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This book brings together a selection of chapters from Volume 5 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*. Japan underwent momentous changes during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Feudal divisions under military rulers that had characterized Japan for many centuries were replaced by a central government headed by the traditional monarch, and long-standing social and political divisions were abandoned in order to build a modern nation state. These chapters chronicle the crop failures and famine of the Tempō era in the 1830s, the crisis of values and confidence that popular culture displayed in the last half century of Tokugawa rule, and the political process that finally brought down the Tokugawa regime and ended centuries of warrior rule. They go on to discuss the peasant and samurai rebellions against the Meiji government, and the broader movement of the 1880s called “Freedom and People’s Rights” that helped to push the government toward a grant of representative government with the Meiji Constitution of 1889. The significance of Japan’s Meiji transformation for the rest of the world is the subject of the final chapter, in which Professor Akira Iriye discusses Japan’s drive to great-power status. “Constitutional rule at home, imperialism abroad” became linked as goals for early twentieth-century Japan.

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THE EMERGENCE OF MEIJI JAPAN

Edited by
MARIUS B. JANSEN
Princeton University



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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page vii</i>
1 The Tempō crisis	I
by HAROLD BOLITHO, <i>Harvard University</i>	
The Tempō famine	2
Civil disorder	5
The foreign threat	9
Critics and criticism	11
Domain reforms	18
Bakufu reforms	24
Mizuno Tadakuni	40
The aftermath	43
The implications	49
2 Late Tokugawa culture and thought	53
by H. D. HAROOTUNIAN, <i>University of Chicago</i>	
The culture of play	53
The play of culture	63
Good doctrine and governance	67
The restoration of worship and work	83
Religions of relief	100
Defense and wealth	116
Cultural practice and the triumph of political centralization	137
3 The Meiji Restoration	144
by MARIUS B. JANSEN, <i>Princeton University</i>	
Troubles within, disaster from without	144
The Harris treaty and its aftermath	150

	The loyalists	156
	Court and camp, daimyo style	161
	The treaty ports and foreign influence	171
	Bakufu rally	178
	Regional reform	181
	Restoration	189
	The Restoration in history and historiography	196
4	Opposition movements in early Meiji, 1868–1885 by STEPHEN VLASTOS, <i>University of Iowa</i>	203
	Early rural protests	204
	The Meiji land tax and village protests	208
	<i>Shizoku</i> revolts	218
	The popular rights movement	238
	Conclusion	262
5	Japan's drive to great-power status by AKIRA IRIYE, <i>University of Chicago</i>	268
	The foreign policy of a modern state	268
	The Meiji polity and society	275
	Consolidation of domestic and foreign affairs, 1868–1880	280
	Domestic politics and overseas expansion, 1880–1895	294
	Imperialism and militarism, 1895–1912	312
	<i>Bibliography</i>	331
	<i>Glossary-index</i>	345

PREFACE

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century Japan was obliged to abandon institutions it had adopted in the early seventeenth century for the regulation of society, politics, and foreign policy. Where once a hereditary samurai class had ruled, supported by stipends provided by feudal lords subordinate to the Tokugawa shogun, a new government headed by the traditional monarchy evened out, and then abandoned, those social divisions. Several hundred mini-states ruled by the daimyo gave way to fifty prefectures governed from the center by state-appointed governors. Contacts with other countries once limited almost entirely to traders at Nagasaki were broadened, initially to a few treaty ports, and then everywhere, as Japan took part in the international order.

These were momentous changes. When they began Japan was a remote and inaccessible island state on the edge of Asia. After they were completed Japan had won membership in the circle of powers and joined its recent oppressors as an imperialist state in Asia. Domestic institutional changes, first begun as defensive moves to maintain national sovereignty, led inexorably to other steps that ended by transforming first Japan and then the Asian and world systems.

The chapters that follow, excerpted from Volume 5 of *The Cambridge History of Japan*, discuss some of these changes to show the nature of Japan's transformation and to show that these changes had their origins in earlier Japanese society. The Tokugawa society that Commodore Perry encountered had undergone very great changes since the establishment of the shogunate in the early seventeenth century. Two and one-half centuries of peace had built a sense of autonomy and national consciousness among samurai retainers in many of the great domains ruled by "outside" (tozama) lords that the Tokugawa founders had left in place. The system of alternate attendance (*sankin-kōtai*) duty at Edo (modern Tokyo) that the Tokugawa bakufu had imposed on all its vassal lords had transformed the upper reaches of samurai society and made it an urban aristocracy. Inter-marriage and

adoption now linked many of the daimyo, and ceremonial duties, education, and artistic and intellectual pursuits had pacified and demilitarized them. Their retainers had become accustomed to service in bureaucratic governments. Patterns of internal trade and commerce that had developed in response to the needs of the great metropolis of Edo, which was probably the world's most populous city with upwards of a million inhabitants, had the effect of making economic zones out of what began as discrete feudal principalities. A lively popular culture of print and theater gave evidence of the spread of literacy throughout society. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a particular flowering of popular fiction, which ranged from sober romances that owed much to Chinese models to scabrous tales popular among the denizens of the cities' crowded alleys.

The disjuncture between this kaleidoscopic urban scene of profits, coins, and goods and the complaisant countryside, with its natural economy of food and taxes in kind with which the regime began, was so striking that many writers struggled to explain it. Political moralists of the seventeenth century extolled the virtues of submission and cooperation. Their successors in the eighteenth century struggled to reconcile that idealized past with the complexity of the society they knew, and wondered what had gone wrong. The remedies they proposed ranged widely: returning the samurai to the land in order to escape the evils of merchant greed, returning to a natural economy, adulterating the coinage, and limiting or banning all further exports of silver and of copper to the Chinese and the Dutch.

In most cases writers took for granted that there was a fixed total to Japan's production as an island country and that the problem was one of the shares of distribution. If merchants were getting more, as they clearly were, it had to be at cost to samurai well-being. Since most who wrote were themselves samurai, it was natural that they thought so; their own incomes, whether in land ratables or in bales of rice secured as stipends from the warehouses, were fixed according to their ancestors' merit, and pride and provisions of rank prevented them from becoming productive. When Tanuma Okitsugu, a late eighteenth-century shogunal leader, thought in terms of raising productivity and was even suspected of planning to deal in foreign trade, many of his contemporaries credited his unconventional proposals to personal profligacy and intellectual aberrance, confusing intellectual innovation with systemic corruption.¹

¹ See John W. Hall, *Tanuma Okitsugu (1719–1788), Forerunner of Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955.)

There were three major attempts to deal with these deep-seated economic ills during the Tokugawa years. Each of them was prompted by hardships that were caused by crop failures for which the closed economy had no answer; each also followed a period of urban growth accompanied by remarkable cultural developments. The efflorescence of the decades before and after 1700² was followed by the famine and reforms of the eighth shogun, Tokugawa Yoshimune, in the Kyōhō era (1716–36). He and his ministers attempted to remilitarize society and make it more responsive to genuine need by vigorous efforts to tighten up the administrative structure: providing supplementary salaries for official service, easing retainers' economic distress through official grants, establishing reclamation projects, promoting production and cultivation of commodities imported at Nagasaki, and instituting currency reforms. All such efforts dealt more with the results than with the root causes of economic distress, however, and few outlived the incumbency of those who sponsored them.

A second period of reforms, this time featuring austerity and discipline, followed the exuberance of the years of Tanuma Okitsugu and became known as the reforms of the Kansei (1789–1801) era. The first minister of the Tokugawa bakufu, Matsudaira Sadanobu, was a grandson of Yoshimune and tried to emulate his reforms. By his time the proliferation of domain schools had resulted in a wide variety of philosophical positions. The bakufu now pronounced the Confucian interpretations of the Sung dynasty Chinese savant Chu Hsi as orthodox, and tried to establish intellectual uniformity in instruction and administration. Literacy and educational training became more important for Tokugawa administrators, and bakufu officials were measured against new standards of Confucian integrity.

The Kansei reforms incorporated many measures that gave evidence of the centrality of urban life and problems for the Tokugawa bakufu in its last half century. Popular literature was censored with a new vigor, and in some well-publicized cases publishers paid with their equipment and authors with their freedom for literature viewed as salacious or disrespectful. Administrative spending was curbed by the imposition of new limits. Immigration into Edo was curbed, and efforts were made to lessen the city's dependence on the provinces of western Japan. The Edo town office grew in size as social services and official vigilance increased. New bureaus were charged with aid and

² The Genroku era is treated by many authors. Howard Hibbett, *The Floating World in Japanese Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), provides translations and commentary on popular literature.

relief for the urban poor, and granaries were set up to provide emergency famine relief. Samurai loans contracted prior to 1794 were declared void in an effort to ease retainers' hardships. Restrictions on foreign trade at Nagasaki, which were already severe, were tightened further.

The intensity of official rectitude at the center in the Kansei years was mirrored in measures adopted by many of the domains. The pace of the establishment of domain schools for future samurai administrators showed a dramatic increase. Between 1781 and 1803 fifty-nine such schools were set up, but in the next forty years, seventy-two new schools were established. This should be understood as an administrative response to the growing maturity and complexity of Japanese society. It found echo in an equally rapid increase in the number of private academies and parish schools for commoners.

Many of Matsudaira Sadanobu's reforms had a lasting impact on later Tokugawa society. His own tenure in office, however, was of short duration. He fell afoul of the eleventh shogun, Tokugawa Ienari, whose fifty years in office set a record for the Edo bakufu. After his minister's resignation in 1793 the shogun set an example of self-indulgence that seemed to set the tone for the early decades of the nineteenth century, which were some of the most colorful and prosperous in Tokugawa history.

The third and last period of Tokugawa reform, orchestrated by the bakufu minister Mizuno Tadakuni after the demise of Tokugawa Ienari, followed crop failures and famine in the 1830s. The Tempō era is the subject of the first chapter in this collection by Harold Bolitho. An index of the hardships of the era, one that was true of each of the reform periods, was the number and severity of protests and agrarian rebellions. The most spectacular revolt of the Tempō era came in Osaka, Japan's second city and economic heartland, in 1837. This was organized by a Tokugawa samurai official. Many of the domains had warehouses from which they merchandised their surplus tax rice in Osaka, and the news of this rebellion spread to every corner of Japan as rapidly as the fires that burned much of the city. Professor Bolitho's essay shows that the reforms that the bakufu mounted proved unsuccessful and decidedly unpopular. During the same years, however, several major domains launched reform programs of their own that fared better, leaving them in a relatively stronger position than the Tokugawa overlord. A large, integrated domain could control its borders and manage its economy more easily than the bakufu, whose lands were spread throughout much of Japan.

But the crisis Japan now entered was more than economic, and its roots led deeper than the Tempō or even the Kansei eras. Professor Harootunian's essay on late Tokugawa culture and thought deals with the crisis of values and confidence that popular culture displayed in the last half century of Tokugawa rule. His discussion embraces themes that were popular in the urban culture of the commoners, and goes on to deal with the nature of new religions and nativist teaching that spread throughout the countryside. Of particular interest and importance in late Tokugawa thought was a school of nativist and nationalist teaching that developed in the Tokugawa domain of Mito. Mito learning, as it was known, emphasized the moral responsibility of the shogun to protect and bolster the national cult that centered on the imperial house. It was to play an important role in the thought of activists and idealists who espoused the cause of the emperor and deplored the coming of the "barbarians" in the last decades of Tokugawa rule.³

Each of the periods of reform was affected by problems of foreign relations. Yoshimune's Kyōhō program included the substitution of Japanese for imported products. In Kansei times fears of the Russian advance from the north led to defensive measures and subsidization of and controls on materials about Western technology and problems of coastal defense. By the Tempō era there was a new awareness of danger from the south, where English naval power was beginning to threaten China at Canton. By this time books brought to Nagasaki by the Dutch and Chinese had alerted growing numbers of Japanese to the possibility of an impending crisis. The bakufu had established a translation bureau in 1811 and co-opted many scholars of Dutch to work in it. By the 1830s discussions became less theoretical and more political; by the end of the decade they intersected with factional rivalry to result in charges of disloyalty against scholars of Western learning. News of China's defeat by England in the Opium War in 1842 spread quickly in Edo and the castle towns, but in an increasingly stagnant political setting there was no response until Perry's arrival in 1853 forced the issue.

Once faced, the problem would not rest. The bakufu was overthrown a decade after Townsend Harris negotiated the first commer-

³ Professor Harootunian has elaborated on these trends in *Toward Restoration: The Growth of Political Consciousness in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) and treats nativism in *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). The thrust of Mito learning is the subject of Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-Foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

cial treaty in 1858. Two decades after Perry's arrival a large part of Japan's new reformist government was abroad on a world tour that extended for over a year and a half. A turnaround so extraordinary could clearly not have been "caused" by the mere appearance of foreigners in Japanese waters. Rather, it was the response to long-felt dissatisfaction with a system that had grown moribund and seemed incapable of creative change. Nevertheless it was crystallized and brought to focus by the problem of trying to accommodate the Tokugawa system to the modern world, something that proved impossible.⁴ The political process that brought down the Tokugawa regime and ended centuries of warrior rule is described in Marius Jansen's chapter on the Meiji Restoration. As a watershed in Japanese history the Restoration has attracted the attention of many historians, and all judgments of Japan's modern society begin with estimates of its nature and significance.⁵ Left-wing analysts often argued that twentieth-century Japanese militarism was the result of the "incomplete" nature of the restoration, while post-World War II commentators professed to see Japan's progress toward democracy as a continuation of trends that began with the young Meiji emperor's promise in the Charter Oath of 1868 that "deliberative councils" would be established so that "all matters" could be decided by "public discussion."

The central feature of the Meiji turnover was the development of centralized institutions in a land that had known the particularism of 260 feudal domains. In 1869 domain administration was evened out, and two years later the domains were abolished. Loyalties directed to local feudal lords would now center on the young Meiji Emperor, and a grid of administrative, school, and police districts transformed the baku-han system of Tokugawa into one of the world's most centralized states. Yet while Western example was important at each step, it was selective and invariably adjusted to Japanese predispositions and needs.⁶

Changes so sweeping affected the samurai class first of all; their

4 The Tokugawa foreign policy crisis can best be followed in the introductory discussion of W. G. Beasley, *Select Documents on Japanese Foreign Policy, 1853–1868* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955).

5 In English, the standard summary is that of W. G. Beasley, *The Meiji Restoration* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972); the events of the Tokugawa fall are analyzed from the winner's side in Albert M. Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961) and from the loser's in Conrad Totman, *The Collapse of the Tokugawa Bakufu, 1862–1868* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1980).

6 D. Eleanor Westney, *Imitation and Innovation: The Transfer of Western Organizational Patterns to Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) and Marius B. Jansen and Gilbert Rozman, eds., *Japan in Transition from Tokugawa to Meiji* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986).

income and, indeed, identity had been premised on their special status as fief holders and warriors. The development of a conscript army and the distribution of land titles to farmers as the basis for a new and national tax system now made samurai expensive and outmoded relics of the past. Small wonder that the new regime found itself facing protest and rebellion from former samurai, especially those from domains that had led in the Restoration struggles and had particularly high expectations of reward. They resented the inadequacy of their pensions and felt themselves betrayed. Stephen Vlastos's chapter, "Opposition Movements in Early Meiji, 1868–1885," considers rural protests and the samurai rebellions, a series that peaked with the great Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, and goes on to discuss the movement calling for "Freedom and People's Rights" of the 1880s. This began with the agitation of former samurai who saw themselves outmaneuvered by their former peers, but quickly became a widely based national demand for constitutional government as an answer to authoritarianism and favoritism. In response to this the Meiji government implemented its 1868 promise of "deliberative councils," but did this as a gift from the ruler, freely given, and not worked out in response to suggestions from below. Once again study missions traveled to the West to select what seemed appropriate. The examples found in Germany, which had itself been united only a decade earlier, seemed preferable to those of Western Europe and America, and German advisors worked closely with their Meiji employers to blend tradition with modernity.

The Meiji Constitution that was promulgated in 1889 was worked out in secret. Its preamble portrayed it as a modern version of imperial benevolence of earlier times. It was designed "to promote the welfare of, and give development to, the moral and intellectual faculties of Our beloved subjects, the very same that have been honoured with the benevolent care and affectionate vigilance of Our Ancestors." Japan was the first non-Western country to inaugurate constitutional government, and although the constitution's removal of military control from elective hands proved fatal in the 1930s, its other provisions were sufficiently flexible to permit steady growth in political party power.⁷

The significance Japan's Meiji transformation was to have for world history is the subject of the last chapter, in which Professor Akira Iriye discusses "Japan's Drive to Great-Power Status." His discussion takes

⁷ See Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

the story from the consolidation of domestic and foreign affairs in the early Meiji period to the victories over China (1895) and Russia (1905) that signaled the arrival of a new imperial state. With colonies in Taiwan and Korea and a foothold on the continent in the Liaotung Peninsula, Japan was poised to take a full share in world politics. Inevitably its self-image changed; imperialism and militarism came to be associated with modernity. By the time the Meiji Emperor died in 1912 his words and image had become surrounded with cultic solemnity. An indemnity from China had been devoted to launching a steel industry, and Japan's future navies would be built in domestic yards instead of being purchased in Europe.

“Constitutional rule at home, imperialism abroad,” in the words of Ukita Kazutami, a popular journalist, became new goals for a generation.⁸ The Restoration generation passed from the scene around the time of World War I. It had presided over immense changes at the center. Local application and individual appropriation in village, school, factory, and barrack would be the task for twentieth-century Japan.

8 Marius B. Jansen, “Japanese Imperialism: Late Meiji Perspectives,” in Ramon H. Myers and Mark R. Peattie, eds., *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895–1945* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 73–4.