A History of Japan, 1582–1941

Internal and External Worlds

This book offers a distinctive overview of the internal and external pressures responsible for the making of modern Japan. L. M. Cullen argues that Japanese policies and fears have often been caricatured in western accounts which have viewed the expansion of the west in an unduly positive light. He shows that Japan before 1854, far from being in progressive economic and social decay or political crisis, was on balance a successful society led by rational policymakers. He also shows how when an external threat emerged after 1793 the country became on balance more open rather than more oppressive and that Japan displayed remarkable success in negotiation with the western powers in 1853–68. In the twentieth century, however, with the 1889 constitution failing to control the armed forces and western and American interests encroaching in Asia and the Pacific, Japan abandoned realism and met her nemesis in China and the Pacific.

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

http://www.cambridge.org

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Plantin 10/12 pt *System* LaTeX 2$_\varepsilon$ [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 82155 X hardback
ISBN 0 521 52918 2 paperback

To the memory of Matsuo Taro, friend and *sensei*

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Preface

This book is intended for undergraduates studying Japanese history, and for the serious reader wishing to read an account of Japan's past. Its purpose is to take a broad view, chronologically and thematically, of trends in Japanese history, and to integrate into a single interconnected narrative many themes from economics, politics and administration, some of which, like linguistic communication, vital for Japan's understanding of the outside world in the period of its isolation, tend to be studied only in specialised works. It also gives prominence to the period before 1868, because all too often accounts of Japan concentrate on the later years.

In the interest of making the narrative accessible to the reader with no specialist knowledge, the book presents a minimum of technical detail, and is sparing in its use of names of individuals and regions. As a history book should be, it is necessarily chronological, though chapters do not hesitate in the interest of analysis of major themes to look backwards and forwards, as chapter 3 does in exploring the context of the remarkably stable eighteenth century, or chapter 6 in discussing the existing levy on rice as a basis of taxation when new demands arose in post-1868 Japan.

The terminal dates of 1582 and 1941 in particular need comment. By 1582 Oda Nobunaga's unification of central Japan had laid the basis on which, by a varied process of combat, moderation and compromise, a unity of sorts for all of Japan was fashioned over the final twenty years of the century and early decades of the following one. In the wake of failure in the 1590s to create a buffer zone in Korea, the fear of outside contacts undermining a precarious harmony led to the progressive introduction of seclusion (sakoku) by the 1630s, destined to last until western pressure in the 1850s and 1860s forced its abandonment. The years from 1868 to 1941 were then to become a period in which Japan could, and increasingly did, exercise its own initiative in dealing with problems in Korea and in China and finally, and more dramatically, in challenging the United States for supremacy in the Pacific. That brought on defeat in 1945 and occupation under an American umbrella, with Japan becoming something of a dependent state (the largest United States military bases

in Asia are still in Okinawa): though Japan is the second economic power of the world, it remains a political pigmy. The years 1868–1941 are the only period in four or more centuries when, along with its war years 1941–5, Japan played a prominent role on the world stage.

The story of Japan is of an interplay between unity (informal, or since 1868 formal) and foreign complexities, which were first avoided by the introduction of sakoku, and then after 1868 became the siren song which lured Japan, the initially reluctant participant in the outside world, fatally on to the rocks of Asia and into the storms of the Pacific. Japan's relations with its neighbours and with the United States are still remarkably unsettled. A peace treaty has still not been signed with Russia, whose move south in the 1780s and 1790s in the cold regions to the north of Honshu triggered Japan's serious political study of the west. Its relations with the United States remain a curious combination of dependency and resentment, though, faced with a choice, a large majority of Japanese would opt for the present situation rather than for the unknown.

This book is concerned centrally with the shaping of Japanese unity, and with the interaction between that process and the outside world: successively sakoku, the opening of the country in 1868, and the dilemmas of resisting forceful intrusion, in the age of imperialism, by western countries into Asia, culminating in 1941 in conflict with the United States. Its main emphasis is on the state (both government and administration), the patterns of foreign trade, menace from the outside world and the shaping of policy under sakoku. It was never an enclosed country to the extent of ignoring the outside world, either intellectually or politically. In turn study of the west and some administrative steps taken over decades made it possible for Japan to negotiate with success first with Russia and then more dramatically with the United States in the 1850s.

The problems of Japan are also seen as political, not economic. The absence of a foreign trade had not been economically harmful. The trade before sakoku was a small one in bulk and shipping alike, though one in an exchange of two high-value commodities, silver and silk. Smuggling – which, if it existed on a large scale, would contradict a benign assessment of Japan's restricted trade regime under sakoku and would support assertions that sakoku was damaging – is a mirage (though contemporary shogunal officials, haunted by security, had an obsession with it). Currency problems likewise have been allowed to take too large a part in the story: the debasements in 1695–1711 or after 1818 mirrored simply the straitened financial state of the shogunate, and the economy itself was an orderly one. Sakoku has had many and varied interpretations, reaching even as far as denial of its existence or at least to the claim that in its full sense it was introduced only in 1793 or 1804. There has been less

attention to *uchi harai* (driving off foreign vessels): internal debate from 1793 to 1848 reflected a policy more pragmatic and sensitive than the caricature in textbooks.

Japan faced two real challenges, one fiscal, an inelastic revenue system which put limits both to government income and to that of its direct employees, the other external: in the face of new challenges from the 1840s Japan would have to form either a unitary state or a confederacy of units. The country's policies at the highest level were handled by remarkably few men and were never set out on paper to the degree they were within western countries. Interpretation, open for this reason, has also been bedevilled by debates, between Marxists and non-Marxists, but sometimes even among non-Marxists, on whether pre-1868 society fared well economically or not. Modern efforts to read history backwards and to find in social and philosophic thought an explanation of how Japan developed have further added to distortion. Ironically, two very different groups, Marxists and the intellectual supporters of the Allied Occupation of 1945, both had a vested interest in emphasising divides, the Marxists because of their theory of class war, a new generation of Allied (and largely American) historians, closely identified with the Occupation administration, because they wanted to find traditions of dissent as an indigenous basis for the creation of an open society.

What originality this book has rests on its study of the structure of foreign trade (and the role of sakoku within it), the importance of the perimeter of Japan (especial the north and the Ryukyus) in the story and the coherence of change in the country's administrative processes, limited but purposeful especially from the 1840s. The story also embraces the competence of the interpreters at Nagasaki, and the eclectic, flexible and competitive nature of Japanese thought. In contrast to frequent emphasis on control of thought, or on conformity, this book sees Japanese thought as open or eclectic, a strength in many ways, though equally in others a limitation. As the older fashion of emphasis on economic decline recedes in current historiography, incipient political collapse has tended to be stressed. This book discounts the existence of a political crisis in Japanese society in the mid-nineteenth century. Divides in Japan sprang either from factionalism among officials in the 1820s or late 1830s or in the 1850s and 1860s from a more serious substantive divide, one at first over the consequences if Japan refused to make concessions and then over the fiscal distribution within Japan of the benefits of change, if change was inevitable.

Other topics are outlined to ensure that the reader has some overall view of Japan. However, some readers may wish to have more information, on artistic life, the structure of agricultural society, urban society,

high and low. For those who wish to read further, the bibliographical note and comment in the footnotes will, it is hoped, furnish guidance. For the twentieth century, there are many books, especially on economic changes. Relatively few books cover the earlier periods, or often do superficially and sometimes with sweeping and simplistic assumptions. Though they may be detailed for some readers the two best books are unquestionably Marius B. Jansen, *The making of modern Japan* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2000) and Conrad Totman, *A history of Japan* (Blackwell, Oxford, 2000). They cover both pre- and post-1868 years, as does the fresh and vigorous treatment in James L. McClain's recent *A modern history of Japan* (New York, 2002). Of shorter books the one which best complements the present book in its coverage of agriculture, urban development and the great business conglomerates is *Tokugawa Japan: the social and economic antecedents of modern Japan* (University of Tokyo Press, 1990, paperback 1991) edited by Chie Nakane and Shinzaburō Ōishi. The introductory and concluding chapters by the editors are short but effective surveys, all the more welcome as they are written from a Japanese perspective, and hence devoid of the patronising tone that so often creeps into western accounts. For an introductory text with a strong flavour of Japan, Charles J. Dunn, *Everyday life in traditional Japan*, though first published in 1969 (first Tuttle edition, Tokyo, 1972), remains, after three decades, a remarkably fresh and readable introduction to Tokugawa times. In a more political framework, E. O. Reischauer and A. M. Craig, *Japan: tradition and transformation* (1973, later reprints by Tuttle, Tokyo), a generous and insightful book by two of the pioneers of post-1945 Japanese studies in the United States, remains perhaps the most rounded introduction.

Although some awareness of Japan was prompted in the mid-1960s by teaching a course on economic development, a serious interest only followed the stay in Ireland of Matsuo Taro (a former student of the great Otsuka Hisao), who interrupted his teaching career in Hosei University in 1972 to come to Dublin to spend two years as a student. The dedication of this book to him is both in very inadequate repayment of many debts of friendship and in recollection of many hours spent in both Japan and Ireland talking on the byways of the two countries, and in the intervals, a long correspondence over twenty-four years. He would disagree with much that is in this book, but without argument with him, advice from him and contacts established by him it would not exist at all. His invitations to teach at Hosei in 1985, 1993 and 1997 played a large role in widening my knowledge. There are advantages as well as real handicaps in coming late, from a long apprenticeship in Irish, British and French archival sources, to Japanese history. This book is not an exercise in

comparative history, though contrasts between administrations and archival sources in Japan and Europe prompted a growing interest in administration and especially in identifying the ways in which the loose administration of the 1780s was gradually strengthened to the point that the Japanese could negotiate on something akin to equal terms in the 1850s and 1860s.

Of other longstanding debts, my greatest ones are to Professor Kawakatsu Heita (International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto) for encouragement and for support in innumerable ways and to Professor Saitō Osamu (Hitotsubashi University) for advice and comments over many years. I am grateful also to Professor Mitani Hiroshi (University of Tokyo), Professor Miyachi Masato (at the time director of the Shiryo Hensanjo), to both Professors Iguchi Takeo (Tokai University) and Kondō Kazuhiko (University of Tokyo) and to Dr Clare Pollard, Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, for advice and comments. Other accumulated debts are to Professors Ueno Itaru (Seijō University, Tokyo), Matsuoka Toshi (Hosei University, Tokyo), Honda Saburo (Osaka Keizai University), Shimizu Yoshifumi (Momoyama University, Osaka), and to my former students Drs Takagami Shinichi (Osaka Sangyō University) and Goto Hiroko (Hosei University, Tokyo). My debts are large to the libraries of Waseda and Hosei Universities, Watanabe Tsuyoshi and Tsukamoto Akira of the Shizuoka Chuo Kenritsu Toshokan, Dr Honma of Nagasaki chuo kenritsu toshokan, and Tokunaga Hiroshi of the Shiiboruto Kinenkan, Nagasaki. Many of the issues have been worked out in classes in Dublin or in seminars in Japan, and a debt remains to those who participated. I am grateful also to Professor Jean Parmentier of Ghent who gave me a copy of his edition of the diary of a deserter from service in the Dutch East India Company army. A large debt must be recorded to Mathew Stout of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, who drew the maps.

The final revision of the book has taken place in the congenial atmosphere of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies, Kyoto, and of its splendid library, to whose staff I am greatly indebted. Two large debts have accumulated in this period, one to Professor Kozo Yamamura of the University of Washington in Seattle who has painstakingly made comments and criticisms on the text, the other to Dr Katsuta Shunsuke, a former student, now of Gifu University, who after pursuing many bibliographical enquiries in my absences from Japan, then kindly read all the Japanese in the text. Neither is responsible for errors that remain. Without their generous assistance they would have been much more numerous.

There are two special debts outside the academic world. The first is to Eileen Kato of Tokyo who has provided many books and newspaper

cuttings which kept me in touch in long intervals between visits, and who has commented on the text; the second to Tsukahara Sueko *sensei*, Professor Matsuo's kanbun teacher many years ago in Nagasaki, whose help ensured that all doors in Nagasaki were opened to me.

Finally, an author's appreciation has to be expressed to many in Cambridge University Press, especially Richard Fisher who in 1991 suggested the idea of the book and later encouraged its progress, Michael Watson, history editor, supportive during a large revision, and Rose Bell, who as copy editor banished many errors and inconsistencies.

The research for this book was aided by a fellowship from the Japan Foundation for three months in 1995, and by grants from the Arts and Social Sciences Fund, and from the Provost's and Incentives Funds of Trinity College, Dublin, towards the cost of short visits.

L. M. C.
Kyoto

Conventions

Macrons are used in the text to indicate long vowels in Japanese. Very frequently used words in the English text (e.g. han, bugyo, daimyo, shogun, sakoku, Tokaido, bushido) and place names (e.g. Tokyo, Hyogo, Choshu, Hokkaido) are not italicised in the text, and the macron where there is one is not indicated. The policy is not followed rigidly: to make it easier for the reader to read the text, both less frequently used words (e.g. *sankin kōtai*, *kan*) and words implying a distinction (e.g. *tozama*, *fudai*), are given in italics, and the macron, where there is one, retained. In the case of the Ryukyu (or Ryūkyū) islands, in which English-language practice varies widely, the usage in the text is that the islands are described as the 'Ryukyus', and 'Ryukyu' is used as an adjective (thus, Ryukyu islanders). Macrons are retained for proper names. The softening of consonants in Japanese in certain contexts is followed in the Japanese in the book (thus, '*kaibō gakari*' and not '*kaibō kakari*') but not in the English if other usages are more common (thus 'Tempō' for 'Tenpō' and 'Deshima' for 'Dejima'). The chronological term *kinsei* covering seventeenth, eighteenth and part of the nineteenth centuries is translated as 'early modern'.

Japanese names are indicated in the Japanese fashion: surname first and given name following. The names of Japanese and Japanese-Americans writing in English are given in the English word order. For Japanese authors, cited for works in Japanese who also appear in the footnotes as authors of texts in English, the author's name for the English-language book is given in the English style (given name followed by surname). In the bibliography, surnames precede in all cases. To avoid confusion in footnotes, for authors who are cited for both languages (or are translated), for English texts the given name is abbreviated to the first letter of the name. Thus in the footnotes Shinbō Hiroshi, elsewhere the author of texts in Japanese, appears as H. Shinbō when his name appears before an English-language text. In a very small number of cases, where confusion could arise and where given name and surname are both cited the surname has been put in capitals. In Japanese the given name is often widely

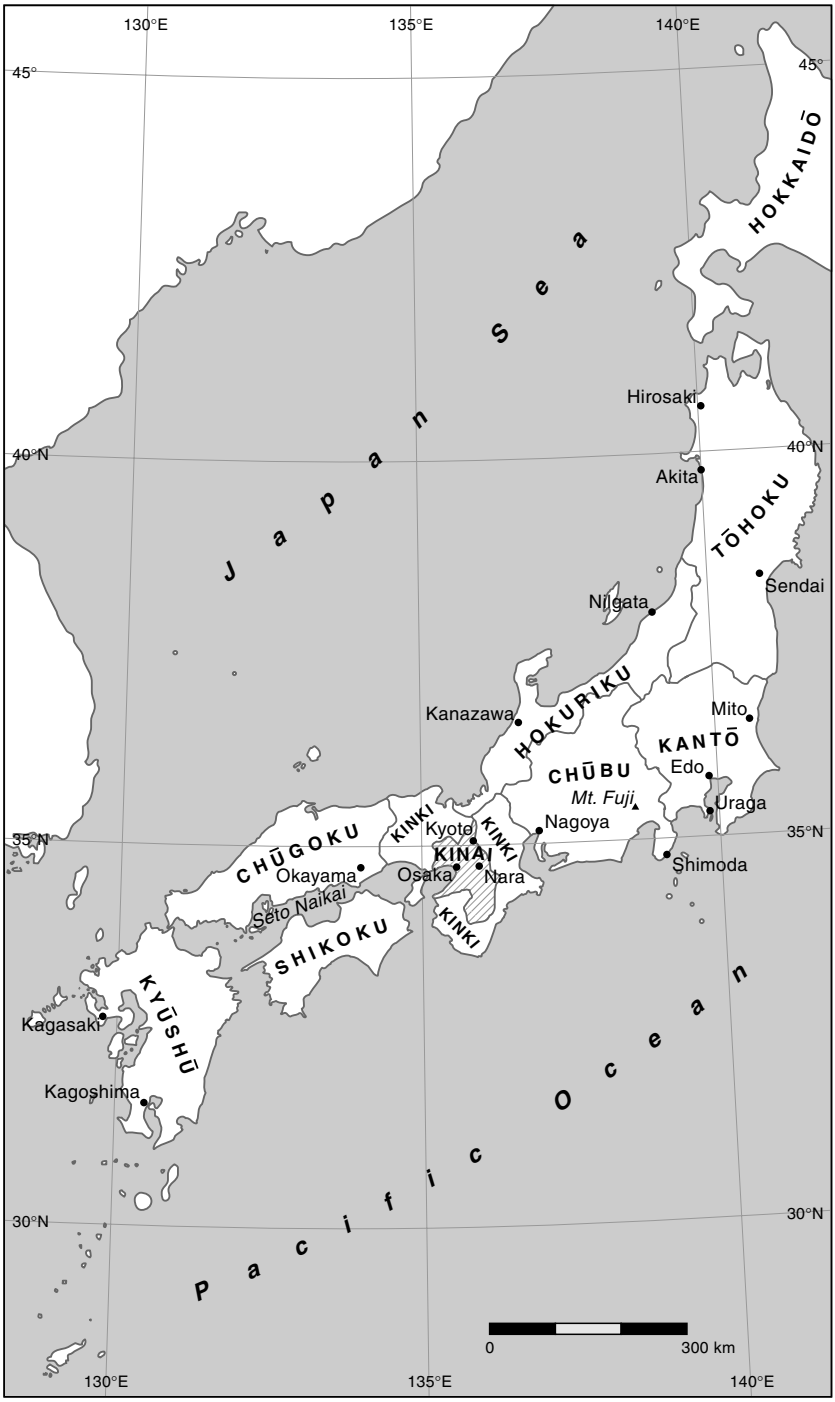
used in place of the surname: thus Ienari in place of Tokugawa Ienari and Sorai in place of Ogyū Sorai.

The identification of territorial divisions can cause confusion to the uninitiated as they are frequently identified by the name of the han, ruling family, castle town, and even, where boundaries do not greatly differ, by the name of the historical province. As far as possible the descriptions in the text are standardised on the han name, and where provinces are distinguished in text or maps this is indicated. There is also (with some slight variations in boundaries in different works) a modern usage to distinguish eight geographical regions (see map no. 1). See also the glossary under Kansai, Kanto and Kuni.

Japan followed a lunar calendar, which had a twelve-month year of 353 to 355 days, and which had to be adjusted by the addition periodically of an intercalary month to bring it abreast of the solar seasons. Dates in the book are usually given in the western calendar: where the month is described as first month, second month etc., the dates are in the lunar calendar.

Abbreviations

CHJ	*Cambridge history of Japan*, general eds. J. W. Hall, M. B. Jansen, Madoka Kanai and Dennis Twitchett, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1988–99)
Kaempfer	*Kaempfer's Japan: Tokugawa culture observed*, ed., B. M. Bodart-Bailey (Honolulu, 1999)
PP Japan	*Area studies. Parliamentary papers, Japan* ed. W. G. Beasley, 10 vols. (Irish University Press, Shannon, 1971–2)
PRO	Public Record Office, London



1. Geographical regions of Japan (the shaded Kinai is a subregion of Kinki)