A History of Japan, 1582–1941

Internal and External Worlds

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Contents

Maps

1 Introduction: Japan's internal and external worlds, 1582–1941

The two most widely held historical images of Japan are its self-imposed isolation (sakoku) from the outside world for almost two and a half centuries, and admiral Perry's challenge to it in 1853. Japan is equally known for its rapid economic growth after 1868 and, already famous for its cars, electronics and pioneering high-speed trains, for becoming in the 1980s the world's second economic superpower. Two questions stand out. Why did Japan pursue from the 1630s a policy of isolation; and why abandoning it in modern times did it succeed so well economically? Between the sakoku period ending in 1853–9 and its post-1960 economic triumphs stand its years of wars and conflicts, culminating in its challenge to the United States in the Pacific war. These events raise their own questions. Were they in some way a consequence of aggression latent in Japanese history, or were they simply part of a complex and mainly post-1840 story embracing the western rape of China, a failed effort by Japan to fashion a successful security policy in a changing Asia, and America's aggressive exercise of its new imperial mantle in the Pacific?

Westerners had long seen a policy of exclusion as either irrational or unnatural (though this was qualified in the accounts by four keen-sighted contemporaries, the well-known Kaempfer and the much less well-known Thunberg, Titsingh and Golownin (Golovnin), all of whom spent time in Japan). Modern writing has often made a distinction between Japanese who favoured exclusion and those who wanted to end it. In other words, writers in recent times, Japanese as well as western, sought to find a tradition which it was hoped would underpin the struggling democracy of the 1930s or the Occupation-imposed one after 1945. There has even been more recently a popularisation inside and outside Japan of a view that a full-blown sakoku policy dates only from 1793 or 1804. Likewise, Japanese trade before the 1630s is sometimes presented in Japanese accounts as large and innovative, and as trade contracted, a traffic between Japan and Korea conducted through the island of Tsushima (in the strait separating Japan and Korea) has been seen rather loosely as much larger and more central to the Japanese economy than it was. Sakoku also has

been represented as an intended mercantilist or development policy. In all these interpretations lies a reaction, in itself intelligent, against older and more simplistic views which saw sakoku as a blindly repressive policy.

A reluctance has long existed in western economic thought to conceive of a comparatively closed economic system as workable or prosperous. The western urge to open Japan (in essence aggression), for justification rested on a belief that sakoku (seclusion) both deprived the country of a foreign trade necessary for Japan's own good and could only have been imposed by internal despotism. The growth of foreign trade, when sakoku was removed in mid-1859, might be seen as a measure of Japan's loss in earlier times.[1] Had sakoku not existed, gains in foreign trade, perhaps as large as those of the 1870s and later, could have been reaped earlier. Yet that overlooks the experience under sakoku. Europeans in the seventeenth century had found few Japanese goods, silver and copper apart, that they wanted, and on the other hand there were, with the exception of silk, few goods from the outside that the Japanese needed in quantity. Japan was self-sufficient in food, and there was no international trade in food in east Asia and no ready supply to turn to in the event of need. The trade arguments, whether special pleading in the nineteenth century to justify western intervention or academic ones in more recent times influenced by the assumed benefits of foreign trade, did – and do – not take account of the fact that an absence of foreign trade outside relative luxuries justified sakoku, or at least made it workable. Agricultural productivity rose sharply in the seventeenth century, and there was also a wide range of technological innovation.[2]

In economic terms the Japan of Tokugawa times was in its way a success tale. It was also at peace with itself (not riven by internal dissent, or by a clamour for the figurehead emperor to replace the shogun as the administrative ruler of Japan). Peace together with the political compromise in the shogunate of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) from 1603 meant that institutional changes were taken no further. In a sense Ieyasu did not seek to profit from his victory at Sekigahara in 1600 by an attempt to turn Japan into a more unitary state, and resistance ended on the basis that his victory would be pressed no further. The permanence of this outcome depended on external menace losing pace and on the

[1] The assumption that foreign trade altered things is evident in the statement by the justifiably highly respected T. C. Smith that 'in fact when foreign trade commenced in the 1850s, both national and town population *began* to grow rapidly, after more than a century of stagnation' (T. C. Smith, *Native sources of Japanese industrialization, 1750–1920* (Berkeley, 1988), p.36; italics mine.

[2] See K. Nagahara and K. Yamamura, 'Shaping the process of unification: technological progress in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Japan', *Journal of Japanese studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Winter 1988), pp.77–109.

advance of Christianity (i.e. the values of western powers) ceasing: an alliance between foreigners and trade-enriched or disaffected han would have threatened the delicate internal compromise and led to a resumption of conflict. The 1630s, the decade in which sakoku was introduced, were years of crisis, but sakoku thereafter worked for two centuries. A fear that the protracted process of transition from Ming to Ching dynasty in China might threaten stability had haunted the Japanese from the 1620s. But after the 1690s, with no Chinese threat eventuating, the eighteenth century became a remarkable, even unique, century of external security. Western ships (the handful of vessels at Nagasaki apart) were recorded only in 1771 and 1778 and again in 1792. The six western castaways who in 1704 arrived in Satsuma for long remained unique.

The question arises why, when Japan finally had to admit a foreign presence, it chose to create western-style institutions of government and more remarkably of justice. Japan's fears in the 1860s (allowance made for changed external circumstances) were similar to those which in the 1630s had justified the introduction of sakoku. Japanese views of the outside world were realistic. In the early seventeenth century, foreigners were weak and divided even if their warships were large and bristled with cannon (Portuguese, Dutch, English and Spanish all engaged in wars with one another at one time or other); commercial interest also shifted south to India and the equatorial region; Japanese silver ceased to be abundant after mid-century. Two centuries later, when the focus of western attention had shifted northwards from India to China, the maritime powers, though rivals, were not at war with one another. France and England were allied in war against China in the late 1850s and they worked together in 1864 when the ships of four western countries in concert pounded the batteries on the Choshu shores of the strait of Shimonoseki. In other words the price of attempting to preserve sakoku, as the many warships in the north Pacific and the example of China showed, was a war which Japan could not win.

Through the limited channels left open by sakoku, Japan had never disregarded the west. Conversancy with Portuguese and then with Dutch as the successive lingua franca of Europeans in Asia existed among a small corps of linguistically competent officials. When Hirado was closed in 1641 and the Dutch transferred to Deshima, the artificial island in Nagasaki bay, the interpreters not only moved but, from the status of private employees of the Dutch, became direct employees of the shogunate. While the famous *fūsetsugaki* – reports which from 1644 on the arrival of vessels the Dutch were required to make on events in the outside world and which were translated into Japanese by the interpreters for transmission to the shogunate in Edo – were political, modest steps

in privately translating medical and technical texts began a decade later. Gradually awareness of the west spread from the indispensable interpreters in Nagasaki into professional circles (medical doctors and astronomers) around the shogunal court in Edo. From the 1780s, when fear of the western threat for the first time since the 1640s recurred, Japan began wide-ranging though limited political study of the west. The famous *uchi harai* policy (firing on and expelling foreign vessels), though formulated as a concept in 1793, became applicable by decree only in 1807 and was at that stage confined to Russian vessels. It was extended to all European vessels from 1825, and when it was seen that it could prove provocative, it was amended in 1842 to admit of succour to the crews of vessels in distress, and a proposal in 1848 to restore it was rejected. After 1780, isolated country though Japan was, there was an evolution of study of the outside world and a constantly changing framework for foreign policy. This awareness of the outside world was accompanied by a gradual creation, starting when Matsudaira Sadanobu (1758–1829) was senior councillor or prime minister (1787–93), of an administrative competence to cope with foreign challenges. *Rangaku* (Dutch or western studies) also had to be reorganised, to become not a somewhat maverick form of knowledge or indulgence pursued by the interpreters after hours, so to speak, and by a few highly opinionated individuals, but a continuous process serving administrative purposes. The result was that Japan had some elements of strengthened administration for foreign affairs by the 1850s, a highly competent knowledge of Dutch (and even some knowledge of other languages), and a practical if incomplete understanding of the west.

When the real challenge came in 1853 and 1854 from the largest groups of warships ever seen off its coasts, Japan was surprisingly capable of dealing with it. In 1853–4 concessions were kept to a minimum and from 1857–8 Japan not only in realistic mode made concessions but in tortuous negotiations succeeded in dragging out over a period of ten years their full application. If concessions became an issue in 1857–8, opinion divided on the extent of concession necessary, and, if concession seemed too much, on the ability of Japan to resist. While no one wanted outsiders, a degree of consensus was established by acceptance of the argument that the unwanted treaties would buy time and, when renegotiation became possible under treaty terms in 1872, it would take place from a position of strength: foreigners could then be confined to a few Nagasaki-style enclaves in isolated centres. Remarkably, from the outset individuals from different generations, whether Yoshida Shōin (1830–59), a young and relatively lowly samurai in Choshu, or Tokugawa Nariaki (1800–60), a powerful daimyo from a collateral branch of the shogunal family, had an urge to study the foreigner on his own ground. The systematisation of this

urge was a series of missions to the west from 1860 to 1871: they gradually made the Japanese aware that the west was too powerful to admit of the radical renegotiation that in 1858 or in the early 1860s had seemed attainable, and for some optimists or bold spirits sooner rather than later. Hence the concept of radical undoing of the treaties was replaced by a limited and realistic one of bringing to an end the humiliating concession of extraterritorial sovereignty wrung from a defenceless Japan in 1858. The prospect of achieving this lay in creating new institutions reassuringly like western ones and under which westerner residents would feel safe rather than in diplomatic negotiation itself.

Concern with economic development has dominated western writing on Japan. Many, perhaps most, undergraduate courses and many textbooks concentrate on the century after 1868 and primarily on reasons for Japan's industrialisation. Early post-1945 study of Japan rested on the assumption that Japan's development after 1868 could be explained by a modernisation process, an approach made fashionable in the 1950s by new theories of development intended to make impossible a recurrence of the depression of the 1930s and to quicken diffusion of the benefits of growth to less developed countries. Walt Rostow's *Stages of economic growth* picked Japan out as the sole case of an allegedly less developed country which had attained take-off. The interest in Japan's success was in no small measure inspired by the Cold War, and by the fact that India had modelled its development plans on the Soviet and centrally planned model. Hence as a model based on private enterprise principles or at least on politically more orthodox principles and of proven success, Japan was seen as an alternative to the new and ideologically suspect Indian model.

If democracy was to be successful in the defeated and occupied Japan of 1945, indigenous traditions which would suggest that democracy rested not simply on values imposed by an occupation power but on domestic traditions of dissent had to be discovered, even manufactured (ironically Marxist and non-Marxist historians agreed on this). John Hall, doyen of post-war American historians of Japan, chose to make Tanuma Okitsugu (1719–88), prime minister 1772–86, the subject of his first monograph, and to cast him in the role of moderniser. Tanuma fell in 1786, and the *uchi harai* policy, at least in its first and mitigated form, was broached or threatened in a document handed to the Russians in 1793. Hence, quite apart from the urge that also existed to find dissident individuals in Japanese history and to turn *ikki* (outbursts of unrest) into a form of political protest, this interpretation of Tanuma as a modernising politician displaying readiness to modify sakoku and sympathy for the opening of trade, offered the basis of an indigenous tradition even at a political level which could be appealed to. More than forty years after the appearance

of Hall's book a re-echo of the same outlook recurs in the final work by Marius Jansen, a close collaborator of Hall and a man deeply sympathetic to modern Japan.[3]

In holding out Japan as a persuasive model for less developed countries queuing up in the 1950s like aircraft on tarmac for take-off, the assumption was that Japan itself had been a backward country. Yet Japan was not backward in the 1850s. Its food output was very high not only by Asian standards of the 1850s but of the 1950s, and on orthodox principles of political economy, it already had the food surplus necessary in theoretical terms to finance economic development, an elaborate trade network and strong industrial and craft traditions. In any event, industrialisation itself was not a central feature of early policy after 1868. Exports were desirable more as a means of paying for imports than as an end in themselves. If unfortunate in having to open its markets from 1859, a crisis in silk in Europe and, fortuitously, the growth of markets in the United States created outlets for tea and silk which a few years previously, even if the will to trade had been there, would not have existed. As a result, the costs of paying for the import content of re-equipping the country on new lines proved much easier than observers, Japanese or foreign in the 1860s, had foreseen. As it was, the process of change proved painful in the 1880s when a policy of deflation had to be pursued and public investment was pruned.

The government, inheriting at the outset the inelastic revenue structure of the shogunate and han (the subordinate political units, some of them semi-independent), lacked the resources to finance widespread change, and infrastructure necessarily took precedence over industrialisation. Given these constraints and competing claims on resources, Japan's army of early Meiji times was a small one, smaller than its population warranted, and defence of the vulnerable northern territories was token. What was significant was simply that the country which in the past had either no army, or, in fragmented fashion, several or many armies, depending on how one counted its slight military strength, now had a sole and national army. Militaristic values did not run deep in early Meiji society. Bushido, the code of the warrior, as it is understood in the twentieth century was an artificial construct first published in Philadelphia in 1899 in very changed circumstances by a pacifist Nitobe Inazō (1862–1933) and, in 1933, by a militarist Hiraizumi Kiyoshi (1895–1984).[4] Its diverse origins and at such key points in Japan's military involvement with

[3] M. B. Jansen, *The making of modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000), p.244. He had already repeated the view in *CHJ*, vol. 5, M. B. Jansen (ed.), *The nineteenth century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp.6, 8, 51, 60, 87–8.
[4] See chapter 8, pp.265–71.

the outside world as 1899 and 1933 reflected its ersatz qualities. External events, not internal circumstances, shaped Japanese foreign policy, whether sakoku in the 1630s, its forced abandonment in the 1850s, or the vigorous role which Japan took, with Korea the main background factor, in its successive confrontations with China (1894–5) and Russia (1904–5). China and the Pacific were to determine Japan's future. Japan's efforts to establish a foothold, economic and territorial, on mainland Asia, to match both Russian encroachment in Manchuria and the growing western stake in a debilitated China, created new tensions. In particular they aroused the distrust of the United States which had its own ambitions in both Asia and the Pacific. Its sense of insecurity led Japan to assume onerous burdens in both China and the Pacific. Competing for scarce resources, both army and navy were in conflict, and rivalry reflected an unresolved problem of allocating resources to cope with challenges in the world's largest country (China) and largest ocean (the Pacific). Even after Japanese victory over Russia in 1905, the fear of Russia, in the wake of the collapse of czarist Russia in 1917, turning into dread of its Soviet and revolutionary successor, accounted for Japan's policies in Siberia (1918–22) and throughout the inter-war period in Manchuria and China. The interests of the United States were to prove even more deadly for Japan. A race by maritime countries to occupy the scattered islands of the north Pacific, beginning in the 1850s, had already added to Japan's insecurity. With the acquisition by the United States in the 1890s of external territories, the Philippines and Hawaii, the possibility of a future conflict between the two countries began to emerge.

Japan in its post-1600 history had been variously helped and handicapped by its institutions or lack of them. The Japan of 1600, at the end of a long period of civil war, was in essence a political compromise, a balance between on the one hand the authority of the shogun or ruler of Japan in foreign policy and on the other the independence in their territories or han of local rulers (daimyo). This was certainly the case for the *tozama* or han which before 1600 were effectively independent, variously supportive, hostile or neutral, and thus contrasting with *fudai* daimyo, mere camp followers, already holding daimyo status or soon to be rewarded with it. Above all there was no central taxation. The delicate nature of the compromise has been underestimated in modern terminology: the term feudal, an ambiguous term often applied to the country, has had to be refined to one of centralised feudalism. This, of course, creates a further problem as Japan demonstrably was not centralised. The term *bakuhan taisei* (bakufu-han system) – a modern creation in Japanese historiography – suggests that the government of Japan was more systematic than it was.

In particular the notion of a system of between 260 and 280 han is misleading; many han were not meaningful institutions in any sense, some so small as to be marginal economically, socially and administratively. The power of the shogun rested on the support of one to two dozen small to middle-sized han, and its political limitations were created by the need not to alienate the large *tozama* han of the south and west. The repeated use of the term bakufu in modern historiography, Japanese and foreign alike, to denote the shogun's government or the action by his officials, suggests a greater freedom of action, a larger number of policy-making officials and a greater capacity for decision making than was the case. There is an irony in the use of the term bakufu at all as it was an archaism popularised in the 1860s by its opponents from the *tozama* as a term of abuse of the shogun's government. A small number of decision-making figures (*fudai* daimyo) apart, there were few functionaries or civil servants to define or execute policy. Except in Nagasaki, Japan's centre of foreign contact, there was nothing akin to government ministries, and in Edo, below *ō-metsuke*, *metsuke*, *kanjō bugyō* and *daikan*, there were few officials with a training to execute the routine tasks of policy administration.

Three circumstances, sakoku, fiscal weakness and internal political compromise, went together. However, if serious challenges to sakoku, such as the sort of external crisis that threatened in the 1630s, were to persist over the years, internal political compromise in facing them could become unworkable. Would the Japanese response to external events – a foreign threat which became progressively more alarming in the middle decades of the nineteenth century – be determined by the shogun or by the han; would the benefits of trade – and trade became an issue when the opening to foreigners of Osaka, long the centre of domestic trade, was in prospect – go to the shogun or to the han? When the shogunate collapsed in 1867–8 Japan had no constitution (apart from a fiction that the shadowy figure of the emperor conferred legitimacy on the leaders of the revolt as it had on the Tokugawa dynasty itself from 1603). From 1868 to 1889 Japan was governed by the representatives of two to four former han, a situation made possible only by use of imperial authority for the legitimisation of the new regime, moderation in demands by Japan's new ad hoc rulers, and grudging acceptance of others (a situation made easier by the knowledge that Japan faced an external challenge). It was a rerun of some of the circumstances of the early 1600s.

Under a parliamentary system created by the constitution of 1889, insecurity, caused by Russian ambitions on land and growing foreign encroachment in Korea, could be responded to more decisively as a result of the ability to raise money by taxation. The risks, apart from the immediate uncertainty over prospects of victory or defeat in the field,

were from a long-term perspective finite as long as the armed forces were small, and the commanders were the first generation of political generals who saw action as subordinated to politics. However, what was to happen when the army became permanently larger and the first generation of generals as they aged or died were replaced by new officers? The risks were compounded by the keenness of the first generation of politicians to minimise outside political interference in administration. In surrendering their authority under the constitution of 1889, they kept as much power as possible in their hands: cabinets were nominated by the emperor, not dependent on approval by the two houses. That ensured at the outset that cabinets consisted of *ex officio* members, and appointment of army and navy officers as heads of the war ministries kept the control of the armed forces safely beyond the control of parliament. Ironically, the constitutional Japan of 1889 was politically weaker than the less legitimate Japan of the preceding two decades. Its army was potentially a semi-independent force; its parliament fractious (predictably hostile to extra taxation) but equally unable to determine policy. Given the vagueness of the constitution, it soon led to the informal emergence of the *genrō*, a small elite of retired senior politicians, who advised the emperor on major issues (notably the nomination of prime ministers) and whom prime ministers in turn were also expected to consult. It was in effect an attempt by the old guard to ensure continuity, one which inevitably broke down in time. Cabinet government, which became true parliamentary government in 1918 (when a majority of cabinet members were parliamentarians), was stable in the 1920s (though ominously the army had sought to plough an independent furrow in Siberia). An unstable China and Soviet strength in Siberia threw things out of balance in the 1930s. Divides between interest groups, divides within factions and even within the foreign ministry itself, traditionally the most open, pointed to an alarming situation. Hence policy drifted dangerously: intervention in China was incoherently planned, the risks were not clearly appreciated. The complacency of politicians, strident militarism in and beyond the armed forces, and ambivalence in public opinion which resented – in the tradition of all that transpired from 1853 – foreign pressure on Japan, can be seen with hindsight to have prepared Japan's nemesis. At the time, foreign diplomats remarked that it was hard or even impossible to meet anyone who really had authority over events.

A question which is unanswerable is the precise assessment of the benefit conferred by sakoku or the price paid for it. Sakoku gave Japan two and a half centuries of peace and a remarkable freedom from external complications. Japan's economic vitality was powerful; intellectually, thought had been free to the point of anarchy (whatever the contrary image painted

in much modern literature); expansive internal trade meant that its tea and silk, inadequate in the seventeenth century, were able to command new markets when unexpectedly such markets appeared after 1860. Did sakoku enable Japan to relate better to the outside world after 1868, or had isolation left the country poorly equipped to cope with challenges? Or if put a different way, had Japan engaged more and earlier with the west, would it have lost out as all other Asian countries who had truck with the west did, or would it have become more unitary, and hence have combined preservation of its distinctive character with a not necessarily entirely harmonious but none the less constructive *modus vivendi* with the west? The balance sheet is complex. Japan's policy of sakoku was it-self in its time successful. Equally, the realism of its policies in the 1850s and 1860s was striking, and, despite the swirling complexities of China in subsequent decades, abroad Japan retained much respect to the end of the first decade of the new century (Japanese intrusion in Korea as a bulwark against Russian advance was welcomed by the other powers). On the other hand, misjudgements accumulated in the 1910s and more alarmingly in the 1930s. Foreign attitudes to Japan reflected the changes. An admiration, somewhat patronising but also in many ways unqualified for Japan, was replaced by growing dislike and by diplomatic hostility. A final judgement on this equation would also require detailed scrutiny of western intentions and behaviour. Western presence in Asia, its pros-elytising Christianity, its aggressions, its rampant colonial expansion of the nineteenth century, the rivalries among western powers themselves, these are as much part of the equation as Japan and its policy. They are in a sense the catalyst of all that happened in Japan and in east Asia.

The argument of this book in a nutshell is that the Japanese policy-makers were rational and for its time sakoku policy was equally rational; the economy was highly developed; and the obsession by western writers for explaining why and how Japan could rival the west is not only pa-tronising but, as far as its economic content is concerned, directed to a non-problem created by reluctance to accept that an eastern country, or at least one eastern country, when it willed it, could apparently effortlessly equal the west. The one problem was that at the outset of its opening Japan had no exports and fortuitous circumstances created the outlets for tea and silk. The economic uncertainties of the 1860s are greatly minimised in modern accounts because foreign trade itself is uncritically seen as not simply a long-term aid to development but an immediate and automatic answer to the international payment needs created by the opening of the country.

The economic resilience as well as the rationale of its institutions, both old and new, has to be a central concern of any study of Japan. The

question is not why Japan succeeded, but why it followed the western model. If it was imitative (a process which at different times led to both praise and criticism of Japan), the motives for imitation were primarily on the security front: the need to gain a defence strong enough to resist the west, and, in the long interval from 1868 to 1894, the paramount necessity of impressing on the west that Japanese institutions had changed sufficiently for outsiders to have confidence in the protection of their interests, if the unequal clauses of the 1858 treaties were abandoned. Many changes (in themselves superficial, even if their adoption might seem surprising in its rapidity), in the style of dress, in the prohibition of near-nakedness by workmen in torrid weather and of mixed bathing, were intended consciously to avoid Japan appearing barbarous to westerners, and hence to ensure that the country was taken seriously. It was not a country in progressive crisis before 1868 (even if a rigid revenue ensured restricted government). In other words, famine or *ikki* (social unrest) were not central to the story. Nor was the country more oppressive after 1793; if anything it was on balance more open, and only bouts of factionalism, caused by the fewness of officials and the loose administrative structure, contradict that picture. After 1868, while economic aspects are important, they are not the decisive feature. The country was already developed, and the defensive dimension of its new role was central to its westernisation. The slogan *fukoku kyōhei* (rich country, strong defence)[5] summarises its intent. The emphasis on Japan as an imitator not only springs from the premise of seeing Japan at the outset as a backward country but, by its emphasis on imitation across a broad range of activities, it also avoids giving recognition to the central role of western aggression as the motivating force for imitation. What Japan wanted to imitate in the 1850s and 1860s was western technology in armaments in order to defend itself. In the urge to imitate the west, admiration for the west was strong in the 1870s; it was, however, significantly qualified within a decade. Even Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), who had written so much in favour of lessons from the west, became more muted in his admiration: another slogan, *wakan yosai* (western science and Japanese values), equally summarised the situation.

The critical issues of 1868 were political and constitutional change and the foreign threat. Sakoku itself was a complex response in its time (the fact that there was earlier debate over the external risks of adhering

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[5] Usually translated as 'rich country, strong army'. The term defence is preferred here, as the early Meiji army was in fact a small one, and the emphasis in the defence debate had been more on artillery and western firearms than on an army as such. The term came from the Chinese classics and acquired currency in debate among highly educated and politically aware Japanese in Japan in the 1850s.

to it unchanged explains why emphasis has been put in some modern historiography on 1804: the modern emphasis, though overdone, is not of itself arbitrary). Japanese awareness of potential outside risks and the debate to which it gave rise for almost a century preceding 1868 is central to appreciating Japanese politics after 1853 and the success of its adjustment from closed country to open one. The country was sensitive to changing circumstances and its immediate responses over many preceding decades to challenges had been informed ones. The role of one or more external languages as a means of communication, the importance attached to language interpretation and a steadily growing accumulation of translation in Dutch as a vehicle for understanding the outside world was a cornerstone in this success. This gets little attention in western monographs, and in Japanese historiography it is examined in specialised monographs rather than in more general works. As a result the motivation behind sakoku and the sensitive shifts of emphasis in the foreign concerns of Japan from 1793 onwards are often not fully appreciated. The return of shipwrecked Japanese and the question of aid for foreign mariners in distress has often led to misunderstanding of what Japanese policy was. This was not an issue for foreigners before 1793 (because they had very rarely approached Japan), nor was it a problem for the Japanese, except when they were faced with the novel crisis situation involving Russia. When shipwrecked Japanese were returned, the requirement was that their return should be effected though Nagasaki, and some regular transfer of seamen occurred through Korea. The few Europeans likewise were sent on to Nagasaki. As for aid to distressed foreign mariners, despite growing concerns it remained the practice, except for Russian vessels from 1807, until 1825. Older practice was restored in 1842. In other words, except between 1825 and 1842 there was help for distressed mariners.

One of the arguments of this book is that there was little if any backing in Japan for the principle of opening up the country. A guarded view is taken of the role of the much-lionised 'Dutch' experts in the rights and wrongs of famous quarrels in Japan: the quarrels are instances of recurrent factionalism in Japanese behaviour, unrelated to philosophic debate (the way the quarrels widened has a striking similarity to the manner in which factionalism in departments – particularly in politically sensitive subjects such as law, economics and history – in state universities in the 1930s acquired national notoriety). The book stresses too the administrative problems, the changes over a half century before 1853, and, a fact that needs to be said, that by any standard and by definition for an isolated country, there was a high degree of both success and realism in Japanese negotiation in the 1850s. In a very real sense realism was one of

Japan's strengths from the 1850s onwards: abandonment of realism was the country's later undoing in the 1930s.

In chapter 2, following this introduction, foreign trade in the seventeenth century is analysed. Trade within east Asia depended entirely on an exchange of high-value goods (silk for silver) effected on a small number of comparatively large ships. There was not a significant exchange in more prosaic or voluminous goods, and for that reason sailings were few compared with the intensive trades in the East Indies and Indian Ocean or in Europe: there were dozens of sailings and, except in the late 1680s for Chinese vessels, never hundreds. Chinese and Japanese traders were viewed with suspicion on one or other or on both coasts, and controls and restrictions affected the conduct of trade. Japanese distrust of the Chinese deepened in the 1620s and 1630s; equally, acts of aggression by Europeans added to doubts about westerners. They were, however, at least on the Japanese side, a welcome supplementary aid to essential exchanges which were constrained by many circumstances when conducted on Chinese or Japanese vessels. In a high-value trade carried out in a small number of vessels, European traders were not at a handicap in actual operations, especially as they were more capitalised than the numerous small traders (running into hundreds) who crowded onto the larger of the Chinese vessels. The offsetting factor was that if financial losses occurred, Europeans were more likely than Chinese to withdraw or run down operations. If trade was to be confined to one or two ports, and if the numerous Chinese and also the Portuguese, who were the Europeans with the most numerous, intimate and diffuse ties in Japan, were constrained to depart within the year as they were in the 1620s, risks were reduced. The five regulations of the 1630s – the core of sakoku policy – were a refinement of controls rather than a novelty. The Portuguese finally fell foul of the shogunate less because of Christianity itself than because, as the sole westerners who were numerous, widespread, sometimes intermarried, and also friendly with daimyo, they were a political risk to a degree that the Dutch were not. With Chinese and Dutch alike finally confined to a single port supervised by officers of the shogun, control for the future preserved the delicate balance between shogun and daimyo, which could be upset if trade enhanced wealth or foreigners were either numerous or scattered across southern Japan and hence uncontrollable. Japan was an example of limited government; no central tax fell on the daimyo or their domains; except in Nagasaki it had no specialised bureaucracy outside accounting offices, and, as peace lasted, the country effectively demilitarised.

Chapter 3 describes the growth of the economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. If foreign trade contracted in the seventeenth

century, the economy itself expanded steadily. The accompanying dynamic of this boom was the growth of Edo as major consumption centre of shogun and daimyo and of Osaka as the marketing centre for the produce of han and as the financial centre to turn products into hard cash. The monetary system was one of two currency zones, with Osaka serving as the exchange market between them. Overland trade was limited, given the mountainous terrain; on the other hand the coastal trade was probably the largest in the world. There was not an economic crisis. What did occur, however, was a persistent fiscal crisis, insoluble given the constraints that the 1600 settlement of Japan imposed on fiscal innovation. If the revenue of the shogun and in the han of daimyo was limited, that meant that the incomes of their servants were also inelastic. Hence, the sense of gloom in writing reflected the unhappiness of a small class, amounting to less than five per cent of the population, but which included the main writers of reform proposals and of complaints alike.

Chapter 4 examines the way a sense of freedom from attack by Europeans (from the 1650s) and from China (after the 1680s) led to a century of unprecedented ease on the security front. Economic conditions were favourable apart from the harvest failures of 1732 and of the 1780s. There was, however, no threat from widespread rural disorder and no political challenge to the shogunate. Nor was there an orthodoxy in belief or in teaching imposed by the state. One result of the situation was that philosophic thought and teaching alike expanded through growing numbers of teachers and schools: schooling was private, eclectic and competitive. In such a framework western studies could find a niche. They began in Nagasaki, as a modest outcrop of scholarly work and teaching by the interpreters. Edo later became the focal point. The need to understand the outside world acquired a new urgency for political reasons in the 1790s.

Chapter 5 argues that the 1780s were doubly a decade of crisis: on the economic front because of harvest failure which reached beyond the north, and on the foreign front because of uncertainty created by Russian expansion in Ezo. However, a long period of prosperity followed to be interrupted only by bad harvests in the 1830s. Political responses to the external crisis were cautious, with definition and redefinition of *uchi harai* reflecting a readiness to comprehend the crisis. Study of the outside world become more systematic and focussed from the first decade of the nineteenth century under government auspices: surveying and mapping teams were created under the technical auspices of the shogunal astronomer, and existing translation work was formalised in a Translations Bureau created in 1811, likewise under his direction. The Hayashi family, already responsible for some of the paperwork of the shogunate, was given what seems an overall role as liaison between this new or intensified activity

and the exiguous administration in Edo castle; from 1845 *kaibō gakari* (defence officials) were instituted, in part to co-ordinate defence, in part to free defence from factional disputes. The Edo government resisted pressures to expand vigorously into the Ezo islands: its caution on this front caused controversy when in 1822 it handed back responsibility for security from its own officials to officials of the han of Matsumae in Ezo. Inevitably outbreaks of factionalism occurred as in 1824–5, 1828 and 1839–40, before tighter administration prevented its recurrence.

Chapter 6 examines how, as it became clear by 1845 that a new challenge was looming, government policy sought to achieve national consensus. This, combined with an imperfect but real knowledge of western strength, made it possible to respond to external challenge successfully. Concessions in 1853–5 which permitted vessels to call but did not allow of trade did not encounter deep opposition (they were a logical extension of the flexible approach evident in *uchi harai* itself). The conceding of trade in 1858 (and in ports on the coast of central Japan) was more controversial. A consensus did, however, develop around the fact that the trade treaties would buy time to arm and they could be renegotiated and whittled down from a position of strength. A reluctant emperor himself acceded when the general views of han were clear and a contentious shogunal succession was out of the way. The trade divide might not have proved so deep if Japan's rulers had not faced the most difficult succession in the history of the shogunate, and the resultant bitterness (deepened by the brusque imposition of a controversial successor on the death of the ailing shogun a month after the American treaty was signed) carried on into the 1860s. The 1860s were a complex decade, inevitably so given the compromise nature of Japanese institutions and the delicate balance between them (power divided between han and shogunate, the imperial institution itself a legitimising device to which both sides could appeal). Three things make it easier to explain the sequence of events. First, some were overconfident of the ability to resist militarily. Second, as the opening of Osaka (the original date for which was deferred) loomed into prospect, the question of whether the benefits of trade would accrue to the han or to the shogun became a central one. Third, in reaction to the urge of shogunal officials and of the emperor (who was a strong supporter of the political authority of the shogun) to punish dissentient han, grew the idea that in a time of crisis war among Japanese was intolerable. Hence loyalism to the shogun wavered. Again, as in 1858, deaths triggered development. The shogun, only twenty years old, died on 29 August 1866, and the emperor unexpectedly a bare five months later. The new shogun Yoshinobu was a young and forceful man who unwisely had backed those in the shogunate who favoured a crackdown on dissentient han, and he

also pushed strongly for shogunal control of the revenues which would accrue in Osaka. The death of the emperor, who was sensitive to the many preoccupations of han, meant his replacement by a young and inexperienced emperor who would be malleable in the hands of a forceful shogunate. The shogunate fell because of the alliance of Choshu (a dissentient han which not only favoured the resumption of *uchi harai* but had put it into practice in 1863–4) and Satsuma (up to this time a loyal supporter of the shogun).

Chapter 7 considers how contact with the outside world through missions sent abroad convinced the Japanese of the strength of the western powers. Undoing of the treaties was soon seen to be unrealistic, and the way of ending the humiliating and unequal conditions, notably extraterritoriality (which meant that foreigners were tried only in consular courts), was by adopting western-style institutions. After 1868, under the abolition of han jurisdictions, termination of the role which Satsuma and Tsushima had held in contacts with the Ryukyus and Korea respectively made urgent a new basis for relations. Korea was particularly worrying because Chinese and Russian encroachment could threaten Japan. Japan's growing stake in Korea in the wake of its wars with China and Russia was acceptable to western powers, but other issues such as trade rivalries among all the countries over China and hostility in the United States to Japanese immigration point to fresh sources of tensions in the first decade of the new century. A Japanese constitution came only in 1889. If the imperial institution had been used to legitimise the pretensions of four han, especially Satsuma and Choshu, the constitution, enshrining the emperor at the centre of the state and very vague as to how cabinet ministers were appointed, was also calculated to protect the stake of Satsuma and Choshu in government and in control of the armed forces. In practice, the emperor nominated ministers (on advice), and the lack of constitutional clarity about the process also ensured that office-holders and not parliamentarians dominated in the three decades from 1890. Army and naval officers were appointed to the war ministries, thus ensuring that Choshu and Satsuma dominance of the armed forces further secured the interests of leaders from both these han.

Japan was a beneficiary of the First World War in terms of its economic boom, diversification of its industrial base, some territorial acquisition and the status of inclusion among the five major powers at Versailles. However, chapter 8 examines how its interests in China and Manchuria and naval rivalry with the United States led eventually to wars with China from 1937 and with the United States from 1941. Cabinet instability in Japanese constitutional government worsened once external issues became central: army and naval ministers were capable of bringing cabinets

down. Moderate Japanese and foreigners resident in Japan alike tended to be complacent that a stable political arrangement could be achieved. While Japan never became totalitarian (and the militarism of the attempted coup by young officers in 1936 revealed the limitations as well as the dangers of the situation), cabinet weakness, combined with the perception in public opinion that opposition abroad to Japanese policy was motivated by selfish ambitions, ensured that there was no reassessment of policy and international crisis widened. Despite the rather artificially contrived campaigns mounted by militarists against individuals, the press itself remained independent, as did teaching except during bouts of factionalism among academic rivals in the state universities (though not in the private universities) when militaristic views served as the dividing line between friend and foe. Japanese history poses greater problems of interpretation than the history of other countries both because it was influenced by the political imperatives of legitimacy (in support of orthodox political institutions in the 1890s and of an effort in the 1930s by militarists to 'reform' them), and because both Marxists in the Japanese universities in the 1930s and, in the wake of the Allied Occupation in 1945, western historians, mainly though not exclusively American, were anxious to find historical evidence of dissent from authority, as proof of traditions to support democracy against authoritarian government in the 1930s or to underpin post-1945 Occupation-imposed institutions. Much of the concluding section of the chapter is devoted to these issues, because from both sides of the spectrum, and from without as from within Japan, views on bushido, militaristic traditions, the imperial system and the nature of dissent in Japanese history have distorted history or even manufactured a false continuity.