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A New Breed of Japanese Born in Meiji

Shidehara Kijūrō was born in 1872. His first overseas post as a diplomat was to the Japanese legation in Incheon, Korea. Having observed the words and deeds of this newly appointed diplomat, Consul Ishii Kikujirō asked Shidehara how old he was. Hearing the reply, Ishii exclaimed, "So you were born after the Meiji Restoration (of 1868). You are different from the other people. I have always suspected you were a new breed of Japanese." Although Ishii himself was born in 1866, only two years before the Meiji Restoration and was just six years older than Shidehara, this was such a time of politico-social turmoil that Ishii perceived a generation gap between Shidehara and himself.

How, though, was Shidehara different from his nominal cohorts? In a nutshell, he was a serious man born in a time of peace. One of Shidehara's colleagues from his days in London later reminisced:

Japanese foreign service men in those days often affected an air of *sempai* machismo. When it came to mastering foreign languages, studying international law, or researching domestic and international situations, however, they were less than enthusiastic. . . . By contrast,