

The Political Context of D. T. Suzuki's Early Life

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THIS ESSAY explores the childhood and adolescent years of D. T. Suzuki (1870–1966). In particular, it investigates his family situation in terms of its status and privilege against the backdrop of early Meiji Japan's push to assert itself culturally and militarily through the education of its youth. The study shows that it was a natural progression for Suzuki to later become closely involved with powerful figures in Japanese politics such as Makino Nobuaki 牧野伸顯 (1861–1949) and Yoshida Shigeru 吉田茂 (1878–1967). The essay hopes to provide greater context for future studies that explore the intersection between twentieth-century efforts to ideologically reform Japanese Buddhism and the promotion of soft power by the Japanese state.

Jolyon Thomas claims that the “New Buddhists” of the twentieth century were complicit in the conscription of Buddhism “for nation-building projects” through the production of “pop Buddhist scholarship.”¹ In the execution of these projects the New Buddhists “not only served as prominent public intellectuals” but also “occasionally bent the ear of politicians and bureaucrats.”² A contemporaneous figure who fits this description was the world-famous popularizer of Japanese Zen Buddhism, and native of Ishikawa Prefecture, D. T. Suzuki.³

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¹ Thomas 2014, pp. 44–45.

² Thomas 2014, p. 47.

³ Thomas 2014, p. 39.

Throughout his life, Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki (referred to below as “Teitarō” to avoid confusion with other family members) maintained close relationships with powerful people in politics—something made possible not only by his contributions to religious studies but also by his privileged family status. Among Teitarō’s later friends of high birth were Konoe (née Maeda) Motoko 近衛貞子⁴ (1871–1955)⁵ and Makino Nobuaki. Konoe was the sixth daughter of the thirteenth-generation head of the Kaga domain, Maeda Yoshiyasu 前田慶寧 (1830–1874), wife of Gakushūin Peers School president, Konoe Atsumaro 近衛篤磨 (1863–1904), and stepmother to three-time prime minister Konoe Fumimaro 近衛文磨 (1891–1945). Count (*hakushaku* 伯爵) Makino was advisor to the emperor as Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal (*naidaijin* 内大臣), father-in-law to Prime Minister (1946–1947 and 1948–1954) Yoshida Shigeru, and, as an advocate of diplomacy with the United States, target of right-wing assassination attempts and Kenpeitai 憲兵隊 “Yohansen” surveillance.⁶ Makino was also a trusted and admired father figure in Teitarō’s life.

Relationships such as these would put Teitarō very much in a position to “bend ears” and contribute to government-related soft-power projects such as the journal *The Cultural East* mentioned below. His relationship with Makino even acted as a channel for him to send his works on Zen to the “emperor and his two brothers” in August of 1933,⁷ and likely contributed to Teitarō, as a prominent public intellectual, being invited to join in secret meetings in June of 1944 with top-level Imperial Japanese Navy officials working to bring Pacific War hostilities to an early close.⁸

An overseas trip Teitarō took later in life highlights his privileged connections. In 1936, he was invited to attend the Congress of Faiths in London by organizer Francis Younghusband and by an American diplomat acquaintance of Makino, Charles Richard Crane. In support of the trip, largely funded by Crane, Teitarō also received three thousand yen from the

⁴ In this essay, the modern standard Japanese form is used for all Chinese characters regardless of origin or time period.

⁵ The dates and the reading of the given name are from Haga 1998, p. 455.

⁶ Dower (1979) 1988 discusses the Kenpeitai secret police “Yohansen” (an abbreviation meaning “anti-war Yoshida”) project. See Grace 2015, p. 103 and pp. 104–6 for more on Teitarō’s relationships with Konoe and Makino, and p. 132 for more on Suzuki’s relationships with other figures targeted by “Yohansen.”

⁷ Suzuki 2006, p. 130.

⁸ Furuta 1999, p. 36. See Grace 2015, pp. 133–34, for more on Teitarō’s relationship with the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai 国際文化振興会,⁹ an organization overseen by friends of Makino and founded in 1934 with the primary purpose of “introducing Japanese culture to foreign countries.”¹⁰

Soon after arriving in London, Teitarō met with Makino’s son-in-law Yoshida,¹¹ who had been on a charm offensive there since May in an effort to secure more favorable treatment by Britain in Japan’s dealings related to Asia and the Pacific. Almost two decades prior, Teitarō had also visited Yoshida on July 24, 1918, while the latter was on another diplomatic mission—this time in Jinan, Eastern China.¹² On his work in China, Yoshida commented on what we would today refer to as his soft power approach to Makino in a 1916 letter stating: “No matter how we are to deal with Manchuria, if we do not win the people’s hearts, then our country’s tasks will never be achieved.”¹³ Much later, after the end of World War II, Teitarō collaborated with Yoshida on another soft power project: the publication of an English-language periodical titled *The Cultural East*, intended to give “thorough information regarding Eastern culture with the idea that it will help to a fair and unprejudiced understanding of the East, leading even to a love of the East.”¹⁴

In 1937, back in Japan after his voyage, Teitarō reworked the lectures he had given at the Congress of Faiths and at various universities in London and other parts of Europe for publication. The result was the romantically ethnocentric *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture* (1938), which was later revised and expanded as *Zen and Japanese Culture* in 1959. This book’s reputation at present may be gleaned from Richard Jaffe’s remark that “both editions of the book clearly are culturally or religiously nationalistic.”¹⁵ The book fueled Robert Sharf’s denunciation of Teitarō’s “egregiously inane . . . nationalistic leanings,”¹⁶ and also informed criticism of Teitarō by such scholars as David Dilworth, Brian Victoria, and Bernard

⁹ Suzuki 2011, p. 16.

¹⁰ See Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 1966, no page numbers. “Kokusai bunka kōryū no genjō” 国際文化交流の現状. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1966/s41-7-4.htm>.

¹¹ Suzuki 2011, p. 21.

¹² Kirita 2005, p. 40.

¹³ Dower 1988, p. 43. Translation by Dower.

¹⁴ Suzuki and Blyth 1946, p. 4. On Yoshida’s involvement in the publication of *The Cultural East*, see Furuta 1999, pp. 36–37. In a remark aimed at the Allies, the periodical warns that “the conquering nations are to be most gravely reminded of their God-given mission, and begged not to go astray, being too blindly drunk with the wine of victory” (p. 5).

¹⁵ Jaffe 2010, p. xix.

¹⁶ Sharf 1995, p. 47.

Faure over what they respectively saw as his apologetism, nationalism, and nativism.¹⁷

The question of what—if any—connection there may have been between Makino and Yoshida’s soft power diplomacy and Teitarō’s romantic portrayal of Japan, directed as it was toward a Western audience, is one that largely exceeds the scope of the present study, which is limited to exploring the incubation of Teitarō’s political identity in Kanazawa. Through detailing the social, financial, geographical, and educational environments of his youth, I hope to provide greater context to his work so as to bridge the gulf between Satō Taira’s image of Teitarō as an “international man of Zen” and opponent to right-wing thought and militarism,¹⁸ and David Dilworth’s view of him as “re-ontologizing” Buddhist philosophy in the service of a Japanese apologist cause.¹⁹

Teitarō’s Father Ryōjun

Akizuki Ryōmin relates Teitarō’s oral accounts of his youth, telling us that in the Meiji period people looked at the role of physician as an art form of caring (*jinjutsu* 仁術) rather than as an occupation.²⁰ While Suzuki Ryōjun

¹⁷ Dilworth 1978, p. 99; Victoria 2010, p. 132; Faure 1993, p. 64.

¹⁸ Satō 2008, p. 118.

¹⁹ Dilworth 1978, pp. 106, 108.

²⁰ Much of the information regarding Teitarō’s early life in this essay is taken from the autobiographical *Watashi no rirekisho* 私の履歴書 (My Curriculum Vitae; SDZ, vol. 26, pp. 499–539, and Akizuki Ryōmin’s *Sekai no zensha: Suzuki Daisetsu no shōgai* 世界の禪者：鈴木大拙の生涯 (The Worldly Man of Zen: The Life of D. T. Suzuki; 1992). These works are used as a framework to support other more detailed or historically reliable sources.

Watashi no rirekisho first appeared as a series of articles in the *Nihon keizai shinbun* in 1961 and was published in 1962 as a stand-alone work in vol. 15 of Nihon Keizai Shinbun publishing company’s *Watashi no rirekisho* series (on its publication, see Furuta 1970, p. 668). It can also be found in vol. 30 of the first edition of Teitarō’s complete collected works, *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集 (Iwanami Shoten, 1968–1971, pp. 585–622). The information in Akizuki’s *Sekai no zensha* can be found scattered throughout Akizuki’s other works and is largely based on personal conversations with Teitarō.

Another shorter autobiography, *Yafūryū-an jiden* 也風流庵自伝 (Autobiography of the Yafūryū Hermit; SDZ, vol. 29, pp. 147–63), was first published in the supplementary volume of the *Suzuki Daisetsu Zen senshū* 鈴木大拙禪選集 (Selected Zen Works of D. T. Suzuki). It can also be found in vol. 30 of the first edition of *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū*, pp. 563–83. The text is a transcript prepared by Shōkin Furuta of Teitarō’s talks with the Japanese broadcaster NHK. An English translation by Chida Mami and Steve Antinoff is included in Abe 1986, pp. 13–26. Teitarō’s *Kōjō no tetsui* 向上の鉄槌 (The Iron Hammer of Improvement; SDZ, vol. 17, pp. 1–191) also contains autobiographical sections, one of which is translated by Wayne Yokoyama as “The Life of a Certain Person” (Suzuki 2007).

鈴木了準 (1822–1876)²¹ was the attendant physician to the Kaga domain's Honda family, he was also given leave to act as town doctor for the locals. Those that were able would give what they could in payment at the end of the year, while others would bring whatever they had left over from hunting or harvests.²²

Ryōjun was the tenth-generation head of the Suzuki family. It was from the fourth generation that the Suzuki lineage became attendant doctors to the Honda family. The fifth- and sixth-generation heads were the birth sons of the previous generations, but those of the seventh, eighth, and ninth generations were married into the family—presumably due to the lack of a male heir. The men that married in were of high status, for example the second-born children of Kaga domain families. Thus, the Suzuki family was an integral part of the Kaga domain and played an important and prestigious role in society.

Kameda Yasunori provides a passage from a document related to the Suzuki family in which Gentarō 元太郎, Teitarō's oldest brother, outlines his family's lineage and their yearly income.²³ To summarize, Gentarō states that Ryōjun (who he refers to as “Shitagau” 柔) was son and heir to Ryōsetsu 了節, the eighth-generation head of the Suzuki family. However, when Ryōsetsu passed away from illness in 1823 (Bunsei 文政 6), Ryōjun was still a child. Thus, Ryūgai 柳崖 was married in to take over as the ninth-generation head—at which point he adopted Ryōjun as his son. In the eighth month of 1848 (Kaei 嘉永 1) Ryōjun took over his late father's hereditary stipend, which provided allowances to the family for the support of six people. In the seventh month of 1860 (Man'en 万延 1) the allowance was extended for a further two people (presumably to allow for his eldest sons, who would later be renamed Gentarō and Kōtarō 亨太郎).²⁴

Gentarō explains that in 1869 (Meiji 2), Ryōjun took up work as a teacher of literature at Kanazawa Shūgakusho 金沢集学所, a school for Chinese studies (*kangaku juku* 漢学塾) opened in 1869 by Hashi Kendō 橋健堂 (1822–1881). The next year, when the clan opened a medical school (*igakukan* 医学館), he was given the further role of medical officer (*ikan* 医官). In the

²¹ According to Mori (1991) 2011, p. 10, the given name of Teitarō's father “柔” is read “Shitagau,” and “Ryōjun” (also written 良準) was his professional name as a medical practitioner.

²² Akizuki 1992, p. 7.

²³ Kameda 1973, p. 14. The document is titled “Senzo yuisho narabi ni ichiruiyuke chō” 先祖由緒并一類附帳 (no pagination given) and is found in the Kaetsunō Bunko 加越能文庫 archive.

²⁴ Kameda 1973, p. 14.

seventh month of the same year, his stipend was adjusted to 39 *hyō* 俵 (bails of rice; approx. 60 kg each), one *to* 斗 (approx. 18 L), and one *shō* 升 (approx. 1.8 L) of rice. It was also then that his status was changed to that of *shizoku* 士族 (gentry). In the fourth month of 1872, with the closure of the schools, he retired from his positions, and in the tenth month of 1874 he withdrew from his role as head of the family, presumably with Gentarō taking over.²⁵

According to Akizuki, Ryōjun was a Confucian intellectual of the highest order—an opinion supported by the high level of education presumably required of him in the professional roles mentioned above. In addition to the many works of classical Chinese philosophy in Ryōjun’s bookcase were Japanese translations of works on traditional Chinese medicine, sitting alongside those on the latest Dutch medical techniques. Also there, illustrating Ryōjun’s interest in Western philosophy and politics, and in line with other intellectuals of his era, were translations of works such as John Stuart Mill’s 1859 *On Liberty*.²⁶

Ryōjun himself also wrote books for his children—one of them being the *Seiyō sanjikyō* 西洋三字經 (Three Character Classic of the West). This book, mimicking the style of the *Honchō sanjikyō* 本朝三字經 of Ōhashi Tama 大橋玉 (n.d.), which was itself following the style of Song-period China’s *Sanzijing* 三字經, gives an easy-to-memorize outline of Western history, starting with Noah’s ark, progressing on to the Roman Empire, and then to a summary of European history. The book contains only 528 Chinese characters organized into lines containing two groups of three characters. Reading the Chinese characters in the *kanbun* 漢文 system (which reorders the Chinese to make it understandable in Japanese), the text begins, “Mukashi seiyō ni, kōzui ari 昔西洋、有洪水” (Long ago in the West, there was a flood).²⁷

Ryōjun wrote two other similar children’s works that influenced Teitarō later in life. When he was only four or five years old, Teitarō would jealously listen to his older sister and brothers read aloud from the books with their father, wishing that he, too, was old enough to join in. Akizuki reports Teitarō as saying,

I had no idea what was written there or what my father was saying, but even today I still remember the feeling of wanting to

²⁵ Kameda 1973, p. 14.

²⁶ Akizuki 1992, p. 10.

²⁷ Sample pages from these books can be seen on the website of Kōeki Zaidan Hōjin Matsugaoka Bunko at <http://www.matsugaoka-bunko.com/ja/collection/book.html>.

hurry up and read with them and write books like that for myself. I suppose this must have been one of the things that influenced me to later become a writer.²⁸

Ryōjun and the Social Upheaval of the Meiji Era

Teitarō explains that the *tonosama* 殿様 (lords) of the region of Kaga were known as the *hyakumangoku* 百万石 (one million *koku*)²⁹ and had previously rivaled the Tokyo-based Tokugawa shogunate (*bakufu* 幕府) in terms of financial and military power. The lords, wary of the prying gaze of the shogunate, enjoyed their ability to keep themselves isolated from the capital geographically and culturally. In this environment, less attention was paid to politics, and Kanazawa became a hub for the arts. On the religious side, Sōtō Zen and Jōdo Shinshū (True Pure Land) Buddhism were able to develop into powerful establishments.³⁰ This context provided fertile ground for the socially privileged Teitarō to explore his intellectual interests.

In 1868, however, tremendous social change came about through the reinstatement of the emperor as the central political figurehead in the Meiji Restoration. Although it was termed “a restoration” in reference to the emperor’s status being restored, the previous political structure overseen by the Tokugawa shogunate had been the status quo for over two hundred years, so the changes that came so suddenly to Japanese society and the Suzuki family would have surely felt more revolutionary than restorative.

Despite all of the changes, according to Akizuki, the Suzuki household initially remained well-off until the sweeping reforms to the land tax (1873–1880) and *shizoku karoku* 士族家禄 hereditary stipend (1876) systems. These changes culminated in an announcement in August of 1876 that all rice stipends would be converted to monetary currency.³¹

²⁸ Akizuki 1992, p. 10. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Japanese are by the present author.

²⁹ *Koku* 石 was a measurement of rice equaling roughly 100–300 liters of dry rice, depending on region, time period, etc. The amount of *koku* that a regional lord commanded was also an indication of power and was therefore similar to the use today of GDP to indicate a country’s financial power. The term “1,000,000 *koku*” came to be an epithet for the wealthy Kaga domain feudal lords.

³⁰ SDZ, vol. 29, p. 147.

³¹ For a discussion of changes to the *shizoku* stipend system in the period 1868–1876, see Beasley 1972, pp. 368–69. For details on changes to the financial system in the Kaga region specifically, see Baxter 1994, particularly pp. 69–81.

In 1873, the new Meiji government had already made some major changes to the *karoku* system by introducing a scheme meant to wean *shizoku* off the stipends by offering lump-sum payments. According to Kameda, *shizoku* receiving less than one hundred *roku* in *karoku* welfare were offered various payout options depending on their status. The *shizoku* themselves could easily see that the *karoku* system was in imminent danger of being discontinued. The payouts were offered in the hope recipients would use them to set up independent businesses. In spite of the government's hopes, however, of the seventeen thousand *shizoku*-level former *bushi* 武士 (samurai) in 1874, only 2,771 accepted a payout.³²

As Sawada points out, "many Japanese who lived through the Restoration of 1868 had become increasingly concerned in the ensuing years about the pace of change in their country."³³ Ryōjun was certainly no exception in this regard, and it is easy to see how this atmosphere of fear concerning an external threat could have imprinted itself into the mind of a youth such as Teitarō. Kameda provides a long quotation from Ryōjun from a January 1874 edition of the *Ishikawa shinbun* 石川新聞 newspaper that clearly shows he was under no illusion that the *karoku* system would continue indefinitely.

Ryōjun's words make it clear he felt that America and England would not just sit by and let the state of disorder continue in Japan. The country had to be made prosperous to make foreigners fear it, thus avoiding falling under foreign rule as neighboring countries had done. Ryōjun saw that, in a worst-case scenario, Japan would need external help to fend off its enemies, but he knew the funds to pay for such help would eventually need to come from the people themselves. Consequently, he felt that those who accepted stipends without giving anything in return were obstinate and foolish. Worse still were those who would protest the end of the system and seek to throw the country into chaos by secretly participating in insurrection.³⁴

According to Kameda, Ryōjun's overall appraisal of the changes was positive. He comments that Ryōjun did in fact see the continuation of the *karoku* system as preferable in terms of his own interests but understood that this would have been impossible.³⁵ Although Teitarō was still very

³² Kameda 1973, p. 12.

³³ Sawada 1998, p. 117.

³⁴ Kameda 1973, p. 15.

³⁵ Kameda 1973, p. 15.

young when the most violent of the changes were taking place, the perceived threat from Europe and the US among adults in the Meiji period and the upheaval it caused must have, at least indirectly, helped to shape his understanding of cultural politics later in life.

Ryōjun passed away on November 16, 1876, at the age of fifty-four, when Teitarō was only six. Although he had few clear memories of his father, Teitarō did recall his own lack of understanding about death at that point. He explains how the funeral took place in November and how he could still remember the seasonal chrysanthemums blooming in rows on nearby Nodayama 野田山 Hill. Apart from the flowers, Teitarō's only other memory of the funeral was tossing a clump of earth down onto the coffin. He supposed this was memorable to him as a child as it was so normal to be throwing stones about.³⁶

In a somewhat hagiographical biography of Ryōjun's life, Katsuo describes how Ryōjun suddenly fell ill with flu-like symptoms, experiencing cold flushes while out seeing patients and passing away peacefully a few days later. Katsuo seems to imply that Ryōjun succumbed to cholera, which was widespread in Japan at the time.³⁷ Teitarō himself speculates that his father likely died of pneumonia caused by influenza, as did his mother Masu 増 (1830–1890) on April 8, 1890, when she was “sixty-three or sixty-four years old.”³⁸ As is clear from Kameda's quoting of Ryōjun's son Gentarō, however, Ryōjun had already officially retired from work and it is questionable whether he really was still seeing patients.

The precise cause of Ryōjun's death, happening as it did in the same year as the big stipend reforms, is unclear. In the introduction to the publication of a collection of letters from her great uncle, Hayashida Kumino says the impression she got of Ryōjun from the letters he sent to her mother was that “he was not really the sort of man that could deal well with a period of harsh change.”³⁹ If Teitarō were older at that point, perhaps he would have felt more animosity toward the stressful political situation that was a backdrop to his father's early death.

³⁶ Akizuki 1992, p. 34.

³⁷ Katsuo 2004, pp. 190–92. Katsuo provides some interesting information on Ryōjun's life and the social environment of the time in which he lived. In his introduction, however, Katsuo admits that he includes “many dramatic reenactments” (p. 5).

³⁸ SDZ, vol. 26, p. 519. Kirita lists her age at passing as fifty-nine (2005, p. 15).

³⁹ Hayashida 1995, p. 7.

Teitarō's School Life

The objectives of the school system in Kanazawa—and the social changes accompanying the Meiji Restoration that formed the background for them—help us to understand how so many important intellectual, business, and scientific leaders emerged from Kanazawa in the mid-Meiji to early Taisho periods. In 1875, the first modern-style elementary school was established in Honda-machi 本多町, and Teitarō was enrolled in it. He remembered that there were tests twice yearly that allowed students to progress to higher levels and that, as a reward for his good progress at the school, he was given five textbooks. Textbooks at that time were simply direct translations of those used in Western education, and thus, according to Akizuki, the education young Japanese received was simply a direct import from the West.⁴⁰

With Teitarō not yet having graduated his first school, Masu, for reasons that are unclear, shifted him to a private tutoring school (*juku* 塾) run by Kazuta Jun 数田順 (n.d.), a friend of the late Ryōjun. There, the focus was on the Confucian *Sishu wujing* 四書五經 (Jp. *Shisho gokyō*; “the four books and five classics”), which the students studied in *kanbun*. In retrospect, Teitarō felt that, combined with his early exposure to Christianity in the school textbooks he received, his formal education was “somewhat of a mishmash.”⁴¹

In 1882, at the age of eleven, Teitarō entered Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō 石川県専門学校 where he would later meet the boys that became his lifelong friends: Nishida Kitarō 西田幾多郎 (1870–1945), Fujioka Sakutarō 藤岡作太郎 (1870–1910), and Yamamoto Ryōkichi 山本良吉 (1871–1942).⁴² Nishida went on to become one of Japan’s most famous philosophers and, in the opinion of James Heisig, he was “squarely on par with the best western philosophical minds” of his time and “in the Japanese context head and shoulders higher.”⁴³ Fujioka became a professor of Japanese literature at Tokyo Imperial University, and Yamamoto became a professor at the Gakushūin 学習院 Peers School for the children of nobility—one of the country’s most prestigious and politically significant schools.

Teitarō reports his memory as being hazy but he believed that, of the twenty or thirty students that entered the school with him, Kimura Hisashi 木村栄 (1870–1943) was always at the top of the class. Kimura would later go on to become a recipient of the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical

⁴⁰ Akizuki 1992, pp. 20–21.

⁴¹ SDZ, vol. 26, p. 515.

⁴² Akizuki 1992, pp. 21–22.

⁴³ Heisig 2001, p. 9.

Society in 1936. Others from around Teitarō's time at the Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō that went on to become famous included constitutional scholar and professor at Gakushūin, Shimizu Tōru 清水澄 (1868–1947), diplomat Kurachi Tetsukichi 倉知鉄吉 (1871–1944), and Buddhistologist Matsumoto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎 (1869–1944).⁴⁴

Later in life, given that two of his best friends and one of his other schoolmates had spent time working at Gakushūin, it is no surprise that Teitarō also found work there soon after returning from his long stay in the United States from 1897 to 1909. He would be introduced to the school by Fujioka and by mathematics teacher Yoshida Kōkurō 吉田好九郎 (1870–1921).⁴⁵

Teitarō left school in 1888 due to financial reasons, but his close friends left shortly after in protest at the changes to the school system. The boys apparently did not agree with the moves to enforce ideals of hierarchy between students and loyalty to the emperor that culminated in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education.⁴⁶

Akizuki reports Teitarō as saying that a great number of famous writers influenced his thought during his early school career—among them Miyake Setsurei 三宅雪嶺 (1860–1945) and Tokutomi Sohō 徳富蘇峰 (1863–1957).⁴⁷ Miyake's father was also a physician to the Honda family, in a nearby town, when Ryōjun was active. Miyake was one of the founders of the Seikyōsha 政教社 society, which existed to “preserve the national essence” of Japan and produced the magazine *Nihonjin* 日本人.⁴⁸ Teitarō would later publish over a dozen articles in *Nihonjin* during the period 1878–1900.⁴⁹

Tokutomi Sohō, founder of the Minyūsha 民友社 society, remained a presence in Teitarō's life through shared connections with important people such as Makino.⁵⁰ Tokutomi is known for advocating the full westernization of Japan in his youth but switching to an ultranationalist stance around the period of the Mukden (or Manchurian) Incident and going on to actively

⁴⁴ SDZ, vol. 26, pp. 505–6.

⁴⁵ SDZ, vol. 26, p. 529.

⁴⁶ For more on the Rescript, see Duke 2014, pp. 351, 366–68.

⁴⁷ Akizuki 1992, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Pierson (1980) 2014, pp. 186–87.

⁴⁹ Kiritā 2005, pp. 7–10.

⁵⁰ For example, Teitarō and Nishida had “a vegetable dinner” with Tokutomi and Makino on August 11, 1931, and Teitarō comments in a letter to his wife Beatrice that Tokutomi is “a well-known newspaperman noted for his literary style and Japanese history of the recent periods [*sic*],” also noting how he met him several times at Engakuji temple when Tokutomi went to visit Teitarō's Zen teacher Shaku Sōen (in “Shokan ichi: 1888–1939” 書簡一: 一八八八—一九三九, SDZ, vol. 36, p. 569).

promote concepts such as *hakubatsu daha* 白閥打破 (“crush the whites”) and *kyokoku itchi* 挙国一致 (“national unity”).⁵¹

Education as Nation Building

In the first few years of Teitarō’s middle school education, the teachers took an easy-going approach. One even rode a horse to school in what was considered a gaudy display, and taught “American-style,” sitting on top of his desk. According to Akizuki’s quoting of Nishida, Teitarō, his teachers, and his group of school friends felt they were part of one big family.⁵² In 1887, however, the character of the school changed dramatically when it was converted into the Daiyon Kōtō Chūgakkō 第四高等中学校 middle and upper school.

Unable to enter the now defunct three-year upper portion of Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō, Teitarō transferred directly into the new school, having fortuitously graduated the lower four-year portion immediately prior to the change-over. However, what had been a warm, friendly, and progressive atmosphere soon became strangled by the strict, aggressive (*budanteki* 武斷的) rules of the new regime.⁵³ The administration of Teitarō’s school had been turned over to a prefectural assembly chairman (*kenkai gichō* 県会議長) from Kagoshima, Kashiwada Morifumi 柏田盛文 (1851–1910), who brought with him a band of policemen descended from Satsuma samurai to act as administrators and housemasters.⁵⁴

Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō had originally been established with the intention of preparing students for advancement to the naval academy. When the Daiyon Kōtō Chūgakkō was introduced, not only did it take over the grounds and buildings of Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō, it was also expected to assume responsibility for the provision of preparatory education for military staff. Due to the necessity of “protecting Japan’s seas,” there was a heavy emphasis on educating *shizoku* such as Teitarō in Western-style mathematics, science, and literature.⁵⁵

In an article on Ishikawa Prefecture’s education system during the period from late Edo to early Meiji, Emori Ichirō points out how the Daiyon Kōtō

⁵¹ Yonehara 2003, p. iii.

⁵² Akizuki 1992, p. 24. Akizuki paraphrases Nishida (1942) 1966, p. 245. On the Japanese Ministry of Education established in 1871, with its American utilitarian-based content and French-based model of administration, see Duke 2014, pp. 112–13, 220.

⁵³ Akizuki 1992, p. 27; Nishida (1942) 1966, p. 247.

⁵⁴ SDZ, vol. 26, p. 507.

⁵⁵ Emori 2004, p. 81.

Chūgakkō was established in Kanazawa largely due to the huge financial contributions made by Ishikawa Prefecture, in particular by the Maeda family of the Kaga domain (to which Teitarō's abovementioned friend Motoko Maeda belonged). Emori states that the first Japanese Minister of Education, Mori Arinori 森有礼 (1847–1889), established the Daiyon Kōtō Chūgakkō in order to cultivate future “national leaders that could stand up to international competition.” Mori hoped the students produced by the school would be equipped with the language and science skills demanded by the Imperial University, a school designed for the purpose of grooming elite human resources for pursuing Japan's nation-building goals.⁵⁶

While other regions were far behind this educational standard, Kanazawa already boasted large numbers of highly educated students ripe for places in the new elitist school system.⁵⁷ As Akizuki quotes Nishida as saying, among their forerunners in the early Meiji period, there were few military personnel (*bukan* 武官) and, especially, civil servants (*bunkan* 文官), who *had not* at some point attended the Kaga domain-sponsored Ishikawa-ken Senmon Gakkō. Indeed, according to Nishida, the student roll of the new school was made up almost entirely of the children of former Kanazawa *shizoku*.⁵⁸

Emori quotes Miyake Setsurei as saying that, in the final years of the Edo period, the Maeda family had come to be recognized for its respect for education and the arts. However, despite the clan's good standing under Tokugawa shogunate rule, it had not been able to contribute even one ranking official (*kenkan* 顯官) to the new Meiji government.⁵⁹ Its failure to secure a position of political power appears to be due to its having avoided involvement in the *sonnō jōi* 尊王攘夷 (“revere the emperor, expel the barbarians”) clashes in Kyoto. Tobe notes that, to mock Kaga, commentators in Kyoto came up with the derisive phrase, “The mosquito fled from the smoke of the capital,” playing on the word “Kaga,” which is homophonous with “*ka ga* 蚊が,” meaning “mosquito.”⁶⁰

Due to its geographical location, the threat from Western countries had already been perceived as high in Kaga for several decades, and a great deal of effort had been put into educating social elites and building up military hardware, thus giving the new Ishikawa Prefecture an advantage over other

⁵⁶ Emori 2004, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Emori 2004, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Emori 2004, p. 77. Emori quotes Nishida (1942) 1966, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Emori 2004, p. 78. Emori quotes Miyake (1950) 1988, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Tobe 2001, p. 337.

prefectures.⁶¹ During the early Meiji period, Ishikawa had the largest number of students at the Rikugun Shikan Gakkō 陸軍士官学校 (Imperial Japanese Army Academy) and the second most at the Kaigunhei Gakkō 海軍兵学校 (Imperial Japanese Naval Academy). Teitarō himself took the military entrance exams in 1891 but was rejected due to poor eyesight.⁶²

According to Emori, the alumni magazine of the Maeda family's educational support arm in Tokyo, the *Kyūchōkan dōsōkai zasshi* 久徴館同窓会雑誌, commented in its January edition of Meiji 26 (1893) that the people of the Three Provinces (Sanshū 三州; the areas that made up the greater Kaga area of Kaga, Etchū, and Noto) had lost the competition in the Restoration and had fallen behind the times. Despite this, the magazine went on to boast, the Three Provinces likely held the future keys to the military and were renowned nationally for their student numbers at the Imperial University, second only to the greater Tokyo area.⁶³

One of the reasons for the success of Ishikawa Prefecture in the later Meiji period was its sponsoring of students at schools and military training centers via the Kaetsunō Ikueisha 加越能育英社, a society for cultivating educational excellence that was founded in 1879. Officially under the jurisdiction of the central government in Tokyo, Kaetsunō Ikueisha was intended to create “instruments” (*yōki* 用器) and “usable resources” (*yūyō no zai* 有用の材) for the state. That is to say, it was designed with the intention of “cooperating in the nation's military buildup.”⁶⁴ Despite its national status, Kaetsunō Ikueisha was in practice overseen and heavily funded by the Maeda family to the extent that it might rightly be considered an arm of the former Kaga domain itself, and this was a part of the family's efforts to support the transition of the Kaga gentry into the Meiji era.⁶⁵

According to the Maeda family, the young descendants of Ishikawa *shizoku* had just the right skills to fulfill Japan's nation-building goals due to their “samurai-like thinking and sense of responsibility.”⁶⁶ Presumably, as Teitarō was accepted in 1891 as a boarder at the Maeda family's Kyūchōkan 久徴館 dormitory in Tokyo, he was thought of as precisely one such young man. In this way, the status of the Suzuki family inside the Kaga domain system helped ensure favorable treatment for one of their children.

⁶¹ Rhee 1970, pp. 148–49.

⁶² Akizuki 1992, p. 35.

⁶³ Emori 2004, p. 79.

⁶⁴ Emori 2004, pp. 80–81.

⁶⁵ Emori 2004, p. 82.

⁶⁶ Emori 2004, p. 81.

Conclusion

This essay has presented and analyzed a range of elements in Teitarō's early youth that, collectively, are highly likely to have contributed to his later forming of relationships with social elites, and thus, to his involvement in the creation of romantic ethnocentric discourses that were useful in the World War II-era promotion of Japanese soft power. While there were certainly many other important factors at play in Teitarō's adult life that helped shape his narratives, this essay has sought to lay the groundwork for further research that positions his adult thought more thoroughly in the context of the time in which he lived. The three important interrelated influences in Teitarō's youth were his family's position in Tokugawa period society; the historical meaning of Kanazawa's geographical location, its leading figures, and its institutions; and the general state of urgency in late nineteenth-century Japan in the face of Western imperialist aggression.

First, Teitarō's privileged birth into a *bushi* family meant that his father was highly educated, which in turn opened up educational opportunities for his sons. At home, the intellectual disposition of Ryōjun was an explicit influence on Teitarō's choice to become a scholar—something that would have been less likely had Teitarō been born a commoner. Outside the home, Teitarō benefitted educationally through Ryōjun's circle of acquaintances and through clan and prefectural support for social elites.

Second, Teitarō's birthplace played an important role in his development. Ishikawa's prosperity and comparative isolation provided a fertile field for the growth of a sophisticated culture. This meant that the area became a hub for the study of Western-style mathematics, science, and literature in the late Tokugawa period, giving it—and, in particular its youths of high birth—a head start in these areas when entering the Meiji period. This helps to explain why so many important twentieth-century intellectuals hailed from Ishikawa.

Lastly, along with a sense of optimism at new possibilities, another important aspect of the historical context in early Meiji was the urgent threat posed by Western imperialism. This helped to cultivate and reinforce the idea of an aggressive outside "other"—a fact also highlighted in the changes to the educational structure in the Meiji period. This sense of urgency spurred on the leading figures of Ishikawa Prefecture to mold "useful tools" for the state from its elite, well-trained corps of descendants of Kaga *shizoku*, of whom Daisetsu Teitarō Suzuki was one.

ABBREVIATION

- SDZ *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū* 鈴木大拙全集. 40 vols. Ed. Furuta Shōkin 古田紹欽, Hisamatsu Shin'ichi 久松真一, and Yamaguchi Susumu 山口益. New, enlarged ed. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1999–2003.

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