In the aftermath of the riots that hit Tokyo at the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese government embarked on a widespread campaign of re-indoctrination. The target was the seemingly frustrated public, and the means was mainly displays of military prowess. The campaign began with a ceremonial review of the returning navy on October 23, 1905, followed by a series of marches and victory parades in the capital, and reached its climax in a huge victory review in the presence of Emperor Meiji on April 30, 1906. On the morning of that spring day, the 54-year-old monarch surveyed the vast spoils of enemy armaments arranged in precise order. Dressed in a new khaki uniform, he then passed through a triple triumphal arch 18.5 meters high that had been erected in honor of the event, and strode toward another grand spectacle. Waiting for him in the outer square were more than 30,000 soldiers, representing the 17 Japanese divisions that had taken part in the combat, as well as about 40,000 dignitaries and invited spectators.

The review was followed by a military parade through the city streets under the rapt gaze of hundreds of thousands of citizens, and lasting until the evening hours. Behind the emperor’s open carriage some of his close relatives galloped on fine horses, accompanied by a Korean prince and the British military attaché. The choice of riders was not fortuitous. The emperor’s family members symbolized the growing importance of the imperial establishment and its place in the hearts of the Japanese nation, while the presence of the two foreign representatives reflected the elevated international status of Japan in the aftermath of the long war. The representative from Great Britain, the world’s foremost power still, signified Japan’s strong and steadfast foreign relations, and the Korean representative in a secondary position served as an indication for the ascent of Japan to the level of a regional power.

This international message notwithstanding, the demonstration was primarily for internal needs, to settle the recent turbulence that had erupted in the Hibiya riots. This popular disorder in the wake of the Portsmouth Peace Conference seemed initially to reflect a patriotic protest, but soon developed into sheer violence by an infuriated mob. The retrospective
design of the display emphasized the positive aspects of the war, but only a few of the spectators could have foreseen the great changes that were to take place in the following years. The next decade was not characterized by public prosperity or national grandeur, nor did it betray any indication of the significance of the war for Japan. This began to manifest itself only after World War I, when Japan turned “suddenly” into a world power.

The discussion of the place of the war in the modern history of Japan began only after World War II, when it was possible to analyze the local strain of imperialism in retrospect. After 1945 it became obvious that the Russo-Japanese War was the greatest conflict in which Japan was involved in the first 70 years of its modernization, overshadowed only by the eight years of continuous warfare (1937–45) on the Asian continent and the Pacific Ocean. Historians of modern Japan customarily view the Meiji Restoration of 1868 and the surrender in 1945 as two “turning points,” or decisive events, in the modern chronicles of this nation. At the first turning point Japan abandoned the feudal system and the traditional, isolationist worldview, and began a rapid modernization; at the second Japan ceased to employ military force and to expand into territories beyond its archipelago. The elimination of militarism at the end of the Pacific War curbed Japan’s estrangement from the West and directed it onto the path of economic development, combined with a certain degree of political detachment from Asia. In light of these events, how may we view the place of the Russo-Japanese War?

During the 1960s a number of Japanese historians debated the importance of the Russo-Japanese War, and two decades later the issue re-emerged in Japan Examined, a volume devoted to major themes in modern Japanese history. One of its chapters examined the legacy of the war, focusing on the role of the war in accelerating Japanese imperialism. In spite of its narrow perspective on the implications of the war, the issue presented there still seems as relevant as ever before. With this background in mind, the following chapter seeks to examine the repercussions of the war on Japan and to determine to what extent it too might be considered a “turning point” in the modern history of this nation.

The rise of Japanese imperialism

At the end of World War I, Japan was regarded one of the world’s Great Powers. As one of the Big Five powers at the Versailles Peace Conference, Japan won a permanent seat on the Council in the newly established League of Nations in 1919. This rise to the status of a world power was meteoric but not instantaneous. Fourteen years earlier, at the end of the Russo-Japanese War, Japan had been already considered as a regional power. Back then, it satisfied most of the criteria that may be applied to define such a designation: it had a sizeable military force, definitely the strongest in East Asia; it was recognized as a power in a series of agreements with other
powers; it played a role in keeping order among the powers in the region under its control; and it had general interests outside its national borders, even though most of them were only in northeast Asia.

World War I did not alter Japan’s position substantially, and, except for a brief military engagement against German forces stationed in Tsingtao, Japan did not take an active part in the war; nor did it make any considerable territorial gains. By and large, its regional position grew only relatively, since at that time the involvement of other powers in East Asian affairs diminished dramatically. After the war against Russia, Japan was able to establish an array of mutual agreements with other powers and thus to fortify its “special position” in northeast Asia. Proponents of “Greater Japanism” were winning out, as Hata Ikuhiko points out, with every further agreement. Strong Japan also meant retention of the Powers’ control of East Asia and the perpetuation of Chinese disintegration.

Renewing their alliance in 1905 and again in 1911, Great Britain remained Japan’s most valuable ally. Despite growing tension and suspicion, the United States recognized Japanese hegemony in Korea in return for Japan’s recognition of its control over the Philippines in two agreements, signed in 1905 and 1908. In late 1906 Japan began negotiations also with France regarding a mutual agreement, and three months later it began to negotiate even with Russia. The negotiations in St Petersburg were a swift and unexpected realization of the vision of Sergei Witte, who only a year and half earlier, in Portsmouth, had spoken of a future alliance with Japan. Eventually, in June 1907 Japan signed an agreement with France (the Franco-Japanese Entente) and in July completed the first series of agreements with its former arch-enemy. The Russo-Japanese Agreement of 1907 ratified the Treaty of Portsmouth, supported the territorial integrity of China and an open-door economic policy within its boundaries, and also contained a secret protocol marking the sphere of control of each nation in Manchuria. Now, for the first time, Russia recognized fully Japan’s interests in Korea and even committed itself to non-intervention, while Japan reciprocated by recognizing Russian interests in Outer Mongolia.

In territorial terms, at the end of war against Russia Japan acquired the southern half of Sakhalin and control over the southern tip of the Liaotung peninsula in Manchuria (renamed the Kwantung Leased Territory). Following the Treaty of Portsmouth and the subsequent agreement with China in late 1905, Japan was allowed to deploy troops in southern Manchuria to guard the tracks and concessions along the South Manchuria Railway. The agreement brought about the establishment of the Kwantung army (Kantōgun), Japan’s military garrison in Manchuria, which played a decisive role in Japanese meddling in Manchuria and the eventual takeover of the whole region in 1931. Korea, Japan’s most coveted prize, still remained independent, but not for long. In the following years Japan grew confident of its power to annex Korea without fearing any Western interference. In November 1905 it took its boldest step toward full control of
the Korean peninsula by forcing a Korean official to sign the Protectorate Agreement, even though at this stage there was still no consensus in Tokyo about the desired policy vis-à-vis Korea. The first resident-general in Korea, Itō Hirobumi, for example, opposed annexation and saw his role as a mission for reform. Eventually, however, Katsura Tarō’s return to power, the resignation of Itō and his assassination, as well as the stubborn Korean opposition to the Japanese presence, led in 1910 to the full annexation of Korea. This was Japan’s most substantial gain in territorial and demographic terms until the early 1930s, and it reinforced Japanese confidence even more.6

Despite the initial modest territorial gains and incomplete military victory, some historians consider the Russo-Japanese War a turning point in the modern history of Japan due, as Peter Duus suggested in an oft-cited paper, to its being the “takeoff point” for Japanese imperialism.7 Duus thereby challenged two other theses. The first postulates that Japanese imperialism developed in a direct, continuous, and deliberate line of expansionist exploits from the first attempts to open up Korea in the 1870s until Japan’s surrender in 1945. Accordingly, the war against Russia was merely another stage, not necessarily a central one, in a chain of events that gave rise to the Japanese Empire. Supplementary to this, a second thesis assumes that, if one insists on a key point in the development of Japanese imperialism, it should be the first Sino-Japanese War (1894–5). This is because, with this conflict, for the first time in three centuries Japan embarked on a full-scale military adventure overseas, aiming to seize a continental foothold.

Duus objected the first thesis, treating it almost as an intellectual casuistry. It was never taken seriously, he averred, because most of the historical evidence unequivocally indicated that the decisions to build an empire were made only in the later stages of the Meiji period (1868–1912), and that even the decision to go to war against China was taken with great caution. Japanese imperialism was mostly opportunistic and derived from transient needs, and consequently the continental expansion cannot be regarded as an inevitable process. At every stage it could have been sped up or slowed down, and at certain times the wheel even turned back. As for the second thesis, Duus reasoned that the first Sino-Japanese War had to be measured according to its results so it could not be regarded as a turning point.8 True, it was this conflict that created the belligerent imperialist line of action that Japan followed until 1945, and its success in the war with China gave decision makers in Tokyo the confidence to dare to challenge Russia a decade later.9 Nonetheless, this war did not ensure Japan’s position in East Asia, as is evident from its capitulation to the Three-power Intervention. In the same vein, that war did not foster Japan’s taking control of Korea, and in the end it remained in 1895 without a foothold on the continent.

Duus’s argument regarding the limited importance of the first Sino-Japanese War makes much sense, certainly compared with the Russo-Japanese War. A quantitative comparison leaves no doubt about the greater weight of the latter. Hostilities against Russia lasted 19 months, compared
with “only” nine months against China, and they cost the Japanese treasury some 1,730 million yen as compared with the 200 million yen required a decade earlier. More than a million soldiers and sailors fought in the conflagration with Russia, five times more than the figure in the previous decade, and the death toll exceeded 85,000 lives, about six times the losses in the previous war. Moreover, it was only after the end of the war against Russia that foreign observers began to regard Japan as a power on an equal footing with other powers involved in East Asian affairs. Only then did Japan become, at least militarily, the strongest power in the region. After the first Sino-Japanese War some military experts were impressed by Japan’s combat capacity, but most of them still professed that, as long as it did not cross swords with a Western opponent, it could not be considered a genuine military power. In the wake of the war against Russia, no expert cast doubt any longer on Japan’s military capabilities. By now Japan was a national menace to China, and thereafter relations between the two nations changed considerably, culminating in a prolonged armed conflict that ended only in 1945. Whereas until 1904 the struggle between the two states focused on Korea, a territory under the sovereignty of neither, by the end of the war with Russia Japan occupied sizeable portions of China’s Manchuria. This control was to endure for the next four decades, stimulating Japan’s appetite for further interference in China’s internal affairs.

Another substantial impact of the war on Japanese imperialism was its commercial outcome. Following the victory the numbers of private businessmen and entrepreneurs who left for the Asian continent in search of new commercial opportunities rose substantially. Many of these enterprising individuals reached Manchuria, whose abundant resources and wide plains they regarded as a business opportunity, and they based their initiatives on Japanese involvement in the area. Within a few years Japan’s economic center of gravity on the continent had shifted to the north, Manchuria becoming the “promised land.” The war contributed toward making imperialism a vision and goal for the entire Japanese people, who began, through mass demonstrations and protests, to exert continuous pressure for additional exploits. Paradoxically, the territories Japan took over created a sense of exaggerated military and strategic needs rather than security: victory was followed by increased military expenditure and additional military build-up.

The upsurge of Japanese militarism

The war’s impact on Japanese militarism was decisive and lingered until the dissolution of the Japanese army and navy in 1945. In military terms, the clash with Russia had no precedents on that scale, and in later years as well it remained Japan’s most fateful military challenge until the Pacific War (1941–5). The war enhanced the status of the military, elevated its commanders to heady fame, and helped to militarize the imperial family symbolically. Both the army and the navy were aware of the significance
of this, and regarded the war as a starting point and reference for training, budgetary allocations, and the creation of military ethos.17 Critically, the war provided the two services with enormous and varied combat and logistic experience, put to use in the next conflict that they were to join four decades later.18

As a lesson in history, the war provided the most solid evidence that the Japanese nation was invincible. This conviction could not have emerged after the victory over China because of the seeming inferiority of the opponent and because the victory had been an isolated case. The triumph over Russia provided the required continuity: Japanese forces won two victories against foes of superior size, one Asian and the other European. The war also reinforced the belief that the national spirit in general, and its fighting spirit in particular, could make up for, if not replace, shortage of manpower and some deficiencies in advanced armament. Yamato Damashii (Japanese Spirit) became a major factor in comprehending Japan’s victory over the supposedly superior Russia. This concept had a long-standing historical background in Japan, but now it was used for military objectives. In the following decades it was to play a crucial role in promoting Japanese militarism, by spurring field commanders to take unnecessary risks in battlefield and by motivating the rank and file to fight to the point of exhaustion and to sacrifice their lives.19

The concept of Japanese Spirit was partly a myth, and like all myths it was detached from reality and thorough analysis. During the war many incidents occurred where Japanese soldiers did not evince much combat spirit, contrary to what Japanese propaganda after the war boasted. During the siege on Port Arthur, for example, a gradual decline in military discipline was evident, and occasionally soldiers were forced to charge. The belief in this spirit was partly responsible for the huge and needless losses incurred by General Nogi Maresuke’s Third Army around Port Arthur, and also for the post-war campaign to conceal these losses and to magnify Nogi, of all commanders, as a war hero.20 In reality, the victory over Russia was not just a “victory of spirit over matter.” Russia was certainly a mighty nation with a much larger army, but throughout much of the war the bulk of its forces remained in Europe and many of the battles were conducted in a state of numerical parity, occasionally even with the advantage on the Japanese side. Ultimately, the emphasis on Yamato Damashii bore a catastrophic message that found expression in the military adventures Japan was to hazard later on.

A similar legacy with horrendous repercussions was the conviction that Japan could defeat a superior force by means of a surprise opening gambit and subsequently conclude the military campaign around the negotiating table. The buds of this notion surfaced in 1894, but the surprise attack on Russia on the eve of the war and the Portsmouth Peace Conference in its conclusion became the epitome of a model war. The same model would be applied optimistically 37 years later, on the eve of the Pacific
War, underlying the audacity to enter an all-out struggle against superior foes such as the United States and Great Britain. The ostensible similarity between the two events, both in scale and in their inherent risk, led Japanese decision makers in 1941 to believe they could replicate the military success against Russia, despite some significant differences in international circumstances. The resort to the successful pattern of a previous war is apparent in the memoirs of Admiral Tomioka Sadatoshi:

> Before and at the beginning of the [Pacific] war, we all believed in the concept of Limited War . . . and anticipated the course of the war as follows: firstly, to attain an overwhelming supremacy over the enemy forces in its early stages and create a strategic equilibrium against the allies; then to seek a favorable opportunity to enter into negotiations with our enemies for a compromise peace, keeping enough potential to continue the war.\(^{21}\)

Nevertheless, the wars Japan waged after 1905 were not exact copies of the campaign against Russia. Not only had global circumstances been transformed substantially, and the enemies been different, but the Japanese themselves had changed. Some of patterns of their combat behavior had altered unrecognizably. The readiness for compromise had gradually narrowed, and there was a noticeable shift toward extremism in the fighting ethos. One such transformation occurred in the attitude to Japanese prisoners of war. The approximately 2,000 Japanese soldiers that returned from Russian captivity in 1906 underwent interrogation, and in accordance with the new regulations published in July 1905 they had to explain the reasons for their becoming captive. By and large, they were not imprisoned, but most of them were forced to retire from service. This attitude was still lenient compared with the combat code three decades later, which regarded falling into captivity as utter shame for the soldier and his family. While the Russo-Japanese War signaled a slight change in attitude to Japanese personnel who were taken prisoner, only in the 1930s did the authorities begin to stress combat until the “bitter end” and the dishonor of falling captive, and only then did Japan endeavor earnestly to distinguish the desired code of conduct among its soldiers from the prevalent code in the West.\(^{22}\)

**The quest for identity**

Toward the end of the war with Russia public opinion in Japan began to expect Western recognition of its newly elevated status as a first-class power (ittōkoku) and a great nation (taikoku). True, only a few years earlier Japan finally altered the unequal treaties its had signed in the mid-nineteenth century with the Western powers, but now any indication of lack of respect or discrimination caused an uproar and triggered a sensitive sense of injury and insult. At the same time, fresh memories of the Three-power
Intervention nine years earlier resulted in intense fears of fresh Western reaction. While neither European intervention nor a second wave of “Yellow Peril” in the West materialized, the Japanese victory did intensify American animosity vis-à-vis Japanese immigration, and led to legislation restricting immigration from Asia. These new restrictions were followed closely in Japan, and the psychological repercussions of this and other tokens of “national insult,” argued Naoko Shimazu, had “a lasting impact on Japanese thinking.” Once relatively acquiescent to Western differential treatment, the victory changed Japanese international expectations in an instant. But it was a rude awakening. Only after the war against Russia, Shimazu correctly observes, did the Japanese become fully aware of “the seemingly unbridgeable racial gap between themselves and the other great powers.”

In the following years Japanese society witnessed the emergence of an extensive discourse known as *jinshuron* (lit. “theories of race”). Its origins are rooted earlier, starting probably with the encounter with Western ideas of a racial taxonomy during the early Meiji era and intensified by European notions of the “Yellow Peril” in the late 1890s. Nonetheless, only after the war did Japanese intellectuals begin to question earnestly their national belonging, expressing skepticism as to whether their nation would ever be deemed as being on an equal footing with the leading powers. Twenty years before the victory over Russia, the influential reformer and thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi had advocated abandoning Asia and joining Europe, but, after the war with China, and still more in 1905, doubts were rife regarding the ability and even the need to do so.

The war reinforced earlier misgivings regarding the course Japan had chosen since the Meiji Restoration. In 1898 the aristocrat politician Konoe Atsumaro proposed the concept of “solidarity of similar races,” promoting collaboration with China vis-à-vis the West via his pan-Asian movement Tōa Dōbunkai and its successor Tōa Dōshikai. In the aftermath of the war such pan-Asian ideas became more popular than ever, gaining new converts. Pan-Asianists were no longer dreamers or extreme figures but included some of Japan’s leading personalities. One of them was Yamagata Aritomo, a former prime minister and one of the five *Genrō* during the war, who in 1905 still subscribed to Fukazawa’s idea. A few years later, however, and especially after the 1911 revolution in China, Yamagata became an ardent pan-Asianist. In the post-Russo-Japanese War era, the incongruity between the two perceptions, one supporting solidarity with the West and one supporting a pan-Asian struggle against the West, grew stronger, and a bitter debate erupted over Japanese identity. In the eyes of many Japanese, however, the world for which they strove left them little choice. While public opinion in the United States and Europe increasingly regarded Japan as a threat to their economic interests and colonial rule in Asia, sympathy for Japan in China and Korea rapidly dwindled. A total ban in China on Japanese merchandise in 1908, and the assassination of Japan’s leading statesman, Itō Hirobumi, by a Korean patriot a year later, sent a stark
message to the Japanese public that even their racial kin regarded them as an alien and hostile entity. At a time of growing need for foreign reassurance, the new circumstances left a strong feeling of isolation. Even the typically sober Itō wrote in 1907 that never before had Japan been so isolated politically.\textsuperscript{28}

In such a state of affairs the initial public euphoria over the victory did not last long. The most perceptible feeling was soon one of disillusionment and gloom. The inadequate diplomatic achievements at Portsmouth—the supposed cause of the “Hibiya riots”—were not the sole cause for the disappointment, and at any rate they did not upset most of the intellectuals. They were simply filled with frustration and dread resulting from what they sensed even before the war as a loss of Japanese identity and its incongruity with Western culture. Early signs of this sentiment had emerged earlier, but the conclusion of the extreme national efforts aimed against Russia gave way to a rather individual quest for meaning, which now collided with still strong elements of the feudal and Confucian legacy. Sensing the \textit{Zeitgeist}, the novelist Tokutomi Roka stated in 1905 that the conversion of Japan into a world power had done very little to strengthen its security and economy.\textsuperscript{29} A similar mirror of the contemporary melancholy is found in the journal \textit{Shin kōron}, which in several issues in mid-1906 dealt with the inability to stem “the tide of deterioration.” In the introduction to the series, the editors reason:

The so-called pessimism, the so-called anxiety, and suicide, all this is the product of an age of decline and has no place in the rising empire of Japan. Nonetheless, these damaging trends are swiftly becoming the sign of the times. Is this not a problem worthy of serious consideration by our intellectual leaders?\textsuperscript{30}

Side by side with growing chauvinism and jingoism, Japan in 1906–12 underwent a significant transformation in the ideological and intellectual sphere.\textsuperscript{31} It was now a time for reflection—a necessary stage that had been postponed before due to the existential threat of Russia. More than any other Japanese, perhaps, it was the writer Natsume Sōseki who depicted succinctly the shattered dreams the Japanese experienced after the war and their growing ambivalence vis-à-vis the West. A year before the outbreak of the war Sōseki had returned from a frustrating three-year stay in London, and thereafter he devoted the remainder of his short life to portraying the Japanese conflict with modernity. “It will be a pity,” he wrote in 1905, “to lose one’s own and one’s country’s special characteristics through too much adoration of the West.”\textsuperscript{32} By means of mainly Western military technology, Japan’s elimination of the Russian threat served as proof of the success of modernization, but this was not necessarily identical with Westernization. In the following decade intellectuals felt free to return to questions of identity, and they made a concerted effort to redefine the essence of being
Japanese. Many of them believed that Japan’s post-war mission was to serve as a bridge between East and West, by reconciliation or by integration.\textsuperscript{33} The national discourse that emerged soon after the war is known as \textit{nihon-jinron} (lit. “theories about the Japanese”), and with certain ebbs and flows it has engaged the Japanese society to this very day.\textsuperscript{34}

Early \textit{nihonjinron} writers focused on the meaning of being Japanese in a modern but non-Western society and the spirit that characterized such a society. The expression \textit{wakon yōsai} (“Japanese spirit—Western technique”) had been coined before the war, but after it a wide range of thinkers sought to redefine that spirit. In 1909 the leading psychiatrist Morita Shōma (Masatake) developed the concept of \textit{shinkeishitsu}—a mental condition supposedly unique to Japanese that manifests itself whenever the mind is occupied with superfluous thoughts.\textsuperscript{35} A year later Nishida Kitarō, the most eminent modern Japanese philosopher, published his \textit{Zen no kenkyū: jitsuzai to jiko} (An Inquiry into the Good). Using Western terms, he sought to define the key concept of “pure experience”—a conscious state unique to Orientals.\textsuperscript{36} Also in 1910 the renowned ethnologist Yanagita Kunio examined in \textit{Tō no monogatari} oral traditions among the peasants.\textsuperscript{37} Focusing on Japanese modernization, he argued that it was not identical with Westernization. Among the peasants Yanagita discovered the ideal of the “common Japanese man,” contending that the repression and exploitation in Japan had originated from a foreign culture, imported in the past from China and in the present from the West.\textsuperscript{38}

A year after the war the radical ideologist Kita Ikki challenged the parental relationships between the emperor and the people dictated by the Meiji oligarchy.\textsuperscript{39} He asserted that both the emperor and the people should belong to the state, and their ties ought to transform accordingly. Kita, the future author of the manifesto of the political right in the 1930s,\textsuperscript{40} was not the only figure to re-examine national ideology. From a single publication on this topic in 1908 the number rose two years later to ten.\textsuperscript{41} In an article published in 1911 the economist Kawakami Hajime began to deal with cultural problems and compared Western individualism, based on a “personal framework” (\textit{jinkaku}), with the Japanese family state, based on a “national framework” (\textit{kokkaku}). Kawakami postulated that Japanese uniqueness lay in the identity of the particular interest of the individual with the public interest. Like many of his contemporaries, Kawakami enhanced the sense of a dialectical opposition between two completely different cultural structures—that of Japan and that of the West.\textsuperscript{42} These two structures constituted the tension, argued Peter Dale, between the individual and society during the period of modernization. The “West” functioned in this equation as an external metaphor for all the outward aspects of the Japanese social structure during the course of modernization.\textsuperscript{43}

The war served as a cause and trigger for the emergence of a new national self-image. Until the war, the Japanese had undergone a process that the American anthropologist Harumi Befu labeled “self-Orientalism,” that is,
the acceptance of the Western perception of the East as inferior by those who are the very object of that perception. After the war, however, new forces began to stress the qualities of the Japanese spirit, suggesting that Japan was equal to the West and in certain spheres even superior. In this evolving intellectual milieu, the West began to represent elements different from, and sometimes inferior to, the cultural framework Japan could offer. This view created a new sense of pride but also was the harbinger of confrontation between two dialectic images: that of Japan on the one hand and that of the West on the other.44

The post-war ideology also imparted greater importance to the emperor. The collision with Russia provided Emperor Meiji with many glorious moments he had never experienced before, and from then until 1945 his heirs were considered both the constitutional monarchs and the father figures of the nation. Although he remained in his Tokyo palace throughout the war against Russia, the emperor was depicted as a senior statesman involved in all strategic decisions. As the war ended he left for the temple of the Sun Goddess in Ise to report the victory, in an unprecedented act that demonstrated, some historians argue, that his divinity had been finally established.45 Victory was the emperor’s, but the “shameful peace” obtained at Portsmouth was not.46 In the seven-year period spanning the conclusion of the war and the death of the first modern Japanese monarch in 1912, the embedding of the modern concept of “emperor,” as the Meiji oligarchy had envisioned it many years before, was finally completed. At the heart of the emerging concept of a family state stood a figure whose status had received a substantial boost during the war. In post-war school textbooks the image of the emperor was further enhanced, presenting him as the symbol of Japan’s national fortitude. The confused young man of 1868 was now the symbol of “Japan’s advance to the level of the world powers.”47

Political and social transformation

In the decade after the war, Japan witnessed a number of social and political developments whose repercussions echoed long afterwards. The three most significant trends associated with the war, as Banno Junji has aptly pointed out, were the emergence of the Rikken Seiyūkai party, which gained a stable majority in the Lower House before the war, the increasing interference of the army and navy in politics, and the rise of popular urban movements. In addition, the war brought about numerous subtle changes that shaped the face of Japanese society and politics as more constitutional, and somewhat more liberal, but also planted resistant seeds for future totalitarianism and ultra-nationalism.48

Politically, the most immediate outcome of the war was a government reshuffle. At the beginning of 1906 the 56-year-old nobleman Saionji Kimmochi was appointed prime minister, in place of the resigning Katsura Tarō. Saionji represented the Seiyūkai, although the actual leader of the
party was Hara Kei (Takashi), a man considered the first genuine party politician. Still, the rise of Saionji did not proclaim any dramatic changes in Japanese politics because the gentlemanly way of appointing prime ministers remained intact. It was Katsura who recommended Saionji for this position; in 1908 the latter recommended the former as his successor, and each of them was able to lead another cabinet before 1913. Nonetheless, Katsura and Saionji did not enjoy the same power pre-war oligarchs had exerted, and after 1906 there was a significant increase in the power of the parliament, which served to balance somewhat the belligerent tendencies toward further continental expansion.\(^49\)

In a similar fashion, the years that followed the war were characterized by further weakening of the Genrō position, the unofficial and manifestly non-democratic council of senior statesmen that possessed the greatest power among the oligarchy on the eve of the war. Eighteen years later all five wartime Genrō were dead. In 1912, three years after the assassination of Itō, Saionji was appointed as the fifth Genrō, and when Yamagata died a decade later he remained alone in this position until his death in 1940. Although the decline of this role constituted theoretically another step toward democracy, in the second half of the 1920s the system of checks and balances in Japanese politics was undermined by the lack of stabilizing bodies promoting general national interests as the Genrō had. Thus, the cessation in appointing additional figures to the position, and the lack of suitable leaders endowed with political realism and assuming national responsibility like the early oligarchs, were damaging to Japan’s foreign policy and probably contributed to some of its rash and adventurous decisions in the following decades.

Another political transformation associated with the war was the growing involvement of the army and navy in internal affairs. This phenomenon had pre-war roots and would recede temporarily in the early 1920s, but the struggle with Russia definitely served as its catalysts. Of the two services, the navy was the greater beneficiary of the war, because of its intact combat record but also because it became evident that, without large annual budgets, Japan would not be able to maintain its naval hegemony in the region. With the establishment of the Ministry of the Navy in 1872, separate from the Ministry of the Army, the navy was considered a secondary service. After the war, however, the navy began to perceive itself as equal to the army, and vied for a greater share in limited resources of the state.\(^50\) In the new political circumstances its leaders were capable now of forging a political alliance with members of the Seiyūkai party, resulting in a counter-alliance between the army and parties opposed to the Seiyūkai. In 1910 the inter-service tension reached a climax when the army demanded two additional divisions to the existing nineteen due to the annexation of Korea. Public support for the navy’s expansion program, and the political commitment to this service, enabled the government headed by Prince Saionji to refuse the
army’s demand. The army counteracted by bringing down the government in 1912, and three years later its demands were finally met.

In the following decades the ties between the military and civilian systems continued to weaken, while both services displayed increasing involvement in politics. Starting in 1912, the army, and to a lesser extent also the navy, made manipulative and frequent use of the practice established in 1890, namely that the minister in charge of each service should be appointed from among the generals and admirals on active service. By then, each had different goals and sets of priorities, which mirrored a new post-war condition that Oka Yoshitake defined as “dissolution of consensuses.” The discord over national goals and the corrosion of the central process of decision-making characterized the following years. In the 1930s the growing interservice competition had a far-reaching and subversive impact on internal politics, accompanied by greater pressures for imperialist expansion.

The post-Russo-Japanese War period is often considered to have heralded the “Taisho democracy” and the broadening of political participation. Certainly, the “golden age of government authority,” which characterized, according to Tokutomi Sohō, the early Meiji era, had ended. The new period was characterized, instead, by the emergence of many popular movements, such as the movement against taxes, arguably a symptom of the political crisis that broke out at the beginning of the Taisho period (1912–13). Within this context the “Hibiya riots” are often regarded as an early sign of the popular movement that led to the political movement of the Taisho period. In fact, certain signs of the political awakening of the masses emerged even before the end of the war, stimulating Prime Minister Katsura to express his concern to Yamagata that the lower classes “are mixing politics with social questions, and now, from grooms and rickshawmen to small tradesmen, the people are raising a hue and cry about an indemnity, though they know nothing about the issue.” Much of the popular protest in Hibiya, and many other protests and strikes peaking in 1907, were associated merely with new a sense of deprivation, both political and economic, and of frustration in that these spheres were monopolized by the few (tokken kaikyū; “the privileged classes”). Nonetheless, it is difficult to discern any direct link between the riots and later political developments. All the popular movements of that period, this one included, were passing phenomena, and their influence remained limited. Even the post-war radicalism was nothing new, and its implications were marginal compared with the reactionary forces at the beginning of the Meiji and Showa eras.

Was the war a turning point?

The term “turning point” carries two different usages, hence implications. On the one hand, it indicates an unusual or a sharp change from a previous
trend—a sort of inverted historical course. On the other hand, a turning point can be considered a mere change in intensity, consisting of significant strengthening or weakening of a persistent trend. In historiographic terms, the first usage can be seen as a breakthrough and even as the beginning of a new age, while the second serves to mark a subdivision within a period. When discussing the significance of the Russo-Japanese War as a turning point, we seem to be dealing with the second meaning. As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, the war caused no sharp turnabout in earlier trends in most spheres, but only led to their strengthening and acceleration. In this sense, the Russo-Japanese War differs from the two indisputably “genuine” turning points in the modern history of Japan—the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and the surrender of Japan in 1945, which stand as remarkable deviations from an earlier course.

In many respects, indeed, the war did not alter any earlier trends for Japan. Its aspiration for imperial expansion had made a modest start back in the 1870s, and the significant incursion into the continent took place during the first Sino-Japanese War. Even the roots of Japanese militarism went back much earlier, and the army and navy were granted large budgets and significantly augmented before the war. The transformation of Japan’s military image at home and abroad had begun before the war, and were it not for such an evaluation Britain would probably have refrained from entering into an alliance with Japan in 1902. Even the indications of disappointment with the West and the desire for a distinct identity that marked the years following the war can be found in many publications at the end of the nineteenth century. Finally, the democratic tendencies that accompanied the strengthening of political parties in Japan were rooted in the establishment of a parliament in 1889 and the slow decline in power of the Meiji oligarchy. It is fairly difficult, therefore, to point to a single sphere in which the war constituted a breakthrough.

The search for spheres in which a genuine shift occurred during and after the war forces the historian to overlook many domains in which minimal changes, if any, occurred. Despite the intellectual quest for identity, the war did not lessen significantly the popular attraction of the West and its culture, and certainly did not slow down the rate of modernization. On the whole, the regime did not change and the oligarchy continued to maintain its strength in various forms for more than a decade. Most economic indices neither improved nor declined steeply, although industry continued to expand. There was no drastic change in the Japanese social structure and its preconceptions since, except for marginal reforms, economic and social inequality persisted, women remained without the right to vote, the urban population continued to grow steadily, and poverty and harsh living conditions continued to characterize the rural areas.

Although disappointing for some, this broad review of the spheres in which transformation was marginal stresses the fact that the war was far from a historical turning point in the first sense of the word. Not only did
it reinforce earlier trends rather than shift their direction, but in many spheres there was actually no significant change, even in the intensity of the trends. This sober perspective notwithstanding, it is difficult to imagine the development of modern Japan without the imperialist drive that characterized it from 1904 to 1945. As Peter Duus (Chapter 3, this volume) suggests, a considerable share of the foreign affairs, industrial growth, and political developments that Japan witnessed during the subsequent four decades were associated with its triumph over Russia.

There is only one alternative and positive model to that of imperial Japan that we seem able to envision. This is post-1945 Japan—a nation with a prosperous economy confined within a limited territory and practically free of territorial disputes. It is difficult to assume that Japan could have clung to such a model in 1904, when its industry was still in its infancy and the state was in the midst of its Age of Imperialism. Historians with a deterministic outlook incline to argue that the war and the imperialist development that followed were a necessary stage in the modernization of Japan. Having only one course open, history does not allow us to examine it properly. All in all, however, a broad view of the actual repercussions of the war on Japan, as well as those that did not materialize, indicates that the Russo-Japanese War was a crossroads, after which many essential processes for the making of what we know today as Japan accelerated. Therefore, we ought to regard this war as a landmark, marginal perhaps in comparison with the two other dramatic turning points, but still one of the key points in the modern history of Japan.

Notes
1 The War Ministry also organized an exhibition of unprecedented proportions in the open courtyard in front of the imperial palace. It presented Russian armaments taken as spoils from the battlefields of Manchuria: more than 70,000 rifles, swords, and spears; nearly 500 guns; and more than 2,000 wagons and carts. On the imperial review and the exhibition in spring 1906, see Fujitani, 1996: 134–6.
4 Japan gained the Mariana, Carolina, and Marshall Islands in the Pacific, and temporarily also the German holdings in the Shantung peninsula in northern China.
6 The annexation of Korea provided Japan with an additional territory of about 220,000 square kilometers and a population estimated at about 13.8–14.7 million subjects, depending on the source. For the population data of Korea in 1910, see Nahm, 1988; and Shin, 2002: 353.
7 Duus, 1983: 154. For a similar view, see also Kitaoka, 1978.
8 Compare with an earlier argument by Inoue Kiyoshi that Japanese imperialism emerged in 1899. In Inoue, 1953.
9 For an expanded discussion on the importance of the first Sino-Japanese War, see Oh, 1983.
11 There are minor inconsistencies about the number of casualties in the Imperial Japanese Army. According to one source the army suffered 60,083 killed in battle (among them 1,926 officers) as well as 21,197 who succumbed to disease (among them 278 officers); see Ono, 1935: 752. The figures for the veneration of warrior spirits at the Yasukuni National Shrine do not qualify as an accurate count of losses but give a clear idea about them. At the two ceremonies held after the first Sino-Japanese War, 12,877 warrior spirits were venerated, while at the ceremonies held after the Russo-Japanese War a total of 88,131 spirits (85,206 of the army and 2,925 of the navy) were venerated. See Yasukuni jinja, 1983, I: 319–27; and Harada, 1986: 212. Following the war the Imperial Japanese Army reported over 60,000 killed and 130,000 wounded; see Öe, 1988: 131. For a summary of the Japanese casualties, see Kowner, 2006: 80–1.
12 For Western views on Japanese military capabilities after the first Sino-Japanese War, see Kowner, 1998: 229–36.
13 For a sample of positive descriptions of Japanese military and combat capabilities, see Ashmead-Bartlett, 1906: 485; Matignon, 1907: 93, 104, 149; Villiers, 1905: 68, 164. A few years later, however, some of the negative pre-war views of Japan’s military resurfaced, notably within British intelligence. See Best, 2002.
14 For Japan’s continental expansion after the war and attitude vis-à-vis China, see Kitaoka, 1978; Matsusaka, 2001.
15 On the growing importance of the Chinese market and the expanding share of Manchuria in Japanese investments and imports after the war, see Duus et al., 1989.
16 On the emperor’s calm and restrained conduct and attitude during the war, see Keene, 2002: 605–29. In an opinion poll on “the greatest figure in history,” conducted among Tokyo factory workers in 1924, the war hero General Nogi Maresuke came second, preceded only by the then reigning emperor. Nogi rated higher than civil leaders in the war, such as Emperor Meiji (4) and Itō Hirobumi (10). In Nakamura, 1992: 51–3; cited also in Shillony, 2005: 183. After the war the rank of the emperor’s aides-de-camp became higher and their authority greater. Similarly, the emperor’s first male grandchild, the young Hirohito, began to undergo military education under the tutelage of the war hero General Nogi Maresuke. In Bix, 2000: 34–6.
17 In 1925 the military began to commemorate the war, and in 1930 it celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with even bigger festivities. In those five years many books and articles were published about the war. In 1930 the tragic heroism of General Nogi was portrayed in a kabuki play, entitled The Fall of Port Arthur. In Bix, 2000: 210.
18 The basic unit the Imperial Japanese Army deployed was the army, and in some battles it was able to coordinate a number of armies simultaneously. The navy too made use for the first time of a large number of modern capital ships, and executed large-scale engagements against a modern fleet as well as complex logistic operations.
19 New infantry manuals were revised to stress the importance of the human spirit in warfare, as well as the importance of the deeds of individual soldiers, thus emphasizing hand-to-hand combat and small-arms fire. In Bix, 2000: 34. On the myth of mind over matter in the Sino-Japanese War, see Lone, 1994: 51; a good example of the use of the term Yamato Damashii can be found in the classic wartime book Nikudan, published in Japanese immediately after the war.
and translated into English two years later as *Human Bullets* (Sakurai, 1907). This argument about the Japanese sense of invincibility and the role of the war as a prelude to future war is presented in greater detail in Cook, 1993: 285; Dickinson, 2005: 539–42; and Wilson, 1999: 182–3.

20 On the glorification of Nogi after the war, see Matsusaka, 2005; and Shimana, 2001. On the making of Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō into a national hero of legendary proportions and its use for political ends, see Dickinson, 2005: 537–9.

21 Cited in Ikeda, 1982: 144.

22 On the change in attitude to being captured in battle, see Hata, 1996; and Straus, 2003: 17–47.

23 On the Japanese efforts during the war to mobilize public opinion in the United States and in Europe, see Kownar, 2001; and Valliant, 1974.


26 Banno, 1977: 126–7. In February 1908 one of Japan’s leading magazines, *Taiyō*, dedicated a special issue to Japan’s national identity, leaving no doubt regarding its position. The issue was entitled “The Clash of the Yellow and White Peoples.”

27 Similar sentiments of disappointment with the West marked the emergence of the Zionist movement, particularly the organization of the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897.


29 Tokutomi is quoted in Iriye, 1989: 778.

30 Quoted in Oka, 1982: 207.

31 For a classic study of the rise of chauvinistic discourse after the war, see Miyagi, 1973.

32 Sōseki is quoted in Jansen, 2000: 480.


34 On the post-Russo-Japanese War origins of *nihonjinron* and the sense of superiority vis-à-vis the West, see Minami, 1994: 29–63. For contemporary manifestations of this discourse, see Befu, 2001; and Yoshino, 1992.

35 Morita, 1926.

36 Nishida, 1910 [1921].

37 Yanagita, 1910 [1935].


39 Kita, 1906 [1959], I: 213.


41 The figures are cited in Jansen, 1965: 82.

42 Kawakami, 1911 [1964].


44 On self-Orientalism in Japan, see Befu, 1995.

45 See, for example, Yasuda, 1990: 57; Shillony, however, suggests that the emperor was not treated by the Meiji oligarchy as a god, certainly not with the deference accorded to his grandchild, Emperor Shōwa. See Shillony, 2005: 165.


47 On the emperor’s place in late Meiji era ideology, see Gluck, 1985: 73–101.

48 Banno, 1983; on the political repercussions of general mobilization during the war, see Matsuo, 1966: 79–80.
50 For the navy post-war expenditures and expansion programs, see Ono, 2007.
52 On the expanding political role of the Imperial Japanese Navy and the inter-service rivalry from 1906 to 1914, see Masuda, 1982; Schencking, 2002, 2005.
53 See, for example, Matsuo, 2001.
54 Tokutomi is quoted in Oka, 1982: 198.
57 For a less strict definition of turning points in general, and regarding Japan’s modern history in particular, see Edström, 2002: 6–11.
58 The war resulted in a temporary large trade balance due to a rise in imports. See Bank of Japan, 1966.