

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

JAPAN'S EARLY MODERN TRANSFORMATION

In 1543 some Portuguese traders in a Chinese junk came ashore on the island of Tanegashima south of Kagoshima, the headquarters city of the Satsuma domain of southernmost Kyushu. This first, and presumably accidental, encounter between Europeans and Japanese proved to be an epochal event, for from the Portuguese the Japanese learned about Western firearms. Within three decades the Japanese civil war that had been growing in intensity among the regional military lords, or *daimyō*, was being fought with the new technology. In 1549 another Chinese vessel, this time purposefully, set on Japanese soil at Kagoshima the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Society of Jesus. This marked the start of a vigorous effort by Jesuit missionaries to bring Christianity to Japan. For another hundred years Japan lay open to both traders and missionaries from the West. And conversely Japan became known to the world beyond its doors.¹

From a strictly Japanese perspective, the century or so from the middle of the sixteenth century is distinguished by what can be called the “daimyo phenomenon,” that is, the rise of local military lords who first carved out their own domains and then began to war among themselves for national hegemony. Between 1568 and 1590 two powerful lords, Oda Nobunaga (1534–82) and Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), managed to unite all daimyo under a single military command, binding them together into a national confederation. The most important political development of these years was without question the achievement of military consolidation that led in 1603 to the establishment of a new shogunate, based in Edo. The shogunate itself, the government of the Tokugawa hegemony, gave form to the “Great Peace” that was to last until well into the nineteenth century.

¹ The use of the term “Christian century” has been applied to this era by Western scholars, but I have avoided using it in this introduction because of its possible overemphasis on the foreign factor. The best-known general work on this subject in English is C. H. Boxer’s *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549–1650* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).

Japan's sixteenth-century unification, as it was both observed by Europeans and influenced by the introduction of Western arms, has naturally suggested to historians various points of comparison between European and Japanese historical institutions. In fact, European visitors of the time found many similarities between the Europe they knew and the Japan they visited.² Will Adams (1564–1620), for one, who landed in Japan in 1600, found life there quite amenable. Japan to him was a country of law and order governed as well or better than any he had seen in his travels. Since his time, historians, both Western and Japanese, have given thought to whether Japan and Western Europe were basically comparable in the mid-sixteenth century. Was there in fact a universal process of historical development in which two societies, though on the opposite sides of the globe, could be seen to react to similar stimuli in comparable ways? The first generation of modern Japanese and Western historians to confront this question readily made the intellectual jump and put Japan on the same line of historical evolution as parts of Europe. The pioneer historian of medieval Japanese history, Asakawa Kan'ichi, typified this positivistic approach. As a member of the Yale University faculty from 1905 to 1946, he spent much of his scholarly life in search of a definition of feudalism that could be applied to both Europe and Japan.³

Historians today are more cautious about suggesting that a tangible continuum might underlie two such distant but seemingly similar societies. Yet they continue to be intrigued by questions of possible comparability in the Japanese case.⁴ We think of early modern Western Europe in political terms as an age of the “absolute monarchs,” starting with the heads of the Italian city-states, the monarchies of Spain and Portugal, and finally England under the Tudors and France under the Bourbons. Underlying these state organizations were certain common features of government and social structure. First there was a notable centralization and expansion of power in the hands of the monarchy, and this tended to be gained at the expense of the landed aristocracy and the church. Characteristic of these states was the

2 A conveniently arranged anthology of excerpts from the writings of European visitors to Japan is available in Michael Cooper, comp. and ed., *They Came to Japan: An Anthology of European Reports on Japan, 1543–1640* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965).

3 Kan'ichi Asakawa's most pertinent articles on the subject of feudalism in Japan have been gathered in *Land and Society in Medieval Japan* (Tokyo: Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, 1965).

4 See the discussion of feudalism in Japan in Joseph R. Strayer, “The Tokugawa Period and Japanese Feudalism,” and John W. Hall, “Feudalism in Japan – A Reassessment,” in John W. Hall and Marius B. Jansen, eds., *Studies in the Institutional History of Early Modern Japan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

growth of centralized fiscal, police, and military organizations and the increasing bureaucratization of administration. There were certain attendant social changes, particularly what is commonly described as the “breakdown” of feudal social class divisions, and the “rise” of the commercial and service classes. Often this process was furthered by an alliance between the monarchy and commercial wealth against the landed aristocracy and the clergy. And finally, common to all, was the growing acceptance of the practice of representation in government. The establishment of diets or parliaments was the truest test of postfeudal society.

Japan during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries underwent several similar political and social changes. The country achieved a new degree of political unity. The Tokugawa hegemony gave rise to a highly centralized power structure, capable of exerting nationwide enforcement over military and fiscal institutions. Yet centralization did not go as far as it had in Europe. Daimyo were permitted to retain their own armies and also a considerable amount of administrative autonomy.

However, in contrast with Europe, Edo military government did not nurture an independent and politically powerful commercial class. There was no parliamentary representation of the “Third Estate.” Rather, the samurai were frozen in place as the “ruling class” and reinforced at the expense of the merchant class. Although internal events in Japan showed certain patterns that invited comparison with Western Europe, the methodology for making such comparisons has not been convincingly developed. To be sure, there have been numerous attempts at one-on-one comparison based on the premise that the unification of Japan under the Tokugawa hegemony was comparable to the appearance of the monarchical states of Europe. Specifically, Marxist theory has been used to equate changes in sixteenth-century Japan with the presumed universal passage of society from feudalism to the absolute state.⁵

The effort to explain Japanese history using concepts of change derived from a reading of European history has its advocates as well as its critics. This point is touched on in several chapters in this volume, especially that by Wakita Osamu. As more is discovered about the political and social institutions of the late sixteenth century in Japan,

5 For a discussion of the controversy over concepts of periodization, see John Whitney Hall, Keiji Nagahara, and Kozo Yamamura, eds., *Japan Before Tokugawa: Political Consolidation and Economic Growth, 1500–1650* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 11–14.

the more complex the problem of comparison across cultural boundaries appears to be. It is important to note that the vocabulary of historical explanation that has evolved among historians working strictly in documents primary to Japan is perfectly capable of identifying and analyzing the Japanese case on its own terms.

The traditional landmarks of Japanese historical periodization help identify the primary boundary-setting events of the period. We start with the Ōnin–Bummei War of 1467 to 1477 that marked the beginning of the final downward slide of the Muromachi shogunate. According to traditional historiography, the period from the Ōnin War to 1568 – the year in which Oda Nobunaga occupied Kyoto and thereby initiated the period of military consolidation – is referred to as the Sengoku period, the Age of the Country at War. Between this date and 1582, when Nobunaga was killed by one of his own generals, traditional historiography has applied the label *Azuchi*, the name of Nobunaga's imposing castle on Lake Biwa. The period from Nobunaga's death to 1598, during which Hideyoshi completed the unification of the daimyo, is given the name *Momoyama*, from the location of Hideyoshi's castle built between Osaka and Kyoto. The victory of Tokugawa Ieyasu's forces against the Toyotomi faction at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600 marked the beginning of the Tokugawa hegemony. Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616) received appointment as shogun in 1603, but his status was not fully consummated until 1615, when he occupied Osaka Castle and destroyed the remnants of the Toyotomi house and its supporters. The Tokugawa, or Edo, period was to last until 1868.

We have already noted that for purposes of distribution and coverage of subject matter, the temporal scope of this the fourth volume of our series is roughly from 1550 to 1800. The years covered do not conform to any single traditional historical era but, rather, include both the Azuchi and Momoyama periods and the first two centuries of the Edo, or Tokugawa, period. This time span is justified on the grounds that it covers the birth and the ultimate maturation of the form of political organization referred to by modern Japanese historians as *bakuhan*, namely, the structure of government in which the shogunate (*bakufu*) ruled the country through a subordinate coalition of daimyo, whose domains were referred to as *han*. Although historians have commonly treated the Azuchi–Momoyama and the Edo periods as distinct entities, more recently they have come to recognize that the origin of the Tokugawa hegemony and the formation of Edo polity cannot be explained without reference to the fundamental institutional

changes that occurred under Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Hence, we now commonly link the earlier age as a preamble to the longer Edo period.⁶

There is, of course, no intent to deny the separate identities of the Azuchi–Momoyama and Edo periods as meaningful units of historical periodization, especially from the point of view of the cultural historian. Similarly, Azuchi–Momoyama still stands for half a century of massive military consolidation and political and social transformation, as the leading regional warlords created the compact domains that were eventually hammered together into a national coalition in 1590 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

Most of the events of this era have been described with superlatives and absolutes. Unification was not simply a matter of conquest by one all-powerful daimyo. Rather, unification was companion to a more universal development, namely, the establishment of the warrior estate (the *bushi* or samurai) as the primary ruling authority in the country. Gathered into the castle towns that served as headquarters for the more than two hundred daimyo, the samurai enforced a rigorous administration over disarmed peasant and merchant classes. Despite the weight of military rule, the general national mood was one of openness to social change and to the outside world. Japanese adventurers engaged in commerce and piracy along the China mainland and into the waters of Indochina and the Philippines. Conversely, when Japan's shores were first visited by European traders and missionaries, they were warmly welcomed. We have noted already that Japan learned of firearms and Christianity from the West. The first had an immediate bearing on the nature of domestic warfare, hastening appreciably the process of military consolidation. The spread of Christianity was basically divisive in its impact, giving rise to deep suspicions and tensions among Japanese of all classes. This ultimately became a contributory factor that led the authorities to close Japan's doors to all Europeans except the Dutch, adopting the so-called *sakoku*, or seclusion, policy. But that was not until 1639 and was the work of the more conservative Tokugawa shogunate.

More characteristic of the ages of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi were the private figures of the first two unifiers themselves. Nobunaga appears as the ruthless destroyer, wholly determined to eliminate all obstacles

6 For recent studies of this transition era, see George Elison and Bardwell L. Smith, eds., *Warlords, Artists, & Commoners: Japan in the Sixteenth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981). Pages 245 to 279 of this volume comprise an extensive bibliography of works in Western languages.

to his national unification. On the other hand, Hideyoshi is remembered as the creator of institutions that became the building blocks for the subsequent Tokugawa hegemony. Yet for all of this, he remains the colorful military upstart, indulging in flamboyant social displays, erecting gilded monuments to the emperor (*tennō*) or to himself. His most grandiose exploit was the controversial invasion of Korea in 1592–8.

The Edo period that followed also projected its own historical image exemplified in the figure of Ieyasu, the only one of the unifiers who succeeded in establishing a hegemony that survived his own death. National unity was institutionalized to safeguard a lasting peace. The major decisions made by Ieyasu and his first two successors as shogun were taken in the name of consolidation and stability. This was evident in the efforts to shape the bakufu as a national instrument of political control. Christianity was interdicted, and foreign contacts were brought under strict regulation. The stamp of *sakoku* that colored the Edo bakufu's relations with the outside world was a reversal of the previous mood of openness. But it should not be thought that all the policies of the Edo shogunate were negative in their intent. Indeed, it was under the Tokugawa that Japan successfully made the transition from military to civil government, something that Hideyoshi had had little time to consider. Moreover, it was Tokugawa policy that permitted or even encouraged the growth of a new urban class, the *chōnin*, and the urban cultural environment that it nurtured. In the area of foreign affairs, the Tokugawa shogunate was to continue to keep its eyes on the outside world indirectly through the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Dutch, who were given restricted access to Japan.

THE ODA–TOYOTOMI INSTITUTIONS OF UNIFICATION

The reason that historians today place such emphasis on the factors of continuity between the Oda–Toyotomi age and the succeeding Edo period comes from a new appreciation of the institutional changes that took place between the last half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth. Earlier writers were not oblivious to this point, but as more has been discovered about the domestic changes of the last half of the sixteenth century, it has become clear that Japan experienced in those years a major transformation in social and political organization, military and economic capacity, and cultural style. Moreover, this transformation was more than a by-product of the unification movement or a reflection of the personal leadership of the

three unifiers. Of late, historians have looked for explanations of the forces of change in two broad areas: the evolving relationships between the peasantry and the land, and between the samurai and the sources of their political power. Both approaches are concerned at bottom with the phenomenon of *hei-nō-bunri*, the process whereby the samurai class was moved into the daimyo's newly formed headquarter towns, leaving a disarmed peasantry confined to the villages in the countryside.

A new look at the agrarian foundations of sixteenth-century Japan was initiated in the 1950s by Araki Moriaki in his study of the massive cadastral survey (the so-called Taikō *kenchi*) conducted by Hideyoshi.⁷ It was Araki's claim that the survey marked a major watershed in national organization. By giving rise to a farming class of small independent farm families under the direct control of regional military lords, it gave shape for the first time in Japan to what Araki claims to be a true serf class. As a consequence, Japan entered a state of feudalism, in Araki's terms.

Araki's work created a stir in Japanese historical circles that has not yet subsided. But whether or not one agrees with his conceptual premises, historians in general have acknowledged that what happened to Japan in the wake of the sixteenth-century cadastral surveys was of fundamental historical importance. The *kenchi* was instrumental in drawing a clear line between the samurai and the *hyakushō* (peasantry). Moreover, it gave rise to the *kokudaka* system of land management and taxation. This remarkable practice converted large numbers of samurai into absentee fief holders possessing proprietary rights of taxation, but not of free disposal, on their lands held in fief. It affirmed the existence of the self-regulated village unit (*mura*) and the cultivators' rights of occupancy.

At the other end of the political spectrum, formation of the Tokugawa hegemony has been studied in terms of the relationship between the bakufu as the central government and the *han* as units of local rule. Before our own time, historians had placed their attention chiefly on the bakufu as the central government – a regime they saw as the willful creation of the Tokugawa house. The growing interest in the study of daimyo domains that began in the late 1930s, however, led to the practice of referring to the government structure of the Tokugawa

⁷ This spectacular accomplishment by the military aristocracy of the sixteenth century was not fully appreciated until the 1950s. With the appearance of Araki Moriaki's *Bakuhau taisei shakai no seiritsu to kōzō* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobō, 1959), the nationwide land survey became a major focus of attention for Japanese historians.

period as a combined *bakuhan* system.⁸ Thus they gave the *han* a position of equal standing with the bakufu.

The present consensus among historians is that government organization during the Edo period was the consequence of the evolution of two political systems: the shogunal system of national control and the daimyo system of local control. Both of these aspects of government were necessary and mutually dependent. In other words, the hegemonic power ultimately acquired by the shogun rested significantly on the ability of the daimyo who made up the shogun's vassal band to assert effective command over their provincial domains. These in fact accounted for no less than three-quarters of the national land base. The shogun, although in possession of the remaining one-quarter, was not prepared to abolish the daimyo and take on the administration of the entire country through a private officer corps. The shogun's government was essentially an expanded version of *han* government. Many features of Tokugawa administration, including its policy of proprietary authority, derived from precedents established when Ieyasu himself was still a daimyo in the province of Mikawa.

The current emphasis on the *bakuhan* and *kokudaka* systems as explanatory concepts for the Edo period has eased the controversy over interpretation in the Marxist sense of whether Edo Japan should be considered a feudal society. As shown in the chapter by Wakita Osamu, so distinctive are the *bakuhan* and *kokudaka* systems, so difficult to compare with other historical models, particularly European, that the use of feudalism as an explanatory device has become less attractive.

Having made this point, however, it must be admitted that scholars are still divided over matters of periodization. A persistent issue is how to interpret the term *kinsei*. Japanese historians customarily apply this term to the Edo period as a whole, now generally adding to it the last three decades of the sixteenth century. Having done this, they assume that in terms of social organization, the Edo period was still essentially feudal. This approach is reflected in the work of Western scholars who have used such phrases as "late feudalism" or "centralized feudalism" as labels to translate *kinsei*. But since the 1960s, Western historians have used the term "early modern" as the preferred translation. What this reveals, as Wakita Osamu notes in his chapter in this volume, is that between the two bodies of scholars, the Japanese tend to think of

8 Two pioneer historians who opened up the study of the *han* in the *bakuhan* context, and their primary works, are Itō Tasaburō, "Bakuhan taisei ron," in *Shin Nihonshi kōza* (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1947); and Nakamura Kichiji, *Bakuhan taisei ron* (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha, 1972).

THE ROLE OF LOCAL STUDIES

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the Edo period as being more feudal than modern, whereas the Western historians think of the same era as more modern than feudal.⁹

THE ROLE OF LOCAL STUDIES

Today's interpretations of the Edo period have changed not simply as a result of shifts in theoretical approach but also as a result of new research methods and interests. Since the 1940s there has been a vast change in the kinds of documents being worked on by Japanese historians, part of an ever-deepening probe into the basic raw materials of the past. The boom in *han* studies came as a result of, and a stimulus to, the gathering and sorting of large quantities of *han* archival materials, much of it still kept in old domain capitals.¹⁰ Local history and village studies were strengthened through the use of documents, such as cadastral registers, tax records, legal briefs on water and land ownership disputes, village headmen's diaries, and the remarkable religious affiliation registers preserved at the village level. Materials of this type contrast with those used by scholars in the 1930s. The latter, as exemplified in the great printed collections produced by economic historians like Honjō Eijirō and Takimoto Seiichi, were in many cases one level removed from what we would call primary, being mainly contemporary historical accounts, scholarly memoranda, laws, and injunctions. Inevitably such materials carried either a conservative establishment-oriented bias or the reverse, an antiestablishment, polemical bias.¹¹

The explosive growth of primary materials now available from the Edo period has given today's historians the means of posing and answering an increasing number of fundamental questions, especially in the field of institutional history. Moreover, the historian finds in such materials an abundant vocabulary with which to explain these data. At the base of the marching and countermarching of vast armies and the violent competition for land and status that the Japanese have called Sengoku was the drive toward hegemony, unification, and the achievement of political stability. The sixteenth-century buildup of effective daimyo power fed the aspiration of provincial lords to reach beyond regional control toward national supremacy. Real power of command gave substance to dreams of national conquest, and these in turn

⁹ See Chapter 3 in this volume.

¹⁰ For an example of the materials contained in the archives of one daimyo house, see my "Materials for the Study of Local History in Japan: Pre-Meiji Daimyo Records," reprinted in Hall and Jansen, eds., *Studies*, pp. 143–68.

¹¹ See Ono Takeo, comp., *Kinsei jikata keizai shiryō*, 10 vols. (Tokyo: 1931); and Takimoto Seiichi, ed., *Nihon keizai taiten*, 54 vols. (Tokyo: Keimei shuppansha, 1928–30).

evoked new expressions of legitimacy. Hideyoshi, the first to bring all daimyo under single command, became in his own words “first within the realm,” *tenka-bito*. The Ashikaga shoguns of the medieval period, for all the noble status they had acquired, were obliged to share political power with other court families, other members of the military aristocracy, and the religious orders. Theirs was a national command limited by the fragmentation of sovereignty and by the precedents and structures of the court-centered institutions of governance.

The creation of a unified national organization based on the exercise of hegemonic military power was not brought about by the assertion of new monarchical powers by forces at the center of the political arena. No member of the Ashikaga house, for instance, fought his way to become “king.” Rather, unification resulted from the emergence of increasingly stronger and larger units of local military lordships, beginning with the small-scale village-level proprietors called variously *kunishū* or *kokujin* (men of the provinces) and then step by step to the formation of the regional lordships of daimyo size. These in turn became the building blocks of a national unity. At the heart of the local military power structure was the lord–vassal relationship among members of the samurai class. Although the shape of shogunal authority changed relatively little during the Muromachi period, the emerging daimyo domains underwent fundamental changes, especially in the strength and spread of the lord–vassal relationship that lay at the center of military house organization. From their early appearance as small military lordships in the Muromachi age, the incipient daimyo domains underwent a long process of evolution, changing shape in response to the different political environments that enveloped them. Modern historians have claimed to be able to identify four different types, or stages, of daimyo development, to which they have assigned the names *shugo*, *sengoku*, *shokuhō*, and *kinsei*, each exhibiting progressively greater strength of control from the center.¹²

Daimyo rule exhibited many regional differences at the start. Hayami Akira makes a case for the existence of three regional zones of economic development: (1) the developed central Kinai region surrounding the capital city; (2) the middle fringe area surrounding Kinai, particularly the provinces of Ōmi and Mikawa; and (3) the Kantō, or eastern provinces.¹³ It was the middle fringe area that, being able to profit from

12 See my “Foundations of the Modern Japanese Daimyo,” republished in Hall and Jansen, eds., *Studies*, pp. 65–77.

13 Shōda Ken’ichirō and Hayami Akira, *Nihon keizaishi*, vol. 4 of *Keizaigakkō zenshū* (Tokyo: Sekai shoin, 1965), pp. 57–58.