

## Speech at the “Rededication Ceremony for the Sanji Muto Study Room”

Dr. Joshua Salyers

In the humanities, “modernity” is often understood as a set of socio-cultural attitudes or philosophies about how “modern” people, cultures, or countries behave or look. When these ideas accompany a period of industrialization on a national scale alongside cultural change, we refer to it as the process of modernization. This process of modernization for any nation requires defining a modern national identity and promoting a series of shared experiences, behaviors, ideas, and symbols. As segments of society define “modernity” differently, conflicting visions of a country or culture arise. It is these conflicting visions of modernity that have driven my research in countries like Mexico and the United States over the course of my career. It is these conflicting visions of modernity that drew me to this project. For Japan, many aspects of this modernization process happened rapidly in the nineteenth- and twentieth- centuries forcing reformers and industrialists to adapt to these changes and define appropriate behavior in a changing society. Today we are here to rededicate this room to the Legacy of Sanji Muto, whose life intertwined with the complexities of modernization in Japan’s recent history.

Muto was an influential businessman at a time when Japanese industrialists and manufactures were forced to decide how to behave in a modernizing industrial economy. Many industrialists followed different management styles and forged their own entrepreneurial identities, often borrowing what they found useful from foreign business models. Ultimately, though, these individuals were faced with questions about how a modern business leader was to behave. How should a business leader, still driven by the need to make a profit, behave? What type of relationship should they have with their workers? What were their responsibilities to their

employees? Muto faced these very same questions. His answers were often unique balancing work-place paternalism with profit efficiency. Ultimately, he believed that a business owner could not fully embrace a strictly modern relationship to their employees, i.e. an entirely profit-driven wage-based capitalist relationship.

This fascinating moment in Japanese history became the inspiration for “Seeds of the Sakura,” a virtual reality historical museum that tells two intersecting stories, the historical context of economic and social changes in Japan and Sanji Muto’s life during that time. Based on historical research and expert interviews, each room in the museum alternates between a major reform or change in Japanese history and Muto’s experiences and actions during that change. Created as both a virtual reality museum and an online 360 video experience, Seeds of the Sakura is available in English and Japanese not only to Pacific’s students, but also viewers around the world.

I would like to say a few words about the origin of this project. In 1919, Sanji Muto established an endowment, the Muto Book fund, with the expressed purpose of advancing understanding between Japan and the United States. In 2018, in recognition of the growing popularity of digital resources, the Muto family approved directing endowment interest monies to digital media projects. This immersive project reflects this new direction and offers students an empathetic understanding of the modernization process in Japan and how that process was lived by one of its prominent citizens.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the impact this project has had beyond creating a shared understanding of Japanese history and culture. As an instructor here at the University of the Pacific, my experiences engaging students in this experiential learning opportunity inspired me to design a course where students produce a similar digital humanities

project. In the Spring of 2020, students in our Pacific Seminar will be creating a virtual reality community experience museum at Pacific. Students in subsequent versions of the course will continue to add museum exhibits that advance our understand of communities around the world. In this way, Seeds of the Sakura has provided a blueprint for experiential student learning and the promotion empathic cross-cultural understanding.

The Seeds of the Sakura project explores the myriad changes in Japanese society and industry during the Meiji Restoration from 1868 to 1912 and the Taishō era from 1912 to 1926. Two notable changes occurred in the mid-nineteenth century that ushered in an era of accelerated economic and social transformation. First, through threats of force, western nations ended the centuries-long isolationist policies of the Shoguns increasing Japanese trade with foreign nations. Second, the Meiji Restoration began when Imperial rule under Emperor Meiji was reestablished after a Civil War ended the Tokugawa Shogunate, under which the Emperor previously had little effective power. The Emperor and his advisors actively pursued rapid industrialization policies and reformed economic and political institutions. Meiji leaders quickly announced the Charter Oath that laid out the reformist vision they had for the nation. Among these oaths was a declaration to seek “knowledge throughout the world in order to strengthen the country,” which led officials to send diplomatic voyages around the world to study foreign political and economic models. Missions like the Iwakura Mission in 1871 signaled a desire to selectively adopt Western institutions that suited their purposes. For example, political reforms created a new constitution and parliamentary government in 1889, but still subordinated it to the Emperor. Examples like this one highlight the fundamental question that Meiji reformers had to answer as they sought to borrow ideas, practices, and institutions from other industrialized nations: “what does ‘modern’ Japan look like?”

It is these questions facing Japanese reformers and how Muto sought to answer them in his own life that *Seeds of the Sakura* explores. As Muto finished up his studies with Fukuzawa Yuckichi, a well-known reform advocate, and attended school at the University of the Pacific in the 1880s, Meiji officials pursued compulsory education, occupational freedom, the abolition of the feudal system, and land tax reforms. Officials invested heavily in the country's industrial growth and enthusiastically adopted western technologies as Japan experienced a period of economic growth and industrial productivity at the turn of the twentieth century.

It was during this context economic growth that Muto returned to Japan and established himself as a leader in the textile industry. As the general manager of the Kanebo spinning company, his innovative business management practices made Muto a national figure and garnered him international recognition. Workers faced poor conditions in textile factories at the same time that Muto pursued significant workplace reforms, such as building a nursery, publishing a company newsletter, providing health insurance, and creating a mutual aid association. While all these management decisions served both Muto's desire to avoid unionizing in his factory, it also reflected his philosophical belief that capitalist business management could also be moral. As his later actions as a politician pursuing a veteran benefits program or as a newspaper publisher doggedly covering perceived political corruption demonstrate, Muto seemed to reject the idea that capitalist success justified violations of moral codes or, simply, "good behavior."

As I mentioned earlier, Muto sought to answer the same questions faced by Japanese reformers and industrialists who tried to define what modern Japan was and what it should be. Sanji believed strongly in adopting foreign practices and technology, but also sought to constrain his behavior by his own moral code. He defined a modern Japanese businessman as a capitalist

that considered more than maximizing profits and provided for the welfare of his workers. For Muto, progressive ideas and management systems could be adopted from abroad as long as such adoptions followed a particular moral code of accountability. In his own words, Muto kept his philosophy simple: “Behave well, sleep well.”

I would like to take this moment to thank our hosts in Osaka, Japan for facilitating interviews, filming, cultural experiences and tours of heritage site, cemeteries, and museums. Haruta Muto, Sanji Muto’s grandson and President of the Kokumin Kaikan Foundation; Managing Director Hasegawa of the Kokumin Kaikan Foundation, Executive Director Hanasaki of the Cotton Industry Club; and several Kyoto University professors graciously offered their knowledge and efforts for this project. As we rededicate the Sanji Muto Study room, I encourage all of you to take the time to experience “Seeds of the Sakura” and explore this fascinating moment in Japanese history and the life of Sanji Muto.