

# Studies of Modern British History in Japan : From National History to Imperial History

Masahiro YOSHIDA

A. G. Hopkins suggests the rehabilitation of imperial history in his fascinating essay, "Back to the Future: from national history to imperial history".<sup>1)</sup> He criticizes the recent trends of the historical studies of the former British Empire and Dominion countries, which are written within a national framework and justify their independence and nation building, but which neglect inter-imperial ties in the former British Empire. He proposes that we should take another look at the imperial history in order to acknowledge the resurgence of the ethnic nationalism in our time.<sup>2)</sup> If we are to recognize the importance of imperial history as Hopkins proposes, we must apply his idea to ourselves. In Japan the historical study of European countries has been an important field of historical researches. British history was a leading field of European history. The themes and methods of European history underwent much change as the Japanese political and economic conditions changed. As I will show you later, the themes of British history have experienced the shift from national history to imperial history in the 1970s. In this paper, I will follow the course of studies of British history in Japan after the Second World War.

Immediately after the War, the studies of European history attracted attention of many younger scholars. The main purpose of their studies was to compare the process of building of national economy in European

countries with the process of Japanese economic development. The transition from Feudalism to Capitalism was one of the main themes. A dominant group was called the Otsuka School, after the name of the leader of the school, Hisao Otsuka, a professor of the Tokyo University. Otsuka published *An Introduction to the European Economic History*<sup>3)</sup> in 1944, and its revised edition was published in 1946. Otsuka examined the history of the commercial rivalry of the European countries from the 16th to 18th centuries, and found that Britain won finally in 1763. He ascribed Britain's victory to higher productivity of the nation. In England the weaving industry prospered in rural areas. In spite of the opposition of urban guilds, rural residents were performing many industrial tasks, which is recently termed "proto-industrialization".<sup>4)</sup> Such development of rural industry contributed to the higher productivity of the British nation. Otsuka stressed the development of capitalism from below, the importance of Protestantism in capitalist developments, and the growth of yeomen and middle classes. This type of capitalist development was thought to be typical of Western Europe but contrary to the militaristic and semi-feudal character of capitalism in Japan before the 1945. Therefore, it was said that the Japanese post-war economic and social reconstruction should be carried out on the model of Britain's modernization in order to democratize Japanese society as a whole. This way of thinking was supported by many historians, social scientists and other progressive intellectuals after the War. Therefore this trend of historiography was also called "Post-War Historiography".

But in the 1960s, when the rate of Japanese economic growth was high enough for the Japanese people to regain confidence in their own abilities, some historians began to criticize the views of the Otsuka school. In 1966 Takeomi Ochi, a professor of Kyoto University, published his work, *The Origins of Modern Britain*.<sup>5)</sup> His work consists of three chapters discussing

politics, economy and culture of England: “the development of political reform” from the Reformation to the Glorious Revolution; “the transformation of society and economy”; “the emergence of the national culture”. In this book Ochi insisted that the Otsuka's view of capitalist developments in Western Europe was a fiction constructed of Max Weber's works and could not be proved by empirical studies of English history. Ochi thought that gentlemen played a more important part in the making of modern British society than yeomen because yeomen disappeared in the 16th century. He made use of R. H. Tawney's *opinion upon the rise of gentry*. Ochi was looking for the image of what England really was in modern era and longing for English culture based on gentleman ideal. Ochi's view represents the romanticism of Japanese historiography whose origin was traced to the 1930s' Japan.

In the 1960s some scholars of the Otsuka School began to make investigations of the Industrial Revolution and the British Imperialism. They made use of the theoretical framework of Otsuka — capitalist developments from below — and applied methods of Karl Marx to their studies. *The Establishment of the British Capitalism* by Akihiko Yoshioka, published in 1968, is an example.<sup>6)</sup> These new themes of historical researches reflects Japan's economic developments and the political and social conditions in those days. At the time the issue of renewing the Japan-US Security Treaty brought about the political and social confrontation between the radicals and the conservatives in Japan. It was said that the study of the transition from feudalism to capitalism was old-fashioned and that we must study critically the capitalist society itself. Moreover, in the latter half of the 1960s, the North-South problem influenced the way of thinking of historians. The importance of “external factors” was recognized and there appeared a new concept of “capitalist world system”. *The Imperialism of Free*

*Trade* by Kenzo Mouri, published in 1978,<sup>7)</sup> was a fascinating work on the imperialist character of the British Free Trade movements and the industrial capitalism. These discussions preceded the prevailing of the theory of the modern world system by Immanuel Wallerstein.

In the 1970s many Japanese historians and social scientists became interested in André Gunder Frank, who presented the notion of “the Development of Underdevelopment”,<sup>8)</sup> and Immanuel Wallerstein, who advocated the theory of “Modern World-System”.<sup>9)</sup> Japanese translations of their books were published one after another. We thought then that it was necessary to reconsider the way of thinking of the post-war historiography or the Otsuka School, who regarded the national economy and the nation-state as units indispensable for the economic welfare and the democracy. Thus reconsideration of the nation-state was beginning in this period.

In the 1970s we experienced a turning point for the historical studies in Japan. In addition to the notions of the underdevelopment and the modern world system, the social history and the popular culture won popularity in Japan. Historians who studied French history introduced new concepts of the Annales School, “collective mentalities” and “total history”.<sup>10)</sup>

As for British history, the Otsuka School was criticized for thinking abstractly the European modernity as a typical model of modernization in general. Those who criticized Otsuka attached importance to concepts that were derived from empirical studies of Britain. In this sense historians from the Ochi School played the leading part of reconsideration of British history. Minoru Kawakita, who belongs to the Ochi School, is one of the most energetic historians. He published *The Historical Preconditions of the Industrialization: Empire and Gentlemen* in 1983.<sup>11)</sup> The title and the subtitle of this book showed the author's interests. He searched the first British Empire for the precondition of industrialization. Especially he

regarded the English commercial revolution as one of the preconditions of the Industrialization in Britain. The development of sugar plantations in the West Indies played the key role in that process. Funds accumulated in the hands of the planters were invested in businesses in England. The slave trade provided merchants in Bristol and Liverpool with much wealth. These funds promoted the industrialization through investments in the manufacturing industries. And the life style revolution in England promoted the Industrial Revolution in terms of demand for manufactured goods. Calicos, which were at first imported by the East India Company from India, were indispensable goods for the slave trade. The calico boom in the 18th century England expanded the home market for cotton goods, which started cotton industries in Manchester. In addition, many of the second generation of sugar planters in West Indies moved to England and they became gentlemen and even Members of the Parliament. Thus Kawakita regarded the empire and gentlemen as indispensable conditions of industrialization in England. His inspiration was Wallerstein's theory of the Modern World System and he has translated many works of Wallerstein.

On the other hand, Kawakita edited several books on English social history. *The British Empire in the Back Alleys*, which was published in 1982, was one of the epoch-making works of social history.<sup>1 2)</sup> It showed the daily life of city dwellers: "the birth of urban culture"; "the family and consumptions"; "foods and drinks of the common people"; "the social history of disease: urbanization and public health"; "the life insurance and murders of infants"; "the domestics in Victorian age"; "leisure and spa-town"; "public houses and drinking". Since then many studies of the daily life in England have been published.

Another epoch-making study is Yoichi Kibata's *The Price for Rule: the Decline of the British Empire and "Empire Mentalities"* published in

1987.<sup>13)</sup> He belongs neither to the Otsuka School nor to the Ochi School. He examined empire mentalities of the British nations during the South African War, the First World War, the Second World War and the Suez War. He concluded the persistency of imperial mentalities of the elites even after the break up of the formal empire. And he disclosed that the same mentalities permeated among the common people of Britain and even among the socialists especially during the wartime periods. His analysis covers the peace movements during the War periods. He pointed out that during the Second World War anti-fascist activities, which supported the war against the Nazi Germany, were incompatible with anti-imperialist movements, which tended to support pacifism. And he referred to Scottish and Welsh nationalisms in relation to the rule of the British Empire. The nationalisms in Celtic fringe were growing as the economic benefits of the integration with England decreased. Kibata has much interest in the racial problems in Britain. He referred to the increase of immigrants from various parts of former empire after the Second World War, the restriction on immigration by the government, and the frequent occurrence of race riots. Thus Kibata regards the persistency of empire mentalities and racial problems in present-day Britain as the price for the rule of the British Empire in the past. Kibata's critical view of the British society is contrary to the Otsuka School's admiration of Western Europe as a model of modernization. Now, the study of imperial mentalities is one of the main themes of British history in Japan.

As I have mentioned above, we have experienced the turning point of the studies of British history in the 1970s. Roughly speaking, their themes have changed from the studies of the formation of the national economy, the bourgeois revolution and the Industrial Revolution, to the studies of British Empire and Imperialism. Moreover, the social history has appeared

as new method of historiography.

In the 1980s, P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins presented the idea of Gentlemanly Capitalism.<sup>14)</sup> Cain and Hopkins minimized the role of the bourgeoisie in the formation of modern British society, and stressed the gentlemanly character of British society. Cain and Hopkins regard the City of London, the financial and commercial center of the world, as the representative of gentlemen and their culture. And they explain the history of the British Empire in terms of the economic development of the home country. The growth of the City of London was the most important factor of the expansion of the Empire after the middle of the 19th century. It reflects the fact that some economic prosperity was experienced in the South of England in the 1880s and 1890s as a result of the Big-Bang in the City of London, though manufacturing industries in the North suffered chronic depression.

The idea of the Gentlemanly Capitalism attracts attention of the younger generation of Japanese historians in the 1990s. I think, the theory of Gentlemanly Capitalism is consistent with the new trends of historiography of Japan since the 1970s, and it throws some light upon the new aspects of the imperial history. They interpreted the overseas development of the British people, not as a result of the growth of manufacturing industries, but as a development of the City of London representing the life style of gentlemen. In addition, we have witnessed the growing interest in British politics quite recently in Japan. On the one hand, the parliamentary system and the election system of Britain are reassessed as models of the parliamentary reforms in the contemporary Japan. On the other hand, the market-oriented economic policies pursued under the Thatcher government have been thought to be the model for the conservative government of Japan.

In conclusion, I think it necessary to investigate the relation of the nation-state and empire. In the field of the British history, understanding the role played by Scotland in the formation of the British Empire is a key point. As Hopkins insists, we must reassess the imperial history in order to understand the resurgence of ethnic nationalisms in the contemporary world. And we must absorb the new fruits of national histories from the new perspective.

- 1) A. G. Hopkins, "Back to the Future: from national history to imperial history", *Past and Present*, No. 164, August 1999.
- 2) Especially, *ibid.*, pp. 214-216.
- 3) Hisao Otsuka, *An Introduction to the European Economic History*, Tokyo, 1944. (大塚久雄『欧洲経済史序説』1944年, 『大塚久雄著作集』第2巻, 岩波書店, 1969年所収)
- 4) Leslie A Clarkson, *Proto-industrialization: the first phase of industrialization?* Basingstoke, 1985.
- 5) Takeomi Ochi, *The Origins of Modern Britain*, Kyoto, 1966. (越智武臣『近代英国の起源』ミネルヴァ書房, 1966年)
- 6) Akihiko Yoshioka, *The Establishment of the British Capitalism*, Tokyo, 1968. (吉岡昭彦編著『イギリス資本主義の確立』御茶の水書房, 1968年)
- 7) Kenzo Mouri, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, Tokyo, 1978. (毛利健三『自由貿易帝国主義——イギリス産業資本の世界展開——』東京大学出版会, 1978年)
- 8) André Gunder Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution*, New York, 1970.
- 9) Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York, 1974.



- 10) Hiroyuki Ninomiya, *Total history and Historians*, Tokyo, 1986. (二宮宏之『全体を見る眼と歴史家たち』木鐸社, 1986年)
- 11) Minoru Kawakita, *The Historical Preconditions of the Industrialization: Empire and Gentlemen*, Tokyo, 1983. (川北稔『工業化の歴史的前提』岩波書店, 1983年)
- 12) Sakae Tsunoyama and Minoru Kawakita (eds.), *The British Empire in the Back Alleys*, 1982. (角山榮・川北稔編『路地裏の大英帝国』平凡社, 1982年)
- 13) Yoichi Kibata, *The Price for Rule: the Decline of the British Empire and "Empire Mentalities"*, Tokyo, 1987. (木畑洋一『支配の代償——英帝国の崩壊と「帝国意識」——』東京大学出版会, 1987年)
- 14) P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I", *The Economic History Review*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 4, 1986; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II", *The Economic History Review*, Vol. XL, No. 1, 1987.