

THE GREATER EAST ASIAN WAR: HOW JAPAN CHANGED THE WORLD

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Mr. Senaka Weeraratna for his kind words, especially those pertaining to my father, Kase Toshikazu.

September 2, 1945 was a day of humiliation for my entire family. My father, then aged 42, was one of the envoys present at the ceremony during which Minister Plenipotentiary Shigemitsu Mamoru signed the Instrument of Surrender. My father stood next to Mr. Shigemitsu as the haughty Douglas MacArthur looked on.

Mr. Weeraratna was kind enough to say a few words about my book, *The Greater East Asian War: How Japan Changed the World*. My father, who lived to the ripe old age of 101, had a habit of looking me straight in the eye and saying, “We may have lost the battle, but we won the war because we liberated the Asian and African peoples.”

I am seldom moved to tears by anything I see on television, but I do remember one exception. In September of this year American actress Meghan Markle and British Prince Harry were married. Their magnificent wedding ceremony was held at Windsor Castle (the residence of the British royal family, known as the House of Windsor). As it approached St. George’s Chapel, the horse-drawn carriage bearing the royal couple looked as though it had been taken straight from a fairy tale, and the silver armor worn by the escort guards gleamed in the sunlight. I was deeply moved.

Inside the chapel an African-American clergyman invited to participate in the ceremony preached about the power of love, speaking in the African-American vernacular.

When I heard a black gospel choir (also from the US) sing “Stand by Me” (originally a spiritual entitled “Stand by Me, Father”), tears streamed down my cheeks. I imagine many of you reacted in the same way.

Ms. Markle’s father is white; her mother is African-American. Throughout the long history of the British royal family, the idea that an African American might become the consort of a prince who is sixth in the line of succession to the British throne would never have crossed anyone’s mind.

Japan deserves credit for helping make this remarkable turn of events possible. We fought a huge war at great human cost and sacrifice. All the nations of Asia won freedom, and the momentum behind their liberation then spread to Africa, whose nations broke the yoke of colonialism, one by one.

In the late 1950s I traveled to the US to study at Columbia University. In those days African Americans could not vote. Furthermore, they risked being lynched if they dared cross the thresholds of hotels or restaurants patronized by whites. There were separate drinking fountains and public lavatories for whites and blacks.

But when the peoples of Africa won freedom, their nations built embassies near the United Nations in New York City, and in Washington DC. African diplomats began to frequent hotels and restaurants that were inaccessible to African Americans. Eventually African Americans followed their lead.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s civil rights movement began to bear fruit in the 1960s. Before then sexual relations between whites and blacks constituted criminal offenses; nor was intermarriage between the two races permitted. Discrimination showed no mercy. African-American baseball players could not work in the major leagues until after World War II.

When I was studying in the US, African Americans were barred from golf courses (unless they were caddies). Today tennis champion Osaka Naomi is playing in tournaments all over the world, but not so long ago the only African Americans seen on tennis courts were members of the cleaning staff or ball boys.

As I watched the wedding ceremony of American actress Meghan Markle and British Prince Harry, it occurred to me that the spirits of Japanese soldiers who gave their lives on the vast battlefields of the Greater East Asian War must also have delighted in these nuptials. That thought precipitated another flood of tears.

At the royal wedding Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip, and Crown Prince Charles, all in formal dress, were present as Prince Harry took an African-American woman as his bride. An ideal world had materialized, thanks to Japan's strength. Throughout human history, which revolution stands out the most? The French revolution? The Russian revolution? The Industrial Revolution? The IT revolution? None of these. The greatest revolution in human history was the achievement of racial equality in the world.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration. What is noteworthy here is that between 1853, when Commodore Matthew Perry's fleet of black ships appeared at Uruga and 1868, the first year of the Meiji era, only 15 years elapsed.

Japan had replaced the Edo Shogunate, which had persisted for 260 years, with a new regime.

We greeted Meiji, a new era. This year, 2018, is the 30th year of the Heisei era, which will come to a close in April 2019.

How will we remember the Heisei era? It will have been a 30-year period during which we failed to revise the current disgraceful Constitution, crammed down our throats by the Occupation forces.

We were able to recreate Japan during a 15-year period beginning with Perry's incursion into Japanese waters. But we could not revise the Constitution over the past 30 years. What have we been doing (and I include myself), for the past 30 years?

Between the last days of the Shogunate and the dawning of the Meiji era we Japanese had two immense dreams. One was the revision of insulting, unequal treaties that had been forced upon us by the imperialist powers of the West.

Japan could not set its own tariffs for imports and exports. Foreign fleets stationed themselves in our ports, in Yokohama and Kobe. We did not have the authority to try foreigners in our courts. We needed to revise those disrespectful treaties.

The other dream was achieving racial equality throughout the world. Many members of Japan's warrior class traveled to the West on observation missions between the end of the Edo Shogunate and the beginning of the Meiji era. During their ocean voyages, the Japanese travelers saw how their fellow Asians were abused by their white bosses, treated like beasts of burden, like slaves.

The Japanese made truly strenuous efforts to get the unequal treaties revised. At the famous Rokumeikan, Prince Ito Hirobumi and his subordinates felt obligated to learn ridiculous Western ballroom dances and to wear Western clothing. Surely such accommodations would prove that Japan too was a civilized nation, and then perhaps the Japanese could make progress with treaty revision.

Until the end of the Edo era (1603-1868) the Japanese wore white when they attended a funeral. However, in the hope of revising the unequal treaties, the Meiji government decreed that black clothing be worn at funerals, as it was in the West. Such were the lengths that the Japanese were willing to go to for the sake of treaty revision.

Early in the Meiji era, again looking toward treaty revision, the Ministry of Education sent notifications to all girls' schools announcing that students should be prohibited from urinating standing up. During the war my mother took me to Nagano prefecture to escape the bombing that was occurring in cities. There I saw a young girl urinating, standing up, in a footpath between rice fields.

I used to travel to Indonesia on businesses. When I spotted a woman urinating, standing up, at the roadside in a rural area of Java, I felt a wave of nostalgia and thought, "They're just like us."

When a foreign head of state visits Japan, a banquet is held in his or her honor at the Imperial Palace. At these banquets the food served is always French cuisine. At the Great Hall of the People, facing Tian'anmen Square, the Chinese serve Chinese cuisine. The Koreans serve Korean cuisine. The Thais serve Thai cuisine. The Indians serve Indian cuisine. Why do the Japanese serve French cuisine?

By the 1970s Japan had just about caught up with the Western powers; at that point someone suggested serving Japanese cuisine. I said that French cuisine should be served for all eternity. We should serve French cuisine so that the pains our ancestors took to get the unequal treaties revised would not be forgotten.

Apparently we began serving French cuisine at state banquets because Japanese cuisine was deemed barbarian, and no nation would want to conclude treaties on equal terms with barbarians. So the Japanese built the Rokumeikan, imitated the Westerners, wore black at funerals, and served French cuisine. We must never forget these efforts.

We dreamed of and longed for a world of racial equality. In fact, racial discrimination was one of the primary causes of the Pacific War.

The phrase *hakko ichiu*, meaning “all the world under one roof” appears in a decree issued by Emperor Jimmu on the occasion of his coronation (ca. 660 BCE). It means that in an ideal world the peoples of the world are living together happily under one roof. The Japanese have no history of racial discrimination.

Earlier Mr. Weeraratna mentioned my father, who was head of the Foreign Ministry’s North American Division when war between the two nations broke out. He oversaw negotiations between Japan and the US from Tokyo. The foreign minister at that time was of Korean descent.

His Japanese name was Togo Shigenori. He was a native of Kagoshima; the name on his census record was Pak Mu-dok. When he matriculated at the Law Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University, he changed his surname to Togo, and adopted the Japanese pronunciation of his given name.

Before World War II, Park Chun-gum ran for a seat in the House of Representatives, using his Korean name. He won, and ended up serving two terms. Tokyo’s Koto Ward, the district from which he was elected, had some Korean residents, but they were overwhelmingly outnumbered by Japanese.

If the Japanese had discriminated against people of other ethnicities, it is very unlikely that a Korean using his birth name and running from Koto Ward could have won a seat in the House of Representatives, certainly not for two terms.

Nowhere in Japanese history do you find instances of racial discrimination. Nor have the Japanese ever kept slaves. I once held a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan in Yuraku-cho. On that occasion I voiced my objections to press coverage of the comfort women.

A correspondent from a leading US newspaper posed the following question: “It is common knowledge today throughout the world that the Japanese condemned young women to a life of misery by forcing them to become sex slaves. How dare you make a statement that defies common knowledge?”

I replied, "I would prefer not to entertain a question of that sort, posed as it was by a reporter from a country that practiced slavery until right before Japan entered the Meiji era (1868-1912)." Japanese and Asian journalists in the audience, which numbered about 150, applauded.

In August of this year the Palais Wilson in Geneva, Switzerland was host to a session of CERD (the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination). At that session CERD was reviewing the situation in Japan. Apparently the committee's members, who represent Korea, the US, Belgium, and other countries had denounced Japan, believing that there is a great deal of racial discrimination there. A delegation from Japan's Foreign Ministry was present; it was led by Otaka Masato, ambassador in charge of UN affairs; Mr. Otaka speaks excellent English.

Mr. Otaka provided a careful explanation of Japan's position. He mentioned that the Japanese government had already offered apologies. In fact, his report was so detailed that it sounded as though he was apologizing again. In his place I would have gone on the offense, emphasizing the fact that the Japanese had never kept slaves, and attacking those nations that had.

There is no point in wasting our tax revenue by paying dues to CERD. It is completely ridiculous for us to be doing this. The Japanese government should tell them that we'll stop paying our share unless they rename Palais Wilson.

February 13, 2019 will mark the 100th anniversary of the Paris Peace Conference (also known as the Versailles Peace Conference), held after World War I ended. At US President Woodrow Wilson's suggestion, those in attendance decided to establish the League of Nations as an organization entrusted with overseeing the postwar world. The Japanese delegation proposed including a clause advocating the elimination of racial discrimination in the Covenant of the League of Nations of Versailles. When the proposal was submitted to a vote, there were 11 votes in favor of (some of them from Europe's smaller nations) and five votes against its adoption.

However, President Wilson issued a pronouncement to the effect that a unanimous vote was necessary to approve a matter of such great importance, thus quashing the Japanese proposal.

Wilson was a dyed-in-the-wool white supremacist. During his presidency discrimination against African Americans worsened. He stated that people of color are intellectually inferior to whites (those who seek proof need only refer to transcripts of his lectures). Like Hitler, Wilson was a proponent of eugenics.

President Wilson once served as president of Princeton University. Nevertheless, members of the school's student body (including white students), recently launched a campaign to remove Wilson's statue from the campus. In the 1960s the US Congress sponsored the establishment of a think tank called the Wilson Center. But here too a

movement has arisen that would change the name of the institution, as Wilson's name is now an embarrassment.

The Japanese government delegation should insist that the name of Palais Wilson be changed. Its members should say that they will refuse to enter the building until it is renamed.

I believe that Japan's history of equality began with the Jomon era (ca. 14,000-1,000 BCE), even before Japan the nation was born. The Japanese have always valued harmony among people.

Perhaps I am engaging in wishful thinking, but I think that next year China will be on the road to ruin. I am convinced that as long as Japan does not give in to China's demands, the world will see the dawning of an Asian era in which Japan takes the lead. Monotheism has come to a standstill. As Mr. Weeraratna mentioned, Nazi racial discrimination was religious discrimination. If you read the New Testament, the new promises of Jesus, you will find the following reference to the Jews: "You are the children of the devil, and his works ye shall do."

Since Hitler was the son of a devout Roman Catholic, he carried out Jesus' teachings to the letter. Europeans had been massacring Jews for nearly 1,000 years. But the Germans, with their sophisticated technical skills, were able to kill more than 5 million of them.

Monotheism is exclusive; it does not value harmony. The adherents of Sunni and Shia, the two main branches of Islam, simply cannot get along with each other. These conflicts have resulted in a great deal of killing. The Japanese have always prized harmony.

We have harmony when three, or four, or five, or six people gather and say, "Let's work together." In Japan we have always had harmony — people working together toward a common goal, with the emphasis on the group rather than the individual.

In closing I would like to mention that it has been some time since the world's attention has come to focus on Japan like this. From the end of the Shogunate through the Meiji era, Japan exerted considerable influence on the Western world: we had ukiyo-e, Japonisme, Japanese design, and Japanese architecture. But these were visual influences.

However, what has caused Japan to capture the world's heart and at long last to become the center of attention goes beyond the visual, even beyond the spiritual. As Mr. Weeraratna said earlier, Japan accomplished the most prodigious revolution in the world. We broached the idea of racial equality to the world. But I do not think we should look to the nations of Asia for gratitude.

But we should be grateful to our heroes, our so-called war criminals. When I go to worship at Yasukuni Shrine, the shrine for our war dead, I will be sure to thank the heroes who created this wonderful, ideal world.