barnhart 1987:198,209f,266; Crowley 1966:285f).

The independence of the military was but one aspect of a more general fragmentation of the state. In the wake of the occupation of Manchuria, party cabinets were replaced by 'whole-nation' cabinets, consisting of military men, bureaucrats and party politicians but these 'transcendent' governments were far from centralized or unified. As Crowley has put it
there occurred a shift to a highly bureaucratic system which was characterized by a remarkable decentralization of power among the respective ministers of state. This pattern of policy-making, not the programs and actions of the ultra-nationalistic groups, the political parties, and army factionalism, would determine the foreign policies of the Japanese government after 1932. (Crowley 1966:180)

It was extremely difficult to arrive at agreed policies, for each ministry would have its own position, as did both services, which controlled their respective ministries. The result was what Crowley has called an ‘amendment style’ of policy-making, with each institution adding its own gloss as policies circulated. Policy-making became dominated by the problem of arriving at an agreed policy (ibid.:195).

These problems of government were self-evident and many attempts were made to solve them. Four and five minister conferences emerged as inner cabinets of key ministers to improve co-ordination, though the problem of reconciling the opposed interests of different ministries remained. The problem of co-ordinating government and military was a particularly difficult one, given the army’s use of the ‘right of supreme command’ to pursue an independent course of action in China and its attempt to usurp the functions of the Foreign Ministry. The result, according to Hosoya, was a ‘dual policy’, which the four and five minister conferences could not resolve. An Imperial Headquarters Liaison Conference was set up in 1937 to improve co-ordination but was suspended in 1938, after the withdrawal of the military because of disagreements over the China policy, and was revived only in 1940, when the views of the government and the military had converged. Hosoya considers that the conference was unable ‘to settle any serious government-military conflicts pertaining to strategic and foreign policy problems’. The conflicts within the state were simply reproduced within institutions of this sort, which could only function when there was already an agreement on policy (Hosoya 1971:94–7).

The difficulty of arriving at agreed policies contributed to expansionary tendencies in various ways. It led to slow and cumbersome decision-making, which could be overtaken by events initiated by local commanders. It led to short-term rather than long-term thinking, and the outcome was often the simultaneous pursuit of alternative, even conflicting, policies rather than the establishment of priorities and decisions as to which policy was best. It was easier to expand in all directions than decide between the contending strategies. In such circumstances it was also easy to revert to a lowest common denominator nationalism or take refuge in vague but unassailable notions of the ‘Imperial Way’ or ‘Japan’s East Asian Mission’, as a means of arriving at consensus. Furthermore, an introspective concern with the problems of policy-making diverted
attention from the realities of the international situation and led to misperceptions of the policies of other states and their responses to Japan’s actions (Michelson 1979:6f,92,141ff,249,273f).

The irrationality of the bureaucratic Japanese state had come to the fore in the 1930s. Bureaucratic states always face problems of co-ordination because each specialized agency develops its own policies and interests, which are legitimated by the professional expertise of its members. Bureaucracies cannot co-ordinate themselves. Co-ordination must therefore come from the outside but the very insulation of the bureaucrat’s career to protect impartial expertise from interest group pressures makes it hard for external co-ordinators to gain purchase. Although all modern states have faced these problems, they were particularly serious in Japan because of the exceptionally bureaucratic character of the Japanese state.

They were not a serious problem during the Meiji era, for the Sat-Cho oligarchy was a small, tightly-knit and authoritative group adept at manipulating and controlling the constitutional and bureaucratic structure that it had itself created. The fragmentation of the state was not a problem for them but rather an advantage, indeed a deliberate strategy, since it prevented any rival group acquiring control of the state apparatus. By the 1920s, however, the political parties had challenged genro control of government and the oligarchs were, anyway, dying out, leaving only Saionji, the last genro, who had been co-opted in 1912. The oligarchy owed its identity and cohesion to its members’ particularistic origins in the feudal domains of Satsuma and Choshu, and their experiences in the Restoration movement, and it could not therefore be reproduced. Saionji recognised that its time had passed and believed that Japan should make a transition to party government. The problem was, however, that, although the oligarchs had not been able to prevent the rise of the political parties, they had created effective barriers to party rule. The constitutional independence of the military and civilian bureaucracies, the absence of collective cabinet responsibility and the imperial prerogatives built into the constitution made a transition to party government impossible (Connors 1987:43,99f,106).

Once the oligarchs had gone the Japanese state was uncontrollable. They had succeeded only too well in establishing bureaucracy, fettering democracy and creating a system of rule which depended on them and which they alone could operate.

iii) Towards a totalitarian state? A new force had, however, emerged on the scene and sought to take control of the state and the economy. The ‘new’, ‘revisionist’ or ‘reform’ bureaucrats, as they are variously called, emerged in the 1920s with the goals of ending corrupt party rule, of restoring the independence and authority of the bureaucracy and preparing Japan ‘to meet the challenge of the future’. They
formed new organizations, such as the ‘Alliance for a New Japan’, which brought together like-minded officials and, crucially, the young officers forming their own movements at the time. The ‘whole-nation’ cabinets of 1932–1936 brought these bureaucrats and the military into government (Spaulding 1971:60ff; Weiner 1984:10,63,89,166).

As argued above, these cabinets could not overcome the disintegration of the existing structure, but this was not the end of the story. The new grouping of bureaucrats and military men set out to build a new state apparatus. They created super-agencies, such as the Manchurian Affairs Bureau, the Cabinet Investigation Bureau and the Planning Board, to bypass the ministries. During the 1930s a new economic bureaucracy, equipped with new laws controlling production and trade, grew up and, after the outbreak of war with China, Konoe attempted to set up a national defence state to mobilize the economy for war. In 1940 the Imperial Rule Assistance Association was created, to integrate and control the population. In 1938 proposals were made to reform the bureaucracy and bring it under government control by establishing a Cabinet Personnel Bureau, relaxing dismissal rules and removing the key requirement that senior officials be promoted career bureaucrats. The military and their bureaucratic allies were trying to construct a totalitarian state to replace the fragmented structure inherited from the Meiji period (Barnhart 1978:94ff; Michelson 1979:64ff; Spaulding 1971:60).

This structure still had, however, an enormous capacity to resist such a take-over. The established bureaucracy, and indeed some of the ‘new’ bureaucrats, fought a long rearguard action against the military’s attempts to secure control of appointments. The Cabinet Personnel Bureau was never set up and it was not until 1941 that the military succeeded in changing the appointment rules (Spaulding 1971:70–6). Attempts to establish state control of the economy were opposed by the zaibatsu, which were able to dominate the ‘control associations’ set up to regulate each industry in 1941. Johnson concludes that ‘During the Pacific War Japan operated essentially a private enterprise economy with surprisingly little government interference’ (1982:153). The Home Ministry subordinated the Imperial Rule Assistance Association, which threatened its control of domestic affairs. The failure of the ‘new force’ to take control of the state is most graphically shown by General Tojo’s struggle to achieve war-time co-ordination. He tried to solve the problem of ministerial co-ordination by occupying the key ministerial positions himself, becoming at various times War Minister, Home Minister and Munitions Minister, as well as Prime Minister. He also tried to establish ministerial control of the armed forces. One man could not, however, remedy the structural flaws of the Japanese state and Tojo’s attempts to centralize authority simply generated greater opposition. His attempts to change the constitution were regarded as self-
aggrandizement and he was suspected of ambitions to displace the emperor, suspicions that played a part in bringing about his downfall in 1944. Thus, the same fragmentation of the state that had made government control of the military impossible in 1931 also prevented the emergence of a war-time dictatorship, of the kind developed by the other major participants in the Second World War (Shillony 1981:10,32,53f,56ff). One could argue that this explains Japan’s defeat but the expanded Japanese empire was anyway a geo-political impossibility.

Japan’s military expansion demonstrates the rationality and irrationality of a bureaucratic state. While the oligarchs ruled, Japan’s expansion was conducted flexibly and realistically. Class interests and party political concerns did not distort the careful pursuit of nationalist policies. Japan built up its strength and acquired an empire without bringing down on itself the might of the empires of the West. Japan was the only non-European country to succeed in this difficult task and, although Japan’s success may be attributed in part to its remote geographical location, credit must be given to the ex-samurai bureaucrats who managed the state. When, however, the oligarchs were gone, the centrifugal forces of an uncontrolled and fragmented bureaucratic state were let loose. Thus, both the rational expansion of the Meiji period and the irrational expansion of the 1930s and 1940s can only be understood in terms of the exceptionally bureaucratic character of the Japanese state.

4. ECONOMIC EXPANSION

If Japan’s military expansion is to be understood in terms of the consequences of bureaucratization, so to is its economic expansion. As with military expansion, the institutions created by the Sat-Cho oligarchy during the Meiji period shaped later developments.

a) Creating the institutions of growth The role played by the state in Japan’s Meiji industrialization is well-known. There were clear economic and military imperatives behind the state’s involvement. Japan needed to industrialize in order to remedy its adverse balance of payments and develop its own capacity to manufacture the weapons of modern war. The Meiji bureaucrats set out therefore to create a suitable financial and communications framework for industry, and established a number of government owned model factories. the state did, in fact, sell off its non-strategic factories, because of its financial crisis in the early 1880s, but this early instance of privatization did not mean that the state had simply dumped these companies in the market-place and relinquished its control over industry. The factories fell into the hands of insiders, i.e., merchant
houses, associated with state finance, and state officials, who constructed the zaibatsu industrial groups. The zaibatsu retained close links with the state, receiving privileged treatment in return for their performance of important state functions. They assisted the state at times of financial crisis, helped to finance Japan’s wars and to administer its colonies. They also performed the vital economic function of concentrating scarce resources of capital and expertise for the development of strategically important industries. Their privileged status and financial strength then enabled the zaibatsu to acquire, through their banks, a dominant position in Japan’s capital scarce economy (Allen 1972:133–4).

More direct means of control were created through the oligarch Matsukata’s construction of a banking system. Matsukata phased out the initially adopted but disorderly American-style independent national banks. Instead, he founded a European-style central bank and a range of specialist banks to carry out specific functions, such as the acquisition of foreign exchange, the exploitation of colonies and the channelling of investment into industry. This last function was also performed by the 1877 created Deposits Bureau of the Ministry of Finance, a means of channelling postal savings into industrial investment and one which was to be crucial to the financing of Japan’s 1950s industrial transformation. The banks were closely controlled by the state, interlinked with each other and with the zaibatsu. There were other private and commercial banks that emerged in the interstices of the system but the key financial institutions were under state control, ‘instruments of a national purpose’ as Allen has called them (Allen 1972:43,52–60).

The state’s control of capital is best exemplified by the attitude taken to its import. Japan was extremely short of capital but borrowing from abroad would have compromised Japan’s independence. Until the later 1890s very little foreign capital was imported and in the early Meiji period foreign owned enterprises were, indeed, bought out. The capital for Japan’s industrialization was raised initially through the taxation of the peasantry and later through the profits of war, especially the 1894–5 war with China, and the use of the banking and postal savings systems to channel private savings into industry. In this way Japan avoided the dependence on foreign capital, which so crippled and distorted economic development elsewhere in the third world. Nationalist bureaucrats preserved an independence which a bourgeoisie or landowner class would have happily compromised in the pursuit of profit (Halliday 1975:53–5).

The zaibatsu organized economy and the Meiji financial structure were to be vital ingredients in Japan’s economic growth after the Second World War but one further element had still to be created, a specialized state agency to direct industrial development. This emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, under the pressures first of
recession and then of war. It was then that the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) was established, important new legislation was passed to control the economy, and the actual bureaucrats who were to direct Japan’s postwar industrial transformation began their careers. The early attempts to bureaucratize the economy did not work, however, because the zaibatsu had become powerful and independent, and resisted attempts to control them. Conflict grew between the zaibatsu and anti-capitalist circles in the military. The zaibatsu, in alliance with the political parties to which they were closely linked, frustrated government attempts to control production. It was, ironically, during the American occupation that state control of the economy increased. Defeat and reform had disposed of the two obstacles to an effective industrial policy, the independent zaibatsu and an anti-capitalist military. The industrial bureaucracy itself was relatively untouched by the purge of those civil servants held responsible for the war, while the occupation authorities’ attempts to first reform and then revive the Japanese economy enhanced the state’s role (Johnson 1982:18–29,99ff,109ff, 136ff,176,195f).

(b) Japan’s postwar industrial transformation. Japan’s postwar industrial expansion undoubtedly owed much to the new international situation after 1945 and the evolution of American foreign and economic policy. Having been initially concerned with reparations and reform, American policy ‘reversed course’ and sought to rebuild the Japanese economy, in order to make Japan a bastion against the advance of communism in Asia. Another aim of American policy was to keep protectionism at bay and restore multilateral trade, by reviving the export capacity of the war damaged economies, so that they could pay for imports from America and close the ‘dollar gap’. But it was above all the demand generated by the Korean war which restarted the engine of economic growth (Borden 1984:4f,15; Schaller 1985:83; Morishima 1981:161).

There was nothing automatic, however, about the subsequent transformation of Japanese industry. This was brought about by the industrial bureaucracy, which made effective use of the institutional and organizational structure inherited from the Meiji era, and the legislative controls first experimented with in the 1930s.

In 1949 the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) was created to replace the MCI. Under MITI’s guidance an industrial policy was developed with clearly specified goals of industrial development. The notion of an international division of labour was rejected, since this would confine industry to the low growth and increasingly competitive production of light consumer goods, such as textiles, and exclude Japan from the high growth industries of the future. Old, labour intensive industries must be allowed to die and new, capital intensive ones, such as steel, petro-
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chemicals, synthetic textiles, shipbuilding and engineering, vehicles and electrical appliances, must be promoted. Then, in the 1970s, a further decision was taken to curtail investment in these industries and advance into the ‘knowledge based’ ones. The tenor of this industrial policy is indicated by the title of the 1953 Okano plan ‘On Making Our Economy Independent’ (Johnson 1982:228f,291).

The explicit formulation of goals is certainly an indispensable element of rational action but goals are one thing and their attainment is something else. The most crucial question of all is how the Japanese state managed to transform industry. One means was the promotion of new industries through trade manipulation. The use of tariffs, ‘non-tariff’ barriers and dual pricing is well-known. The obsession with these ‘unfair’ methods has, however, distracted attention from the other means used. Japanese industry was short of two key things, capital and foreign exchange, and by controlling access to them the state could shape industrial development. The shortage of capital and the small equities market meant that industry was financed largely by loans from banks, ultimately controlled by the state, and the Meiji founded postal savings scheme, now under MITI’s control, a major source of capital for new investment. Industry needed foreign exchange, in order to import the raw materials and technology unavailable in Japan, and foreign exchange had been under state control since the 1930s. The state’s industrial policy depended on prewar institutions, on the Meiji created banking system and postal savings scheme, and the 1930s foreign exchange control laws (Eccleston 1986:64–70; Johnson 1982:25).

Also of great importance was that other Meiji institution, the zaibatsu industrial group. Although broken up by the occupation authority, the zaibatsu were reconstituted under the tutelage of MITI but without the family owned holding companies, which had previously controlled them, and now characterized by a pattern of mutual ownership by their constituent parts, though they were still centred on banks. These groups mediated between the state and industry, concentrated capital and resources, and constituted an elite of privileged companies able to compete with the West. Their organization across industries provided integration and flexibility and produced a dynamic competitiveness between them. The institutions created by the Meiji bureaucrats to finance and direct an independent economy were alive and well, if modified to suit the times, in the 1950s (Morishima 1982:97f; Scott 1986:162f,167f,192).

The functional relationship between the state and industry was cemented by the custom of amakudari, the ‘descent’ of bureaucrats from the ‘heaven’ of the civil service to a second career in business (or politics). Such careers are far from unknown elsewhere but in Japan they have been exceptionally institutionalized because of the rigidity of seniority rules in the civil service. Whole classes of civil servants are
promoted at a time and as the available positions diminish towards the top, those for whom no post can be found are required to retire and obtain second careers elsewhere. The economic ministries have tried to insert their retiring officials into key positions in industry, so that they can promote ministerial policy. On the other hand, amakudari has given business a certain leverage over the civil service, since those approaching early retirement need to prepare the way, while once in their second career they provide their new employer with know-how and influence over their juniors still in office. It is therefore difficult to assess the significance of amakudari and decide whether it has facilitated the state direction of industry or business control of the state. Johnson gives examples supporting both arguments (Johnson 1982:67f,271,283,287).

This raises the whole question of who was controlling whom. Marxist or near-Marxist writers, such as Yanaga, argue that business controlled the state but Curtis has convincingly criticized the ‘business-in-government’ idea. This is a difficult problem to sort out, given the shared goals, interdependence and interpenetration of the business world and the state. Both sought Japanese recovery and the development of heavy industry in the 1950s. MITI needed the reconstructed zaibatsu to bridge the gap between the state and the anarchy of capitalism, while big business sought loans, licences and tax concessions from the state. Apart from the amakudari connections between the two and the organizational links provided by numerous advisory and consultative bodies, there were the bonds of family and education, which, according to Taira and Wada, have created a homogeneous elite embracing big business and the state. Does all this mean that one has, in fact, to fall back on the woolliness of the ‘élite’ concept and abandon the idea of saying anything about the direction of the relationship between industry and the state? (Curtis 1975:44f; Taira and Wada 1986; Yanaga 1968:34f,258f).

What one can say is that the state’s control over industry has declined since the 1950s. There are two main reasons for this. Firstly, ‘liberalization’ was forced upon Japan and MITI lost many of its formal powers of control. Secondly, the very success of industrial expansion lessened the dependence of industry on the state. Industry became more able to finance itself, accumulated reserves of foreign exchange, and could therefore act more independently. Thus, in 1969 Mitsubishi successfully challenged MITI’s policy of keeping American capital at arm’s length, by making the joint venture deal with Chrysler to produce the Colt. One may note that the Mitsubishi group was, it seems, particularly difficult for MITI to influence, because of the group’s policy of excluding amakudari civil servants. There was none the less some revival of MITI’s authority when the oil price rises of the 1970s ‘reminded the Japanese that they needed their official bureaucracy’ (Johnson 1982:297). It has also been suggested, by Vogel,
that pollution control, consumer protection and industrial location legislation has given MITI new weapons. MITI's decline in influence should clearly not be exaggerated but there seems little doubt that MITI's capacity to direct industrial development has diminished since the 1950s and that MITI has had to operate increasingly through 'administrative guidance' rather than mechanisms of legislative and financial control. The very fact of this decline none the less implies that there was an important degree of state control during the period of industrial transformation in the 1950s (Fukui 1972:40; Johnson 1982:Ch.7; Stockwin 1982:137f,156; Vogel 1975:xv).

c) From rational to irrational economic expansion? If the authority of the state has declined, this matters little so far as economic growth is concerned, since it has become self-sustaining. Indeed, one could argue that, like the military expansion of the 1930s, it has become so uncontrollable that it is now irrational, for it threatens to generate a protectionist backlash in other countries that would threaten Japan's exports and undermine Japanese prosperity. To continue the parallel, one could argue that the weak coordination of an exceptionally bureaucratic state has made it difficult for the government to restrain economic expansion in order to prevent it becoming self-destructive. Campbell has criticized those who present a monolithic picture of the Japanese state and goes on

in fact, most case studies indicate that co-ordination among agencies or conflicting interests is absent or ineffective. At the time of this writing, the inability of the government, despite intense foreign pressure and the commitment of the political leadership, to dismantle the many barriers against imports (regulations, inspection procedures) maintained by various ministries and their LDP and interest-group backers is providing yet another good example. (Campbell 1984:325)

As an instance of this, the exclusion of Cable and Wireless from the Japanese telecommunications market, which precipitated the British threat of trade sanctions in March 1987, showed how one ministry, that of Posts and Telecommunications, could stand out against the government's liberalization policy. Conspiratorial interpretations of Japanese policy charge the Japanese with duplicity but it may be that Japan's resistance to full liberalization is, at least partly, the result of the malintegration of the exceptionally bureaucratic Japanese state. As in the later 1930s, there may be an awareness of the need to avoid antagonizing other countries but an inability to do so because of the absence of effective co-ordination.

It would, however, be unwise to push this parallel too far, for it is not clear that Japan's expansion has been irrational in this way. It has been easier to halt Japanese military than Japanese economic
expansion. Japanese industry has already penetrated through potential tariff barriers by investment in the consuming countries, which have indeed become dependent on such investment for employment and their own industrial competitiveness, Nissan's British car plant being a case in point. The build up of Japan's surplus has also given it immense financial power. Seven of the world's eight largest banks are now Japanese. Japan finances a large part of British local government debt and of the American budgetary deficit. Japanese investors have an enormous weight in money and stock markets (Turner 1987). This financial power now constrains the action of Western governments. Thus, it is reported that the British government had second thoughts about its March 1987 plans for trade sanctions, after the Bank of England and the Treasury warned of the financial repercussions of such actions (Daily Telegraph, April 1, 1987). Similarly, the American government adopted a more conciliatory approach after talk of economic retaliation against Japan precipitated falls on US bond markets (Financial Times, April 4 1987). It must be very doubtful whether the West could now win a trade war with Japan. As the Japanese economic minister Takahashi decared in 1928: 'It is much harder to nullify the results of economic conquest than those of a military conquest' (quoted by Johnson 1982:120). No-one may have listened at the time but few would deny the truth of this statement today.

5. CONCLUSION

The argument of this paper is that the rise of Japan as a military and industrial power was a result of the exceptionally bureaucratic character of the Japanese state. This exceptional degree of bureaucracy resulted from the emergence of a ruling salariat separated from the land, the carrying out of a revolution by members of this salariat, and their building of a modern state designed to establish Japan as a world power and maintain their power in Japan. During the Meiji period the bureaucracy carried out a limited, controlled and highly rational expansion, motivated mainly by strategic considerations. The expansion of the 1930s did not lack a rationale but was irrational in the sense that it was heedless of costs and self-destructive. This irrationality was inherent in the bureaucratic character of the state, in the centrifugal tendencies and weak co-ordination typical of bureaucracy, dysfunctions which had earlier been contained by the Sat-Cho oligarchy. The defeat of Japan not only brought self-destructive military expansion to an end, it also created the internal and international conditions for an economic expansion master-minded by the state, which used the control structures inherited from the Meiji period, and developed during the 1930s, to transform industry. The bureaucracy did this so
successfully that expansion became self-sustaining, possibly irrational because, like military expansion, it eventually generated an international opposition that could reverse it. Furthermore, as with military expansion, the disintegration of the bureaucratic state has made the control of these expansionary tendencies difficult. It is, however, far from clear that economic expansion has been self-destructive in the same way, for it has proved much harder for the West to combat than military expansion.

Bureaucracy, far from being inimical to change, growth and expansion, as is often assumed, has been, in the Japanese case, associated with all three. Japan’s pre-modern bureaucracy was not, like that of China, a stifling ‘capstone’ structure on top of society (Hall 1985:52) but decentralized, ‘penetrative’ and a source of revolutionary change. The modern bureaucratic state, established after the Meiji Restoration, facilitated growth and expansion both because it preserved Japan’s economic and political independence, and because it created an institutional framework for the promotion of development. The Japanese war-time state has often been seen as totalitarian but, although it was undoubtedly authoritarian and repressive, it was far from being an integrated totality. Particular bureaucratic states may have been conservative, static and monolithic but the Japanese case shows that these features are not characteristic of the bureaucratic state as such. The most bureaucratic of modern states has also been the most dynamic.

Lastly, it is time to return to the theoretical issue which runs through the article, namely the conflict between the Marxist and Weberian perspectives on the development of the state. The history of Japan supports the Weberian approach. Although the Tokugawa shogunate was undermined by changes in the mode of production, it was the contradictions of the superstructure and the impact of the West that were primarily responsible for Japan’s nineteenth-century revolution. The Meiji revolutionaries were members of a frustrated service class and Meiji Japan was ruled by bureaucrats. Japan’s Meiji expansion is to be explained more by inter-state conflict and the bureaucrats’ response to it than by class conflict and the imperatives of capitalism. The military expansion of the 1930s was produced by the disintegration of the bureaucratic state rather than a fascism generated by class conflict. Since the Meiji period the state has controlled capital, not capital the state. Japan’s postwar economic expansion resulted from changes in the international situation and the state’s use of the institutional heritage to develop and implement its industrial policy. To argue all this is not to deny that capitalism has generated economic classes and class conflict, or that the Japanese state has fostered capitalism and become dependent upon it, or that capital has used the state against labour. It is to argue that the Weberian approach provides a better explanation than the Marxist
one of the rise of Japan. Finally, one may note that Japan’s rise exemplifies the tension between the rationality and irrationality of bureaucracy, the fundamental issue raised by Weber’s work on the modern state.

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