

---

---

## Introduction

ON A BRISK autumn day in November 1913, Prime Minister Yamamoto Gonnohyōe looked out to sea and smiled. Assembled before the admiral-turned-national politician was one of the largest naval flotillas that would grace Tokyo Bay in Yamamoto's lifetime. The vessels, the pride and joy of the Imperial Japanese Navy, had gathered for the most impressive Grand Maneuver of the Fleet that had occurred since Japan's victory celebration, held in October 1905, to commemorate the triumphal return of Japan's Combined Fleet following the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. Though assembled ostensibly to showcase the prize vessels of the Japanese navy, including the newly arrived British-built battle cruiser *Kongō*, one of the largest and most technologically advanced warships afloat in 1913, a pronounced political purpose lay beneath the impressive visual display of power. Coming exactly one day after Navy Minister Saitō Makoto introduced the navy's proposed five-year expansion program to the full cabinet in a private session, Yamamoto used this "magnificent spectacle," as one *Tokyo Asahi shinbun* reporter described it, to confirm popular speculation that his government would seek Diet approval for a massive ¥350 million naval expansion package when parliament opened the following month.<sup>1</sup> Timing was not a coincidence.

If the event exuded politics and popular pro-navy nationalism, the primary political purpose of this maneuver, selling naval expansion, was perhaps best betrayed by the impressive assemblage of politicians, businessmen, and imperial dignitaries who shared the main reviewing stand with the prime minister. Moreover, owing to the increasingly important role of

Japan's electorate, Japan's naval leaders opened this event to the public, and in response thousands of citizens gathered at places along the shore to view the navy's vessels. While the collection at sea illustrated the navy's might, technological prowess, and military evolution, the groups gathered on shore, particularly those on the reviewing stand, revealed something just as impressive as the display at sea, if not directly responsible for it: the navy's increased political clout and influence. Yamamoto and others in the navy knew full well that support from groups represented by the navy's invited dignitaries, namely Diet politicians, Seiyūkai leaders, maritime industrialists, members of the press, the new emperor, and citizens, would be instrumental to passage of the navy's highly coveted expansion proposal. This Grand Maneuver of the Fleet illustrated, perhaps better than any other event, the important interplay between power, pageantry, politics, propaganda, and nationalism that contributed to, and reflected, the rise of the modern Japanese navy.

Though this carefully orchestrated event impressed journalists, dignitaries, and citizens alike, the navy did not always enjoy such support or wield such political influence and military power. The navy had, for much of the early to mid-Meiji Period (1868–1900), languished as Japan's junior service. Prior to the 1890s, Japan was not a naval nation. Naval or maritime affairs had been severely restricted during the previous Tokugawa era (1603–1868), and the Meiji government thus inherited neither a spirited naval tradition nor state-of-the-art equipment to serve as the foundation for future naval development. Furthermore, strategic concerns of the new state initially revolved around consolidating control at home and suppressing any possible internal rebellion rather than projecting power overseas. This understandably increased the priority given to the army's spending requests over those of the navy. Finally, factional clan-based politics also constrained naval growth in comparison to that of the army. While leaders of the former Satsuma domain eventually gravitated toward positions of power and influence in the navy during the late 1870s, thus providing this service with greater political representation and influence in the new government, the army's *Chōshū* ties were pronounced from the beginning of the Meiji Restoration. "Chōshū," in the words of distinguished historian Albert Craig, "was big," and clan connections provided army leaders with greater political access, bureaucratic clout in early Meiji Japan, and their service with appropriations that far exceeded that of the navy's.<sup>2</sup> The navy's annual peacetime budget surpassed the army's only twice from the beginning of the Meiji state to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5 and only once between

1905 and 1914. In the realm of national budgetary politics and international naval power, size mattered.

A number of factors accounted for the navy's political emergence and military growth to the world's third largest maritime military force by 1922. Those groups represented at the Grand Fleet Maneuver of 1913 speak volumes. Ironically, the very factors that inhibited naval growth in the early Meiji years compelled navy leaders to seek newly emerging political allies, to immerse themselves in parliamentary politics, to construct real or imagined justifications for fleet expansion, and to create and disseminate innovative naval propaganda that called for larger budgets to fund naval expansion. After gaining ministerial independence from the army in the early 1870s, securing larger budgets became *the* political cause if not overriding preoccupation of Japan's admirals. Fortuitously for the navy's leaders, their pragmatic explorations and political immersion coincided with the development of a more pluralistic and participatory political environment in Japan and an era of imperialism abroad. Both benefited the Japanese navy considerably. This began at home with the opening of parliament in 1890 and became more pronounced as the Seiyūkai political party emerged as the primary force in parliamentary politics after 1905. At home too, an increasingly literate and enfranchised public, more accessible than ever through a burgeoning mass print media, provided farsighted naval leaders with new avenues by which to gain, foster, and channel support for their institution's political objectives at a new and previously untapped level in society. Finally, on a regional or international geopolitical level, imperialism and war afforded the navy with more than one opportunity to enlarge Japan's empire and showcase its military victories within the public sphere. In turn, naval leaders subsequently used such military exploits to justify ever-increasing requests for greater appropriations over the late Meiji and early Taishō eras. Empire begot expansion and military increases.

Fruitful the navy's activities indeed proved. Beginning in earnest and with great calculation and precision after the political ascension of Yamamoto Gonnohyōe—who served as secretariat to the navy minister (1891–96), navy minister (1898–1906), and prime minister (1913–14)—and continuing throughout World War I, the navy evolved as a sophisticated political elite. Under Yamamoto's supervision and leadership, once described by the journalist-cum-historian Uzaki Ryojō as the same care with which a “tiger guards its lair,” naval leaders comprehended, adapted to, and manipulated the changing and increasingly pluralistic political environment that developed in late Meiji and Taishō Japan.<sup>3</sup> In short, the navy massaged

the newly developing erogenous zones of the Japanese body politic more successfully than almost any other organization in the late Meiji and early Taishō periods. It did so first and foremost to serve its own institutional or parochial ends, but in doing so the navy also strengthened or at least further legitimated parliamentary democracy, demonstrated the potential political effectiveness of mass propaganda and pageantry, fostered nationalism, and enlarged Japan's empire toward the South Seas in perception as well as reality. In doing so as effectively as it did, moreover, it became a significant budgetary and political rival to the army. Heightened interservice rivalry, a by-product of the navy's emergence, shaped politics, empire, and society far more than other historians and scholars of Japan have recognized throughout the years covered by my study, and this important trend continued well up until the end of World War II. The navy's emergence thus, in a phrase, made waves.

### *New Approaches to Naval History: Institutions, Politics, and Money*

While historians have written little on the early Japanese navy, historians of the German, British, and American navies have demonstrated far greater awareness of, and directed far more attention to, the politics which surrounded naval expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Eckart Kehr provided the first detailed history of the politics that surrounded the emergence of the Imperial German Navy.<sup>4</sup> In his study *Battleship Building and Party Politics in Germany, 1894–1901*, Kehr explored the German navy's political pursuits to gain appropriations for fleet expansion and the important role that German political parties and parliamentarians in the Reichstag came to play behind the emergence of the German navy as an impressive instrument of state, empire, and ultimately war.<sup>5</sup> In a recent study, Paul Pedisich took a similar theoretical and methodological approach in documenting the critically important role political parties and representatives within the U.S. Congress played in naval expansion in the United States between 1882 and 1916, a role far greater than that played by successive U.S. presidents.<sup>6</sup> Recently too, Mark Shulman and Peter Trubowitz have conducted extensive work on naval politics, at both the regional and the national level, that contributed to the emergence of the American navy.<sup>7</sup> Focusing attention across the Atlantic, John Beeler documented how politics shaped the world's strongest military fleet, Britain's Royal Navy, and its naval policies during the Gladstone-Disraeli era.<sup>8</sup> In Japan too, as my

study will document, parliamentarians, particularly those from the Seiyūkai political party, played a similarly vital role behind the navy's political and military emergence. My study will thus add to an emerging body of historical literature that explores the relationships among parliamentary politics, society, and naval development and expansion.

The above-mentioned studies all fall within and considerably strengthen a “new theoretical school” of naval history first expounded by John Sumida, David Rosenberg, and John Hattendorf.<sup>9</sup> Incorporating a methodological approach that privileges the politics, bureaucracy, and economy behind naval development during the late nineteenth and twentieth century, proponents of this new school have convincingly articulated how modern navies evolved into remarkably complex, politically active, and significant organs of state out of simple economic and political necessity. Though often overlooked by military historians interested in battles or military hardware, navies required vast amounts of annual funding to purchase, construct, and maintain warships, land-based infrastructure, naval institutions, and personnel. To fund such programs, admirals in navies around the globe, but particularly those in countries with newly emerging navies that possessed no naval tradition to build upon, found it necessary to implement imaginative and persuasive means to persuade politicians and the public to support the expensive cause of naval development. In doing so, navies significantly altered politics, empire, and society in pursuit of their narrower and more parochial concerns, namely larger budgets. Nowhere was this more evident than in Japan. Moreover, owing to Japan's constitution, nowhere did a military service exhibit a greater ability to shape national politics, society, and empire than in Japan.

### *The Japanese Navy in a Historiographical Context*

Inexplicably, naval historians and scholars of Japan have written very little about the political birth or emergence of the Japanese navy and what this meant for politics and society in pre-World War II Japan. One factor contributing to this omission is that historians have directed far greater interest and inquiry into battle histories, war, and the military and technological emergence of the Japanese navy. On one level this is not surprising. Militarily impressive warships and naval engagements still captivate people's attention today as much as they did a hundred years ago, when in the aftermath of Japan's victory over Russia authors, military observers, and journalists published a plethora of books on Admiral Tōgō's decisive fleet

engagement at Tsushima, as well as other victorious exploits of Japan's navy.<sup>10</sup> In the most thoroughly researched and informative study on the Japanese navy to date, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy*, David Evans and Mark Peattie likewise directed their attention toward the military and technological development of the Japanese navy. While their study is impressive, the authors admit that the monograph is something "far short of a complete history," as it does not examine in detail such topics as naval budgets, the navy's relation to civilian government, or its involvement in domestic politics. In short, their work provides a narrow discussion of the political and economic factors that lay behind the creation of Japan's modern navy, factors which are the focus of my study.<sup>11</sup>

Though scholars have composed political studies on the Japanese navy, these too are limited in scope. Generally these historical works have focused on one of two topics: either naval disarmament;<sup>12</sup> or the politics behind the navy's formation and execution of a Southern Advance policy in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> The overall pre-1920s political lacuna associated with the Japanese navy stems in part from the erroneous assumption that the young navy was an apolitical service or one that transcended politics in Meiji-Taishō Japan (1868–1926). The respected military historian Tsunoda Jun went so far as to claim that "the navy rarely engaged in politics" and that "the words navy and politics, when put together, sound odd."<sup>14</sup> The distinguished military and political historian Asada Sadao furthered this position, writing: "Above all, the tradition of the 'silent navy'—non-involvement in politics—lay at the base of its passive attitude toward state affairs in general."<sup>15</sup> While some historians in Japan have recently exhibited greater interest in naval politics in Japan's earlier periods, the interpretation of a nonpolitical navy or a silent service that held itself above politics in the Meiji and Taishō periods persists.<sup>16</sup> This view, as my study will show, simply does not stand up to detailed historical scrutiny. Politics was the lifeblood of the Japanese navy, as it was for the navies of Germany, the United States, and Britain in the same historical period.

Scholars who have looked at the close relationship between the military and politics in pre-1945 Japan have directed far more attention toward the political exploits of the Japanese army. The army, led by politically active and important statesmen such as Yamagata Aritomo, Katsura Tarō, Terauchi Masatake, Hirata Tōsuke, and Tanaka Gōichi—or so it has been suggested in many studies—at various times worked with, coerced, and challenged, "constitutional government" to secure its political and budgetary objec-

tives.<sup>17</sup> In his recent biography of General Katsura Tarō, Stewart Lone convincingly argued that army leaders actively engaged in politics to further the political and budgetary aims of their service, concluding that defense budgets were one of the “most powerful engines driving change in Japan’s political system.”<sup>18</sup> They were. The army, however, held no monopoly on political involvement in Meiji-Taishō and early Shōwa (1926–45) Japan. Using coercion, but far more often pragmatism, the navy also engaged in parliamentary and cabinet-level politics in Meiji-Taishō Japan, and did so with great success. While naval officials did exert their political authority on more than one occasion in an attempt to block the formation of a potential cabinet which they believed would refuse to support the navy’s budgetary interests, the navy never sought to “overthrow” constitutional government in Meiji-Taishō Japan. It did not need to do so. Rather, pragmatic naval officials secured their political objectives most successfully by forging alliances and partnerships with other burgeoning political elites: the political parties in the Diet, in particular the Seiyūkai.

Thus, another theoretical fallacy that my study will challenge and dispel within a larger Japanese historiographical context is that the navy was always a retrograde or oppressive force in Japanese politics. Though this view was shared by many prosecutors at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, also known as the “Tokyo Trials,” and is still taken as gospel by some post–World War II historians in Japan, it is flawed. More damaging, however, this misrepresentation exonerates many in the prewar party movement for their involvement in assisting the military services’ emergence as strong, well-funded, and politically active elites. The significant emphasis that scholars have placed on the military’s “overthrow” of “liberalism,” “democracy,” and “constitutional government” during the “dark valley” of 1930s Japan has severely obfuscated the sizable role that political parties played in assisting the emergence of the military services, and particularly the navy, as a strong, well-funded, politically active elite in the late Meiji–early Taishō period. Partly this stems from the fact that scholars have mistakenly associated many pre–World War II political parties almost exclusively with “liberalism” and prewar democracy, thus portraying them as victims of Shōwa militarism.<sup>19</sup> These supposed victims, however, were not “principled pacifists” who attempted to rein in the military in Meiji-Taishō Japan only to pay a political price later in the 1930s for their earlier antimilitary attitudes. The leaders of the political parties supported naval expansion for the same reason that compelled their members not to exert more effort to block the growth of military expansion in Meiji-Taishō Japan: the pursuit

of power. The political parties of prewar Japan were pragmatic power-seeking organizations led by savvy leaders who actively sought and secured working relationships and political alliances with other elite groups in order to increase their political power and influence. As my study will demonstrate, the newly emerging Japanese navy proved to be an exceedingly attractive alliance partner for the Seiyūkai party in Meiji-Taishō Japan. The military's involvement in politics, including parliamentary and party politics in 1930s Japan, was thus not an aberration or a marker that signified that something had gone terribly wrong in Japan's polity, a disjuncture from the past. Rather, it was a symbol of political continuity, a signpost signaling that both the military's involvement in politics and the parties' support for military expansion that defined politics of the tumultuous 1930s had their precedents well and firmly established in late Meiji-Taishō Japan.

Finally, the navy's emergence as a strong elite in Meiji-Taishō Japan contributed to another phenomenon that manifested itself with increasing regularity in early Shōwa Japan: army-navy rivalry. In pre-World War II Japan, that rivalry expanded well beyond clan-based factionalism and institutional outlook; it encompassed appropriations, research, and development, and it fostered conflicting notions concerning the direction and nature of Japanese imperial expansion. The rivalry grew almost unabated up until the end of 1945. Owing to the unique constitutional and extralegal privileges granted to the military services by Japan's constitution, interservice rivalry and political intervention in the furtherance of each service's institutional aims strongly influenced Japanese politics and society, perhaps more than in any other country. In Meiji-Taishō Japan interservice rivalry and military involvement in politics, whether cooperative and pragmatic or coercive, provided at different times both a dark harbinger and a strong contrast to the politics and society of Japan in the 1930s. The emergence of the Japanese navy indeed made waves and in doing so significantly influenced and thoroughly reflected the rise of modern Japan.