

THE EMPEROR'S ADVISER

Saionji Kinmochi and pre-war Japanese politics

Volume 66

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GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

Few countries in the world today can be unaware of the increasing international impact of Japan. From the ashes of defeat in 1945, Japan has risen to become one of the most dynamic and successful economic powers in the world today. The broad outlines of how this has been achieved are reasonably well known. There are, however, many little-documented aspects of contemporary Japan, and many thinly understood facets to the Japanese experience of modern development. Japan is neither unique (as sometimes asserted), nor merely a copy of the outside world, but rather a fascinating source of human experience which deserves to be tapped and disseminated far more widely than it now is.

The Nissan Institute of Japanese studies at the University of Oxford, in conjunction with Messrs Croom Helm, has decided to launch a series of books designed to make the Japanese experience more accessible. Some of the books will be relatively specialised, scholarly monographs. Others will be of a more general kind, with the aim of introducing the reader to some broader aspect of Japan.

We are very happy to publish as the second in the series Lesley Connors' work on the prewar statesman Saionji, the last surviving Genro or elder statesman, who played a key role in advising the Emperor and appointing prime ministers until his death in 1940 on the eve of the Pacific War. Dr. Connors presents a fresh interpretation of Saionji's role and achievements, assessing these in a more favourable light than some previous historians. In writing the biography of Saionji, she also relates what happened at the centre of Japanese government over a period of great drama and far-reaching change.

J.A.A. Stockwin,
Director, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies,
University of Oxford.
January 1986

For My Father

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the scholars, friends and family members who gave their help and encouragement during the preparation of this book and the doctoral thesis from which it grew. Many institutions and their staff gave unstintingly of their help. I would particularly like to thank the staff of Hosei University, Tokyo University and the National Diet Library in Japan, and of the Centre for Japanese Studies at the University of Sheffield and St. Antony's College, Oxford. Mr. Saionji Kinkazu, Mr. Kido Takasumi and Mr. Harada Kei shared their memories of the men with whom they grew up. Prof. Akio Yasuoka of Hosei University spent long hours teaching me to read Saionji's attractive but illegible writing whilst Prof. Yamamoto Shiro inspired me with the belief that such struggles were worthwhile. Prof. Banno Junji, Dr. Gordon Berger, Dr. Thomas Burkman, Prof. Alvin Coox, Dr. Gordon Daniels, Dr. Ian Gow, Prof. Hata Ikuhiko, Mr. Graham Healey, Dr. Janet Hunter, the late Prof. Richard Storry and Prof. David Anson Titus generously read and criticised sections of the manuscript. Prof. Arthur Stockwin was the impetus behind the present work and contributed greatly to its completion. I would finally like to thank my mother who gave me the time to write, my husband whose humour sustained me and Jessica, Eleanor, Hannah and Jojo who distracted me.

INTRODUCTION

It is rare to find a man of such significance in the political development of a country so neglected by its historians as Saionji Kinmochi. There are, even in the National Diet Library in Tokyo, no collected papers of the man whose political activities began before the opening of Japan to the West and ended only months before her momentous attack on Pearl Harbor. Much of this neglect has been the result of the nature of his involvement in politics. As adviser to three Emperors, his influence, though at the highest levels, was un-publicised and largely unchronicled. Some of the blame however must fall on the urbane public image cultivated by Saionji himself and passed into history by his protegee Hara Kei, whose acid descriptions of Saionji's ineffectuality have distorted descriptions of Japan's last Genro.

This biography is an attempt to substitute for the bland and passive public persona attributed to Saionji a picture of a determined political leader with clearly defined objectives, a coherent political philosophy and the political sense to know when both needed to be abandoned. Saionji's Genro years, from 1913 to his death in November 1940, were a period of rapid political development for Japan both domestically and in terms of international standing and outlook. Saionji's biography during these years shows the massive extent of his own contribution to Japanese politics, but also illustrates with great clarity both the rise of the liberals and the total erosion of their power in the period leading to the Pacific War.

From it emerge answers to a number of questions about modern Japanese politics and Saionji's role in it:

1. Saionji's political philosophy; its consistency and importance in his practical politics.
2. Saionji's function in Japanese politics; why he was sought after politically at the different stages of his career.
3. The changing role of the court and nobility in modern Japanese politics.

4. How, when and why fluctuations occurred in the balance of elite power.

5. The changing role of the Genro, the small group of imperial advisers, and its importance for constitutional government.

Some answers confirm the general picture of Saionji and the Saionji group which can be found in general histories of the period. Some indicate that, in the conventional view, the emphasis has been misplaced or placed with too heavy or too light a hand. In a number of important areas it is necessary to revise the traditional picture.

There is, surprisingly, a lack of specific information on Saionji's involvement in certain issues which with hindsight appear important. The Washington Conference of 1921 is one such case. Equally surprising were the other issues which forced themselves into the biography because of the interest they aroused at the time. Thus, at the time of the Washington Conference, the chief preoccupations of the Emperor's advisers Saionji, Yamagata Aritomo and Matsukata Masayoshi, as they emerge from the Hara Diaries and all other sources available, were the issues of the Crown Prince's betrothal, his trip abroad and the Regency.

The most fruitful sources of information on Saionji vary with the period. The Hara Diaries, Kobayashi Yugo's history of the *Seiyukai*, biographies of major contemporary politicians such as Ito Hirobumi, Yamagata Aritomo, Inoue Kaoru and Katsura Taro, and a large number of letters written by Saionji himself make up the core of the 'primary' materials on Saionji during the early 1900s. For Saionji's Genro period, the same role is played by the diaries of the next generation of political leaders, Matsumoto Gokichi, Kido Koichi, Honjo Shigeru and Ugaki Kazushige and by the Harada memoirs and biographies of Tanaka Giichi, Saito Makoto, Chinda Sutemi and Konoe Fumimaro and reminiscences of Saito, Okada Keisuke and Wakatsuki Reijiro.

Given the factionalised, privatised nature of the decision-making process in Japanese politics, those who were privy to Saionji's thoughts were, almost without exception, sympathetic to his views and in order to examine Saionji's participation in the political process, his assessment of it, his attempts to change it and the effects it had on him and his group, these sources have been used centrally. Most of the detailed first-hand records of his involvement in politics, at least in the Genro period, were written by members of the Saionji group. The Hara diaries provide a flavour to the description of Saionji's pre-and early Genro career which

is lacking in the later chapters. Even Hara, however, was for most of the time, at least ostensibly, on the ‘same side’.

Perhaps it would be appropriate here to acknowledge a particular debt to the Harada memoirs and to defend the use which has been made of them. The memoirs, written by Saionji’s secretary as a record of the political activities of the Saionji group, have been criticised as gossipy, ambiguous and inaccurate. Some of this criticism is justified; events are dramatised and dates and times sometimes do not correspond with other reports of the same incident. Harada also assumes knowledge which the modern reader may not possess. However, the use to which the memoirs have been put here makes much of the criticism irrelevant. The memoirs were written by Harada and read, corrected and annotated by Saionji himself before finally being redrafted. As a record of what Saionji was told by his chief political liaison man and of Saionji’s reactions to this information it is therefore both sound and useful.

Finally, there is much anecdotal material about Saionji’s private life, the breadth of his interests, his non-political friendships, habits and lifestyle. Many biographies agree in their descriptions and judgements. Some are probably true, others are less believable. There are vivid descriptions of Saionji’s childhood. Brought up by a housekeeper from the age of nine, after the death of his adoptive parents, he was an active and involved young man who, despite Bakufu injunctions against the practice of martial arts, learnt riding and swordsmanship. He had a reputation as a brilliant, if arrogant, youth who read widely and enjoyed political debate. The overall picture of Saionji in these accounts is of a highly cultivated, educated man with a fondness for both Western culture and Chinese classics.

He was a man of habit but was not given to placing great store by precedent. He provoked love and admiration but also exasperation and scorn. Ito Hirobumi’s description of Saionji, as Japan’s Lord Rosebery, an enlightened liberal, with a loathing for politics, was apt enough to stick. He was renowned for his wit and sarcasm, for being a good listener and for his unruffled calm. There are details of his dress, aggressively Western in his youth, always elegant and with a lingering foreignness even in his old age, his taste in food, very particular—he found it difficult to keep his cooks—and the architecture of his houses, designed by himself and financed by his younger brother. There are reports of the women in his life, the mistress he shared with his political rival, Katsura, and the *ex-gisha* who accompanied him to Versailles, and of his love for literature and support of literary groups. There is reference to, but very little detail on, Saionji’s relationship with his two natural brothers, the Grand

Chamberlain, Tokudaiji Sanenori, and adopted heir to the Sumitomo family, Sumitomo Kichizaemon. Saionji liked Bonsai and hated playing the biwa—a family instrument. He disliked the Nanga school of painting of the early 19th century and generally preferred Chinese to Japanese art, his avowed ideal being understated elegance. He liked emotional Edo music more than songs accompanied on the shamisen. Perhaps more than anything else, he enjoyed reading, often Chinese classics and, in his later years, as his eyesight deteriorated to the extent that he found it difficult to read *Kanji*, mostly Western books, and he himself composed *haiku* and practised calligraphy.

There is much which could be said about this side of Saionji's life but, interesting as it is, it has little bearing on his role as a politician. Saionji himself acknowledged that descriptions of his private life would be acceptable, but asked to be spared a political biography. For a man in Saionji's position this was a pious request and it is Saionji as a public figure and his political role with which this biography is concerned.

CHAPTER ONE

SAIONJI'S EMERGENCE AS GENRO THE SAIONJI-KATSURA COMPROMISE

A Biographical Sketch: The Early Years

Saionji Kinmochi was born in Kyoto on October 23rd, 1849. He was born Tokudaiji Yoshimaro, the second son of Tokudaiji Kinzumi and younger brother of Tokudaiji Sanenori who was later to become Grand Chamberlain. The Tokudaiji family was one of nine noble families (*kuge*) who provided middle ranking advisors to the Court. In 1853, as was common practice among Japan's elites where a family lacked an heir, Yoshimaro was adopted into the family of Saionji Morosue. Both the Tokudaiji and Saionji families were branch lines of the Fujiwaras who had intermarried extensively with the Imperial family and had effectively ruled Japan for three hundred years during the *Heian* period (794–1185).

Saionji's familiarity with the Court and his exposure to politics began during his childhood. At the age of four he was appointed Chamberlain and elevated to the rank of senior official (*Kampaku Shogun*), at the age of thirteen. It was as a child and then as a young man that his connections with the *kuge* leaders of the early Meiji period were established and his relationship with the boy who in 1866 was to become the Meiji Emperor, was cemented. Since Saionji was two years older than the young heir to the throne, they did not attend school together, but played together as children and formed a sufficiently close relationship for the Meiji Emperor to send enquiries after Saionji's health when he was ill in Europe.

From the age of eleven to the age of eighteen, Saionji was educated at the Gakushujo. This school for the sons of the Court nobles (*kuge*), now famous as the Gakushuin, became a notable centre of the anti-*Bakufu*, 'Revere the Emperor, expel the barbarians', *sonnojoji* movement. Records

show that in 1867 Saionji was active in pressing the Court to become involved in the armed struggles between the Tokugawa Shogunate and Satsuma and Choshu clan forces and to treat the Tokugawa as rebel forces. It was in this same year that Saionji conceived an unseasonable admiration for the West after reading Fukuzawa Yukichi's *Seiyo Jijo*, an admiration which grew into an ambition to study abroad.¹

In the spring of 1868, at the age of nineteen, Saionji was appointed to the developing government structure as one of the hundred-odd new councillors (*sanyo*), deputies in the new administrative departments. Fighting continued in the North, however, and for a time he was seconded to military service in charge of *Satcho* troops and acting as liaison between Satsuma and Choshu forces attempting to pacify the Hokuriku region, before being recalled to local government service as Governor of Echigo. These appointments extended and developed his contacts with a wide variety of people inside and outside the government. These included Iwakura Tomomi, with Sanjo Sanetomi the most influential of the Court nobles in the new regime, and, like Sanjo, a man familiar with Saionji from weekly meetings at the Court. They embraced also Omura Masujiro, Vice-Minister of Military Affairs and proponent of such radical reforms as the abolition of the fiefs and the introduction of universal military conscription, who advised Saionji against a career in the military, and Kido Koin, the chief voice of the Choshu clan in central politics, who subsequently sponsored Saionji with other members of the Government.

Before his departure for Echigo, Saionji shocked the public and attracted much criticism by being the first *kuge* to appear at Court in Western dress and with cropped hair. It was not until several years later that Western dress became a reasonably common sight and the traditional hairstyle was abolished. On his return from the North, Saionji took lodgings in a geisha district of Tokyo where he indulged a taste for ballads and popular songs and translations of Western books. For a six month period in 1869, Saionji studied French at the newly opened predecessor of Tokyo University, the Kaiseijo. That same summer he was put under a week's house arrest for travelling without government permission to Kyoto and for his involvement there in the establishment of the Ritsumeikan School, a literary discussion group for the education of loyalists.²

With the help of Kido Koin and Omura Masujiro, Saionji received government permission and an unusually generous scholarship to study law in France. He left Japan in December 1870.³ For ten years, from 1871 to 1880, Saionji, with great enthusiasm, lived and studied in France, acquiring fluent French, the sing-song tones of a Marseilles accent and an

enduring passion for Vichy water From the autumn of 1872 he attended classes with the radical legal theorist Emile Acolas. He also enrolled in classes at the Sorbonne from where he graduated with a degree in law. Through his connection with Acolas, Saionji became acquainted with other French friends, many of whom, such as Clemenceau and Floquet, came to hold positions of political prominence. He was intimate too with literary figures such as the Goncourt brothers, the Gautiers and Liszt. It was Edmond Goncourt who wrote of Saionji at this time that he had the face of a Chinese, with upturned eyes and thick lips that laughed like a child and hair parted in the middle like a stylish Parisian, When he talked in his sleep he spoke both French and Japanese. When he discussed the law and artificial, as opposed to natural, subjects, he formulated his thoughts in French, but when the topic was concerned with natural objects or emotions his thoughts came naturally in Japanese.⁴ His Japanese friends from this period included men like Nakae Chomin and Matsuda Masahisa, who became active in radical or party politics after their return to Japan.

After ten years of happy exposure to French culture and liberal philosophy, Saionji returned to Japan. It was October 1880 and he was thirty-two. The following spring, 1881, Saionji became editor of the *Toyo Jiyu Shinbun*, a newspaper set up as an organ of the burgeoning popular rights movement. He resigned this position the same year in a somewhat delayed response to orders from the Emperor. Saionji's separation from the cause championed by Okuma Shigenobu, the young Hizen aspirant to the inner circle of Meiji oligarchs, and by Itagaki Taisuke, one of the Tosa liberals, put him firmly in the Government camp when the split came later that year. This was emphasised by his appointment in November that year as a Vice-Councillor in the Sangiin, a body set up to continue the drafting of the constitution begun by Iwakura and Ito Hirobumi that summer. Ito, born the son of a Choshu peasant and adopted into the family of a low ranking samurai where he had worked as a servant was to become Japan's first prime minister. By 1881 Ito had won the support of Iwakura and the Emperor and had established himself as one of the major forces for modernisation. In March 1882, Saionji set off with Ito on an eighteen-month journey around the European capitals to observe the constitutions in operation in other countries. On these long train rides through Europe they discovered a basic sympathy of opinion and, to Iwakura's satisfaction, Saionji's most important political relationship was cemented. Saionji's relationship with the Satsuma leader Matsukata Masayoshi, who also rose to prominence as Finance Minister in 1881,

and who was to outlive all the other Genro with the exception of Saionji himself, was less satisfactory.

In July 1884, with the promulgation of the laws rationalising rank, many of the new Meiji leaders were elevated to the peerage. Saionji was awarded the rank of Marquis, below Iwakura who had died the previous year, but above Ito and Yamagata Aritomo who were made Counts. Yamagata, who by the turn of the century was the most famous of the Meiji oligarchs and known as the 'father of the army', had begun the new era as a soldier in the Choshu forces under the command of Saionji. By 1884 however, despite his lower rank, Yamagata, like Ito, held incomparably greater sway in the new regime than Saionji who, almost ten years their junior, had spent the politically most important years of the Meiji Restoration away from Japan.

Saionji's years abroad however qualified him for a job in Japan's now burgeoning Foreign Office. His diplomatic career began in Austria in 1885 and for six years kept him away from Japan in Germany and in Belgium, broadening both his knowledge of Europe and his circle of intimates. His closeness with Mutsu Munemitsu, a career diplomat who subsequently served in both the Yamagata and Ito Cabinets began abroad. In 1891, Saionji returned to Tokyo as Director of the Bureau of Decorations, and for three years lived uneventfully in Omori in a house provided for him by his younger brother, Sumitomo, developing the personal connections among the domestic political elites which his years in Europe had weakened.

His first cabinet appointment, as Minister of Education in the Second Ito Cabinet from September 1894 to September 1896, coincided with a surge in enthusiastic nationalism. These feelings had been intensified by the diplomatic struggles to revise Japan's 'unequal' treaties with the West and by Japan's success in the Sino-Japanese war, and brought to fresh heights by the humiliating necessity to bow to the demands of Russia, France and Germany to cede the Liaotung Peninsula won in the war. An integral part of this new Japanism, the Imperial Rescript on Education promulgated in 1890 under the Yamagata Cabinet, had condemned the pursuit of Western knowledge and advocated 'the inculcation of a specific ideological code'. Ito's appointment of Saionji as Education Minister was significant in the ongoing struggle over constitutional interpretation. On the one side were ranged Yamagata Aritomo and the Kumamoto educationalist and economic historian, Motoda Eifu, committed to personal Imperial rule and the direct involvement of the Court in politics,

and on the other Ito and Saionji with their belief in limited constitutional monarchy and the separation of Court and politics.

Seen against this backdrop, Saionji's public arguments in favour of the liberalisation of education, are particularly notable. Saionji was in several noteworthy ways heir to Ito's first Education Minister, Mori Arinori. Both strongly opposed the teaching of classical texts and religion in schools as unproductive, and advocated replacing these classes with the teaching of English.⁵ Both saw in education Japan's path to independence and international standing. Saionji told a press conference in 1895:

If we want to stand effectively as one of the great powers and to defend our honour, we must seek first of all to cultivate and nourish firm roots which can produce fine fruit. How can we implant these roots? The way to do it is to promote and expand education, and to make progressive application of the power of science.⁶

Saionji's vision of an internationally oriented Japan took on a more concrete form towards the end of his first period as Education Minister. At this time, he collaborated with Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu and a young man introduced to him by Mutsu, Takekoshi Yosaburo, who was to become one of his earliest and most admiring biographers, to produce a magazine which he named *Sekai no Nihon (The Japan of the World)*.⁷ When Mutsu fell ill in the spring of 1895, Saionji was appointed acting Foreign Minister, and began what was to become a lifelong preoccupation with Japan's relations with the Western powers. As Foreign Minister for the last fifteen months of the Ito Cabinet, Saionji was involved in the negotiations surrounding the return of the Liaotung Peninsula and China's payment of reparations, and in the settlement of the conflict between pro-Japanese and pro-Russian factions in Seoul which came to a head in the involvement of Japanese nationals in the assassination of the Korean Queen Min. Saionji had written to Inoue in Seoul in February, only weeks before the coup d'état, voicing deep anxiety about the future of Japan:

There is great insistence on 'Japanism' and 'an aggressive fighting spirit', but behind these are lies and greed. There will be no end to the misery which arose without warning from victory in the war, unless we develop adequate countermeasures.⁸

This anxiety was to re-emerge greatly strengthened forty years later.

In 1897 following the resignation of the Second Ito Cabinet, Saionji travelled to France. In a number of letters to Ito throughout the previous

year, Saionji had complained of illness and during his trip abroad, he suffered from acute appendicitis. It was a recurrence of this illness which brought to a premature end his next brief tenure as Education Minister in the Third Ito Cabinet. His legacy, an attempt to liberalise education policy through a second Imperial Rescript on Education, failed when the Cabinet fell. Saionji remained close to Ito during the following years and took an active role in the planning of Ito's new political party, the *Seiyukai*, and in negotiations with leaders of the existing political party, the *Kenseito*. In September 1900 he wrote to a friend:

You will have read about the establishment of the *Seiyukai* in the newspapers. There are many people who slander us and there are many erroneous ideas about.... I would like to tell you in detail of my aspirations for the *Seiyukai*...but, to put it very briefly, they are (that it should become) 'the salvation of the times'.⁹

When the Fourth Ito Cabinet was established just one month later, in October 1900, Saionji was not given a cabinet post, but was appointed President of the Privy Council, thereby ensuring Ito's control of the Privy Council, whilst at the same time allowing Saionji, as Council President, to attend cabinet meetings. It was in his capacity as President of the Privy Council that Saionji was appointed temporary Prime Minister from October to December during Ito's illness, and again when the Cabinet fell because of budget problems in May 1901. It was popularly believed that Saionji would be confirmed in this appointment. The diaries of Hara Kei, ambitious, politically machiavellian and soon to become one of the significant influences in Saionji's political career, suggest that Saionji was offered the post but turned it down in the belief that there would be unacceptable restrictions on his freedom to organise his cabinet. However, an Imperial message relayed to Saionji by the Grand Chamberlain, his elder brother Tokudaiji, suggests that the post had always been intended to be purely transitional:

Saionji too is of a weak constitution and ought not to work for long periods. The Genro should, with some urgency, make strenuous efforts to find a solution.¹⁰

When Katsura Taro, Yamagata's protege and like his patron a Choshu military figure, became Prime Minister in June 1901, Saionji remained in his post as President of the Privy Council, retaining the right to attend

cabinet meetings and continuing to act as a conduit between Ito, Hara and other party leaders.¹¹

Saionji's appointment to the Presidency of the Seiyukai and the Origins of the Saionji-Katsura Compromise 1903–1906¹²

The political relationship between Saionji and Katsura began in June 1903 with Saionji's assumption of the leadership of the *Seiyukai* during the third year of the First Katsura Cabinet. It stumbled along through various shifts in the balance of power until the fall of the Second Saionji Cabinet in December 1912 and the subsequent major upheaval in Japanese politics, the Taisho Crisis. During these ten years of relative political stability, known as the '*Keien*' period of Japanese politics from a combination of the Chinese readings of the names of Katsura and Saionji, Saionji's relationships with the political elites matured and crystallised, and his influence both in and out of office developed accordingly until in 1913 he emerged as the last appointed member of the select group of imperial advisers, the Genro.

At the start of this period in 1903, Saionji was fifty-four, and brought to the office of party president a variety of experience ranging from diplomatic postings in Europe, to ministerial office in the Ito cabinets and presidency of the Privy Council. He also brought to the job an extensive and impressive range of personal contacts. Saionji's appointment as President of the *Seiyukai*, and the withdrawal of Ito Hirobumi to the Privy Council, were precipitated by a combination of pressures. There was growing dissatisfaction within the *Seiyukai* with Ito's handling of the party's relations with the Government which had led to a number of withdrawals of *Seiyukai* Diet members. Though this in itself was not a serious threat to Ito's position as President of the party, the general mood of political instability caused by the commotion in the *Seiyukai* was brought to new heights by the resignation of the Prime Minister, Katsura Taro.

The manner of Saionji's selection was as autocratic as were Ito's usual dealings with the *Seiyukai*. Party leaders Hara Kei and Matsuda Masahisa were instructed by Ito that he wished to be succeeded by Saionji, and the process was effected within a few days. Saionji remarked of his appointment: 'Ito told me to take it and it was more or less a case of my giving it a try to see if I could be of any use.'¹³ Saionji was known personally to only a handful of leaders in the *Seiyukai* at the time of his

appointment. His contacts with Hara Kei were regular if not particularly close and the party executive, through Hara, had for some time used Saionji to facilitate negotiations with Ito.¹⁴ Saionji's role within the *Seiyukai* before he became president of the party was thus not related to party management as such, but was that of a conduit between the party leadership and Ito. It was essentially an expanded version of this role which he continued to play after 1903.

Although Ito's resignation was followed by a second wave of withdrawals and the *Seiyukai* lost its majority strength in the Diet when its numbers were reduced by almost a third, the party ultimately benefited from the change in leadership. As an aristocrat and a non-clan politician, Saionji brought prestige to the *Seiyukai*. He also brought with him strongly held liberal beliefs and broad political experience. His relationship with *Seiyukai* was different from Ito's, and the active role which the party was able to play under Saionji gave it an internal cohesion which had been impossible under Ito's autocratic management of the party's relations with the other elites. Saionji was generally a popular public figure and his appointment was for the most part treated favourably in the press where he was described as having Ito's fullest confidence and as having always been regarded as his rightful successor. He was characterised 'as a man of brilliant parts' whose weak point was his delicate health.¹⁵ Saionji's ill health has more often than not been interpreted as diplomatic illness. His correspondence with Katsura undermines this theory. Saionji's illnesses, whether physical or psychological in origin, were frequent and debilitating and explain at least in part his reputation as lazy and lethargic.¹⁶ In this connection, it has been remarked that shortly after his appointment, Saionji moved permanently from Tokyo to his summer house in the coastal resort of Oiso, and his letters to Katsura indicate that his visits to Tokyo after 1906 were indeed limited. However, Oiso at this time was a noted political centre where the homes of Ito Hirobumi and Yamagata Aritomo were to be found, and it is reasonable to suppose that Saionji's chief contributions to the party were made more in the villas of Oiso than in the conference halls of the *Seiyukai's* Tokyo headquarters.

Saionji, like Ito, stood apart from the affairs of party organisation, a job which fell increasingly to Matsuda and the eager hands of Hara. His value to the *Seiyukai* lay elsewhere, in his relationships with Ito and the Genro and in his connections with the Court. The role of the nobility in Japanese politics was historically of great importance, an importance which was reaffirmed when the *kuge* councils of the early Meiji period brought the Court into direct participation in politics. As the new political order was

developed in the years up to 1889, both the reality and the trappings of power passed to the clan (*han*) bureaucrats. Nevertheless, the decision to make the Imperial institution the focal point of the new state ensured that the old aristocracy retained at least some of its former significance. Saionji, who had long-standing family and personal connections with the Court as well as an intimate relationship with the new beneficiaries of power in the Meiji state, was in an unparalleled position to benefit the cause of party politics.

The emergence of Saionji as Genro in 1913 was a direct result of the effectiveness of the working relationship between Saionji and Katsura from 1903 to 1912, which permitted the controlled transition and growth of Japanese politics towards institutional diversity. Saionji's role in achieving this transition was central. The compromise relationship allowed the *Seiyukai* to develop its political role and expand its influence whilst ensuring that certain areas of decision making remained under the control of the Government and the Genro. At the time of Saionji's appointment to the presidency of the *Seiyukai*, anti-party feeling amongst government leaders was growing, the fortunes of both the *Seiyukai* and the *Kenseihonto* (the party resulting from the reorganisation of the *Kenseito* and the *Rikken Kaishinto* following the formation of Ito's party) were at a low ebb and there was considerable dissatisfaction amongst rank and file party members with the agreements reached between party leaders and the Government. One of the main areas of conflict was the Government's conduct of foreign policy and Saionji was instrumental in preventing party interference in diplomacy.

Negotiations for a Russo Japanese agreement recognising Japan's special interest in Korea, and Russia's special position in Manchuria, had begun at the end of July 1903. By October, when talks were still inconclusive, general opinion had become militant and a large number of societies had been formed, the most effective and well known of these organisations being the so-called *Tairodoshikai* (Anti-Russian Association). Concerned at the impact which the *Tairodoshikai* was making on *Seiyukai* party membership, the Standing Committee sought to mitigate the effect by obtaining a directive from Saionji, the text of which was distributed to party members. The notes read:

The cultivation of national strength, that is the promotion of culture within Japan and the expansion of national interest and wealth in external relations, have been national policy since the Meiji Restoration.... The *Seiyukai* has no intention of doing anything other than support the

national policy laid down in the Meiji era, thereby promoting national strength and increasing national prestige. This has already been set out clearly in the general manifesto and there should be no misconceptions amongst members at this late stage. Consequently, despite the controversy over this diplomatic problem, there is no necessity for us to dwell on this afresh in the *Seiyukai*. There are those who argue in simplistic terms that if there is not peace there is war and if we are not rigid, then we are weak, but diplomacy does not consist simply of war or peace, rigidity or weakness. We must therefore allow the government as much freedom of action as possible if it is to achieve success in foreign relations in accordance with the national policy already laid down. Even so, if the Government goes against the desires of this party, that is to say against the desires of the people, then they will have misunderstood Meiji national policy, and our responsibility will be clear.¹⁷

Despite this directive, *Seiyukai* rank and file opposition to the leadership policy of co-operation with the Government on this issue continued to strengthen so that three weeks later, at the beginning of November 1903, Saionji made a speech which further clarified his views on party involvement in foreign policy and on Japan's role in international politics:

The Meiji Constitution was intended to eliminate the stratum between the Emperor and the People to enable all men to go where they would and to do the things for which they were most suited. Political parties are a means of achieving this.... It is obvious from history that countries whose politics develop in accordance with these principles prosper whilst those which do not, decay. Parties were born of the need to abolish hierarchical divisions in society and to put people in a direct relationship with one ruler ... There are cliques which are afraid of the very word 'party' ... similarly, the appearance of the word 'imperialism' has been seen as heralding the imminent decline of parliamentary politics... this shows a lack of knowledge and expertise which is laughable, but which would be deplorable if it were allowed adversely to affect national development. This problem is not the sole preserve of Japan. All the civilised nations have followed the same difficult path, whilst countries which have not yet undergone this process suffer from considerable disorder. I am sure that Japan as a nation possesses characteristics to enable her to pass successfully through this period to which we have only recently come. The general world trend is one of continuing progress and there is no reason why Japan should be an exception.

What should the attitude of the *Seiyukai* be during this transitional period? In a word, we must take the popular will, that is good, enlightened popular will, and make it our own. What I am saying is commonplace in the West but completely new to Japan and China.... Unless we follow the popular will we will not progress.... If we promote industry necessary to the country and advance in a way which is straightforward and honest, people will naturally be won over to the Party. If there is conflict and dispute over strategy, we might make temporary gains, but we shall soon be defeated. Party men who would lead the nation must look overseas and must resolve to make Japan the best in the world.

Several friends have written from Europe that party discretion and military discipline in the face of the current controversy over diplomacy, are seen as tremendous advances and have enhanced Japan's reputation there. Be that as it may, to reach the ranks of the advanced nations, the people too must be composed and discreet. We will not win the respect and sympathy of other nations if we are hot headed and discourteous—a source of weakness even in times of peace, but especially in times of trouble. This is not something that the authorities alone can work for.

In the present diplomatic troubles you are naturally uneasy at entrusting things to the authorities and your worries are compounded by a lack of information. You should nevertheless remain calm. There is absolutely no value to the nation to be found in shackling the authorities with conflicting theories and differing demands. If we do so and government negotiations are unsuccessful, it will be too late to be regretful. This troubles me greatly. I am not worried about any general lack of patriotism, but afraid of where an abundance of patriotism might lead us. We must avoid infantile demonstrations which will weaken the country.

Our people have a big fight coming. Whether we like it or not, there will have to be a big war, and that war will be a desperate war, a war in which the whole nation will be involved; a war where we are pitted against the whole world. To fight this war we must have absolute trust. The people must be bold, knowledgeable, quick and diligent, but most importantly they must have trust. Hitherto, Japan has lagged behind, and the voice of the parties has been hushed. The politicians of the civilised nations have brought all their efforts to bear on this war. This war is a total war, but it is also a peaceful war where guns are not heard, a war of civilisation, an economic war. If we win this war, it would be very easy to acquire guns and warships and to win what might be called a true war. If we intend to engage in this war, urgent preparation is needed now. Financial readjustment and administrative reform are the first