

Evolution of the Concept of “Small Japan” in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

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Abstract

After the Meiji Revolution, Japan developed a strong national inferiority complex. It was manifested, in particular, in relation to the size of Japan's territory. Even though it was comparable to the major European countries, it was still considered “small”, since Japan compared itself with the collective and “hostile” West. In addition to the territorial “smallness, there was another meaning justifying the use of the term “small” with regard to Japan. During the Meiji period, Japan had an exceptionally rapid population growth. Malthusian-tinged concerns about this began to be pronounced in the late 1880s. Economists and demographers started talking about the fact that the territory of Japan was “small” for the rapidly growing population. The measures proposed by Malthus to reduce the birth rate were not discussed in Japan for ethical reasons, and also because a large population was seen as the “power” and “vitality” of the nation. Instead of measures to change reproductive behavior, projects for the resettlement of the Japanese abroad began to be proposed. However, all plans to encourage emigration were frustrated by the reluctance of the Japanese to leave their homeland. In the emigration context, publicists of that time often regarded the attachment of the Japanese to their home area as a negative property. The debate about Japan's overpopulation escalated in the 1920s due to the food problem. It could certainly have been solved, but it would have required considerable effort and time. However, the military-political elite showed impatience and decided that the main way to solve the problem of overpopulation was military expansion. Despite the continued population

growth and increasing demographic pressure, a policy of encouraging fertility began to be implemented in the late 1930s.

Keywords: Japan, history, territory size, historical demography, overpopulation, food problem.

In the Tokugawa era, thinkers of Confucian orientation determined the sentiments and emotions of the ruling elite. In their understanding, neither “big” nor “small” were positive characteristics in relation to the size of the country. They believed that the ideal state was to be “average”. The well-known astronomer and geographer Nishikawa Joken (1648–1724) wrote: “If a country is big, it does not mean that it is respected. Its honorability is determined by the correct alternation of the four seasons, the advantages and disadvantages of its people. If a country is too big, the feelings of people and their customs are very diverse and it is difficult to make them the same. And therefore, China, although it is a country of sacred sages, but still the dynasty there comes after some time into disarray and governance becomes difficult for a long time... As for Japan, its size is neither small nor large; the customs and feelings of its people are the same, and it is easy to manage them” [Nishikawa 1988, p. 25].

Japan was closed to entry and exit and did not seek to expand its territory. Despite the high population density, the shogunate did not make any serious attempts to acquire even “no man’s” Hokkaido, which was so close.

During the Meiji period, the situation changed dramatically. Now the large size of the country began to be considered an advantage and a matter of pride. In the 1890 Constitution, the country was called the “Great Empire of Japan” (*Dainippon Teikoku*). At that time, the Japanese were still suffering from a strong inferiority complex; so that name hardly reflected an honest understanding of the situation. Rather, it showed the level of ambitions and geopolitical dreams.

Before the victorious war with China (1894–1895), pessimistic sentiments prevailed in society both regarding the geopolitical

significance of Japan and the size of its territory. It was common to define the country as a “lonely (small) island” located in the Far East. Japan fought against unequal treaties imposed on it by Western countries in the 1850s. Moreover, the West acted as a united front in this case: all European countries and America received the status of the most favored nation, i.e., when one of the countries managed to get any privileges from Japan (for example, in preferential customs taxation or in the rights of its citizens to extraterritoriality), they extended to all countries that had a “friendship treaty” with Japan. Therefore, it is only natural that Japan felt itself to be in an unfriendly world, the aggregate size of which was huge in terms of both territory and population. The philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō (1855–1944), who was close to government circles, wrote in 1891: “Japan is a small country, its population is only 40 million people, it is surrounded on four sides by enemies, and therefore the only way to defend its independence is the willingness of every Japanese to sacrifice his life for the sake of the state, the emperor, the motherland” [Oguma 2010, p. 50–52].

In the early Meiji period, the size of Japan increased significantly due to the inclusion of Hokkaido, the Ryukyu Archipelago, the Ogasawara Islands and the Kuril Islands, but the Japanese compared the size of the country not with the former Japan, but with the “great” Western powers. Those of them that were comparable in size to Japan (say, England or France) had extensive colonies, which greatly increased their size. There was another reason for complaining about the smallness of Japan: the enormous internal difficulties that the country experienced in the process of modernization (in particular, the high level of poverty) began to be explained by the “insignificance” and “scarcity” of its territory [Yoshida 1944, p. 154].

The feeling of the “smallness” of Japan’s territory in relation to the “world” (first of all, the West) is well studied; no work dealing with issues of geopolitics can do without mentioning the inferiority complex, infirmity, and impotence that possessed the Japanese [Meshcheryakov 2012, p. 72–84]. However, it was not only the territorial and geopolitical aspect of Japan’s “smallness” that worried the Japanese of that time.

There was another aspect related to the demographic situation, which was given much less attention in the works of Western researchers. In the early 18th century, the population of Japan reached demographic equilibrium and stabilized at the level of 31-32 million people. As for the Meiji period (especially its second half), the country began to show an extremely rapid population growth. According to the first household census in the history of new Japan (1872), its population numbered 33 million 110 thousand people. Japan was ahead of Great Britain (26.3 million people) and Italy (26.7) in this indicator, but behind Germany (40.8) and France (36.8) [Livi Bacci, 2010, p. 192]. By 1913, the population of Japan (excluding the colonies) had already increased to 53 million 362 thousand people (in the UK it was 42 million, in Italy – 35 million, in Germany – 65 million, in France – over 41 million people).

The rapid growth of the Japanese population was primarily due to an increase in the marriage rate. This increase can be explained by several reasons. Under the Tokugawa Shogunate, the principle of male primogeniture prevailed; this means that the eldest son was the sole heir of the house. This principle prevented disputes over the division of inheritance, but younger sons were limited in the possibility of creating their own family. Now these restrictions were significantly relaxed. In addition, the elimination of class restrictions during the Meiji period created better opportunities for finding a marriage partner. All this had increased the marriage rate 80 to 98 percent by the late 19th century. At the same time, the number of children in the family did not change and was about five per married couple [Meshcheryakov 2021, pp. 80–100].

Pro-nation state publicists saw in the population growth evidence of the power of Japan, whose mission was to create a colonial empire, which would put it on par with the “world powers”. As time went on, the life and consciousness of the Japanese became more and more militarized. Many of them were convinced that the wellbeing of the country depended on the power of the army, and the strength of the army was young people. The more of them, the more powerful the army and Japan on the whole. There should be a lot of Japanese young men so that the number of conscripts can be increased. These

are the ideas expressed by Kure Ayatoshi (Fumiyaki, 1851–1918), a statistician, professor at Keio University, one of the main organizers of the population censuses. His credo was formulated in the preface to the book released immediately after the end of the victorious war with Russia. No sooner had one war ended than the professor began to think about future wars – both with certain states and with an indefinite (at that time) range of countries. In particular, he was sure that Russia would not put up with the loss of Southern Sakhalin and the Kwantung region and would look for an opportunity to “take revenge” on Japan [Kure 1905, p. 92]. The 1920 edition proudly emphasized that in terms of population, Japan ranked third among the “world powers” (Asian countries were not among them) after the United States and Russia. It was argued that the cherished desire of the Japanese people was that the rapid population growth would continue in the future [Jinkō mondai... 1920, pp. 95, 100].

Some Japanese considered population growth as a favorable factor for the country, but, at the turn of the 1880s–1890s, the most far-sighted economists and demographers began to express concern about the overpopulation of “tiny” Japan. The scientists based their concern on the ideas of Malthus. Agreeing with him that uncontrolled reproduction inevitably leads to overpopulation, they believed that in the future the Japanese would face hunger, struggle for survival, excessive competition and unemployment, which would cause social unrest.

However, Malthus’s ideas regarding voluntary restrictions in procreative behavior (reduction of sexual contacts, late marriages or rejection of them for economic reasons) were not popular. They were rejected for two main reasons: firstly, they contradicted “human nature” and, secondly, such self-restraint went against the purpose of Japan, since the ability to reproduce was seen as the “strength” and vitality of the nation. On this basis, it was not the thoughts of Englishman Malthus regarding self-restrictions that were in demand, but the historical experience of his homeland, England, which solved the problem of overpopulation not at all by changing procreative behavior, but by emigration and creation of a colonial empire.

Great Britain was considered the mightiest world power, and the Japanese strove to equal it. At the same time, it was not about imitation in liberalism or democracy – conservative German ways turned out to be closer to the Japanese. No wonder the Japanese constitution was based on the German one (Great Britain successfully managed to do without a constitution). In the historical experience of Great Britain, the Japanese were most attracted to the end result – a colonial empire and world hegemony, and in this Germany could not compete with Great Britain, on whose possessions “the sun never set.” In 1875, the then iconic thinker Fukuzawa Yukichi wrote: “since England produces high-technology goods with a high added value, it brings wealth, the population grows, and therefore the British have managed to settle all over the world” [Fukuzawa 2009, p. 279–280].

During the Tokugawa era, Japan was closed to entry and exit. Now it had opened up to the world and received unprecedented opportunities for demographic policies in its resettlement aspect. One of the pioneers of Japanese demography, Sugi Koji (1828–1917), wrote in 1888, when the population of Japan had not yet reached 40 million: “Having embarked on the road that the rest of the world is following and having received the right to resettle, my compatriots should immediately deploy a powerful resettlement movement.” Since the Japanese population is “growing every year,” this means that the country’s territory is becoming cramped for the Japanese. Such population growth is fraught with unthinkable spending on food and clothing. This imposes on us a responsibility to future generations, for the sake of which the emigration of the Japanese of the present is urgently needed. If you do not resort to it, the competitive struggle for existence will escalate; there will not be enough food and clothing, which will eventually lead to cannibalism [Yoshida 1944, p. 161–162].

Thus, the demographic problem was largely transferred to the moral dimension: some of the Japanese were asked to realize that their departure would ease the fate of those who remained at home. In the Tokugawa era, they thought in a similar way: leaving for seasonal work (and it was a very common phenomenon) brings benefits to

the family remaining in the small homeland, since it eliminates extra mouths to feed and serves as a source of income for the family remaining in the countryside. It was believed that daughters sold by their parents to be city prostitutes also did their honorable filial duty. But now it was not about duty to the family, but about duty to the whole nation.

The government began encouraging emigration in 1885 (primarily to Hawaii and the United States), but emigration initiatives encountered great difficulties not only of material, but also of psychological nature. The reign of the shogunate formed a type of person characterized by an increased degree of sedentariness. This was due to both the nature of wet rice growing and the social policy of the shogunate, which prevented resettlement and suppressed the “pioneer” spirit. The ability to endure, adapt to circumstances and “landscape” were the features of the introverted character of the Japanese of that time. These properties hindered external migrations; publicists often reproached their compatriots with “excessive” love for their small homeland and persistently suggested that the Japanese should take off and rush to explore new territories.

The economist Hattori Tooru (1863–1908) was a prominent propagandist of the resettlement movement. In 1891, he said that, in comparison with the Japanese of the 16th century, the Japanese of his time had lost the pioneer spirit and differ from the former as “clouds and swamp slime.” Stating the excessive population density of Japan, Hattori urged its inhabitants to “be filled with bestial determination and overcome the boundless stormy waves” [Hattori 1891, p. 101].

In 1893, the Society of Colonists (*Shokumin kyōkai*) was founded, and it enjoyed state support. It also tried to persuade the Japanese to get rid of the cowardly legacy of the shogunate era: “From the point of view of the geographical location of our country, resettlement is the most natural thing... For the inhabitants of a maritime country, the sea is blue everywhere, and it is only natural to have the courage to surf the vast expanses, not to lock yourself on a secluded island and to conquer distant lands” [Yoshida 1944, p. 198].

According to Hattori's calculations, in 50 years (that is, in 1941), the population of Japan would reach an "unthinkable" level of 65 million people, whom the "tiny" Japanese land would not be able to feed and clothe, even taking into account the fact that sparsely populated Hokkaido would be able to accommodate 9.5 million people in the future [Hattori 1891, pp. 105–108]. (In fact, the population of Japan reached 65 million in 1931, and the number of residents of Hokkaido numbered less than 3 million at that time and never reached the level of 6 million people.)

All estimates of the future population of Japan emanated anxiety. In the first issue of the bulletin of the Society of Colonists, the need for emigration was justified by the high population density (more than 1,600 people per square ri, i.e., about 104 people per square kilometer) and high rates of its growth (400–500 thousand people per year). Thus, in 70 years (in 1963), the number of Japanese will double, and 80 million people will be doomed to poverty on the insignificant Japanese land. In this regard, resettlement measures to reduce the number of people feeding in Japan should be taken immediately [Yoshida 1944, p. 193]. In 1895, the same bulletin stated: since Japan ranks first in the world in terms of population density and growth rates, it should also take first place in terms of the number of emigrants [Ibid., pp. 197–198].

The assertion that Japan was a "champion" in terms of population density and growth rates was, of course, some exaggeration, but the propensity for sweeping judgments was an inherent property of the publicists of that time (of all times?). At the same time, comparisons of Japan with similar indicators for Asian countries, as a rule, were not carried out: partly because there were no accurate statistics for these countries, but partly because Japan compared itself only with "civilized" countries. In any case, however, the belief that Japan was the most populous country with the highest population growth rates had practically no alternative. The desire to stand out and consider your country "unique" was strong, but at that time it was largely fulfilled by complaining about unprecedented difficulties, and not by emphasizing its merits.

The need for emigration was recognized by many thinkers and ideologists. However, not everyone considered this task realistic. In 1889, Inoue Tetsujirō wrote with chagrin: “There is only one place for Japanese people to live in the whole world – Japan; it should be borne in mind that a Japanese person can live only in Japan. It is hard to expect a change in the current situation; when the Japanese will be able to develop, become a strong and large nation, they’ll spread around the world, begin to move to other countries. Therefore, for a certain time, the Japanese will only be able to live in tiny Japan” [Inoue 1889, p. 6].

At that time, almost no one openly argued that there were too many Japanese and that their numbers should be limited or reduced in some way. The emphasis was on the fact that they had too little of their own land. Thus, not so much the large number of the Japanese was emphasized, as the smallness of the territory in which they had to live. In fact, in comparison with the European countries with which the Japanese liked to compare themselves, the land of Japan did not look tiny at all: it was larger than the territory of England or Italy. Nevertheless, in the discourse of that time, not only objective indicators were actualized, but also the emotional perception of reality.

There were three ways to ease demographic pressure:

Firstly, a reduction in the birth rates through the permission of abortions and the use of contraceptives. Such measures began to be seriously discussed in society only in the 1920s, but as a result, the government banned the family planning movement.

Secondly, mass voluntary emigration; however, the Japanese sedentary complex could not be overcome, and the results of emigration turned out to be extremely limited. In 1925, 987 thousand Japanese lived outside the country in the territories that Japan considered its colonial possessions. A significant part of them were there temporarily. The same applies to foreign countries, where there were 596 thousand Japanese. This was absolutely not enough to mitigate the demographic situation in the “ancestral” Japan. Moreover, there was also a flow of immigrants to Japan (primarily from Korea).

Only the third way turned out to be really demanded – the creation of a colonial empire, that is, the seizure of foreign territories. Calls for voluntary and peaceful resettlement had a military component from the very beginning. Having justified the need for emigration and colonization with the help of arguments about the smallness of the country's territory and its populousness, the influential economic journal *Tokyō Keizai Zasshi* wrote in 1893: currently, the number of voluntary migrants is only 22,845 people, but all of them are members of the "Yamato people and require care" from the Navy [Yoshida 1944, p. 191]. The Colonists' Society advocated the construction of a powerful fleet on the same basis. It is hardly necessary to remind that aggression under the pretext of protecting one's subjects or citizens (now it is called "humanitarian intervention") was (and is) a common practice of Western "diplomacy," which was a model for Japan.

Tokutomi Sohō (Iichirō, 1863–1957), one of the leading journalists of the time, wrote on July 3, 1894: "The key condition for the greatness of a people is its ability to multiply." Since Great Britain demonstrated this ability to a greater extent than Holland or France, it was Great Britain that became the mightiest world power. Japan also shows high fertility – despite the fact that its population density has already reached the limit. Now two Japanese persons share a room with an area of two mats, but in the future they will literally have to sleep on top of each other. In order to at least not increase the current population density with its annual growth of 400 thousand people, Japan needs to expand its territory by an area equivalent to the former province of Omi every year. When water boils, it spills over the edge. When it spills, it will definitely flow somewhere. The same thing happens with the population" [Tokutomi 1894, pp. 78, 11–12].

Thus, expansion was equated with an "objective" law, which gave it credibility and released from irrelevant moral reproaches and remorse of one's own conscience. The most natural direction of this "fluid" expansion of the Japanese is, according to Tokutomi Sohō, China. To substantiate this thesis, "objective" data are again provided – this time geographical. European peoples allegedly spread to those places that

most correspond in climatic terms to their homeland. Therefore, the Spaniards and Portuguese go to the tropics, the English – to warm lands, and the Scandinavians – to cold lands. Since the length of Japan along the north – south axis is very large, the Japanese are accustomed to any climate, and temperature difficulties do not frighten them. Therefore, unlike the inhabitants of European countries, they have the opportunity to spread in any direction and create “new homelands” (*shin furusato*) everywhere. In this respect, the Europeans are not able to compete with the Japanese. Therefore, the only competitor of the Japanese is the Chinese, who are also accustomed to any climate, and therefore the belligerent eyes of the Japanese should turn towards China [Tokutomi 1894, pp. 12–18].

Tokutomi Sohō was a well-informed and non-shy person. It was as if he saw it in a crystal ball: Japan attacked China on August 1, 1894, and in 1897, Emperor Meiji granted Tokutomi the senior degree of the 5th rank.

Having attacked China, Japan acquired Taiwan. In 1904, it attacked Russia and annexed Southern Sakhalin, and also took away from Russia the right to lease the Liaodong Peninsula with its fortress Port Arthur. In 1910, Korea was annexed, which caused a storm of enthusiasm, since now Japan had become a “mainland power.” Military victories dramatically raised the self-esteem of the Japanese. After the Japanese-Chinese war, even the “doubter” Inoue Tetsujirō stopped talking about the weakness of the Japanese and changed his pessimism to the confidence that they have the highest spirit of enterprise [Oguma 2010, p. 63].

The acquired colonies significantly expanded the borders of “tiny” Japan, which began to be steadfastly called “great” and “multinational.” The self-deprecating phrase “island country” fell out of use. After the victory over Russia, talk about Japan’s smallness in geopolitical terms was put to an end – it was assumed that Japan had acquired the status of a “world power.” The prominent theorist of Japanese colonialism Nitobe Inazo (1862–1933) was pleased to record that, with the annexation of Korea, Japan ended its closed and limited “island consciousness” [Ibid., p. 125]. Other publicists were happy to state that the area of present-day Japan was larger than the territory of Germany;

like Great Britain, it owned colonies, including those on the mainland. Thus, complaints about the closed and tiny island space were replaced by imperial pride.

However, despite significant territorial acquisitions and awareness of their country as big and even "great," the theme of "smallness" of Japan had not lost its relevance. But now the focus of concern had shifted to the small territory in terms of producing food resources for the growing population. Some scientists raised this topic back in the late 1880s, but now it had become really widely discussed. The discussion was provoked by the "rice riots" (1918), when rice prices soared 3 times. Although the problem was solved relatively quickly by importing rice from Taiwan and Korea, a hypothetical shortage of food stirred public opinion.

In 1927, the population of Japan proper (excluding colonies) was 61 million 659 thousand people with a density of 161.5 people per square kilometer. In 1935, there were already 69 million 254 thousand people in the country, and the population density increased to 181 people. Since three-quarters of the country's territory is occupied by mountains, the concentration of the population on the plains and in the cities was much higher. In Tokyo, it was 2,970 people, and in neighboring Kanagawa Prefecture – 782 people. However, the geographical distribution of the population was very uneven. Thus, the population density in Hokkaido was only 35 people per square kilometer [Eisei nenpō 1939, p. 46].

The existing technologies no longer allowed increasing harvest yields in a noticeable way. Food production could theoretically be increased by expanding agricultural land. In terms of population density, Japan was inferior to some European countries – Belgium, Holland, and Great Britain. However, when calculating the population density not for the entire territory of the country, but only for arable land, it confidently led: 9.69 people per hectare of land (in Great Britain – 2.26, in Germany – 1.85, in France – 1.08) [Kiyomizu 1929, pp. 24–25]. In many Western countries, a much larger part of the territory was given over to agricultural land than in Japan. In France, it was 42 percent, in Germany – 44 percent, in Great Britain – 25 percent, and in Japan –

only 16 percent [Waga kuni... 1928, pp. 5–6]. In Japan, there were lands that could be turned into arable land, but they were of poor quality and were located in areas less suitable for field cultivation (especially for rice cultivation) – for example, in the Tohoku region, Hokkaido, or Southern Sakhalin. However, the development of these lands required significant investments. Peasants did not have such funds to invest, and large businesses invested capital mainly in industry with its higher rate of profit. The government allocated funds for the development of Hokkaido, but they were not enough, given the increasing costs of the army: in connection with the conquest of Manchuria in 1931, their share in the budget increased sharply and exceeded 30 percent; in 1934 they amounted to 44 percent, and in 1937 – almost 70 percent, which made it impossible to implement any large-scale peaceful programs. As a result, the population growth outstripped the growth of acreage.

By modern standards, the dependence of “Japan proper” on foreign food was not so great (for rice, it was about 15 percent), and the shortage was covered by the export of industrial products. However, politicians and publicists sounded the alarm: Japan, which in ancient times was proudly called “the country of rich harvests” or “the country of abundant reed plains and amazing ears of rice,” had become an importer of rice. It was emphasized that the entire population growth was provided by those products that were grown in the colonies (mainly in Korea, partly in Taiwan) and abroad [Yanaihara 1928, pp. 143–145]. This was extremely unpleasant from the point of view of self-identification of the Japanese, for whom “rice” and “Japan” were in the same synonymic row. So thought, for example, the founder of Japanese ethnology Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962; see about him: [Meshcheryakov 2020]). This idea enjoyed support at the very top. In 1929, a rice field was arranged for Emperor Hirohito on the palace grounds, which he allegedly looked after himself. Of course, it had nothing to do with the food of the sovereign or his people, but it had a very important symbolic meaning – the unity of the emperor with the people. Starting from 1931, rice from the imperial field was used for offerings to Shinto gods during the harvest festival. Both the emperor and his people and their common

gods ate the same food. The Japanese received about a half of their calories from rice.

The government's position on the demographic issue was ambivalent. On the one hand, the population growth caused deep sovereign satisfaction, but, on the other hand, concern. At the first meeting of the Government Committee on Demography and Food (July 20, 1927), Prime Minister Tanaka Giichi (1864–1929) said: "In recent years, the population of our empire has grown rapidly, which symbolizes the prosperity of the state and evokes joy. Population growth not only testifies to the vitality of our people, but also forms the basis for a strong country. However, the territory of our country is small and deprived of natural resources, and the development of industry is still insufficient, so due to the high population density, food consumption is growing rapidly, and now and then there is an imbalance in the supply and demand of workforce, which brings instability to the life of the people" [Fujino 1998, pp. 121–122].

The publications of economists and demographers were filled with anxiety. Professor Yanaihara Tadao (1893–1961) of Tokyo Imperial University (1893–1961) wrote with undisguised anxiety in the first sentence of his book on demographic problems: "The natural population growth in our country is almost a million people a year, which has an intimidating and depressing effect on the psyche of the people, so that discussions on demographic issues are bursting with heat" [Yanaihara 1928, p. 1]. The main concern was the food supply of the multi-million people. It was not for nothing that in 1928, the Government Committee on Food compiled a bibliography of recent (1922 – January 1928) publications on demographic problems. The list consisted of 153 works. At the same time, the compilers stipulated that they were unlikely to be able to track all the publications [Jinkō mondai-ni kansuru seron 1928, p. 1].

Even children's writer Miyazawa Kenji (1896–1933) could not ignore the food problem that so worried the Japanese. In the fairy tale "The Great Feast of Vegetarianism" (*Bijitarian taisai*), he, mentioning the theory of Malthus, confronts different opinions about diet in an almost journalistic form and comes to the conclusion that the most effective

way to solve the food problem is to abandon meat in favor of plant food, since its production is much cheaper [Kōhon Miyazawa... 1973, p. 229].

The thesis that Japan was small for a rapidly growing population was exaggerated in every way. The discussion about overpopulation reached its peak in the second half of the 1920s, when supporters of birth control and family planning entered the arena. However, as a result, the government banned this movement and took an even more determined course to seize foreign territories that qualified as a necessary “living space” for the Japanese. The ideas of Karl Haushofer (1869–1946) regarding the lack of “living space” were extremely popular not only in Germany, but also in Japan. Recognizing Haushofer’s intellectual achievements, the Japanese government awarded him an order.

Since the early 1930s, the military in Japan had been gaining more and more influence. They intended to obtain food and natural resources “for free” by conquering new territories (the colossal costs of the army were not taken into account in this strategy). The goal of the military was not the intensive development of the economy (a task that requires many years of hard work) and international trade, but the immediate provision of resource and food self-sufficiency. As elsewhere in the world, the style of thinking of the Japanese military assumed pressure, determination, impatience, reliance on simple ways to solve complex problems, and complete disregard for other people’s interests.

In 1931–1932, as a result of the Japanese aggression in Manchuria, the “independent” state of Manchukuo was created, which was completely controlled by Japan; in 1937, Japan began a “big” war with China. That year, a campaign to increase the birthrates was launched. Whereas before that time there had been concern about too rapid population growth, now the government decided overnight that there were too few Japanese people. On January 22, 1941, a grandiose programme was adopted to increase the number of the Japanese. Its preamble stated that an increase in population was necessary for the successful construction of a “sphere of co-prosperity in East Asia” under the auspices of Japan. In December of the same year, Japan declared war on the United States and Great Britain.

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Since the Meiji Revolution, the concept of a “small country” has undergone a significant evolution. In the early years of Meiji, it sounded like a complaint about a small territory and geopolitical insignificance. Together with the creation of the colonial empire, complaints about the smallness of the territory in its opposition to Western countries stopped or softened, and in the 1920s the thesis of overpopulation of the country came to the fore. It was implied that Japan was small for the increasing number of the Japanese, and its land was not able to feed them. The ruling elite showed impatience and did not seek solutions to the food problem with the use of domestic resources, which would have taken too much time. They preferred to resort to an expansionist policy accompanied by a course not to reduce the birth rate, but to increase it.

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This article was originally published in Russian. The reference for primary publication is: *Meshcherykov A. N. Evolyutsiya ponyatiya “malen’kaya Yaponiya” v kontse XIX – nachale XX v. [The Evolution of the Concept of “Little Japan” in the late 19th – early 20th Century]. In *History and Culture of Japan*. Issue 15. (Orientalia et Classica. VII (LXXVIII). Moscow: HSE University. Pp. 453–464.*