



## From The Editor's Desk-Post-Pandemic Edition

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The eighteen months of 2020/2021 has been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, affecting individual lives, organizations and global business interests in ways that we who lived through it can only begin to contemplate. It may be premature to call this issue “post-pandemic,” but at *Shashi*, we like to be optimistic. The fallout of extended shutdowns and Zoom meetings has already been the subject of many conferences and papers, and surely will be the subject of many more, but this issue is not one of them. Volume 6 of *Shashi* nevertheless reflects the disquiet and anxiety of the times with articles about business in Japan in the context of upheaval.

Historians love upheaval, not just because it is easier to discuss and report change than stability, but because crises best reveal historical phenomena. After all, history is not just the documentation of the names, dates and events of the past, but the interpretation of them. Implicit in this process is a comparison with the present in order to better understand the world that we live in. Change can be gradual, but disruption accelerates the process. It can cause great leaps forward or regression, depending on the responses of the actors.

Inter-Asian trade by merchants of Western origin was a centuries-old process but the negotiation of commercial treaties, first by Townsend Harris (1804-1878) of the United States in 1858 (taking effect in 1859), and in quick succession by the other so-called Five Powers (the United Kingdom, France, Russia and the Netherlands) robbed Japan of the control of foreign commerce and brought disruption to existing production and trade routes. In this first of two parts, Steven Ivings examines one of the lesser Japanese treaty ports, Hakodate. Although it had some significance as a focus for trade with the Ainu, it was included in negotiations because Harris saw it as a vital port for American whalers to obtain fresh supplies. Ivings presents the history of John Henry Duus, an Anglo-Danish merchant located in Hakodate to examine country trade, especially of kombu. With the exception of specie and bullion, the country trade has been little examined in post-Perry Japanese history. The Dutch East India Company, its successors and Chinese traders dealt in consumable exports but it would be interesting to know if the difference in scale had a noticeable impact.

Steven Ericson moves the conversation ahead a century to a time of arguably one of the greatest periods of upheaval in Japanese history - the American Occupation (1945-1952). The devastation by bombing, massive loss of life, military and civilian returnees and other effects of a losing war effort brought about many significant changes to Japanese society. As part of their reconstruction efforts, Americans sought to break up the old structures of power and wealth and establish institutions and practices that they believed were better. It was of course not merely altruism, but an effort to prevent any future rise of militarism. Ericson examines the attempt initiated by GHQ to redistribute

the wealth of the powerful pre-war zaibatsu that was part of this effort. Not only does this provide a window into the Occupation as a whole, but into the extent that change can be imposed, showing upheaval and change are not synonymous.

Although three of the contributors to this issue are named Steven, we strenuously deny any favoritism to those with this moniker. We encourage anyone, regardless of how they call themselves, to submit articles, research notes or essays relating to business or company history in Japan in English or Japanese to this journal.

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