

Hassojitz

**Sojitz - A General Trading Company
The Pioneers who Paved the Future
of Japan**



Volume

I

The Founding

 **sojitz**

New way, New value

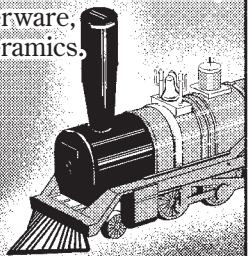
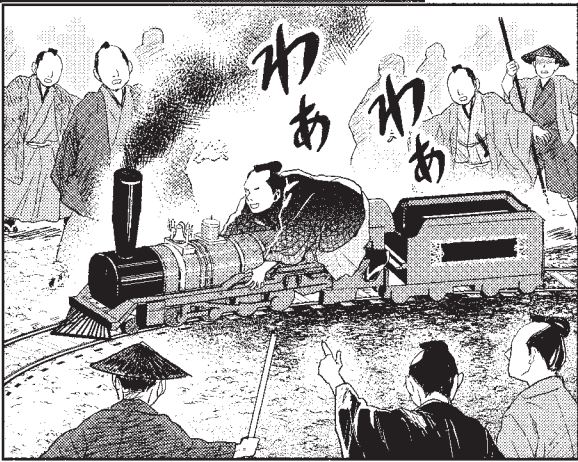
This historical account is based on archived materials from the companies and organizations involved. While Sojitz strives for historical accuracy, certain expressions and depictions have been adapted for the manga. In addition, character dialogue is fundamentally based on historic quotes, but also includes conjecture.

1853
Perry
arrives in
Japan

Closed off for
over 200 years,
Japan was far
behind the rest
of the world.

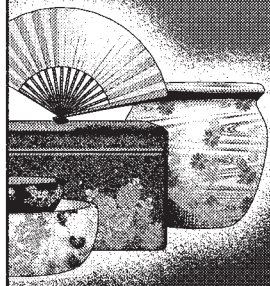
Matthew Perry,
Commander of the East India Squadron

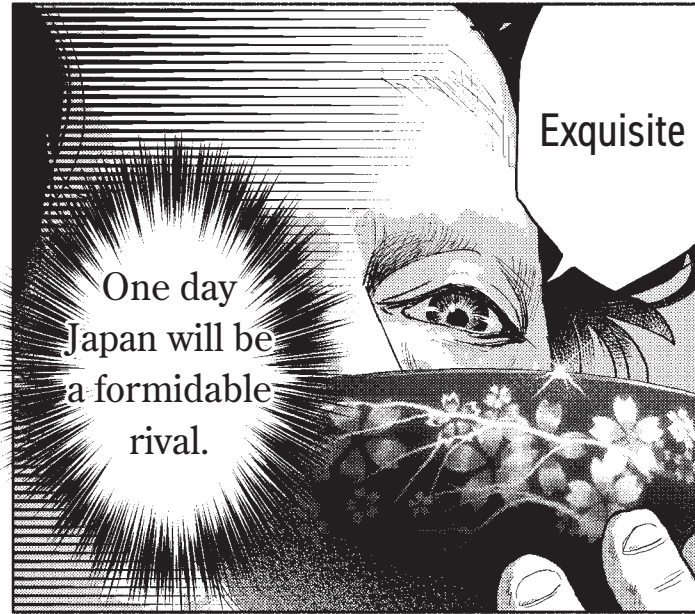
Perry presented the
shogun with a miniature
steam engine.
Japan offered traditional
crafts such as silk textiles,
lacquerware,
and ceramics.



Hmph.
It's a far
cry from
civilized
America.

Japan's a
country of
savages
all right.





One day
Japan will be
a formidable
rival.

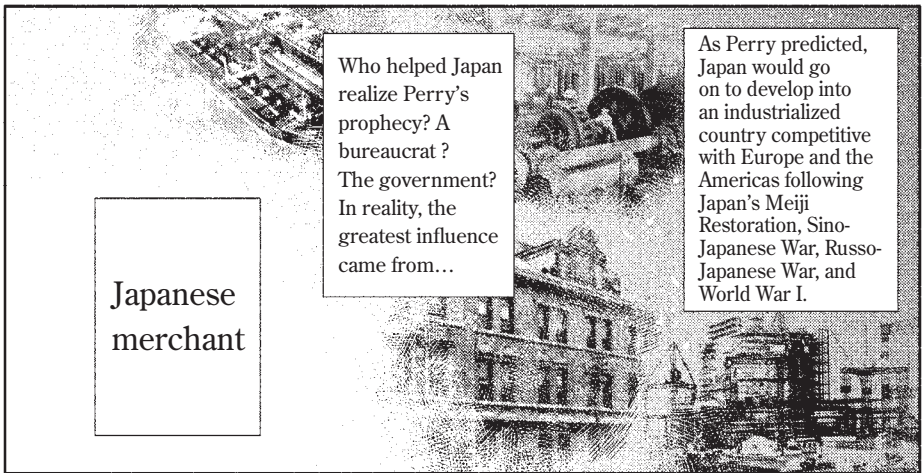
Exquisite

No doubt,
Japan was
far from a
developed
nation,
however...



These
fine
crafts
are
....

“Japan surely will not remain behind the most industrialized nations. The Japanese are remarkable for their curiosity, adaptability, and agility... the country will rise to rank amongst the top nations. With the skills of the civilized world, the Japanese will be a strong competitor in the machinery industry.”
– Perry’s personal journal –

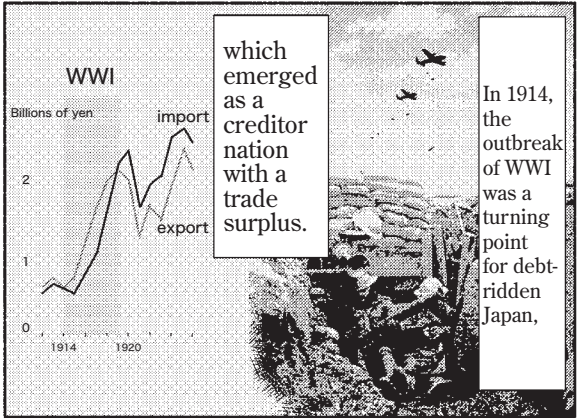


Japanese
merchant

Who helped Japan
realize Perry’s
prophecy? A
bureaucrat ?
The government?
In reality, the
greatest influence
came from...

As Perry predicted,
Japan would go
on to develop into
an industrialized
country competitive
with Europe and the
Americas following
Japan’s Meiji
Restoration, Sino-
Japanese War, Russo-
Japanese War, and
World War I.

After opening its borders, it was Japan's moment to shine. Sojitz originates from the three companies that led this transformation.



In 1914, the outbreak of WWI was a turning point for debt-ridden Japan,

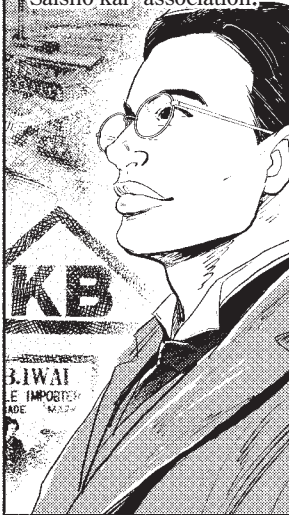
Japan Cotton Trading Co., Ltd.

A trading firm that procured cotton from around the world to be used as raw material for spinning—the largest industrial sector of its day. The firm acquired vast amounts of foreign currency through exports of cotton thread and cloth.



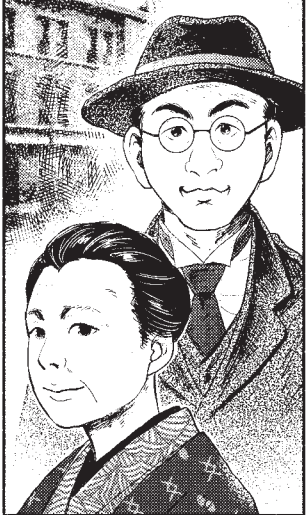
Iwai & Co., Ltd.

A strong promoter of the domestic production of imported goods, Iwai set up a group of manufacturing companies that would later form the “Saisho-kai” association.



Suzuki & Co., Ltd.

Japan's top general trading company, which established over 80 operating companies primarily in the manufacturing industry.





Sojitz carries on this enterprising DNA.

Sojitz's predecessors were bursting with innovative ideas and entrepreneurial spirit, developing a range of businesses in anticipation of the next generation...

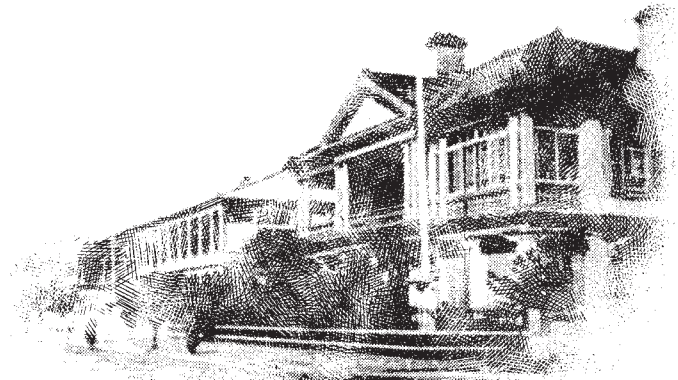
This story explores the history that defines Sojitz.

sojitz

Hassojitz

発想 × **sojitz**

Inequitable trade at Kobe's foreign settlement



Hassojitz

*Sojitz - A General Trading Company
The Pioneers who Paved the Future
of Japan*



Katsujiro Iwai, Yone Suzuki, and Naokichi Kaneko
—The young pioneers



Iwajiro Suzuki was married to Yone Suzuki.

Suzuki & Co., Ltd. was founded in 1874 by Iwajiro Suzuki as a trading house for Western sugar.

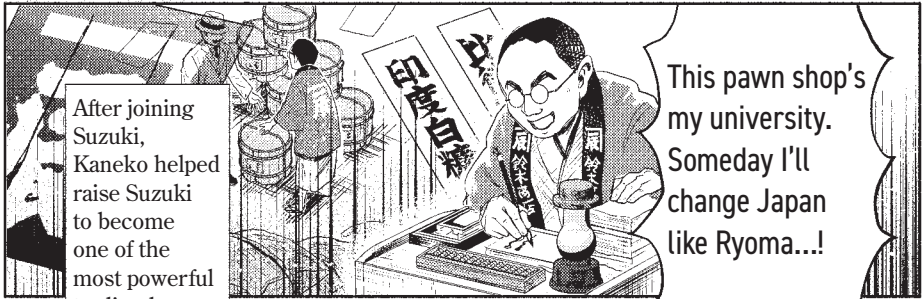
1868 Opening of Kobe Port

Kaneko was born in Tosa (currently Kochi Prefecture). He worked at a pawn shop, where he devoured the shop's books and developed an admiration for the famous Ryoma Sakamoto who was also from Tosa and shaped Japan during the Meiji revolution.



A 20-year-old Naokichi Kaneko traveled from Tosa District to serve as an apprentice.

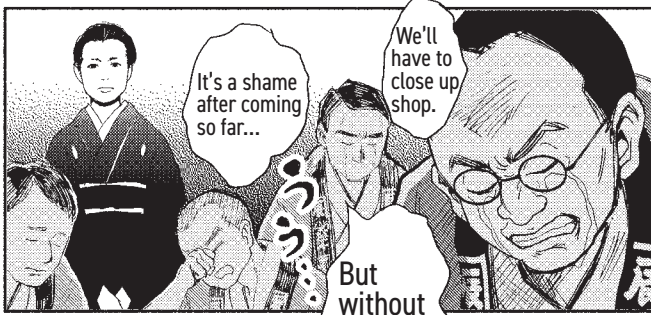
Nice to meet you. I'm Naokichi Kaneko.



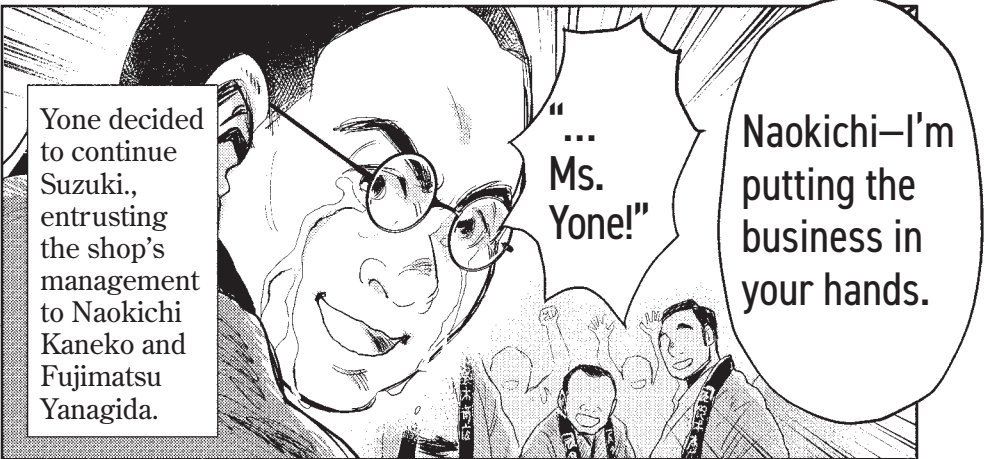
After joining Suzuki, Kaneko helped raise Suzuki to become one of the most powerful trading houses in Kobe.

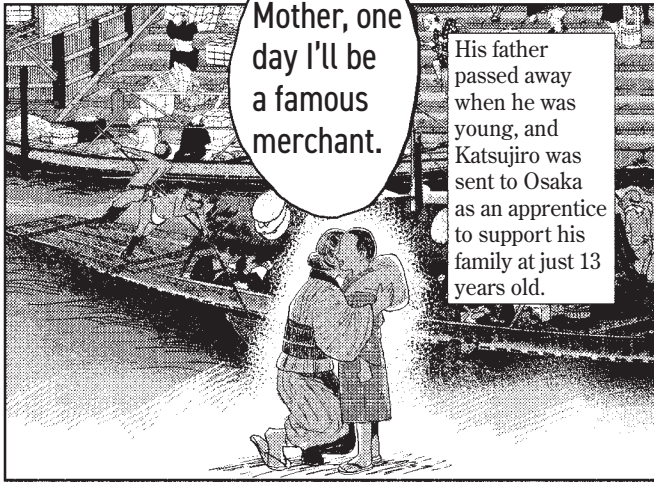
This pawn shop's my university. Someday I'll change Japan like Ryoma...!

However,



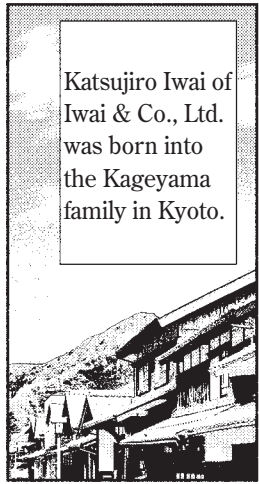
just as Suzuki was beginning to rise to prominence, the owner Iwajiro Suzuki died suddenly.





Mother, one day I'll be a famous merchant.

His father passed away when he was young, and Katsujiro was sent to Osaka as an apprentice to support his family at just 13 years old.



Katsujiro Iwai of Iwai & Co., Ltd. was born into the Kageyama family in Kyoto.



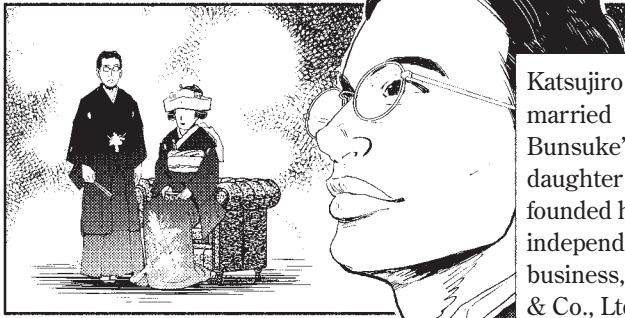
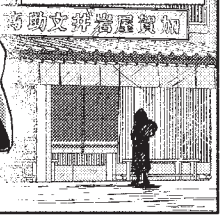
Yes, sir!

We're a trading house that handles foreign goods coming into Nagasaki. Work hard.



I look forward to working with everyone!

Katsujiro's apprenticeship was at Kagaya Iwai Bunsuke Shoten, which was founded by his cousin in 1862.



Katsujiro married Bunsuke's daughter and founded his own independent business, Iwai & Co., Ltd. in 1896.

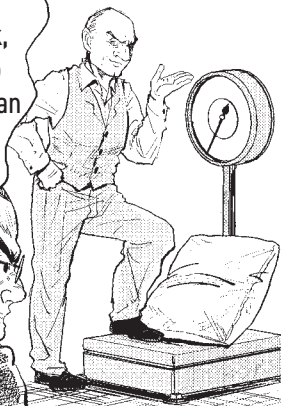
Iwai Bunsuke Shoten grew to become an illustrious trading house in Osaka.

At the foreign settlement, both men subject to inequitable treatment as a result of Japan's low status.

Naokichi Kaneko and Katsujiro Iwai
Both men would end up frequenting the same foreign settlement in Kobe.



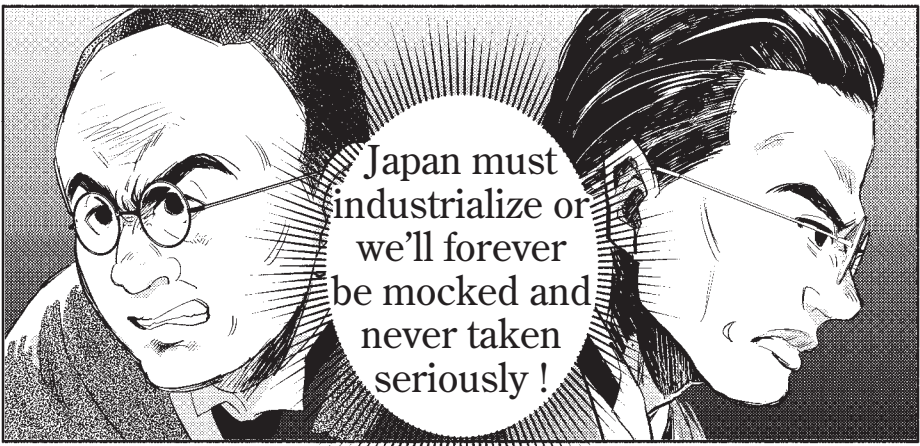
We must pay whatever they ask, they're immune to our laws, and Japan can't tax'em.



Why are customers like us forced to use the back entrance?!



Japan must industrialize or we'll forever be mocked and never taken seriously!



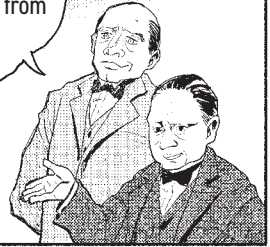
No!

I can't continue trading with you when you take advantage of us by selling at inflated prices.

We're working on behalf of the Japanese people.

Mr. Iwai, stop trading directly with overseas sellers. We'll give you the same price that you'd get from them.

Katsujiro Iwai began trading directly with overseas trading houses without going through the foreign settlement as an intermediary.



Korekiyo Takahashi,
Yokohama Specie Bank

Mr. Takahashi!

Why must the Japanese make advance payment in nickel silver to receive imported cargo when foreigners can use trust receipts?

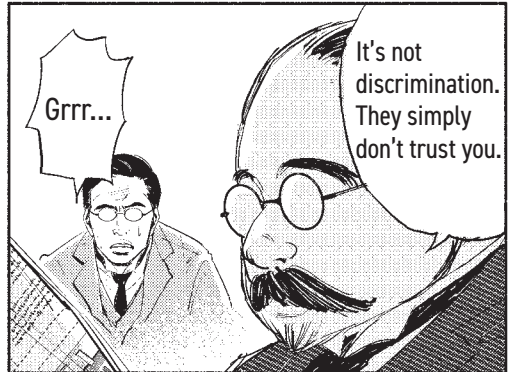


Something must be done.

Grrr...

It's not discrimination. They simply don't trust you.

Finally!



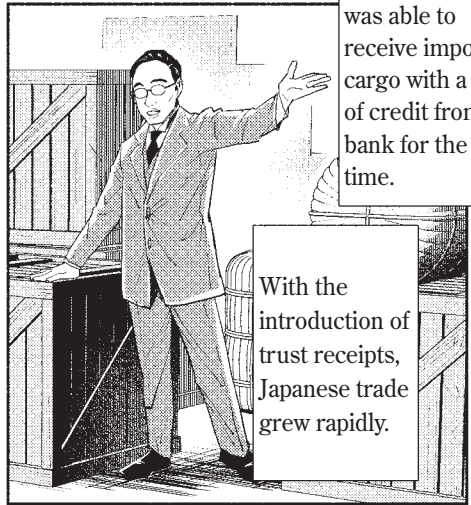
... Nevertheless





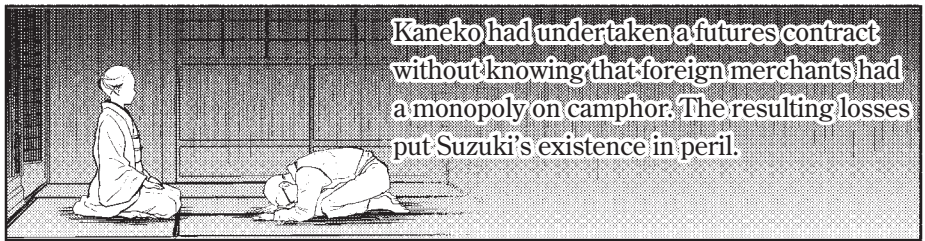
Ms. Yone... Forgive me.

However, everything did not go smoothly for Kaneko Naokichi of Suzuki & Co.



By providing collateral, Iwai was able to receive imported cargo with a letter of credit from the bank for the first time.

With the introduction of trust receipts, Japanese trade grew rapidly.

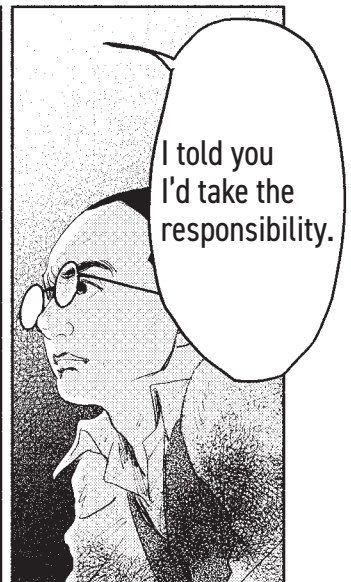


Kaneko had undertaken a futures contract without knowing that foreign merchants had a monopoly on camphor. The resulting losses put Suzuki's existence in peril.



Do what you're able to on your end.

Let me see what I can do.

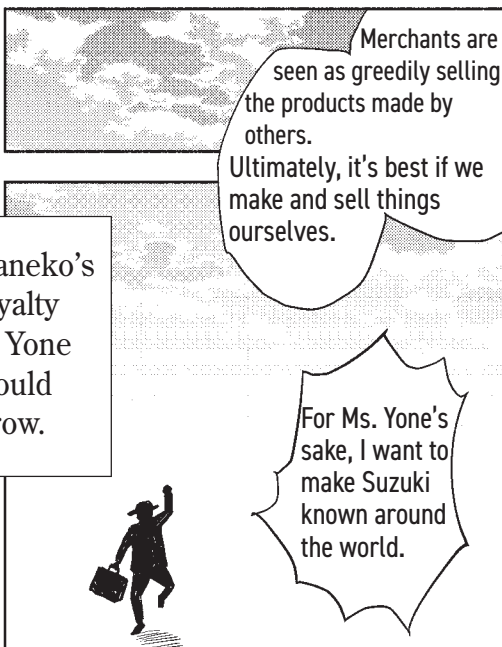


I told you I'd take the responsibility.



It's not much but we'd like to settle with this money.

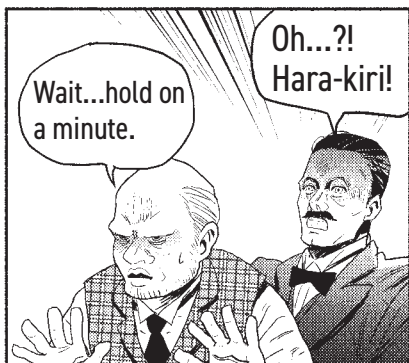
If you refuse, I'll have to commit hara-kiri right here!



Merchants are seen as greedily selling the products made by others. Ultimately, it's best if we make and sell things ourselves.

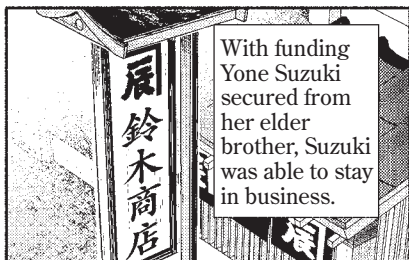
Kaneko's loyalty to Yone would grow.

For Ms. Yone's sake, I want to make Suzuki known around the world.



Wait...hold on a minute.

Oh...?! Hara-kiri!



With funding Yone Suzuki secured from her elder brother, Suzuki was able to stay in business.

Kaneko Naokichi and Iwai Katsujiro.
Despite suffering indignities, the two men
were also introduced to sophisticated
foreign products at the settlement.

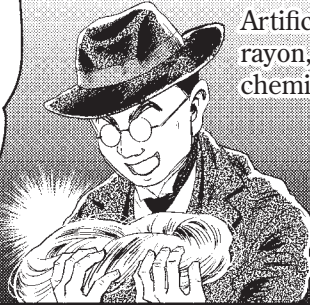


So this is a
celluloid product...
The world's first
plastic...



Celluloid was the world's first synthetic
plastic invented in America in 1868.
It was first imported to Kobe in 1877 to the
French trading house.

Ooh! So this the
artificial silk being
mass produced in the
West. What shine...



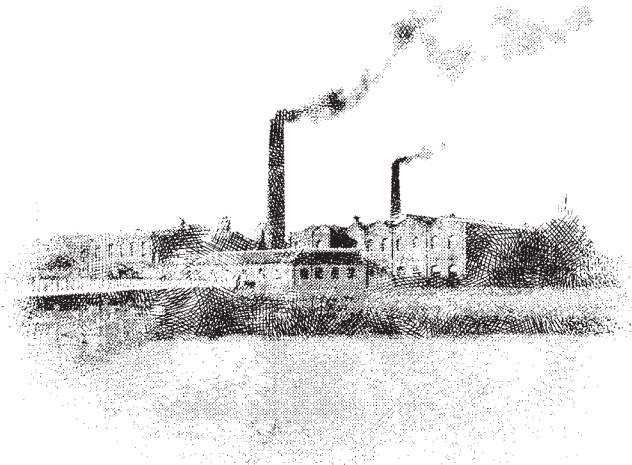
Artificial silk, also known as
rayon, was produced using
chemistry instead of silkworms.

It was first produced in
France in 1882, and the
British trading house in
Kobe began imports the
following year.

Let's begin
manufacturing
these products
in Japan! We
can't rely on
foreign countries
forever!



The rise of Japan's spinning industry and
establishment of Japan Cotton Trading Co., Ltd.



Hassojitz

*Sojitz - A General Trading Company
The Pioneers who Paved the Future
of Japan*



Tsuneki Sano, Shingoro and Asako Hirooka, Tomoatsu Godai, and Eiichi Shibusawa
—The founders of Japan Cotton Trading and related business leaders

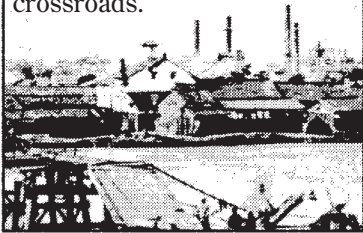
The Meiji business leader Tomoatsu Godai made an entrance at this critical moment.

Osaka's merchants must band together!

Osaka

Following the Meiji Restoration, the political and economic center moved to Tokyo.

While Osaka's merchants had built the economy in the Edo period, they now faced a crossroads.



Let's create a business that calls for large investments of capital like the West.

Banks, railroads, gas...and most importantly cotton spinning.

I went to Europe to procure a cotton spinning machine for Kagoshima Spinning.

The cotton spinning industry will surely help to industrialize Japan.



Mr. Godai. Your words moved me. I'm impressed how far you're willing to go for Osaka...

Godai's message resonated with Ichibei Tanaka.

Osaka's merchants will once again lead Japan.

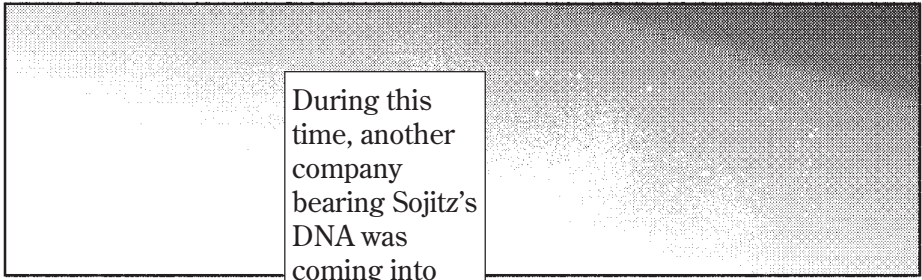
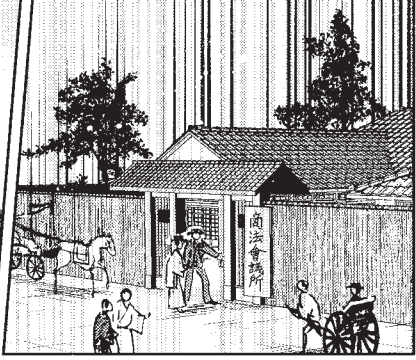
In 1878, Godai established the Osaka Chamber of Commercial Law to unite Osaka's merchants.



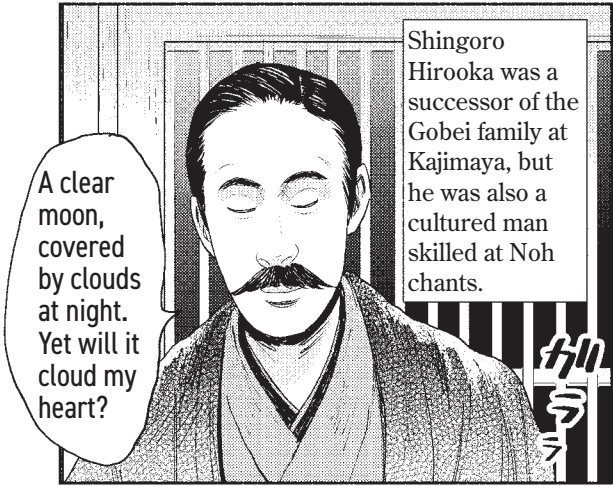
Behold our collective strength!

Shibusawa solicited investments from nobleman and founded Osaka Spinning Co., Ltd. (today's Toyobo Co., Ltd.)

In 1882, Eiichi Shibusawa also took action.

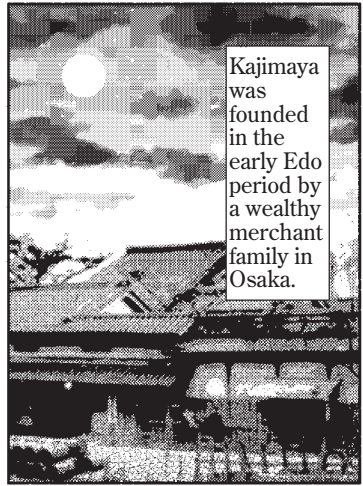


During this time, another company bearing Sojitz's DNA was coming into being.

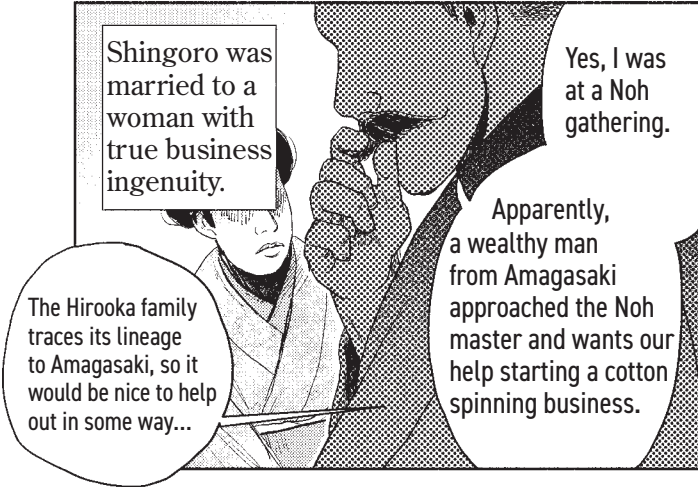


A clear moon, covered by clouds at night. Yet will it cloud my heart?

Shingoro Hirooka was a successor of the Gobei family at Kajimaya, but he was also a cultured man skilled at Noh chants.



Kajimaya was founded in the early Edo period by a wealthy merchant family in Osaka.



Shingoro was married to a woman with true business ingenuity.

Yes, I was at a Noh gathering.

Apparently, a wealthy man from Amagasaki approached the Noh master and wants our help starting a cotton spinning business.

The Hirooka family traces its lineage to Amagasaki, so it would be nice to help out in some way...



You're home. Reciting Noh again?



Cotton spinning! What an excellent idea. Let's get everyone involved.

Asako Hirooka would become known as one of the greatest business minds of the Meiji period.



I suppose the Noh club can occasionally come in handy.

At the time, Asako was already deeply involved in the establishment of Kajima Bank and the development of a coal mine business.



My dear husband, your Noh circle includes Senba merchants. I'm sure those connections will be helpful.

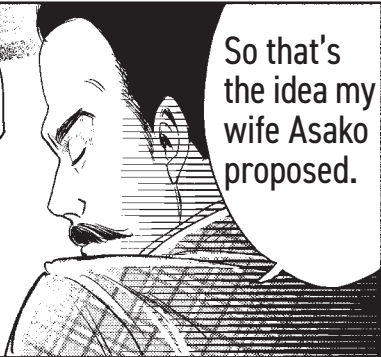
Everyone? You mean invite my Noh club?



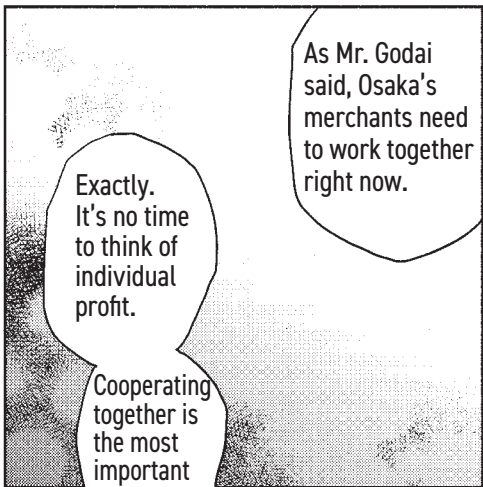
Asako has true business genius. Let's do it.

That's quite an interesting business idea.

Motonosuke Fukumoto Chubei Kihara



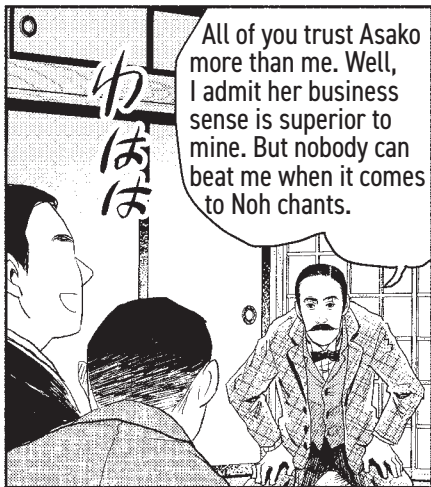
So that's the idea my wife Asako proposed.



As Mr. Godai said, Osaka's merchants need to work together right now.

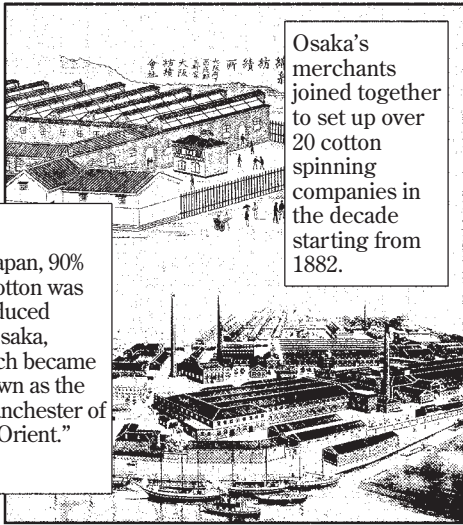
Exactly. It's no time to think of individual profit.

Cooperating together is the most important thing now!



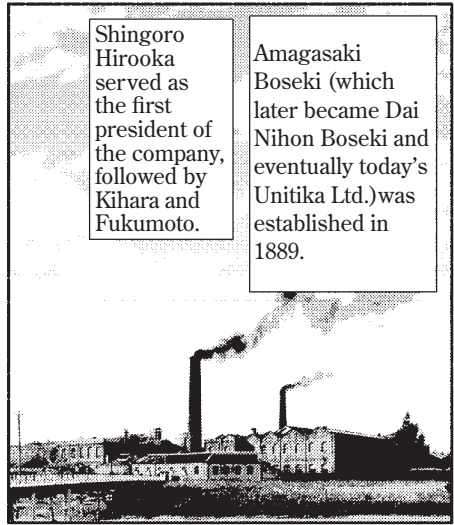
わはは

All of you trust Asako more than me. Well, I admit her business sense is superior to mine. But nobody can beat me when it comes to Noh chants.



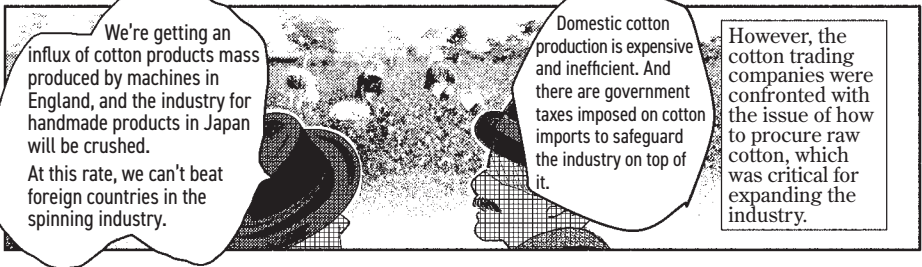
Osaka's merchants joined together to set up over 20 cotton spinning companies in the decade starting from 1882.

In Japan, 90% of cotton was produced in Osaka, which became known as the "Manchester of the Orient."



Shingoro Hirooka served as the first president of the company, followed by Kihara and Fukumoto.

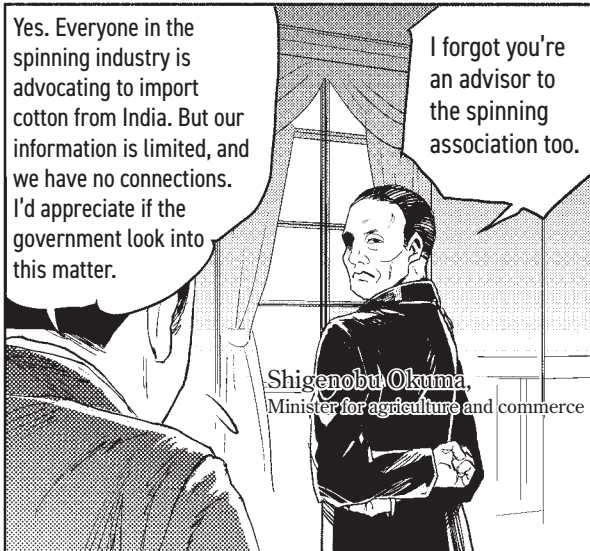
Amagasaki Boseki (which later became Dai Nihon Boseki and eventually today's Unitika Ltd.) was established in 1889.



We're getting an influx of cotton products mass produced by machines in England, and the industry for handmade products in Japan will be crushed. At this rate, we can't beat foreign countries in the spinning industry.

Domestic cotton production is expensive and inefficient. And there are government taxes imposed on cotton imports to safeguard the industry on top of it.

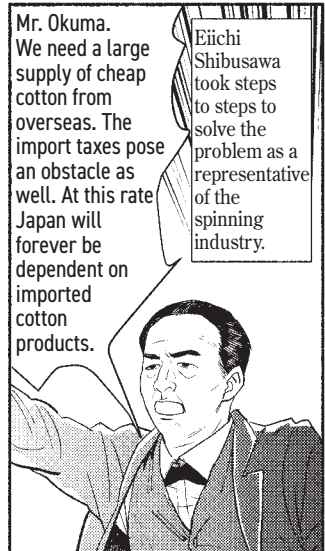
However, the cotton trading companies were confronted with the issue of how to procure raw cotton, which was critical for expanding the industry.



Yes. Everyone in the spinning industry is advocating to import cotton from India. But our information is limited, and we have no connections. I'd appreciate if the government look into this matter.

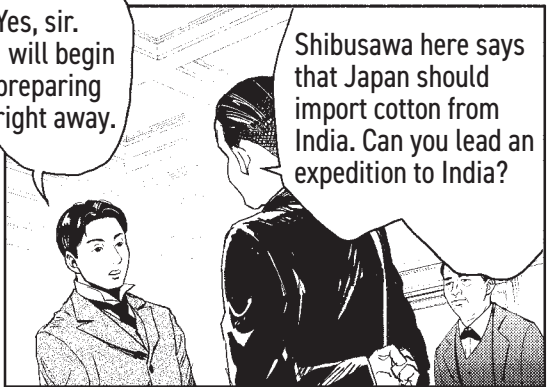
I forgot you're an advisor to the spinning association too.

Shigenobu Okuma
Minister for agriculture and commerce



Mr. Okuma. We need a large supply of cheap cotton from overseas. The import taxes pose an obstacle as well. At this rate Japan will forever be dependent on imported cotton products.

Eiichi Shibusawa
took steps to solve the problem as a representative of the spinning industry.



Yes, sir.
I will begin
preparing
right away.


Shibusawa here says
that Japan should
import cotton from
India. Can you lead an
expedition to India?



Yes.

In that
case, I have
the perfect
person.

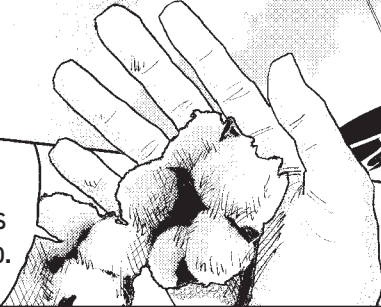
Sano?



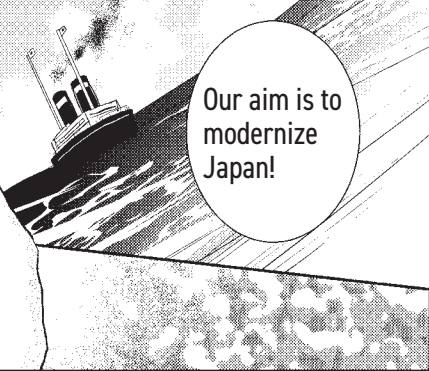
No, this is
not just a
personal
matter.

I'm very
grateful.

Tsuneki Sano,
Secretary of agriculture and commerce



Hmm. The
quality of this
cotton will do.



Our aim is to
modernize
Japan!



The
expedition
headed by
Secretary
Tsuneki Sano
submitted the
results of
their findings
to Okuma.

I'm glad
I'll be able
to give
a good
report.



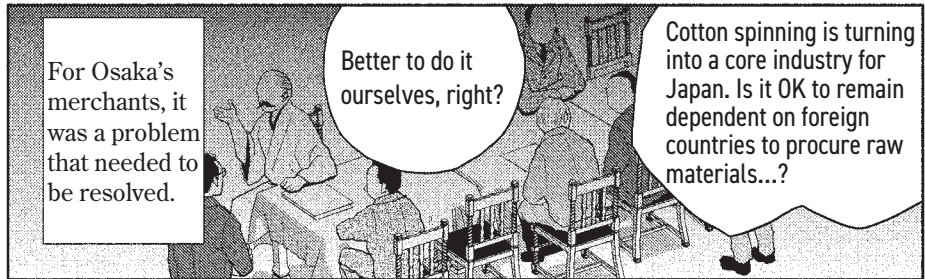
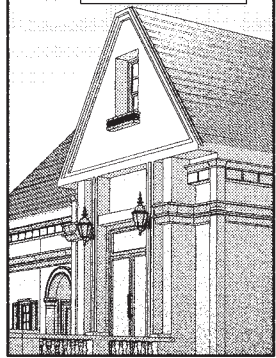
No need to sell to Japan. The British empire will buy our cotton.

If you don't like our prices, we won't sell to you.

But that's just too expensive...

But the foreign merchants were profiteers.

However, Japanese companies in the spinning industry had no choice but to rely on the foreign settlement in Kobe to procure cotton.



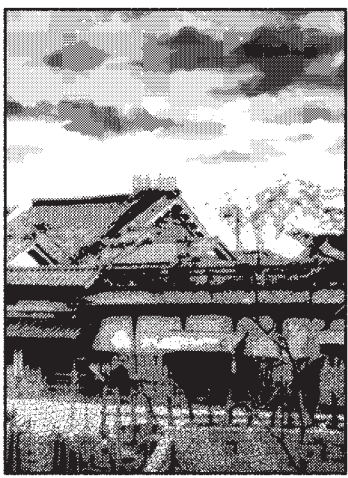
For Osaka's merchants, it was a problem that needed to be resolved.

Better to do it ourselves, right?

Cotton spinning is turning into a core industry for Japan. Is it OK to remain dependent on foreign countries to procure raw materials...?



We know the quality of Indian cotton and the import tax issue can be worked on, but we must act now...



Yes. I heard that it was the lifeblood of founder Oguri, famous minister of finance during Meiji restoration.

A trading company... father's Hyogo Shosha (trading company) was the first to use "shosha" in its name.

What if you all formed your own trading company?

In the past, Kajimaya lent money and tried whatever it could to navigate the chaos during the Meiji restoration.

...OK, I'll make some calls.

Osaka's merchants need to stick together like Mr. Godai advocated.

It can't hurt to try to form a new trading company.

Here in Japan there is a growing movement for us to run a trade business for Indian and American cotton on our own.

But domestic demand is not being met. If we stand by, foreign merchants will jump in to dominate the Japanese market.

The first president would be Tsuneki Sano who led the cotton expedition to India.

In 1892, the heads of Settsu Spinning, Hirano Spinning, Tenman Spinning, Amagasaki Spinning and 25 influential figures in Osaka came together to found Japan Cotton Trading Co., Ltd.

This is not a squabble over fees or overhead costs. That fate of one of Japan's emerging industries is at stake.

We are establishing our own trading company to further this mission.



We can do it !!



next to the residence of the late Godai.

Japan Cotton's headquarters were established in Nakanoshima

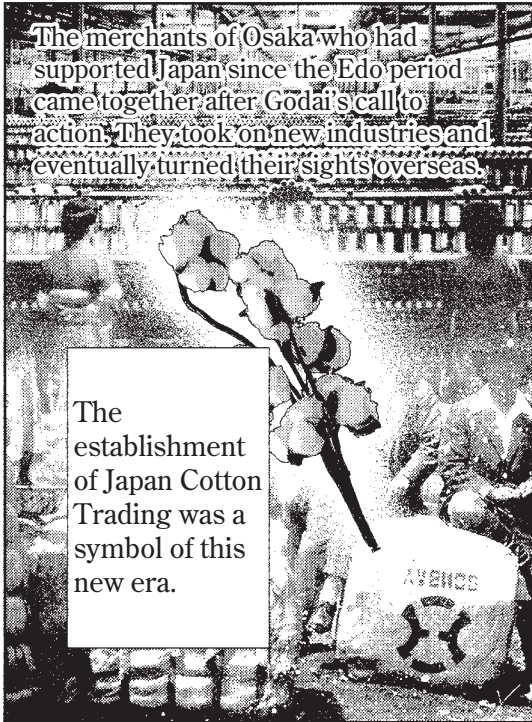


Of course.

Mr. Godai's looking out for us. We must succeed.

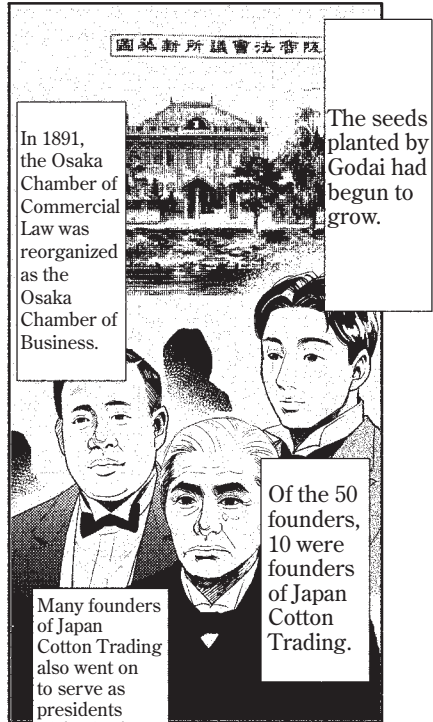
Hmm. You're right.

My husband. The real test is to come.



The merchants of Osaka who had supported Japan since the Edo period came together after Godai's call to action. They took on new industries and eventually turned their sights overseas.

The establishment of Japan Cotton Trading was a symbol of this new era.



大阪商會新築圖

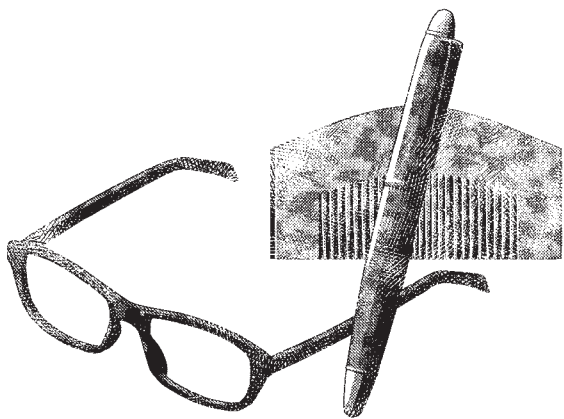
In 1891, the Osaka Chamber of Commercial Law was reorganized as the Osaka Chamber of Business.

The seeds planted by Godai had begun to grow.

Many founders of Japan Cotton Trading also went on to serve as presidents of the Osaka Chamber of Business.

Of the 50 founders, 10 were founders of Japan Cotton Trading.

The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War,
entry to Taiwan, and Suzuki and Iwai's
domestic production of celluloid

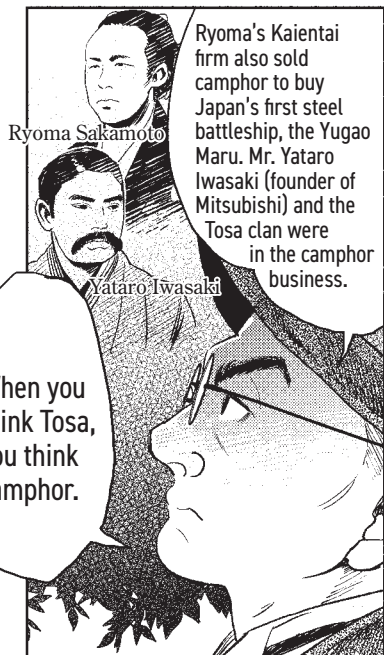
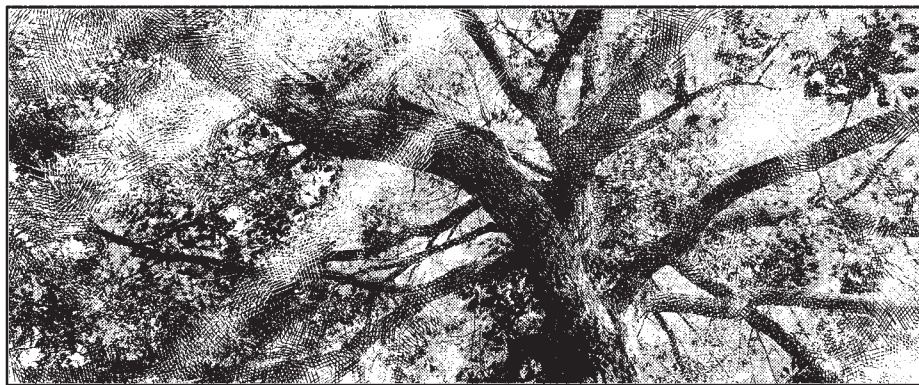


Hassojitz

*Sojitz - A General Trading Company
The Pioneers who Paved the Future
of Japan*

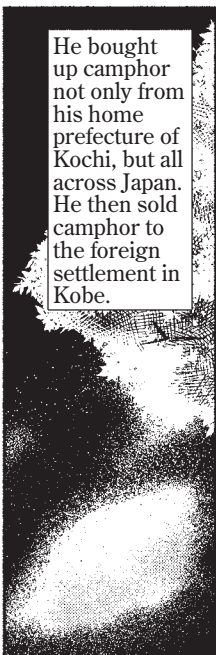


Shimpei Goto, celluloid, and menthol
—The key players in Japan's expansion to Taiwan and Japan's foray
into the manufacturing industry



Ryoma's Kaientai firm also sold camphor to buy Japan's first steel battleship, the Yugao Maru. Mr. Yataro Iwasaki (founder of Mitsubishi) and the Tosa clan were in the camphor business.

When you think Tosa, you think camphor.



He bought up camphor not only from his home prefecture of Kochi, but all across Japan. He then sold camphor to the foreign settlement in Kobe.

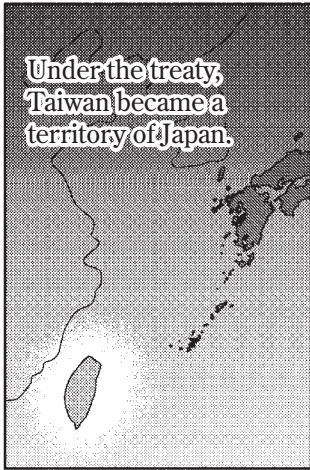


Since joining Suzuki, Kaneko had focused on camphor extracted from camphor trees.

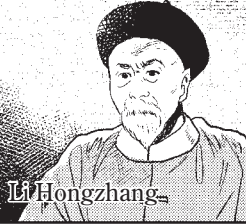
Camphor trees are only found in parts of East Asia. Taiwan was known to have the largest plantations.



At the time camphor was used in insect repellent, medicines, and perfumes. Demand was also increasing for use in explosives and celluloid.

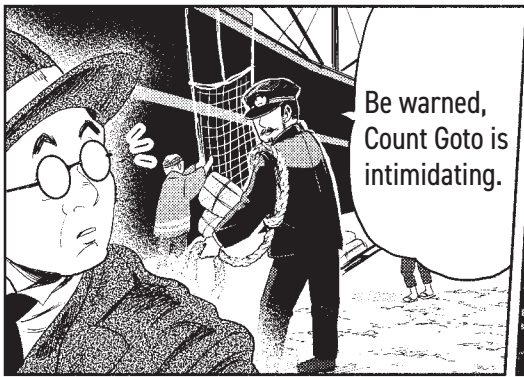
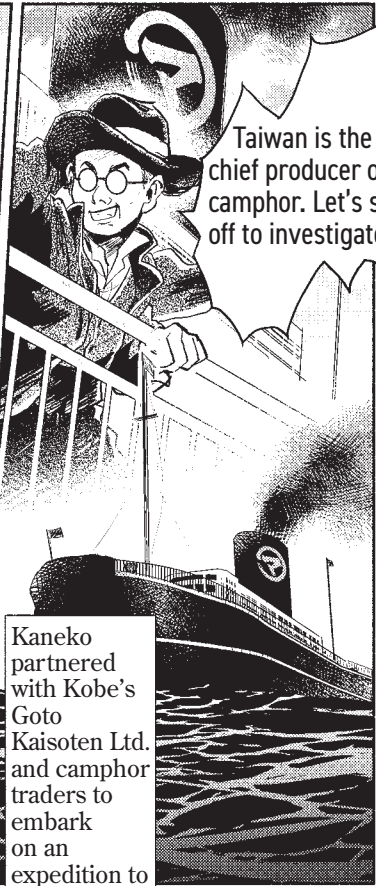
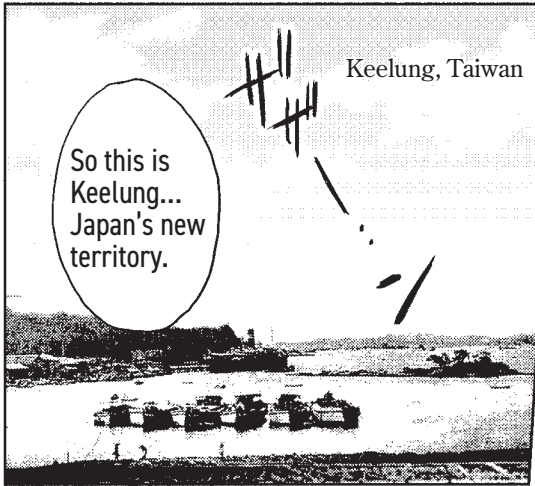


Hmph. How could our great Qing empire lose to such a small country...



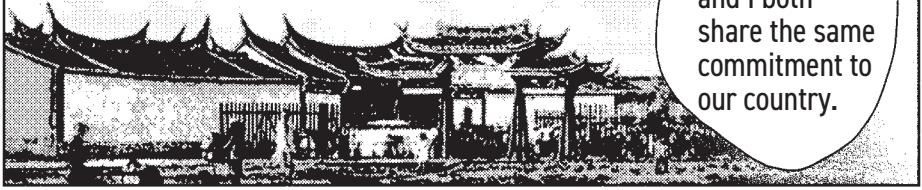
The following year, the war ended with a Japanese victory and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki.

In 1894, the Sino-Japanese War broke out.

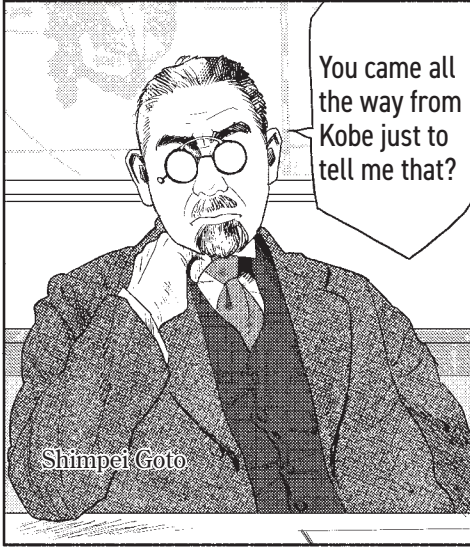


Kaneko partnered with Kobe's Goto Kaisoten Ltd. and camphor traders to embark on an expedition to Taiwan.

The Government-General of Taiwan

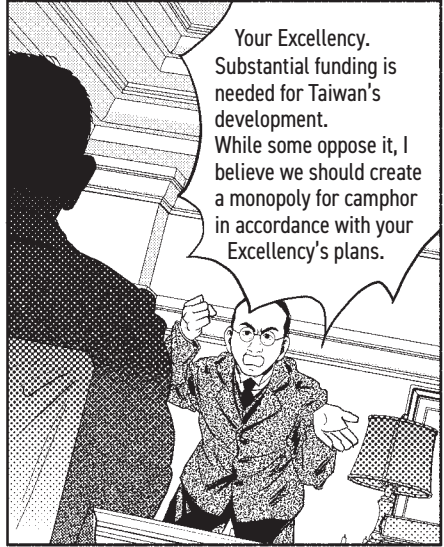


Leave it to me. Count Goto and I both share the same commitment to our country.

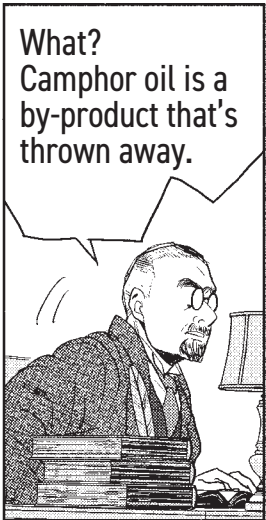


You came all the way from Kobe just to tell me that?

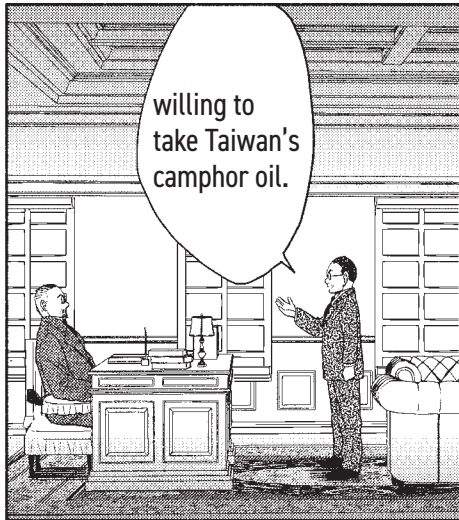
Shimppei Goto



Your Excellency. Substantial funding is needed for Taiwan's development. While some oppose it, I believe we should create a monopoly for camphor in accordance with your Excellency's plans.



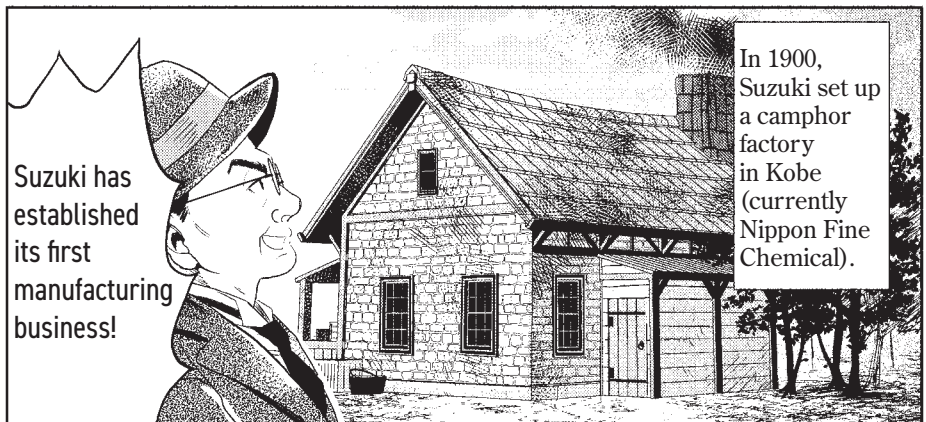
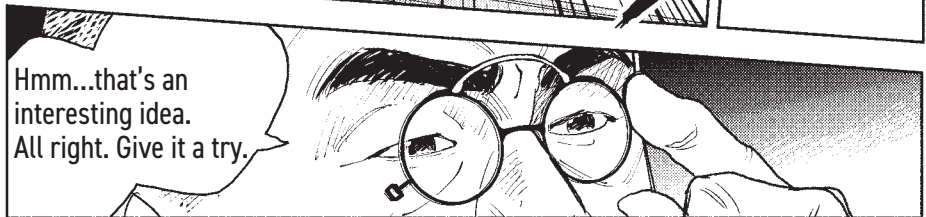
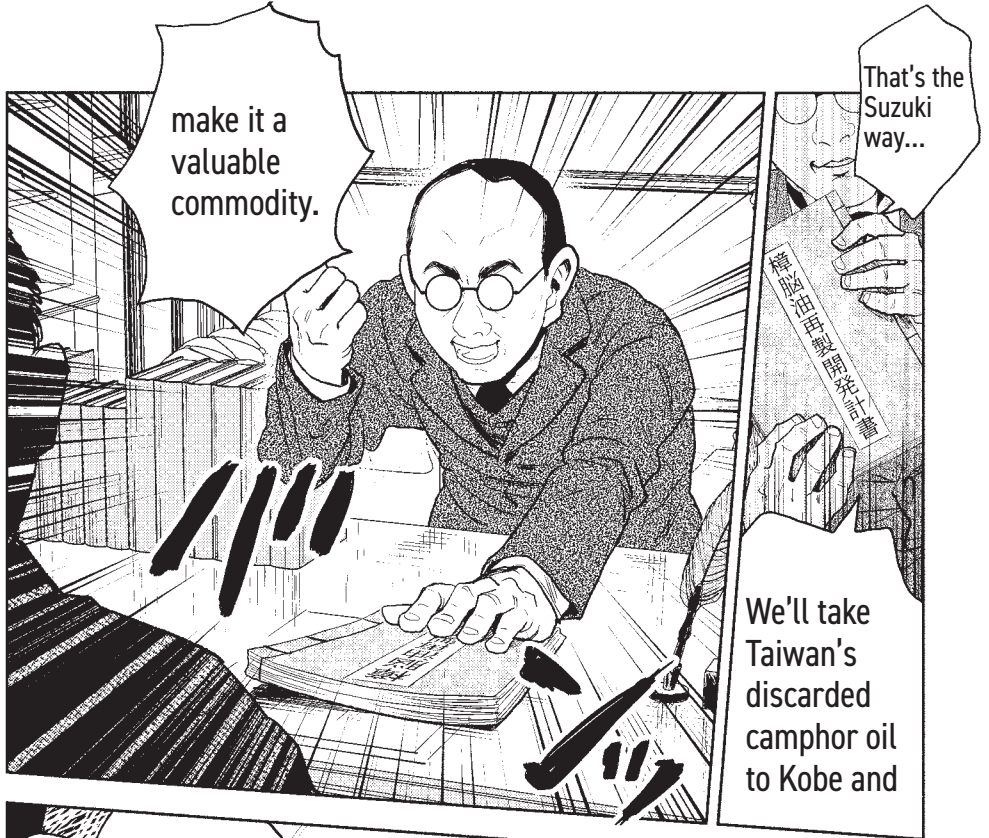
What? Camphor oil is a by-product that's thrown away.



willing to take Taiwan's camphor oil.



We at Suzuki are



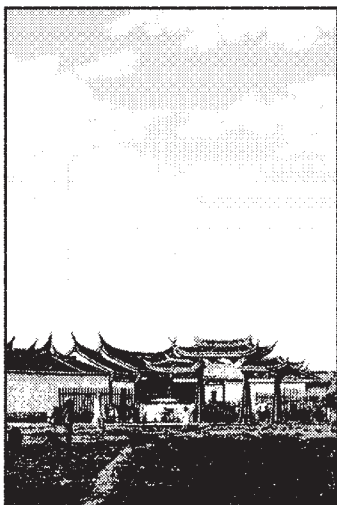
Camphor went on to become one of Kobe's leading exports.

I'll elevate Suzuki's name and change the nation. .

By manufacturing products ourselves, we'll bring prosperity to Japan.

Again? What has he come up with now?

Your Excellency, Mr. Kaneko from Suzuki & Co. is here to see you.

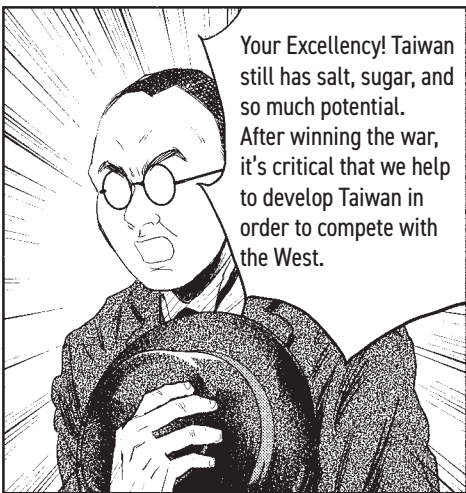


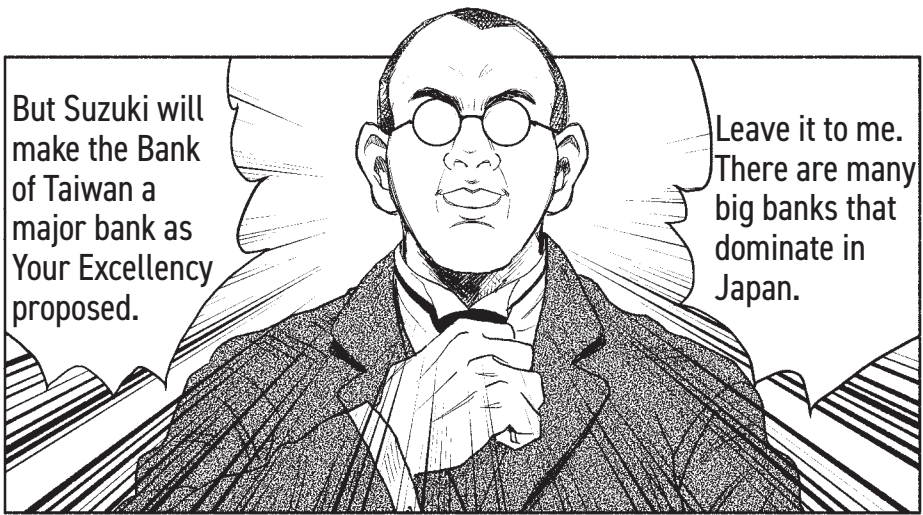
Actually, there's a matter with the Bank of Taiwan I want to ask Suzuki...

コホン



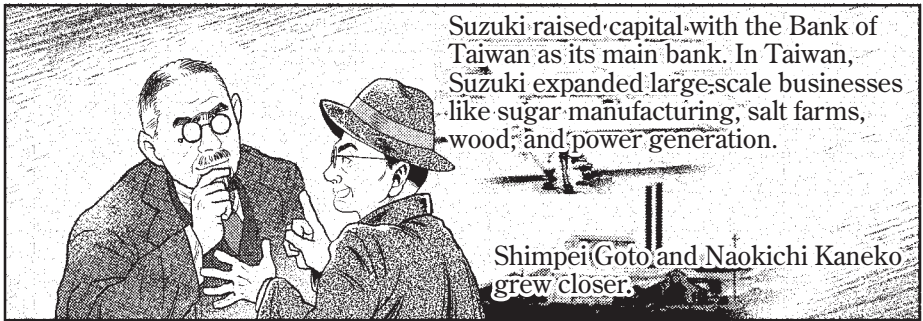
Your Excellency! Taiwan still has salt, sugar, and so much potential. After winning the war, it's critical that we help to develop Taiwan in order to compete with the West.





But Suzuki will make the Bank of Taiwan a major bank as Your Excellency proposed.

Leave it to me. There are many big banks that dominate in Japan.

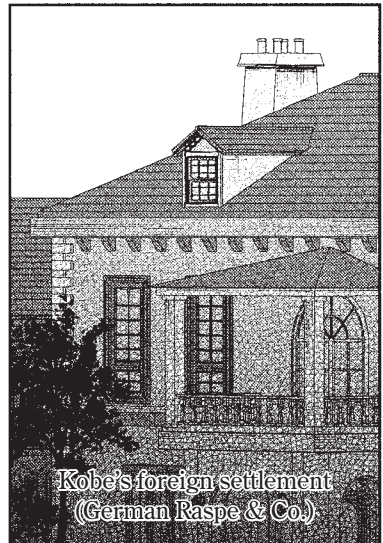


Suzuki raised capital with the Bank of Taiwan as its main bank. In Taiwan, Suzuki expanded large-scale businesses like sugar manufacturing, salt farms, wood, and power generation.

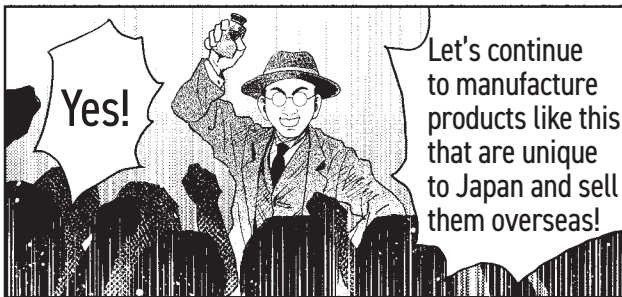
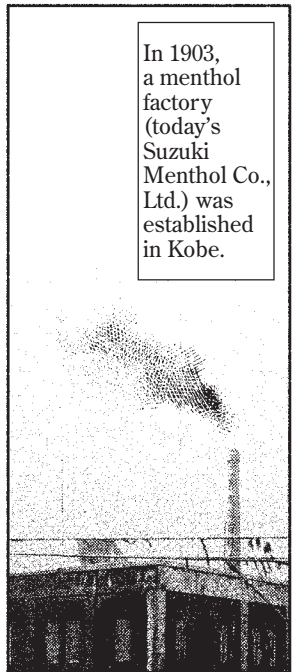
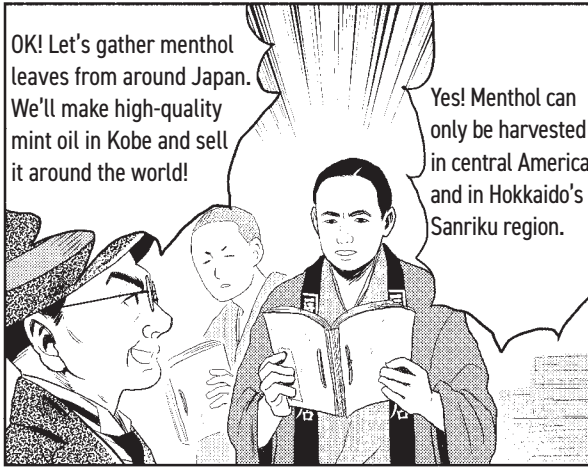
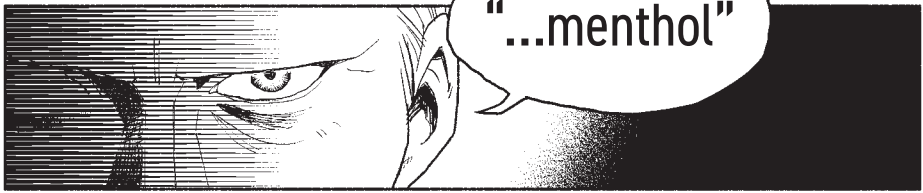
Shimpei Goto and Naokichi Kaneko grew closer.

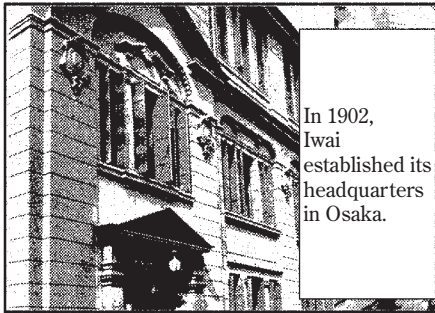


I beg you—tell me something you want.

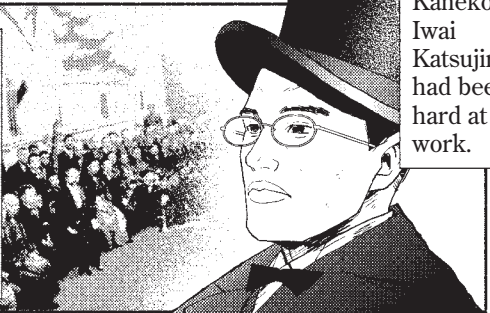


Kobe's foreign settlement (German Raspe & Co.)

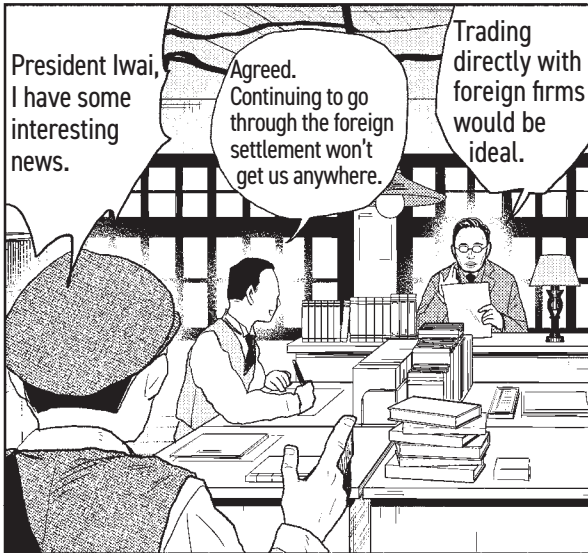




In 1902, Iwai established its headquarters in Osaka.



Just like Kaneko, Iwai Katsujiro had been hard at work.



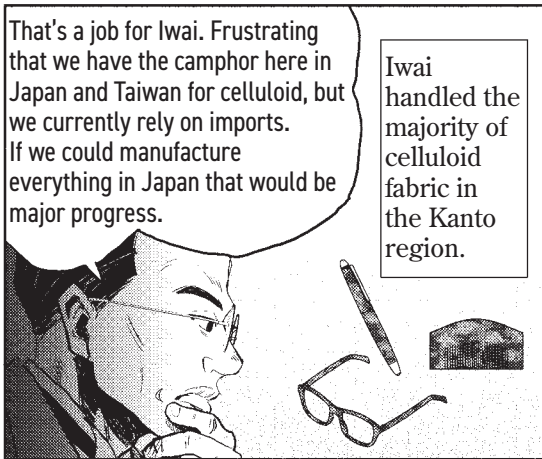
President Iwai, I have some interesting news.

Agreed. Continuing to go through the foreign settlement won't get us anywhere.

Trading directly with foreign firms would be ideal.

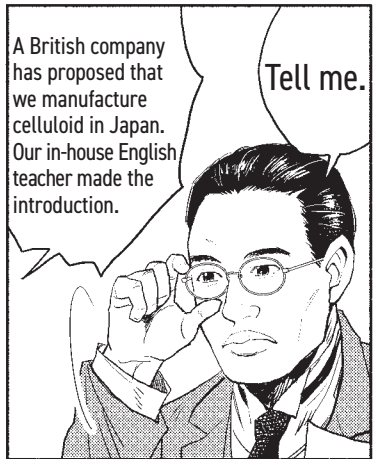


Iwai was the first to import and make commercial use of bicycles.



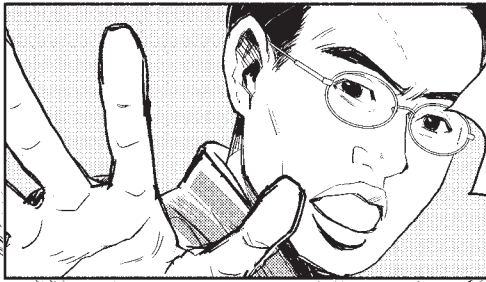
That's a job for Iwai. Frustrating that we have the camphor here in Japan and Taiwan for celluloid, but we currently rely on imports. If we could manufacture everything in Japan that would be major progress.

Iwai handled the majority of celluloid fabric in the Kanto region.



A British company has proposed that we manufacture celluloid in Japan. Our in-house English teacher made the introduction.

Tell me.

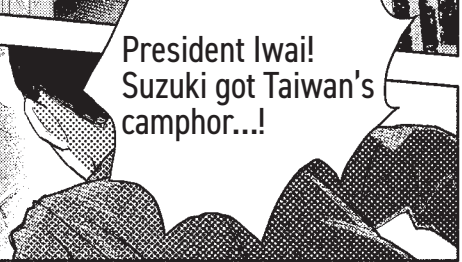


The celluloid industry will pave the way for Japan's future prosperity. We can't miss this chance! Sound out Taiwan's monopoly bureau in order to secure raw materials.

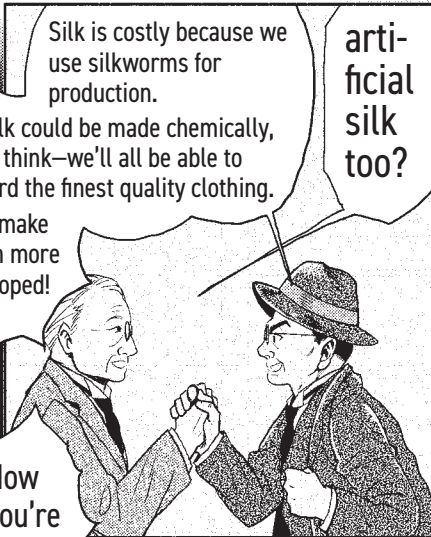
At this time, Kaneko and Iwai's paths would cross.



What do you mean?!



President Iwai! Suzuki got Taiwan's camphor...!



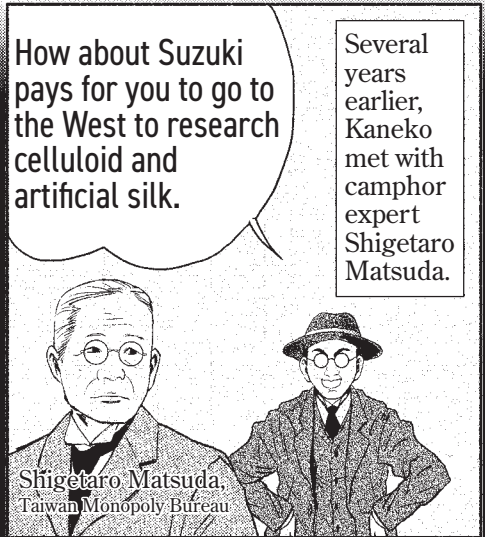
Silk is costly because we use silkworms for production.

If silk could be made chemically, just think—we'll all be able to afford the finest quality clothing.

Let's make Japan more developed!

artificial silk too?

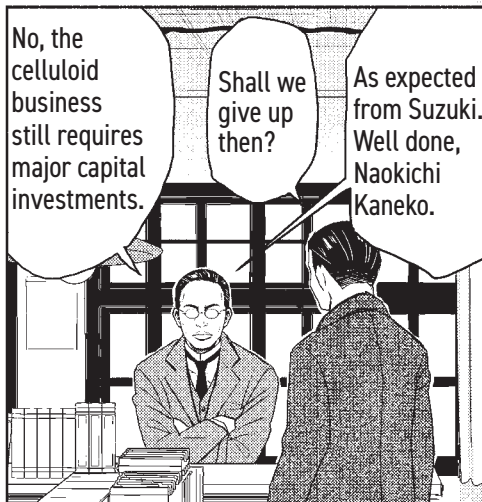
Now you're talkin'!



How about Suzuki pays for you to go to the West to research celluloid and artificial silk.

Several years earlier, Kaneko met with camphor expert Shigetaro Matsuda.

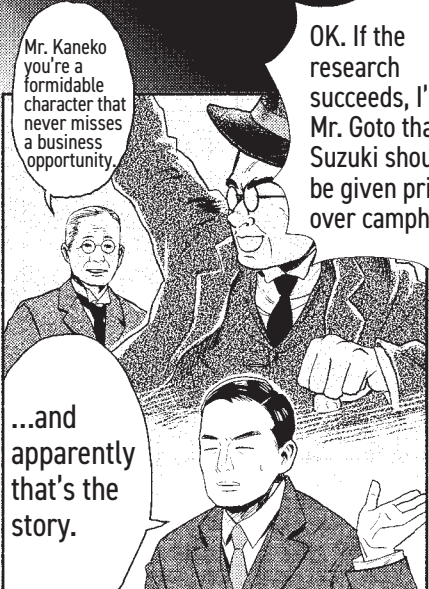
Shigetaro Matsuda, Taiwan Monopoly Bureau



No, the celluloid business still requires major capital investments.

Shall we give up then?

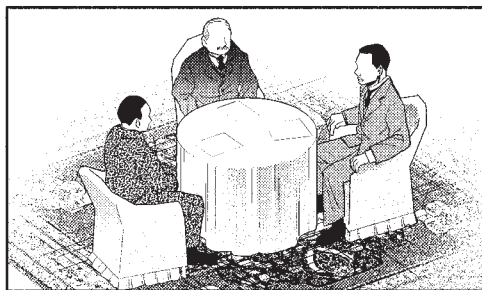
As expected from Suzuki. Well done, Naokichi Kaneko.



Mr. Kaneko you're a formidable character that never misses a business opportunity

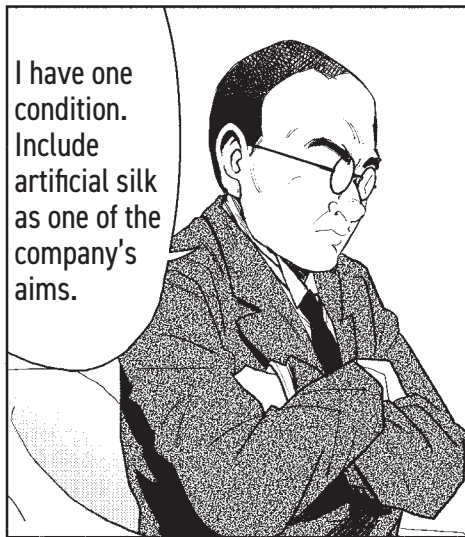
OK. If the research succeeds, I'll tell Mr. Goto that Suzuki should be given priority over camphor.

...and apparently that's the story.



Negotiations thus began.

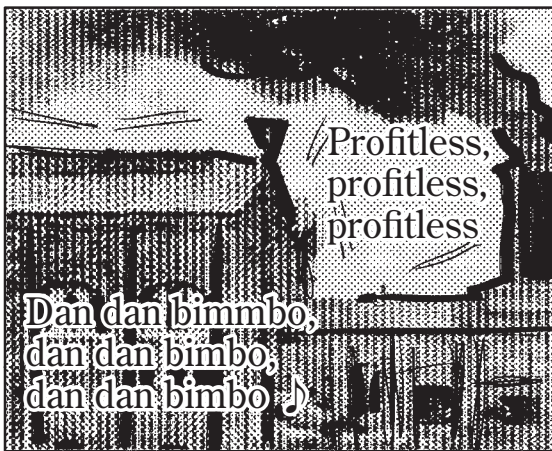
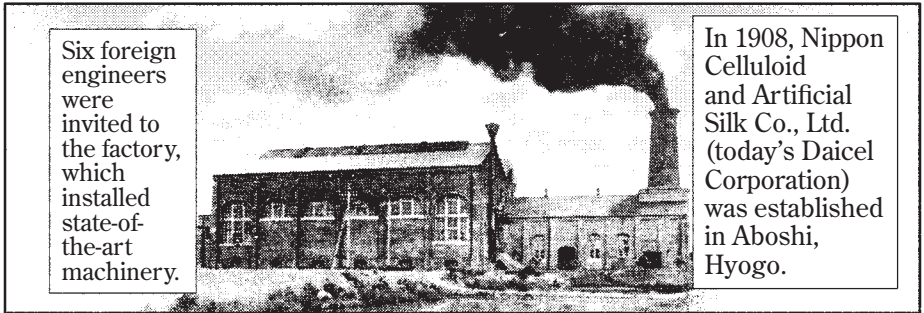
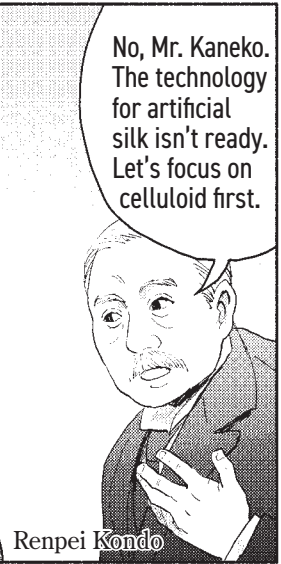
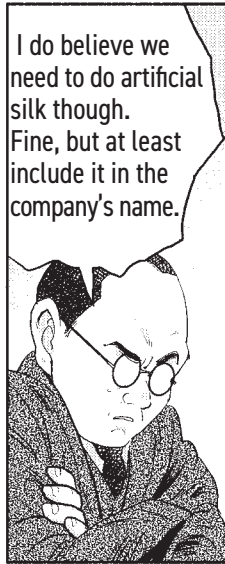
Even Suzuki can't tackle it alone. Better yet, let's involve Mitsubishi too. This project requires everyone's collaboration.

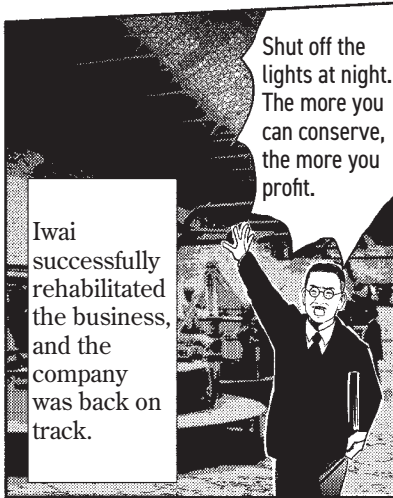
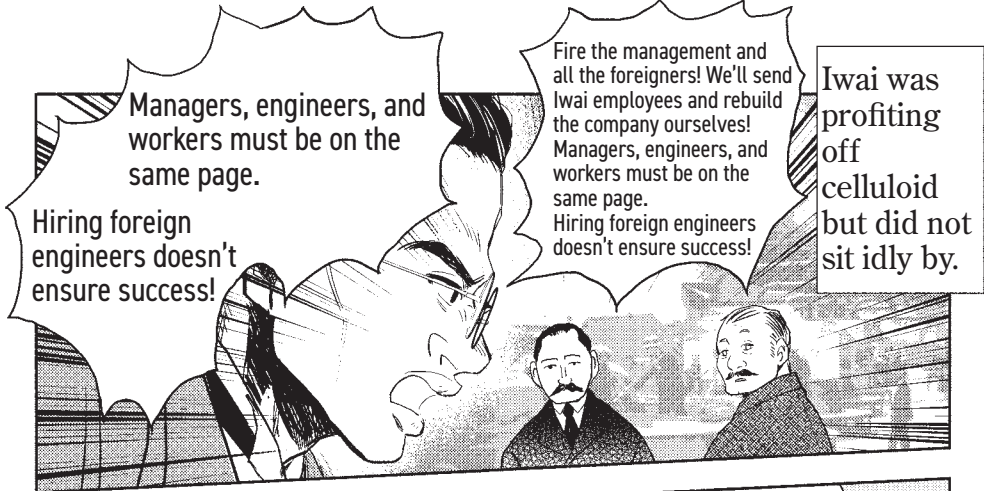


I have one condition. Include artificial silk as one of the company's aims.



To make this business a success, all three of our companies must join forces.





"In 1908, Nippon Celluloid Artificial Silk Co., Ltd. was established by Mitsubishi, Iwai & Co., and Suzuki & Co. The company was a forerunner in Japan's industrialization process for celluloid products and the chemical industry. Japan Celluloid can be considered the birthplace of Japan's *monozukuri*."

In honor of its 90th anniversary, Daicel erected a monument at its Aboshi factory.

Iwai exported Japan Celluloid's products. Products with the KB mark (Kagaya Bunsuke= Iwai Bunsuke's trade name) were sold around the world as a major export of Japan.

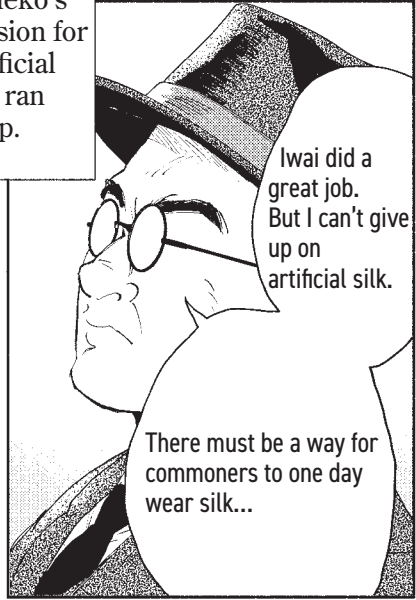


Nippon Celluloid Artificial Silk Co., Ltd. (now Daicel)
Hirotarō Nishida,
Engineering Manager



Mr. Nishida?
I don't want to
say this too loudly
in front of Mr.
Kondo, but can you
begin the rayon
research?

Kaneko's
passion for
artificial
silk ran
deep.



Iwai did a
great job.
But I can't give
up on
artificial silk.

There must be a way for
commoners to one day
wear silk...

Kobe's Monopoly Bureau



Uh...
Yes!
Understood.

You there—
we'll fund your
trip to Europe
if you research
artificial silk.

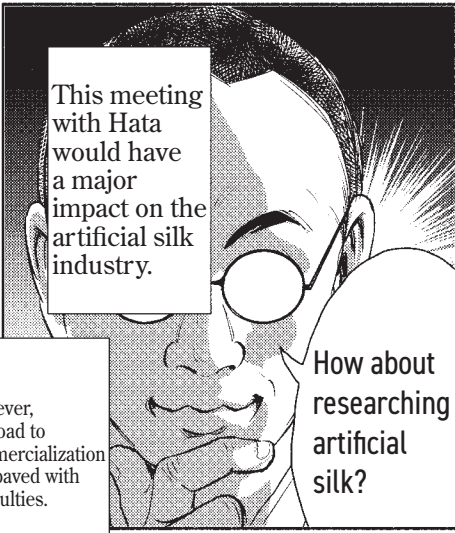


Kaneko was
said to meet
with anyone
who visited.

Good of you
to come.
Sit.

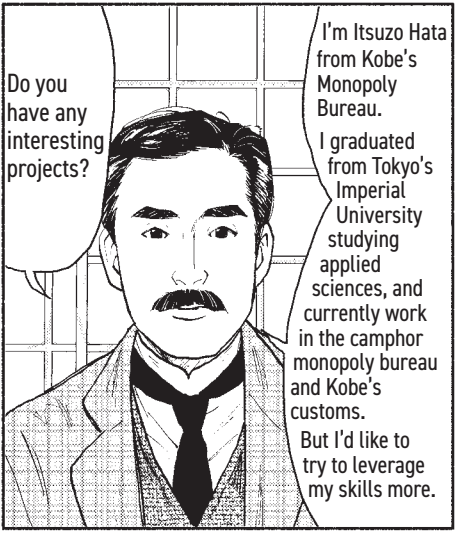
At that time,
Kaneko
received a
fateful visitor.

This meeting
with Hata
would have
a major
impact on the
artificial silk
industry.



How about
researching
artificial
silk?

Do you
have any
interesting
projects?

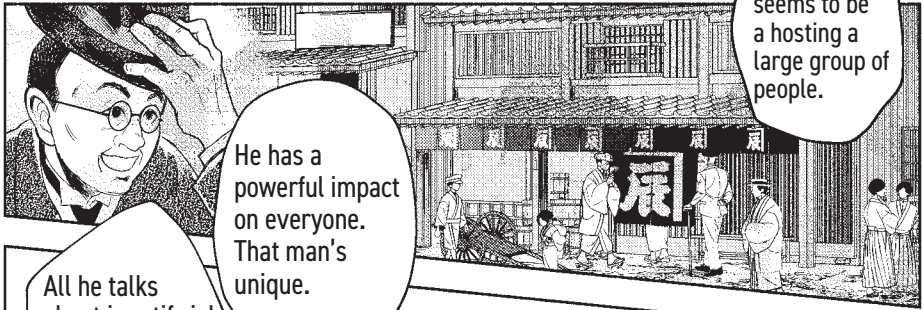


I'm Itsuzo Hata
from Kobe's
Monopoly
Bureau.

I graduated
from Tokyo's
Imperial
University
studying
applied
sciences, and
currently work
in the camphor
monopoly bureau
and Kobe's
customs.

But I'd like to
try to leverage
my skills more.

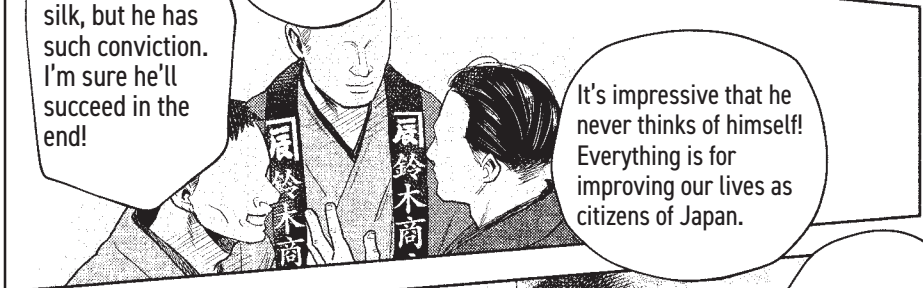
However,
the road to
commercialization
was paved with
difficulties.



Mr. Kaneko seems to be a hosting a large group of people.

He has a powerful impact on everyone. That man's unique.

All he talks about is artificial silk, but he has such conviction. I'm sure he'll succeed in the end!

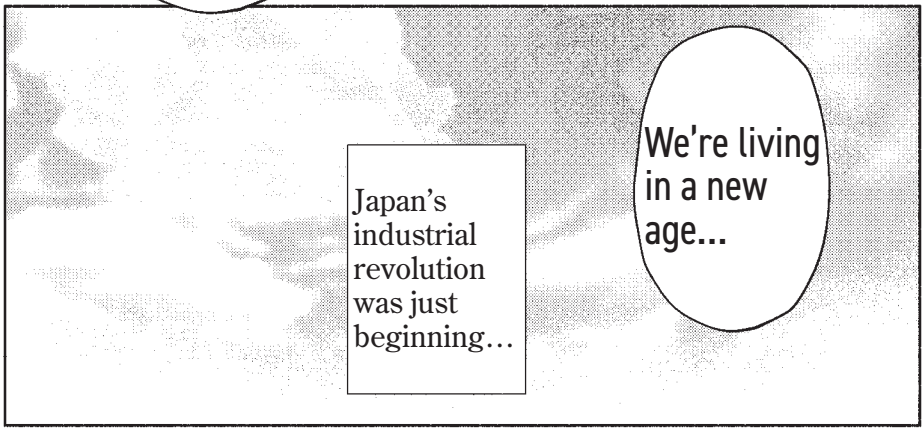


It's impressive that he never thinks of himself! Everything is for improving our lives as citizens of Japan.



Kajimaya set up Japan Cotton Trading in Osaka. That's the Japanese merchant spirit for you.

You know the Aboshi factory? Iwai was the one who saved it. He listens to young researchers. He's humble and driven too. As merchants, they both have the same high aspirations.



Japan's industrial revolution was just beginning...

We're living in a new age...