

REVERSE EMULATION AND THE CULT OF JAPANESE EFFICIENCY IN EDWARDIAN BRITAIN

CHIKA TONOOKA*

Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge

ABSTRACT. *This article considers a particular moment in world history when an instant of epoch-making triumph in the non-West – Japan’s defeat of Russia in 1905 – coincided with a period of intense national anxiety in Britain in the wake of the South African War (1899–1902). One outcome of this historical intersection was the emergence in Britain of a euphoric ‘cult of Japan’ that saw many Edwardians, obsessed with the idea of ‘efficiency’, deploy Japan as both a referent for British shortcomings and a model for reform. The article asks why proponents of ‘efficiency’ – most of them ardent imperialists – deemed it acceptable, even strategically advantageous, in such domestic debates to draw upon examples from Japan – an ‘Oriental’ race and former protégé – in apparent contradiction of Western supremacism. The article contends that Britain’s emulative attitudes were underpinned by an emergent plural conception of ‘civilization’, which appraised Japan’s attainment of civilization as consistent with Western standards whilst at the same time recognizing elements of Japanese particularity – an outlook that justified reciprocal learning.*

In November 1902, Sidney and Beatrice Webb – two leading Fabians of the day – invited a small group of friends for dinner at their home at 41 Grosvenor Road, London. The event marked the beginning of what became known as the Coefficient Club – a dining and debating club, which, for the next few years, would meet on a monthly basis.¹ Drawing high-profile figures from across the political spectrum, its purpose, in the words of one member,

Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, CB2 1TA ct354@cam.ac.uk

* The author would like to thank Peter Mandler, Harumi Goto-Shibata, Riho Isaka, David Motadel, Kaz Oishi, and the anonymous referees for their advice and comments on the article in its various stages of development. The research presented in this article was first started at the University of Tokyo, and forms part of the author’s doctoral project on Japanese ‘civilization’ and conceptions of ‘progress’ in British thought and culture, c. 1880–1945, supported by the Cambridge Commonwealth, European & International Trust.

¹ Members included: Leo Maxse, Leo Amery (Unionists); Richard Haldane, Edward Grey, Halford Mackinder (Liberal imperialists); H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell (Fabians). For a detailed account of the club’s activities, see Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and social reform: English social-imperial thought, 1895–1914* (London, 1960), pp. 72–82.

was to ‘discuss the aims and methods of Imperial Policy’, a concern now of paramount importance in light of Britain’s recent performance in the South African War (1899–1902).² As reflected in the naming of the group, key to their discussions was the idea of ‘efficiency’, an umbrella-term encompassing a variety of proposals from army reorganization and compulsory military training to educational reform for the sake of imperial survival. Despite their shared anxiety over Britain’s imperial future, the Coefficients retained confidence in the moral legitimacy of Britain’s colonial interventions: ‘British rule over Oriental or uncivilised peoples’, members postulated, was a ‘duty’ and a ‘service, giving them peace, and material prosperity’.³ Yet the minutes of the club’s discussions reveal a major exception to their Orientalist outlook. Deliberating on their cause just as the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) was unfolding in the Far East, members did not identify in Japan an example of non-European inferiority, but rather a ‘good object lesson’ for Britain; the high degree of patriotism displayed by the Japanese was taken as a foil against which to criticize the ‘atrophied’ principles of self-sacrifice in their own society.⁴

This exception of Japan from Orientalist condescension, and its centrality instead as an object of Edwardian emulation, forms the subject of this article. Despite the unique significance of Japan in modern world history as the first non-Western society to modernize without formal colonization, and the first to achieve a major military victory over a European power, historians have paid surprisingly little attention to the intellectual impact of Japan’s spectacular rise on Western culture, such as that of Britain. Under the enduring influence of Edward Said, the question of British perceptions of non-European ‘Others’ has sustained a rigorous debate amongst historians about ‘race’, and about alternative categories of difference such as ‘class’, and ‘civilization’, but as a foundational theme of the New Imperial History, much of the discussion has been confined to British perceptions of their colonized subjects.⁵ Where historians – including G. R. Searle in his seminal study of the efficiency movement – have noted the Edwardian fascination with Japan, their treatment has been largely limited to descriptive accounts of Japanophilia, such that the particular *intellectual* significance of deploying a *non-Western* model such as Japan has been

² W. A. S. Hewins, *The apologia of an imperialist* (2 vols., London, 1929), 1, p. 65.

³ Coefficients’ Club minutes, ‘For what ends is a British empire desirable’, 15 June 1903, British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London School of Economics, London, ASSOC 17.

⁴ Coefficients’ Club minutes, ‘How far is it possible to evolve a system of national ethics for the British empire?’, 12 Dec. 1904, BLPES, ASSOC 17.

⁵ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978); David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: how the British saw their empire* (London, 2001); Peter Mandler, ‘The problem with cultural history’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), pp. 94–117. For an overview of this debate, see Simon J. Potter, ‘Empire, cultures and identities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Britain’, *History Compass*, 5 (2007), pp. 51–71.

overlooked.⁶ The possibility, more specifically, that such an instance of eulogizing may present a key exception to Said's thesis on Western fashioning of an inferior Oriental 'Other', and provide novel insights into British thinking about race and civilization, remains unexplored. In seeking to analyse Britain's emulative discourses on Japan, this article re-situates the Edwardian cult of Japanese efficiency within the continuing historiographical debate about British conceptions of non-Europeans, and in so doing, highlights the significance of extending the boundaries of the New Imperial History by focusing on the Russo-Japanese War as an event that both challenged and re-shaped prevailing British ideas of 'race', 'Western superiority', and, ultimately, 'civilization'.

In his *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914*, the late C. A. Bayly described modernity as an 'aspiration to be "up with the times"', and as a 'process of emulation and borrowing'.⁷ The Edwardian fixation with Japan as an exemplar of 'efficiency' provides important evidence that even at the start of the twentieth century, after centuries of surging ahead of the world, the desire to 'keep up with the times' could exercise a powerful force on Western sensibility. Nor was the process of emulation a one-directional affair between the West and the non-West.

What follows begins by contextualizing the Edwardian emulation of Japan within a longer trajectory of changing Anglo-Japanese relations, before outlining the particular importance of Japan as a referent in debates about national cohesion. In considering why advocates of efficiency so unhesitatingly called for lessons to be learnt from a non-Western – 'Oriental' – example, the main body of the article investigates the intellectual repercussions of the rise of Japan on British conceptions of human difference, highlighting the evolution of Britain's civilizational perspective as the root of such emulative attitudes.

⁶ G. R. Searle, *The quest for national efficiency: a study in British politics and political thought, 1899–1914* (London, 1990), pp. 57–60; Colin Holmes and Hamish Ion, 'Bushido and the samurai: images in British public opinion, 1894–1914', *Modern Asian Studies*, 14 (1980), pp. 309–29; Yorimitsu Hashimoto, 'White hope or yellow peril?: Bushido, Britain, and the Raj', in John W. Steinberg and David Wolff, eds., *The Russo-Japanese war in global perspective: World War Zero* (2 vols., Leiden, 2005–7), II, pp. 379–402. Much of the extant literature on national efficiency has instead focused on the importance of Germany as a rival and model; for Searle, national efficiency was above all an attempt to 'commend... a social organization that more closely followed the German model', *Quest for national efficiency*, p. 54; similarly in Semmel, *Imperialism* (especially pp. 234–5). Searle does not develop any further on Japan in his later works: *Country before party: coalition and the idea of 'national government' in modern Britain, 1885–1987* (London, 1995); *A new England?: peace and war, 1886–1918* (Oxford, 2005). The theme of efficiency only receives fleeting reference in Philip Towle's 'Race, culture and the reaction to the Japanese victory of 1905 in the English-speaking world', in Rotem Kowner and Walter Demel, eds., *Race and racism in modern East Asia: Western and Eastern constructions* (Leiden and Boston, MA, 2013), pp. 281–306.

⁷ C. A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: global connections and comparisons* (Malden, MA, and Oxford, 2004), p. 10.

I

The Coefficients, in their championing both of ‘efficiency’ and of Japan, represent a microcosm of what was a broader phenomenon in Edwardian Britain. A term first popularized by Lord Rosebery in 1901, the new political catchword of ‘efficiency’ found much popular resonance in the prevailing mood of anxiety about ‘national decline’, stimulated in part by the emergence of new rivals – the US and Germany – since the 1880s, and heightened in particular by the recent setbacks in South Africa (most gravely during ‘Black Week’ in December 1899 when the British army lost three consecutive battles) and revelations of Britain’s serious military deficiencies in the official post-war inquiries. As *The Spectator* observed in 1902, there was a ‘universal outcry for efficiency in all the departments of society in all aspects of life...Give us efficiency or we die.’⁸ A response to the period’s particular concerns about Britain’s place in a changing world, and manifested as a series of public debates on reform, national efficiency, in short, represented a fixation with adaptation – a ‘cult of the modern’ – that, in the words of G. R. Searle, sought to ‘discredit the habits, beliefs and institutions that put the British at a handicap in their competition with foreigners’.⁹

The Russo-Japanese War thus coincided with a period of intense national concern over reform in Britain. As the first modern war in which both sides deployed large regular armies equipped with advanced weapons, the events in the Far East seemed to provide a timely insight into the nature of future warfare, occasioning the despatch of a great number of British newspaper correspondents and War Office attachés to the battlefields of Manchuria.¹⁰ Once the Japanese began to overwhelm their enemies in the ensuing battles, they sent a multitude of reports lavishing praise on the efficacy of the Japanese military organization, discipline, and, above all, patriotism, informing avid readers at home that the British had ‘so much to learn’ from the newly arisen Eastern Power.¹¹

Such an interest can be seen as part of a wider story of Britain’s changing relationship with Japan. During the years of her rapid domestic transformation following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Japan’s relationship with Britain had been one of pupillage. The organizational structure of the Japanese Diet established under the constitution of 1889 was modelled in part on the British bicameral system and, as regards technology transfers, of the 580 foreign engineers employed by Kobushō (the Ministry of Industry), as many as 78 per cent were

⁸ *Spectator*, 16 Aug. 1902, p. 4.

⁹ Searle, *Quest for national efficiency*, p. 54.

¹⁰ A. D. Harvey, ‘The Russo-Japanese War, 1904–1905: curtain raiser for the twentieth-century world wars’, *RUSI Journal*, 148 (2003), pp. 58–61, at p. 58.

¹¹ A. L. Haldane, ‘The battle of Liao-yang – Fourth Japanese Army. Operations from the 29th August to the 4th September 1904’, in *The Russo-Japanese War: reports from British officers attached to the Japanese and Russian forces in the field* (3 vols., London, 1908), I, p. 320.

British, contributing greatly to the development of Japan's infrastructure, notably the railway.¹² Moreover, in 1870, Dajō-kan (the Great Council of State) made the decision to appropriate the British navy as its chief model, adopting British battleships, and inviting officers from Britain to train Japanese personnel at the newly established Imperial Naval College.¹³ However, as Toshio Yokoyama has shown, many Victorians disapproved of 'Occidentalized' 'New' Japan, preferring the romanticized image of the 'Old' Japan associated with traditional art and paradisiacal villages.¹⁴

Diplomatically, the years after 1890 saw a number of important developments, beginning with the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1894, which finally provided for the reversal of unequal treaties and the abolition of extra-territoriality, followed by Japan's victory in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) and intervention in the Boxer Rebellion (1900), and, most momentously, the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance in 1902 in response to the threat of Russian expansion in the Far East. Although press reactions in Britain 'fell short of enthusiasm',¹⁵ few writers made an all-out assault on this unprecedented venture that tied Britain to a non-European Power, such that British Foreign Secretary Lord Lansdowne later expressed surprise that the treaty had been 'taken so well'.¹⁶

Yet reactions to the events of 1904 to 1905 suggest that for all the diplomatic recognitions prior to 1904, there had been a lingering conception of Japanese inferiority in the British mind. Japan, in the words of David Lloyd George, had been regarded 'merely as an Oriental power' until the Russo-Japanese War, which came as a 'great revelation of its power to the world'.¹⁷ Remarking upon a similar change in perception in January 1905, another critic wrote candidly: 'Last New Year's Day the Japanese were "yellow monkeys"'.¹⁸ The effect of the victory over a major European power thus proved transformative; galvanized by the chronological juxtaposition of their disastrous performance in the South African War with Japan's stunning performance against Russia, after 1904–5 the British no longer saw in Japan a protégé to patronize nor a

¹² Shoichi Matsuo, *Jiyu minken shiso no kenkyu* [Studies on the idea of freedom and people's rights] (Tokyo, 1990), pp. 182, 188, 193, 209, 249; Janet Hunter and S. Sugiyama, 'Anglo-Japanese economic relations in historical perspective, 1600–2000: trade and industry, finance, technology and the industrial challenge', in Janet E. Hunter and S. Sugiyama, eds., *The history of Anglo-Japanese relations, 1600–2000: economic and business relations* (New York, NY, 2002), pp. 1–109, at p. 24.

¹³ Saburo Toyama, *Nihon kaigunshi* [A history of the Japanese navy] (Tokyo, 2013), pp. 25–48.

¹⁴ Toshio Yokoyama, *Japan in the Victorian mind: a study of stereotyped images of a nation, 1850–1880* (Basingstoke, 1987).

¹⁵ Ian H. Nish, *The Anglo-Japanese alliance: the diplomacy of two island empires, 1894–1907* (London, 1985), p. 226.

¹⁶ Julian Amery, *The life of Joseph Chamberlain* (6 vols., London, 1932–69), iv, p. 165, qu. in Nish, *Anglo-Japanese alliance*, p. 226.

¹⁷ House of Commons Deb., 9 Aug. 1911, Hansard, 5th series, vol. 29, col. 1179.

¹⁸ 'The progress of the world', *Review of Reviews* (RR), 31 (1905), pp. 1–13, at p. 2.

pre-modernity to romanticize, but rather a source of reciprocal learning – an outlook epitomized by *The Times* in October 1905: ‘We have sent many missionaries to instruct others; we might well send a few to instruct ourselves. The Japanese...have done what this country, as at present organized, could not possibly do in an equal emergency...It behoves us to know how they have done it.’¹⁹

II

Although much of the immediate criticism of the South African campaign was directed at the army, many in Britain viewed the humiliating events of 1899 to 1902 as symptomatic of a far deeper national malaise. In a culture that typically considered national success and sound character to be inextricably linked, Britain’s unexpected struggle against the Boers was widely taken as evidence of the nation’s lack of moral fibre. Against such a context, the flood of sensational stories about Japan’s remarkable displays of ‘patriotism’, ‘unconquerable resolution’, and ‘the maximum of devotion’ against Russia allowed Japan to attain an unprecedented height of prestige, as voices across the political spectrum called for a sense of public duty akin to that of Japan for the sake of imperial survival.²⁰

Outside of the Coefficient Club, one such voice came from the former Liberal, now Unionist MP, Joseph Chamberlain. In an article later reviewed by the conservative *National Review* as ‘inspiring’,²¹ Chamberlain identified in the ‘unparalleled patriotism’ of the Japanese ‘the greatest object-lesson ever presented to the world’; ‘something of the same spirit’, he insisted, was now required in Britain.²² The most ardent of all was Alfred Stead, son of the pioneering Victorian journalist W. T. Stead, who produced a book-length eulogy *Great Japan: a study in national efficiency* (1906) with a foreword by Lord Rosebery.²³ Amongst Fabian circles beyond the Webbs, admirers included the eminent physicist Sir Oliver Lodge for whom the Japanese displays of ‘public spirit’ provided an affirmation of the virtues of placing ‘the State above the individual; common good above personal good’.²⁴ In observing the broader public reaction to the war, *The Times* noted: ‘people here...are beginning to realize the unity of the vital principle which runs through all the actions of the Japanese, the intensely-felt patriotism which secures efficiency in one service as much as in another’.²⁵

¹⁹ *Times*, 7 Oct. 1905, p. 9.

²⁰ *Daily Express*, 3 Aug. 1905, p. 5; *Times*, 6 June 1904, p. 10; *Spectator*, 21 Jan. 1905, p. 5.

²¹ ‘Episodes of the month’, *National Review* (NR), 45 (1905), pp. 193–224, at p. 210.

²² Joseph Chamberlain, ‘Nelson’s year and national duty’, *Outlook*, 15 (1905), pp. 323–5, at p. 325.

²³ Alfred Stead, *Great Japan: a study in national efficiency* (London, 1906).

²⁴ Oliver Lodge, ‘Public service versus private expenditure’, *Fabian Tract*, 121 (1905), pp. 10–11. In the same year, the Fabian Society organized a lecture on Japan to be given by Percy Alden who had visited the country in 1898; Fabian Society Executive Committee minutes, 7 Apr. 1905, BLPES, FABIAN SOCIETY/C/9.

²⁵ *Times*, 14 Oct. 1905, p. 9.

Such resonance within Britain is unsurprising, considering that languages of ‘character’, and increasingly ‘national cohesion’, occupied an important place within late Victorian and Edwardian discourses of imperialism.²⁶ Something of a sensation in the closing decade of the century was the Social Darwinian Benjamin Kidd’s *Social evolution* (1894), which went through nineteen editions in the four years following its initial publication. Kidd’s main thesis was that the West owed its ascendancy to its ‘social efficiency’, rooted in Christianity – the so-called ‘religious character’ of its people – and associated with such traits as ‘great mental energy, resolution...and single-minded devotion to conceptions of duty’.²⁷ The South African War soon shook some of this Social Darwinian confidence as to whether the British would remain the ‘fittest’, but also gave additional vigour to debates about ‘character’ and its assumed interdependence with imperial survival, heightening concerns about ‘national cohesion’, not only amongst Conservatives but by now also amongst New Liberals more prepared than the old to look upon British society as organic and national.²⁸ One outcome of this unity of interest was the emergence of cross-party discussion groups, of which the Coefficients were one notable example. Stories about the self-sacrificing patriotism and unity of the Japanese thus resonated with and, in turn, served to reinforce, the prevailing nexus of British ideas on character, national cohesion, and national destiny.

In coming to terms with this aspect of Japanese character, an important influence on British opinion came from Inazo Nitobe’s best-selling *Bushido, the soul of Japan*,²⁹ as Colin Holmes and Hamish Ion have recognized.³⁰ The tendency observable during the early days of the Russo-Japanese War to attribute the character of Japanese troops to Prussian influence³¹ soon faded as Nitobe’s idea of Japanese patriotism as a feudal legacy of the samurai (*bushido* literally meaning ‘the way of the warrior’) was given additional publicity through committed champions in Britain.³² Accordingly, in discussing the

²⁶ Peter J. Cain, ‘Empire and the languages of character and virtue in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (2007), pp. 249–73; H. John Field, *Toward a programme of imperial life: the British empire at the turn of the century* (Westport, CT, 1982).

²⁷ Benjamin Kidd, *Social evolution* (London, 1894), p. 287.

²⁸ Peter Mandler, *The English national character: the history of an idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2006), p. 120.

²⁹ Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido, the soul of Japan: an exposition of Japanese thought* (Tokyo, 1900). Nitobe, a Quaker, indicates in his preface that his objective is to expound an ethical system comparable to Christianity in the West, attributing the book’s origin to a conversation with a Belgian jurist over the nature of Japanese morality in the absence of religious instruction in schools.

³⁰ Holmes and Ion, ‘Bushido and the samurai’.

³¹ *Times*, 6 June 1904, p. 10.

³² Notably, Stead in *Great Japan* and his contributions to magazines, e.g. ‘Bushido, the Japanese ethical code’, *Monthly Review (MR)*, 14 (1904), pp. 52–62. See also military correspondent Charles à Court Repington in *The Times*, 4 Oct. 1904, p. 6; and ‘Letters to the editor’ in *The Times*, 8 Oct. 1904, p. 8; 13 Oct. 1904, p. 6; 15 Oct. 1904, p. 4; and 20 Oct. 1904, p. 13 for (largely appreciative) reader responses. Repington later expanded on the

need to evolve a 'system of national ethics', the Coefficients equated *bushido* with 'the patriotism of the whole nation', asserting that '*Bushido*' now needed to be 'engrafted...on English public spirit'.³³ Another notable admirer was Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts Movement, who identified his scheme as an attempt to do for Britain what '*Bushido*...has done, and is still doing, for Japan'.³⁴ The scheme won the approval of H. G. Wells who famously called the ruling-elite of his *Modern utopia* (1905) the 'Samurai'.³⁵ Such emulative attitudes towards *bushido* in fact mark an ironic instance of 'reciprocal learning'; that Nitobe's concept was an 'invented tradition' has been well noted by his Japanese contemporaries and later scholars alike,³⁶ but, more revealingly, a recent work has highlighted the influence of contemporary English ideals of chivalry and the 'gentleman' on the nascent development of the concept in Meiji Japan.³⁷ In advocating an appropriation of *bushido*, the British were striving for an unconscious re-importation of what had long been an 'English tradition'.

Less appreciated in the extant literature, however, is the extent to which such apparent fascination with *bushido* was underpinned by a more critical reading, and in fact a re-conceptualization in Britain, of Nitobe's original contention.³⁸ It is well known that an eminent British Japanologist like Basil Hall Chamberlain dismissed *bushido* as a 'fabric of ideas', but such critical attitudes towards the historical validity of the concept were in fact prevalent earlier, and amongst larger sections of British society.³⁹ As early as 1905, the *Saturday Review* pointed out that Europeans who could remember the samurai at the time of the revolution in 1868 recalled 'not the chivalrous, brave, frugal, courteous, loyal, patriotic, self-sacrificing knights', but 'a class of roistering bullies': '*Bushido* was never

theme in *The war in the Far East, 1904-1905* (London, 1905). For Japanese efforts to promote *bushido* in Britain, see Hashimoto, 'White hope or yellow peril?', pp. 390-3.

³³ Coefficients' Club minutes, 'How far is it possible to evolve a system of national ethics for the British empire?'

³⁴ Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for boys: a handbook for instruction in good citizenship* (London, 1908), p. 239.

³⁵ H. G. Wells, *The new Machiavelli* (London, 1911), p. 337; H. G. Wells, *A modern utopia* (London, 1905).

³⁶ Koshi Suzuki, 'Meijiki nihon ni okeru bushido no soshutsu' [The invention of Bushido in Meiji Japan], *Tsukuba Daigaku Taiiku Kagakukei Kiyou* [Bulletin of Health and Sport Science, University of Tsukuba], 24 (2001), pp. 47-56. Although prominent in the West as the chief Anglophone architect of *bushido*, Nitobe's impact on *bushido* discourse in Japan was limited: Yuzo Ota, *Taiheiyou no hashi toshiten Nitobe Inazo* [Inazo Nitobe as a bridge across the Pacific] (Tokyo, 1986), pp. 23-5, 61.

³⁷ Oleg Benesch, *Inventing the way of the samurai: nationalism, internationalism, and bushido in modern Japan* (Oxford, 2014). Benesch also notes Nitobe's limited influence on the content of *bushido* discourse in Japan, p. 229.

³⁸ As with Holmes and Ion in 'Bushido and the samurai', Jenny Holt's recent discussion of the *bushido* narrative in Anglophone literature focuses on the figure of the samurai: Jenny Holt, 'Samurai and the gentlemen: the Anglophone Japan corpus and new avenues into Orientalism', *Literature Compass*, 11 (2014), pp. 36-46, 47-59.

³⁹ Basil Hall Chamberlain, *The invention of a new religion* (London, 1912).

once appealed to as a national incentive by the great leaders of Japan until her reformation was complete.⁴⁰ Less acerbically but no less inaccurately, Ian Hamilton, the senior military attaché in Manchuria, who had been given a copy of *Bushido* as a present from the Japanese army, identified the samurai as ‘already men of yesterday’.⁴¹

A more dominant explanation in Britain for the roots of Japanese patriotism instead stressed the effectiveness of Japan’s new educational system. A particular emphasis was laid on moral teaching in schools – the cultivation of ‘a feeling of moral obligation’ to the emperor – ‘splendid results’ of which were now seen to be manifest in the war.⁴² The origin of such development was explicitly located in 1890 – the year of the Imperial Rescript on Education.⁴³ Such were also the conclusions reached by the War Office, following their newly organized visit to Japan in 1906. Demonstrating the seriousness of the interest in Japan, the two-month expedition officially aimed to ‘study locally the system and methods of Japanese military education’, having seen ‘what the Japanese can do in war’.⁴⁴ The delegation, which surveyed Japanese primary and middle schools as well as military preparatory schools, concluded in their subsequent report that the ‘efficiency’ of the Japanese soldier was ‘due less to his natural characteristics than to the education which he receives in his youth’.⁴⁵ They identified in Japan’s high conception of patriotic duty (‘no parallel among the nations of the world’), not so much a feudal legacy of the samurai as a product of the ‘progressive programme of ethical instruction’ based on the 1890 Rescript on Education; the displays of ‘heroism’ during the recent war amounted to a ‘practical realization’ of what would have otherwise seemed ‘Utopian’.⁴⁶ The eulogistic tone of the report was most probably sincere; in a private letter to Leo Amery, the author of the report, Colonel A. M. Murray who led the delegation, wrote from Tokyo: ‘for discipline and endurance our men are not in the same boat with the Japanese’; ‘I am convinced of the superiority of their system over our public school system for making officers for modern war purposes.’⁴⁷

⁴⁰ ‘Sun-struck’, *Saturday Review (SR)*, 100 (1905), pp. 596–7, at p. 596.

⁴¹ Ian Hamilton, *Staff officer’s scrap-book during the Russo-Japanese War* (2 vols., London, 1905–7), II, p. 21.

⁴² Edward P. Culverwell, ‘Japanese education and character’, *NR*, 46 (1905), pp. 319–31; see also ‘The marvel of Japanese education’, *RR*, 32 (1905), p. 394.

⁴³ House of Commons Deb., 16 Mar. 1909, Hansard 5th series, vol. 2, col. 997.

⁴⁴ ‘General report on the Japanese system of military education and training’ (1906), The National Archives (TNA), London, WO 33/407, pp. 3, 26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

⁴⁷ A. M. Murray to Leo Amery, 14 May 1906, Churchill Archives Centre, Cambridge, papers of Leopold Amery, AMEL 2/5/5. Cf. A. Hamish Ion, ‘Japan watchers: 1903–1931’, in John F. Howes, ed., *Nitobe Inazo: Japan’s bridge across the Pacific* (Boulder, CO, 1995), pp. 79–106, at pp. 89–90, which stresses the primacy of British military interest in ‘traditional Japanese values’ in the immediate aftermath of the war and regards sceptical discussions of Nitobe’s conception of *bushido* in 1910 (in Alexander Bannerman, ‘The creation of the Japanese national

An increasingly common line of thinking in Britain thus held that patriotism in modernized Japan had been taught in schools, and this was where Britain, by comparison, lagged behind. Having cited the example of Japan, the prominent geographer Thomas Holdich asked: ‘Do we take the least trouble to inculcate the principles of patriotism *ab initio* in our elementary schools, either in England or in India?’⁴⁸ ‘*Bushido*’ – as a term to denote the self-sacrificing patriotism of the contemporary Japanese – remained in widespread use, but became associated less with feudal Japan than with modern Japanese schooling. Thus Lord Meath, initiator of ‘Empire Day’, was now to expound in the House of Lords: ‘Ever since the revolution in 1867...*Bushido*, or the spirit of chivalry, has been taught in the schools...The children are taught that the individual is nothing and that the state is everything’; ‘some kind of imitation of *Bushido* in our schools’ was now desirable.⁴⁹ Such use of the term differs markedly from the original conception by Nitobe who had been keen to insist that ‘moral precepts’ learnt in childhood had not been given in schools, but were instead rooted in *bushido*, and had similarly denied as ‘less than half truths’ the idea that Japan’s victory over China had been the ‘work of a modern school system’.⁵⁰

Such re-conceptualization of *bushido* needs to be contextualized within Britain’s broader preoccupation at that time of the use of education as a means to strengthen national consciousness. As noted earlier, late Victorian and Edwardian imperialists saw the need to improve national cohesion, one manifestation of which was a nationalizing campaign in schools. The Conservative government in 1902 reclaimed control of education from the local school boards and sought to impose a stronger national curriculum with a greater emphasis on citizenship, patriotism, and history, which had long been neglected.⁵¹ However, such a change in policy was slow to bear fruit. Flags and maps were lacking until the First World War, compulsory history lessons added up to no more than a dozen a year and, more fundamentally, there was a prevailing diffidence about direct inculcation.⁵² It was in the face of such unsatisfactory progress at home that critics found in their adapted *bushido* an ideal and foil against which to reassert the importance of teaching patriotism.

A more radical manifestation of the preoccupation with national cohesion was the campaign for national service, led by the National Service League,

spirit’, *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 54 (1910), pp. 697–719) as evidence of considerable change of contemporary opinion.

⁴⁸ Thomas Holdich, ‘England’s strength in Asia’, *Fortnightly Review (FR)*, 78 (1905), pp. 640–55, at p. 652.

⁴⁹ House of Lords Deb., 20 Feb. 1905, Hansard 4th series, vol. 141, col. 549.

⁵⁰ Nitobe, *Bushido*, pp. v, 126.

⁵¹ Mandler, *English national character*, p. 130.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 130–1; J.H. Grainger, *Patriotisms: Britain, 1900–1939* (London, 1986), pp. 27–47.

founded in 1902. Unsurprisingly, for George F. Shee, its founder, the Japanese provided a useful counter-point for highlighting Britain's need for a lesson in 'self-subordination': whereas the Japanese, with their solidarity of purpose, were 'one', he argued that the British – 'devoted to the idea of absolute individual liberty' – lacked the unity vital for imperial survival.⁵³ More surprisingly, even for the scientifically minded proponents of efficiency, the seemingly conservative notions of 'spirit' and 'national cohesion' proved compatible with their technocratic language of 'scientific organization'. As part of a similar series of articles on Japan's 'scientific spirit' published in *Nature* during this period, Henry Dyer, a former Professor of Engineering at the Imperial College of Engineering in Tokyo, asserted that the 'chief lesson' Japan afforded to Britain, in view of Japan's remarkable transformation, was that the term 'science' had to be used in its 'broad sense' – that all efforts must be guided by a 'consciousness of the real aims of national life'.⁵⁴

What underlay all of these positive appraisals of Japan was a shared recognition of a certain fundamental difference between the British and the Japanese. As Dyer remarked, the Japanese mind was dominated 'to a great extent by collective opinion', unlike the British, which was 'strongly individualistic'.⁵⁵ After all, what had allowed the Japanese to succeed, both on the battlefield and in their 'domestic revolution', was their prioritization of 'collective duty'.⁵⁶ From such a viewpoint, it was now possible for *The Times* to propose: 'this doctrine of devotion to the good of others...may well prove a useful corrective to the excessive individualism into which Western civilization sometimes shows a tendency to degenerate', a point iterated by the War Office delegation to Japanese schools.⁵⁷ This dichotomy between Japanese self-subordination and British individualism was most acutely perceived by advocates of national service. In the words of the journalist and Coefficient member J. L. Garvin, the Japanese (and Germans) were 'trained to die for their country' whilst 'we, more than any other people – except the Americans – are taught to live for ourselves'.⁵⁸ In its fundamentals, this dichotomy was recognized as a question of rights versus duty. As Lord Roberts, the president of the National Service League lamented, it was 'painful' to 'hear Englishmen talk...so much

⁵³ George F. Shee, 'The organisation of the national resources', *MR*, 17 (1904), pp. 22–32, at pp. 27–8.

⁵⁴ Henry Dyer, 'Education and national efficiency in Japan', *Nature*, 71 (1904), pp. 150–1, at p. 151.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Times*, 6 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; 'I am beginning to understand the secret of these people being so successful in war: they work on exactly opposite ideas to us. We do all we can to exalt individuality, whereas they... require absolute self effacement as a condition of leadership', Murray to Amery, 14 May 1906, AMEL 2/5/5.

⁵⁸ J. L. Garvin, 'Imperial and foreign affairs: a review of events', *FR*, 87 (1910), pp. 16–33, at p. 32.

of their rights and so very little of their duties'.⁵⁹ Although no supporter of compulsory service, for Ian Hamilton too, the greatest lesson afforded by Japan was 'the idea that the public interest comes first and the private interest comes a long way second'; 'What is *right* compared with *duty*?'⁶⁰

Such eulogizing about Japan did not please everyone. Critical reactions to the so-called 'cult of Japan' were mostly found in publications associated with the radical wing of Liberalism, such as the *The Speaker*, which was opposed less to Japan than to the concept of 'efficiency' as a whole, regarding it as a threat to the traditional liberal values of popular control and individual rights.⁶¹ Other criticisms involving Japan tended to be made as part of a broader disapproval of Britain copying other nations. One commentator, for example, argued that in view of the differences in historical trajectories, 'what is efficient in Japan is not necessarily efficient anywhere else'.⁶² Significantly, though, the kind of explicit criticism once made in the *Saturday Review*, deploring the fact that 'a European nation should have taken Asiatics so closely to [their] hearts' and 'a Christian nation...be admiring excessively a nation of pagans', was rare.⁶³

Such exceptions notwithstanding, against a backdrop of widespread concerns about imperial survival, Japan's performance in the Russo-Japanese War allowed her to rise to a new prominence in Edwardian Britain. If the Boers' wartime capacity had pointed towards the efficacy of a barbaric martialism and fuelled concerns over the possible malady of modern civilization, the Japanese, with their recent break-neck trajectory of modernizing reforms, reinforced the virtues of progress, and herein lay – despite their non-European status – an apparently preferable model for the British in crisis. The lessons arising from Anglo-Japanese interactions were now regarded as reciprocal. As *The Times* neatly encapsulated, if the Japanese had 'learned much from the West', the Japanese had 'set...in return an example of high endeavour... which [the British] may well study'.⁶⁴ In their fundamentals, the critical self-reflections on Britain's status quo were underpinned by a widely recognized contrast between Western individualism and Japanese self-ordination, a comparison which, contrary to the Saidian framework, involved not a disparagement of an Oriental 'Other' or even an idealization of an 'Old' Japanese 'tradition', but rather an appreciation of a 'New' reformed Japan now in certain respects deemed more 'modern' than Britain.

⁵⁹ *Times*, 16 Nov. 1905, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Staff officer's scrap-book*, II, p. 33.

⁶¹ 'The curse of party?', *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 13 (1905), p. 26; 'Persons and politics', *The Speaker: The Liberal Review*, 12 (1905), p. 619.

⁶² 'Musings without method', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 178 (1905), pp. 710–17, at p. 714.

⁶³ 'The childish public', *SR*, 98 (1904), pp. 195–6, at p. 195.

⁶⁴ *Times*, 5 June 1905, p. 9.

III

At a simple level, given the context in which reform debates took place in post-South-African War Britain – coinciding as they did with Japan’s spectacular performance against Russia – it is easy to see that an emulative discourse on Japan found resonance amongst proponents of efficiency. Given also the growing rivalry with Germany – the other archetype of efficiency – during this period, it is not inconceivable that Japan, as Britain’s ally following the alliance of 1902, proved the more politically convenient referent. Yet at a more fundamental level, these discourses of emulation present a certain paradox: the vast majority of such proponents were imperialists, whose commitment to empire, as epitomized by the Coefficients in the opening paragraph, rested in part upon their sense of superiority over non-European people. As upholders of such an ideology, why then did advocates of efficiency so unashamedly partake in the ‘cult of Japan’, and call for lessons to be learnt from an ‘Oriental’ example? And what underlying intellectual attitudes in Edwardian Britain are revealed by such appraisals of an Oriental nation that were deemed acceptable, even strategically advantageous, all under the acutely ‘modern’ sensibility of adapting Britain to the changing times?

Before exploring this issue further, it is first necessary to review nineteenth-century conceptions of human difference within the British empire in order to consider how British observations of Japan were shaped by, and in turn came to re-shape, British imperial discourses of ‘race’ and ‘civilization’ around the turn of the century. Whilst rightly recognizing the ambiguities of biology and culture in the Victorian construction of (never singular) racial ideas, much of the historiography has focused on the controversies of the 1860s between an emergent but marginal polygeneticist viewpoint represented most notably by the comparative anatomy of Robert Knox and James Hunt’s Anthropological Society of London, which outlined distinct and unequal racial types based on a biological determinism (and also found articulation amongst Catherine Hall’s mid-Victorian sceptics of the civilizing mission in Jamaica), and what is now thought to have been a more orthodox monogenesist position that defined a unilinear path of social evolution from the ‘savage’ towards a ‘civilized’ state, confident in the pre-eminence, and universal transferability, of English culture and institutions (what Peter Mandler has termed a ‘civilisational perspective’, and Douglas Lorimer a discourse of ‘assimilation’ in contrast to the ‘exclusionary’ perspective of the polygeneticists).⁶⁵ The

⁶⁵ Christine Bolt, *Victorian attitudes to race* (London, 1971), pp. 1–28; J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and society: a study in Victorian social theory* (Cambridge, 1966); Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination, 1830–1867* (Cambridge, 2002); Peter Mandler, ‘“Race” and “nation” in mid-Victorian thought’, in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young, eds., *History, religion, and culture: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 224–44; Mandler, *English national character*, pp. 72–86; Douglas Lorimer, ‘From Victorian values to white virtues: assimilation and exclusion in British racial discourse, c. 1870–1914’, in Philip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British*

historical context changed after the 1880s, particularly with the onset of the age of 'high imperialism' epitomized by the scramble for Africa that unleashed a new phase of territorial expansion and colonial development that relied on coloured wage-labour whilst denying non-white subjects in Africa as in Asia their democratic rights in stark contradiction to metropolitan developments in franchise extensions. Also with mounting issues of exclusionary immigration legislation in the self-governing dominions adding further fuel to the so-called 'colour question', the period after the 1880s has been associated with the rise of a new social scientific discourse of 'race relations' composed of a new and fertile vocabulary used to depict an increasingly divided and unequal world of European and (the lexically new) 'non-European' peoples, far removed from the mid-Victorian universalist vision of a colour-blind empire.⁶⁶ There were analogous intellectual reconfigurations within the scientific world, including not only a greater dissemination of scientific racism of the racial typologies kind from the 1880s onwards under the influence of Francis Galton (president of the Anthropological Institute, 1885–9),⁶⁷ but also importantly, the growth of racial perspectives rooted more broadly in 'scientific naturalism' that viewed human beings as natural objects subject to natural laws, interpreting the decline and even the extermination of aborigines under European imperialism as a natural process, devoid of moral responsibility or human agency.⁶⁸ Transformations in the broader institutional context including the professionalization of science, expansion of state education, and increased production of science textbooks facilitated the dissemination of such scientific world-views.⁶⁹ The net outcome of these manifold late nineteenth-century developments, according to Lorimer, was the superseding of the 'assimilating' vision of Victorian values by the 'exclusionary' language of 'white virtues' as the dominant (though not sole) discourse, as British civilizational assets – once

world (Calgary, AB, 2005), pp. 109–34; Douglas Lorimer, 'From natural science to social science: race and the language of race relations in late Victorian and Edwardian discourse', in Duncan Kelly, ed., *Lineages of empire: the historical roots of British imperial thought* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 181–212; Douglas A. Lorimer, 'Race, science and culture: historical continuities and discontinuities, 1850–1914', in Shearer West, ed., *The Victorians and race* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 12–33; Douglas A. Lorimer, 'Science and the secularization of Victorian images of race', in Bernard Lightman, ed., *Victorian science in context* (Chicago, IL, and London, 1997), pp. 212–35. For an alternative formulation of the 'civilisational perspective' that identifies technology as the primary marker of civilization, see Michael Adas, *Machines as the measure of men: science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1989).

⁶⁶ Lorimer, 'Natural science to social science', pp. 181–212; Lorimer, 'Race, science and culture', pp. 12–33; Lorimer, 'Victorian values', pp. 109–34. On race and immigration, see Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: white men's countries and the international challenge of racial equality* (Cambridge, 2008).

⁶⁷ Lorimer, 'Natural science to social science', pp. 186–8.

⁶⁸ Lorimer, 'Science and secularization', pp. 228–9; Lorimer, 'Race, science and culture', p. 25.

⁶⁹ Lorimer, 'Science and secularization', p. 228; Lorimer, 'Natural science to social science', p. 192.

enshrined as a universal creed – came to be re-established as the exclusive property of white people.⁷⁰ Viewed in these contexts, British attempts, illustrated in Bill Schwarz's recent study, to resolve the intellectual dilemma presented by the South African War – that the principal enemy was white – are emblematic of what may be summed up as the burgeoning 'exclusionary "civilisational perspective": the Afrikaners, the British typically claimed, were 'less civilised, or less white', than themselves.⁷¹

It was this late Victorian and Edwardian vision of the 'white man's world' that came under challenge with the Japanese victory of 1905. As *The Times* editorial recognized, the defeat of a European monarchy by 'a nation of unmixed Asiatic blood' marked an event of 'the very highest importance' to the 'whole human race'.⁷² The 'triumph of Japan', the *Review of the Reviews* remarked, sounded 'the death knell of the ascendancy of the white race'.⁷³ This new reality was to be reconciled by revising the exclusive synonymy of 'civilization' with 'whiteness'. As one critic reflected, 'the era of inequality between the races is over. Henceforth white and yellow man must meet on equal footing. Yet one thing is certain – that the victory of civilisation is assured'; whereas the Japanese had proved themselves 'true friends and honourable foes', boasted honest statesmen, and obeyed 'laws which the West recognises', it was the Russians who had 'fallen behind in the race of progress'.⁷⁴ Japan, echoed *The Times*, had been 'fighting in the common cause of all civilized nations'.⁷⁵

In discussing the rise of Japan in terms of 'civilization', a number of commentators also dwelt on Japan's domestic transformation. The Japanese, according to *The Times*, had 'mastered the ways of Western civilization with extraordinary completeness'.⁷⁶ Aside from the manifest progress in material terms, Japan's socio-political organization received special mention. In the words of the Liberal political economist Leonard Courtney, Japan, in breaking away from feudalism, had 'set up a parliament of the most approved fashion' following a 'careful examination of the latest teaching of the Western world'.⁷⁷ Expressed in the language of the time, civilizational capacity for organization could be explicitly linked to 'efficiency'; the Coefficients maintained that the 'real test of civilization' was 'general efficiency and power of organization and of providing for the future, whether economic or military'.⁷⁸ Japan's military

⁷⁰ Lorimer, 'Victorian values', p. 117.

⁷¹ Bill Schwarz, *The white man's world* (Oxford, 2013), p. 229.

⁷² *Times*, 6 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

⁷³ 'The books of the month: are there any superior races?', *RR*, 31 (1905), pp. 538–42, at p. 538.

⁷⁴ H. W. Wilson, 'Japan's Trafalgar', *NR*, 45 (1905), pp. 782–805, at p. 804.

⁷⁵ *Times*, 4 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Times*, 7 Jan. 1905, p. 9.

⁷⁷ Leonard Courtney, 'The regeneration of parliaments', *Contemporary Review* (*CR*), 87 (1905), pp. 761–72, at p. 761.

⁷⁸ Coefficients' Club minutes, 'What part are the coloured races destined to play in the future development of civilization', 16 Jan. 1905, BLPES, ASSOC 17.

success against Russia thus came as the ultimate attestation of her ‘civilized’ status – a view apparently widespread enough to prompt cynical reflections on the irony of the fact that in ‘Christian civilisation...the decisive test of full-growth has been one of war and death’, and the ruling deity ‘Mars – the heathen God of War’.⁷⁹

The exclusionary civilizational perspective of the previous decades was now recognizably untenable. As the liberal sociologist L. T. Hobhouse observed, the rise of Japan as a ‘modern power’ came as a repudiation of earlier beliefs that ‘the characteristics of European civilization were a monopoly of race’.⁸⁰ For Benjamin Kidd, Japan ‘literally fulfilled’ his prediction in *Social evolution* (1894) that ‘sooner or later, it would become clear...that the Western peoples in basing a claim to supremacy on the assumption that they possessed any inborn intellectual or other mental superiority over the less advanced races of men, were building on a false hope’.⁸¹ In his introduction to the 1908 edition of *Principles of Western civilisation*, Kidd asserted more clearly than ever: ‘civilisation is not a matter of race, nor descent, nor superior intellectual capacity but of ethos’.⁸²

Not only did the rise of Japan reaffirm the mid-Victorian ‘civilisational perspective’ on social evolution and its applicability to non-whites, but also raised the possibility that a successful civilization most equipped to win the ‘struggle for existence’ might not even necessarily be Western. As outlined in the previous section, in the wake of the Russo-Japanese War the British lavished much praise on the apparently non-Western characteristics of the Japanese, whether their collective spirit in place of Western individualism, *bushido*, or moral instruction in schools. Such appraisals, moreover, were often made to highlight British deficiencies by comparison, and formed part of a wider debate about Britain’s national regeneration. Few therefore regarded the rise of Japan as a straightforward case of Westernization. Whilst Japan’s assimilation of Western practices was widely recognized as discussed above, such recognition rarely resulted in self-eulogizing about the universal efficacy of Western civilization; rather, the tendency was to downplay the idea of ‘imitation’. As *The Times* argued, ‘mere imitation would never have made her what she is’; whether in the case of lessons from Europe within the last generation, or those from China and Korea many centuries ago, it was stressed that Japan had been ‘impressing with her own individual character as a nation’ what she had absorbed from others.⁸³

⁷⁹ W. T. A. Barber, ‘The coming of age of Japan’, *London Quarterly Review*, 12 (1904), pp. 226–37, at p. 227; Avebury, ‘Excessive national expenditure’, *Nineteenth Century and After* (NC), 58 (1905), pp. 706–15, at p. 714.

⁸⁰ Leonard T. Hobhouse, *Social evolution and political theory* (New York, NY, 1911), p. 144.

⁸¹ Benjamin Kidd, *The science of power* (London, 1918), pp. 111–12. See Kidd, *Social evolution*, pp. 243–334, for his original assertions.

⁸² Benjamin Kidd, *Principles of Western civilisation: a sociological study* (London, 1908), p. xx.

⁸³ *Times*, 6 Sept. 1905, p. 7. September 1905 also saw the outbreak of the Hibiya Riot in Tokyo in protest of the terms of the peace treaty with Russia. However, unwavering in their

Indeed, if the Japanese demonstration of a capacity to rise to modernity and power had the effect of reinvigorating a less racially exclusionary civilizational perspective, Japan also profoundly challenged existing British conceptions of the very nature of 'civilization'. For example, for all his later insistence on his prescience, the immediate aim of Benjamin Kidd in writing *Social evolution* (1894) had been to explain how the West had achieved their superior place in the scale of development, with his answer being social efficiency derived from Christianity.⁸⁴ As evident from his prediction that Western arts and sciences might be acquired by the non-West, 'civilization' in this context denoted a specifically Western civilization. Yet, in reality, for all its debt to Western civilization, the new 'civilization' exemplified by the Japanese diverged in important ways from the European model: not only had Japan exhibited non-Western uniqueness on its path to civilization with its remarkable displays of discipline and self-subordination but, more perturbingly, this was a path that had not passed through Christianity.

The outcome of the Russo-Japanese War – the defeat of a Western, Christian power by a non-Western, so-called 'heathen' power – was widely taken as a major intellectual challenge to the age-old belief in the relationship between Christianity and civilization. Any nation that had stood the 'supreme test' of war was not to be easily dismissed as 'wanting in...moral and intellectual greatness'.⁸⁵ As the prominent jurist John Macdonell recognized, the 'rise of Japan' and the 'enfeebling of Russia' might mean 'an end...of the Christian hegemony of the world'.⁸⁶ The Japanese success, Beatrice Webb speculated, would 'alter not merely the balance of power, but the balance of ideas – it will tell against Christianity as the one religion'.⁸⁷ Later, in an article subsequently acclaimed as 'remarkable' and voicing 'the feeling that has been growing in the minds of many thousands',⁸⁸ the editor of the non-sectarian *Hibbert Journal* candidly admitted:

Christendom, as a whole, long accustomed to treat all pagan races as morally inferior to herself, now stands confronted by a non-Christian civilisation...whose claim to moral equality, at least, cannot be disregarded, except by those who are morally blind. Through the rise of Japan a fresh term of comparison has come into existence

appraisal of the Japanese character, *The Times* described the disturbances as 'superficial and transitory' amongst a race 'not accustomed to suffer their feelings to dominate their reason and their sense of duty', *Times*, 7 Sept. 1905, p. 7; see also *Times*, 9 Sept. 1905, p. 5.

⁸⁴ H. G. Wells wrote in *A modern utopia* (1905), 'Mr. Kidd did not anticipate Japan', p. 346.

⁸⁵ *Times*, 7 Oct. 1905, p. 9.

⁸⁶ John Macdonell, 'The future Hague Conference', *CR*, 88 (1905), pp. 848–56, at p. 856.

⁸⁷ Beatrice Webb, *Our partnership*, ed. Barbara Drake and M. I. Cole (London, 1948), entry for 22 Dec. 1904, p. 299. For a more detailed account of the Webbs' positive assessment of the Japanese including their later first-hand observations during their 1911 visit, see J. M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the non-white world: a case of socialist racialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9 (1974), pp. 181–92.

⁸⁸ 'Japan's challenge to Christendom', *RR*, 32 (1905), pp. 502–3.

in the presence of which the self-estimates of all Christian nations and of Christianity itself will have to be revised.⁸⁹

For a number of commentators, the conduct of the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese War provided unmistakable evidence of such moral efficacy. Commending the Japanese on the ‘touches of humanity and sympathy’ with which they tended their wounded adversaries, and refrained from any subterfuges, John Macdonell frankly avowed: ‘a non-Christian State has set an example to Christian nations...on the lines of civilisation. The superior prestige of the West for humanity is gone.’⁹⁰ In a similar vein, the development of the Red Cross Society in Japan garnered praise in the *Contemporary Review*. The Society’s commitment to impartial treatment of wounded soldiers was taken to prove that the ‘feeling of human pity’ was ‘at least as strong and as widely diffused in non-Christian Japan as...in any Western and Christian country’.⁹¹ Such activities, the writer propounded, should instead be taken to dispel the mistaken assertion that Japan’s progress had been confined to material progress and that the Japanese remained ‘barbarians at heart’.⁹²

The roots of such moral characteristics were rarely identified as creedless. Instead, many sought to identify the influence of religious or quasi-religious beliefs other than Christianity to explain the dissonance of non-Christian moral excellence. In the case of the Red Cross Society, the ideological roots underpinning the concept were recognized as Confucian, and explicitly not as Christian, such that the society in Japan did not constitute ‘merely a copy’ of the European model, but was seen to reflect ‘the peculiar moral, social and religious ideas...prevailing in Japan’.⁹³ Others, such as *The Times*, associated the ‘noblest qualities’ of the Japanese with Buddhism.⁹⁴ Likewise, for the editor of the *Hibbert Journal*, the qualities displayed by the Japanese reflected a ‘spirit of Buddhism’, which, by comparison, stimulated a critical take on the current state of Christianity, which was seen to be tainted by an ‘astounding divorce’ between ‘ideas’ and ‘normal practice’ resulting in a demoralization manifested among the ‘idle rich’ and ‘drunken thousands of Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, or the East End’.⁹⁵

Even in the case of concepts unfamiliar to the West, an emphatically sympathetic attitude was taken:

⁸⁹ ‘Is the moral supremacy of Christendom in danger?’, *Hibbert Journal: A Quarterly Review of Religion, Theology and Philosophy*, 4 (1905), pp. 19–41, at pp. 22–3.

⁹⁰ John Macdonell, ‘International questions and the present war’, *NC*, 56 (1904), pp. 142–51, at p. 145.

⁹¹ O. Eltzbacher, ‘The Red Cross Society of Japan’, *CR*, 86 (1904), pp. 324–32, at p. 324.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 325–6. On the activities of the Japanese Red Cross, see Naoko Shimazu, *Japanese society at war: death, memory and the Russo-Japanese War* (Cambridge, 2009).

⁹⁴ *Times*, 12 Feb. 1906, p. 9.

⁹⁵ ‘Is the moral supremacy of Christendom in danger?’, pp. 30, 39.

When a Japanese reverently refers to the benign spirits of his ancestors, the expression may sound strange to us...But we must not be so dull as to miss the truth that in this form the Japanese...do homage to the same unseen Power whom we in other forms of speech endeavour to approach.⁹⁶

The close relationship now being established between the state, religion, and loyalty also received some notice. Acknowledging that the 'politico-religious element' in Japan tended to be 'anti-Christian', Archibald Colquhoun (former administrator of Southern Rhodesia) observed that patriotism, taken in the Japanese sense (and explicitly not 'in the Western sense'), possessed the 'essentials of any true religion': the recognition of supreme power, the practice of certain rites, and conformity with rules of life.⁹⁷ Meanwhile, Japan's allegedly low commercial morality, which had long been a source of British resentment, came to be emphatically treated as an unrepresentative exception.⁹⁸ The combined result of such lines of thinking was an atmosphere in which, in the words of a contemporary writer, 'it was not uncommon for a man to be considered a scarecrow of bigotry and obscurantism because he distrusted the Japanese, or lamented the rise of the Japanese, on the ground that the Japanese were Pagans'.⁹⁹

There is a certain consistency in the nature of these discussions on the moral-religious dimension of Japan. Not unlike Nitobe's own motivation in writing *Bushido, the soul of Japan*, far from disparaging the Japanese as 'heathen' on account of being non-Christian, these British writers insisted on identifying some kind of an alternative creed to Christianity through which to explain the Japanese moral conduct. In so doing, commentators were anxious to make explicit the negligible influence of Christianity in Japan; no longer to lament its absence, but rather to give respectful recognition to certain fundamental differences between Japan and the West, and even to praise Japan's displays of 'non-Westerness' in place of uncritical imitation. Such observations closely parallel the series of emulative discourses on Japanese patriotism, *bushido* in schools, or collective spirit, all of which stressed Japan's particularity rather than its successful Westernization. Japan's victory against such a great European power as Russia on the back of a remarkable domestic transformation, combined with the undeniable displays of moral efficacy in their wartime conduct, meant that Japan now had to be fully recognized as 'civilized'. As expressed most clearly by *The Times*, Japan, 'judged by every standard of

⁹⁶ *Times*, 17 Oct. 1905, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Archibald R. Colquhoun, 'The secret of Japanese patriotism', *MR*, 26 (1907), pp. 70–82, at pp. 80–1. The significance of the 'newly invented' Japanese religion of Shinto to state propagation of national morality was noted more explicitly and critically later by Basil Hall Chamberlain in *The invention of a new religion* (1912). For a secondary discussion of this point, see Helen Hardacre, *Shinto and the state, 1868–1988* (Princeton, NJ, 1989).

⁹⁸ Joseph H. Longford, 'The commercial morality of the Japanese', *CR*, 87 (1905), pp. 705–11; Hamilton, *Staff officer's scrap-book*, II, p. 161.

⁹⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (London, 1905), p. 300.

modern civilization and by every principle which underlies our professions of Christianity' had, 'in peace and in war...stood triumphantly the most severe tests by which the highest qualities of a great nation can be tried'.¹⁰⁰ Yet the 'civilization' exhibited by Japan was not to be treated as synonymous with Western Christian civilization. The dissonance of a 'heathen' civilization was to be reconciled through acceptance that the newly arisen civilization was different from, yet still consistent with, Western standards of civilization. The idea of 'civilization', in short, now rested upon a more plural perspective.

Such understanding of 'civilization' signifies an important divergence from the old Christian or Enlightenment universalist conception of civilization that had presumed a high level of fundamental commonality among all humans, underpinned by theories of monogenesis. The revised understanding of civilization allowed for dissimilarity, amongst which existed religious and cultural diversity, as well as differences in skin colour. As outlined above, the racially exclusionary perspective on the Japanese as an irredeemably inferior race of Orientals was rendered obsolete by their demonstrable capacity to shoot up the ladder of civilization, but in British eyes, they remained both non-Western and non-white – hence Britain's recognition of the epoch-making significance of the Japanese victory over Russia. In all this, the British contrasted sharply with the Americans who, in Joseph Henning's study, are shown to have come to terms with the rise of Japan by arguing that the Japanese were not 'Asiatic' but in fact (ethnologically or adoptively) 'Aryans', seeking thus to maintain their belief in the supremacy of the white Anglo-Saxon race.¹⁰¹

In Britain, the idea that there were profound differences between the West and Japan was not merely compatible with, but rather an integral part of, the new civilizational outlook. It is this twin recognition of Japanese civilization and particularity that also explains the unhesitating manner in which Edwardians sought inspiration from the Japanese in their quest for efficiency. As *The Times* recognized upon the conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War, from difference arose mutual lessons:

The rise of a nation whose civilization contains many elements which differ profoundly from those that go to make up the civilization of the West must exercise a new and powerful influence on the mind of the West...a constructive influence... Japan will doubtless be affected by growing intercourse with the West, as the West will inevitably be affected by her. Each will learn, and must learn, from the other good and evil.¹⁰²

Members of the Coefficient Club also encapsulated something of this sentiment in their discussion on the future development of civilization. Referring to Japan as an example of a nation that had 'taken European or general civilization' but

¹⁰⁰ *Times*, 5 June 1905, p. 9.

¹⁰¹ Joseph M. Henning, *Outposts of civilization: race, religion, and the formative years of American-Japanese relations* (New York, NY, 2000), pp. 137–64.

¹⁰² *Times*, 6 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

'kept its own culture', the participants recognized that alongside the more universal function of civilization as 'the organisation of life for the better satisfaction of the ordinary human needs', there was also a cultural dimension to civilization, which was 'peculiar to some particular people or some particular time'.¹⁰³ The plurality underpinning their vision is evidenced by their conclusion: 'every race has its own merits, and can contribute something towards a common civilisation'.¹⁰⁴ Such a conception of civilization was explicitly acknowledged to differ both from the 'old racial view', which rested on 'biological evolutionary theory', and also from the 'Christian, positivist, or liberal view', which ignored 'all racial differences', and considered 'men as not only equal but similar': 'that men are not equal and similar', the Coefficients asserted, 'is obvious'.¹⁰⁵ Tellingly, what was now in question was not how far Western civilization would spread, but instead how far, in view of the culturally particularistic dimension of civilization, 'a common world community' with a 'common culture' would gradually emerge.¹⁰⁶

IV

What remained open to debate in Edwardian Britain was the extent to which the achievements of Japan represented an exception amongst 'Asiatics', or was instead the beginning of a broader trend towards an 'Eastern awakening'. One response, common during and immediately after the Russo-Japanese War, was to insist upon the uniqueness of the Japanese case. 'Irreconcilable differences' and 'gulfs' were identified between Japan's patriotic and progressive character and China's apparent lethargy and contempt for Western civilization.¹⁰⁷ Such unfavourable comparisons often formed part of widespread counterarguments in Britain to dispel the idea of a 'yellow peril' more strongly pronounced in the continental press – that the rise of Japan would be followed by the rise of a hostile East, and culminate in a joint crusade against Western civilization.¹⁰⁸ Such 'hasty generalizations', *The Times* remarked, 'seem to us unfounded'.¹⁰⁹ *The Spectator* epitomized the dominant view of the day when they

¹⁰³ Coefficients' Club minutes, 'What part are the coloured races destined to play in the future development of civilization'.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ O. Eltzbacher, 'The yellow peril', *NC*, 55 (1904), pp. 910–25; *Times*, 7 Sept. 1904, p. 7; *Times*, 28 Sept. 1904, p. 7.

¹⁰⁸ Another common argument against 'yellow peril' was to view Japan as the true upholder of civilization and to identify Russia instead as the 'real peril'; see for example *Times*, 25 Nov. 1903, p. 9; *Times*, 25 May 1904, p. 7; D. Boulger, 'The "yellow peril" bogey', *NC*, 55 (1904), pp. 30–9; Eltzbacher, 'Yellow peril'.

¹⁰⁹ *Times*, 6 Sept. 1905, p. 7.

observed in May 1904 that the Japanese, in their extraordinary degree of patriotism and organization, were ‘no more Asiatic than they are European’.¹¹⁰

However, such positive insistence on Japanese exceptionalism became increasingly untenable in light of unfolding developments in Asia and the emergent wider implications of Japanese success for the British empire.¹¹¹ Politicians in the House of Commons repeatedly referred to growing signs of unrest in the East, especially in India, while in regard to China, many writers were forced to revise their previous views on Chinese apathy as they began to observe a ‘new spirit’ and an ‘awakening’ on account of its growing nationalism. Accompanying these widespread observations was an undisputed recognition that the stimulus behind this new Asian confidence was Japan’s recent triumph over a white, European power; much as the British might insist on the uniqueness of the Japanese case, it was becoming clear that those in the Orient identified an affinity with the Japanese, and thus viewed such modernization and rise to power as imitable.¹¹² The rush of Chinese and Indian students to Tokyo after 1905 was seen to provide confirmation of this new reality.¹¹³

These developments had the effect of dispelling some of the earlier scepticism towards the ‘yellow peril’. For one critic, they represented a disturbing realization of Charles Pearson’s controversial thesis on the inevitable decline and fall of white civilization.¹¹⁴ Although few other writers went as far as this, E. J. Dillon, a prominent journalist who had previously dismissed the ‘yellow peril’ as a ‘meaningless’ cry and magnanimously welcomed the rise of Japan on the grounds that ‘the first place to the most deserving people’ was the ‘fundamental law of the international community’,¹¹⁵ grew more alarmist: ‘all Asia is awakening to a sense of its rights...the Japanese are the natural leaders of the

¹¹⁰ *Spectator*, 14 May 1904, p. 4.

¹¹¹ For an overview of the impact of the Russo-Japanese War on the rise of nationalism in the non-West, see Cemil Aydin, ‘A global anti-Western movement? The Russo-Japanese War, decolonization and Asian modernity’, in Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, eds., *Competing visions of world order: global moments and movements, 1880s–1930s* (New York, NY, 2007), pp. 213–36.

¹¹² House of Commons Deb., 21 June 1905, Hansard 4th series, vol. 147, col. 1288; House of Commons Deb., 20 July 1906, Hansard 4th series, vol. 161, col. 600; House of Commons Deb., 26 Feb. 1906, Hansard 4th series, vol. 152, cols. 837–8; House of Commons Deb., 5 Nov. 1906, Hansard 4th series, vol. 164, col. 88; House of Commons Deb., 1 Apr. 1909, Hansard 5th series, vol. 3, col. 579; *Spectator*, 18 Aug. 1906, p. 6; *Spectator*, 22 Sept. 1906, p. 5; *Spectator*, 16 May 1908, p. 5; *Times*, 24 Apr. 1906, p. 9; *Times*, 19 May 1906, p. 13; Lionel Giles, ‘The awakening of China: a street placard from Hunan’, *NC*, 60 (1906), pp. 521–32; Lancelot Lawton, ‘Imperial and foreign affairs: China – the stirrings of the waters’, *Academy and Literature*, 81 (1911), pp. 549–50; Bernard Houghton, ‘The renaissance in Asia’, *Westminster Review*, 177 (1912), pp. 1–9.

¹¹³ ‘Asiatic students in Japan’, *RR*, 37 (1908), p. 271; E. J. Dillon, ‘China’, *CR*, 100 (1911), pp. 256–76, at p. 273; Arthur Diosy, ‘The Chinese revolution’, *CR*, 100 (1911), pp. 704–11, at p. 707.

¹¹⁴ Viator, ‘*Asia contra mundum*’, *FR*, 83 (1908), pp. 185–200. For Pearson’s original thesis, see Charles Henry Pearson, *National life and character: a forecast* (London, 1893).

¹¹⁵ E. J. Dillon, ‘Foreign affairs’, *CR*, 86 (1904), pp. 281–98, at pp. 286–90.

new movement...For Europe in general and for Great Britain in particular this impending upheaval is fraught with danger of the gravest kind.¹¹⁶ The capacity and zeal for progress that had aroused euphoric appraisals about 'efficiency' when considered particular to Japan instead generated anxiety when deemed no longer unique but widespread across Asia. As Dillon recognized, 'the Japs or the Hindoos – are by no means inferior peoples...That is the essence of the matter.'¹¹⁷

As the decade progressed, Japan's own behaviour in the Far East also fed into this sense of anxiety. Enthusiasm was increasingly replaced by critical reassessment to the point where *The Spectator* noted in 1908, 'the cold fit has noticeably arrived'.¹¹⁸ Reflecting widespread disenchantment, *The Times* observed that in Korea as in Manchuria, the Japanese, 'though claiming to appear as liberators... behaved too often as heavy-handed conquerors'.¹¹⁹ Although the resultant disunity of Asia – arising from Chinese and Korean alienation from Japan – could be used to reinvigorate repudiations of the 'yellow peril' by denying the possibility of a united military front against the West, Japan's expansionist ambition remained a cause for concern.¹²⁰ In this regard, Shigenobu Okuma's speech in 1907 on Japan's duty to 'protect' India from 'European oppression', although generally regarded as unrepresentative of the official Japanese viewpoint, did little to quell anxieties.¹²¹

Another major source of tension towards the end of the Edwardian decade was the issue of Japanese immigration to the British dominions. As the journalist Lancelot Lawton recognized, the situation was 'complicated to an extraordinary degree' by the fact that while Japan was Britain's 'friend and ally', the presence of her people was 'resented by the Colonies more than the presence of the people of any other Asiatic race'.¹²² For some British, reflecting their recognition of Japanese capacity, the crux of the issue was seen to be Japanese 'virtue' rather than 'vice': 'at the bottom of the whole affair', *The Times* remarked, 'is economic jealousy...the real objection to the Oriental is that he is too frugal, too industrious, and too efficient'.¹²³ For others, the issue awoke in them the uncomfortable reality that recognition of the validity of Japanese civilization, founded on an appreciation of their difference, could not induce a sense of affinity. *The Spectator* candidly captured this problem of civilization without assimilation:

¹¹⁶ E. J. Dillon, 'Foreign affairs', *CR*, 93 (1908), pp. 236–56, at p. 246.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹¹⁸ *Spectator*, 23 May 1908, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ *Times*, 19 Aug. 1909, p. 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Spectator*, 28 Dec. 1907, p. 4; Dillon, 'Foreign affairs', *CR*, 93 (1908), pp. 244–5.

¹²² Lancelot Lawton, 'Imperial and foreign affairs', *Academy and Literature*, 81 (1911), pp. 27–9, at p. 28.

¹²³ *Times*, 28 Oct. 1907, p. 9.

Can they honestly say that they would like to live...with men and women of the yellow race...called upon almost daily to choose whether they would conform to the moral, intellectual, and social standards set by Asia...or those set by Europe? We do not wish to argue here whether the European standards are necessarily better, and we are fully aware that a Japanese may often put to shame a European in matters of morality, temperance, and self-restraint. The fact remains, however, that the moral and social and political ideals are different.¹²⁴

The specific implications of the issue for Japan were acutely recognized in Britain:

Asiatics previously seemed to be excluded because of their temporary backwardness in civilisation. But now they have proved, as the educated among them think, their potential equality. Still being refused the privilege of free settlement...they realise at last that Asiatics are shut out of the other Continents because they are Asiatics; and that nothing but force seems likely to reverse that state of things.¹²⁵

In replacing the former intellectual dialectic between civilizational universalism and racial supremacism, a new, even thornier tension thus emerged between 'civilization' and 'race' that was to reach its apex in 1919 with Japan's controversial and ultimately unsuccessful demand for racial equality at the Paris Peace Conference.¹²⁶

V

The Edwardian fixation with Japanese efficiency marks a particular moment in world history when a period of intense national anxiety in Britain coincided with the epoch-making emergence of a new power in the East, reversing the conventional direction of the 'process of emulation' between the West and the non-West.

A product of a very specific set of domestic and international circumstances in this way, the infatuation with Japan was ultimately a short-lived phenomenon. As shown in the last section, once the full implications of the Japanese triumph – the extent of its impact on Asia and of Japan's own ambitions, and their possible interference with British interests – became apparent, the enthusiasm for Japan evaporated considerably. Crucially however, what remained solid in the British mind was the underlying recognition of alternative civilizations driven by the rise of Japan. A clear articulation of this, and one that epitomizes this article's argument, found expression in *The Times* in 1907:

¹²⁴ *Spectator*, 13 July 1907, p. 4.

¹²⁵ Viator, 'Asia contra mundum', p. 195. Valentine Chirol (formerly at *The Times*) similarly recognized this tension between 'race' and 'civilization' in discussing Japanese immigration to the United States; see 'Japan among the nations', *Living Age*, 277 (1913), p. 818.

¹²⁶ On the Racial Equality Proposal (1919), see Naoko Shimazu, *Japan, race and equality: the racial equality proposal of 1919* (London, 1998).

It has hitherto been the tacit assumption of the white races of mankind that the world belongs to them...that civilization can only mean their civilization, and religion only their religion...There are now, however, many indications that his assumption can no longer pass unchallenged. There are qualities in some of these non-white races and in their civilizations of which he did not perhaps take proper account...it seems to be time for the white races...to recognize that, in the changed conditions, the old haughty and dictatorial attitude stands in need of modification.¹²⁷

This recognition of alternative civilizations – of the capacity of non-whites – could find expression in admiration and fear alike. Under the specific conditions of anxiety about national decline, and whilst the accomplishments of the Japanese were still believed unique, such recognition of an alternative civilization manifested itself as a euphoric cult, underpinned by an outlook that relished reciprocal learning. In their quest for national efficiency, the British thus looked towards the Japanese, neither as pseudo-Europeans, an inferior race, nor as heathen savages, but rather as the bearers of an advanced yet different civilization.

¹²⁷ *Times*, 15 Jan. 1907, p. 9.