

Japanese Militarism and the Monarchy

They say a picture is worth a thousand words, which might imply you are about to read a 10,000 word introduction. Not to worry, reader! Although there are ten postcards in this exhibit, the accompanying text is brief. The postcards tell a visual story of two key figures and two landmark events in the history of the Japanese Empire.

The Japanese Empire began in the 1860s and ended in 1945. Just three Emperors were on the throne during this period. Tectonic changes in Japanese social, political, and economic life occurred during these four score years. Indeed, the Japanese leaders set upon a crash-course in modernization. Momentous change was seen, through an odd kind of logic, as a process of looking backward (*fukkō*). For the Japanese people a key constant in the sea of ongoing changes was the traditions of the Imperial household.

An entire social class—the warrior Samurai—had been abolished. But a culture of militarism pervaded the political elites. Modernizing the armed forces was accurately seen as a necessity toward the creation of a level playing field with Western colonial powers. Expansionism began in 1895 when Japan was ceded Formosa at the end of the Sino-Japanese conflict. But Japan's first singular military feat was sinking the Russian Baltic fleet in the Tsushima Strait of Korea in 1904. This led to the annexation of Korea by Japan.

The hero of this military victory was Admiral Togo. His achievement soon earned him the title of Baron and he was appointed the tutor of young Hirohito, the heir to the Imperial throne. Thus, in his youth Hirohito would become fully indoctrinated with a militaristic set of values.

Hirohito was enthroned in 1928. The ceremony was another milestone event promoting the ideas of looking backward and assuring a militaristic culture would prevail in Japan.



The first two of Japan's three Imperial era emperors are pictured here.

Matsuhito was emperor of the Meiji era (1867-1912).

Yoshihito was emperor of the Taisho era (1912-26).

He is photographed in the emperor's unique ceremonial costume. The newspaper extra edition clipping proclaims the new Taisho era. A 1 sen stamp (Scott 116) is tied to a commemorative cancel.



This postcard from 1915 commemorates the enthronement of Emperor Yoshihito. It depicts a traditional dance being performed for the emperor. The commemorative stamp (Scott 151) is tied to a commemorative cancel.



On faux stamps, Admiral Togo, hero of the Tsushima Strait naval victory, is pictured second from the left, along with four other admirals. The Japanese stamp commemorating the amalgamation of Japanese and Korean post offices (Scott 83) is tied to a cancel commemorating the twelfth anniversary of Japanese control of Taiwan.

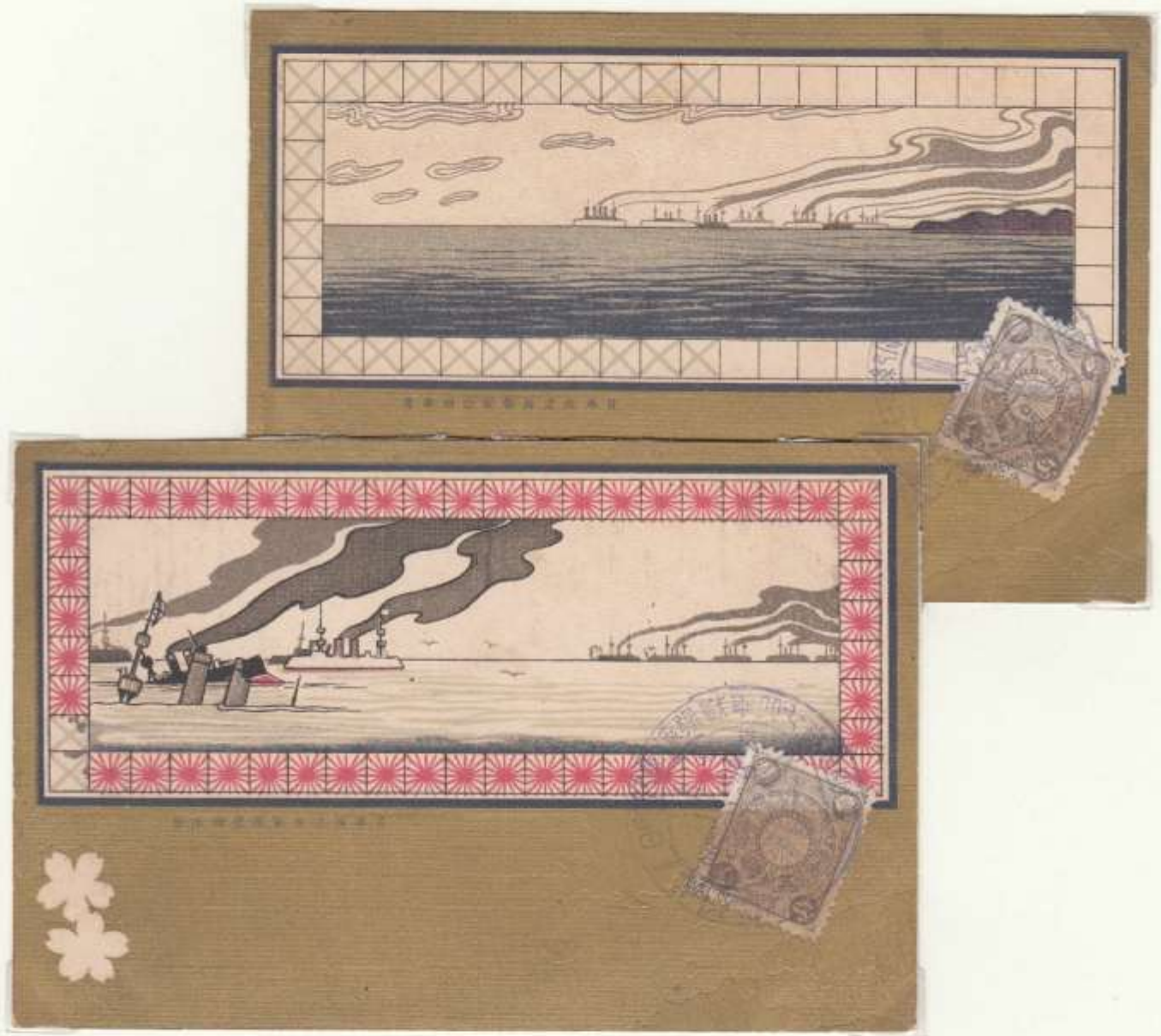


Admiral Togo's signature is in the top panel at the far left. Two other admirals' signatures appear in the lower panels. To the immediate right of Togo's signature is written: "from Kagoshima; admiral." The large script is a poem which literally translates: "Absolute reach true ending." The Tazawa definitive stamp (Scott 95) is tied to a commemorative cancel which reads: "Naval commemoration day of the war. 04-1906" Note the misspelling of 'victorious' in the English subscript.



The autographs of our three victorians admirals.
 東郷村上岡三提督の筆蹟

Below is a pair of postcards depicting the Japanese naval victory at Tsushima Strait off the coast of Korea. On each one a half sen Tazawa definitive (Scott 92) is tied to a commemorative cancel which reads: "Naval commemoration day of the war 04-1905."



A formal portrait of Hirohiito, heir apparent to the imperial throne, dressed in military costume.



The seven stamps at the top and right of this postcard are faux. The three in the upper left corner were issued in 1916 to commemorate the nomination of the heir apparent, later Emperor Hirohito. The four to the right were never issued. The real stamp at the bottom left (Scott 202) is one of four in the series that commemorate the enthronement of Emperor Hirohito in 1928, and is tied to a commemorative cancel.



Here are formal portraits of Emperor Hirohito and his Empress, on a postcard commemorating his enthronement. Behind their portraits the royal crest, the chrysanthemum, is embossed on ceremonial flags. At the lower left a six sen enthronement commemorative stamp (Scott 203) is tied to a commemorative cancel.

