

A Short Introduction to Japanese History
(Shotoku)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

First, a note about the required division of Japanese history into “Periods.” Reality alert: Just because you can divide your own life into periods—such as childhood, high school, and middle-age for example—does that mean that who and what you are / were changed drastically on the first day of your college career? Probably not. Did puberty overtake you in a day and suddenly you were an adult? My condolences if it did. The point is that even though historians love to divide the past into all sorts of periods, that doesn’t mean that anything changed suddenly for the majority of the people. Nor does it mean that nothing changed. Periods are conveniences; ways of breaking several thousands of years into easily digested pieces. For that reason, I have elected to divide the chapters in this book along lines of generally recognized periods of Japanese history. This is, of course, not the only way this could be done.

1.1 Setting the Stage: Geography

Anyone interested enough to find and read a book like this is probably already aware that Japan is an island nation. Big surprise. It is composed of four main islands¹ and hundreds of smaller ones, all formed through volcanic activity. Of the four main islands, northern Kyushu and western Honshu are the closest to the Asian continent.

Korea is about 130 miles from Japan. China is a bit farther. This distance is something like four times the width of the English channel. The effect is that for much of its history Japan has been close enough to benefit from continental culture, but isolated enough to avoid being overwhelmed by it. This has been of enormous importance in the development of Japanese culture. While Europe and China suffered repeated invasions by steppe nomads and other Eurasian barbarians, Japan was spared each time (save two, the Mongols invaded twice but lost both times). The barbarians ravaging Eurasia did not share the cultural assumptions of the people they conquered and thus could greatly threaten or damage the subjected culture. This was not the case in Japan - although they had centuries of civil war, it was civil, that is, it usually stayed inside the bounds Japanese culture set for warfare. Of course, it was also violent, as war tends to be, so although holy places were important for all sides they were sometimes

¹(NE to SW: Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu)

destroyed. But with the important exceptions of temples and shrines that were active participants in the wars, those that were destroyed were usually rebuilt soon after the war ended because they were just as important to the victor as to his enemies. The barbarians ravaging Europe saw no reason to treat churches or monasteries as anything other than convenient concentrations of gold and other wealth. This isolation is one reason that Kyoto is full of temples and shrines dating back many hundreds of years.

Most (over 75%) of Japan is hilly or mountainous, meaning extremely limited room to live and grow crops. Only about 14% of Japan's land is arable. For comparison the figure for the U.S. is 20%, and for the United Kingdom, 29%. The Japanese love to dwell on how small their country is, and although several countries in Europe are in fact smaller, Japan is by no means a large country. America's arable land alone is more than twice as large as the whole of Japan. Another unfortunate consequence of steep mountains is that Japan's rivers are short, swift, and shallow. In other words, they cannot be used for transportation.² Everyone and everything has to walk or be carried over the mountains.

Japan's rivers do serve one purpose: they are used to irrigate the plains. However, all these mountains don't leave a whole lot of room for plains. What flat areas there are have to serve the dual functions of agriculture and providing living space. It is no accident that the three largest plains in Japan are home to five of the largest cities. Tokyo occupies much of the Kanto plain, Nagoya is situated on the Nobi plain while Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe share the Kinai plain. These three account for over 15 million people in a combined space a little smaller than Connecticut. Not a whole lot of room left for growing rice. When all the math is done, Japan has to try to feed 125 million people crammed into a mountainous country about the size of California with precious little farmland. As if this weren't bad enough, Japan lacks almost every mineral and resource needed by industrialized countries in the modern world. Oil is a good example: Japan imports 99% of its oil and petroleum products.

One fact remains to be addressed. Japan, a small island nation, has a longer total coastline than China, a huge continental power.³ Practically since day one, geography has forced, or at least encouraged, the Japanese to look out to the oceans for food and transport. Aquatic plants that in English are labeled "weeds" are important items in the Japanese diet. The Japanese eat fish that I don't even know the English names for. They have a long history of sea trade with East and Southeast Asia. Japanese pirates were the scourge of Asian seas for centuries. Until the 1600's, there were sizable Japanese communities scattered throughout East and Southeast Asia. It was only under the Tokugawa Bakufu (1600 to 1867) that the Japanese were forced to turn their collective back on the open seas.

²Which is doubly true now that so many of Japan's rivers have been dammed and reduced to little more than creeks.

³The numbers are: 14,500 km for China and 29,751 km for Japan.

Chapter 2

The Earliest Times

2.1 Pre-History

No one knows exactly where the Japanese came from. Despite what some people claim on a regular basis, they are not a homogeneous race. (There is no such thing.) Although there is a fair amount of controversy about their origins, the people described as “Japanese” are related to mainland East Asians and thought to be related to South East Asians and South Pacific Islanders as well. There has in the past been quite a bit of immigration from, and through, Korea. The Japanese language is thought to be related to the Polynesian and Altaic language families. What this all boils down to is that the “Japanese” are in fact quite a mixed group. However, there hasn’t been any large scale immigration in centuries. So, the Japanese might not be the mongrols that many modern Americans are, but in the long duree, there is no such thing as a pure race and the Japanese are as impure as everyone else.

2.1.1 Jomon and Yayoi Periods

Long, long ago, some stone age types lived in Japan. They shared the islands with a proto-Caucasian¹ group of people known today as the Ainu. Why either of these groups were here no one really knows. What is known is that someone other than them was making pottery decorated with intricate cord markings sometime around 8,000 B.C. These people, whoever they were, lived in pit dwellings and very inconsiderately didn’t bother leaving any written documents for the historian to understand them by. Since they couldn’t read or write this isn’t all that surprising. What they left us instead was lots of those pots with the really neat cord markings, which is why some archeologist somewhere decided to name this stone age hunter-and-gatherer culture the “Jomon” culture and their day of supreme rulership of the sacred islands as the “Jomon Period.” Jomon, as you might have guessed, means “cord markings.” The Jomon period lasted until a wave of immigrants from the Asian mainland arrived around 250 BC with better technology and took over from the Jomon people. Quite logically,

¹I have to look into this a bit more, but in this case, ‘proto-Caucasian’ seems to mean ‘caucasian, but we have no idea what a bunch of white people are doing in the very Far East thousands of years before the birth of Christ.’ Or something like that. Bit like finding a group of Africans living in Iceland before any Europeans got there.

this new period from about 250 BC to about 250 AD is known as the “Yayoi Period.”

Actually, the only reason this period is called “Yayoi” is because that is where the first artifacts of the culture were found.² Soon after these new folks arrived iron and bronze tools and weapons made their first appearance in Japan.³ Around 100 BC the rice culture of South East Asia entered Japan. This was to define the Japanese way of life until industrialization in the late nineteenth Century. Rice Culture = Lots of people work together to grow the highly labor intensive rice crop. Because of the need for large-scale irrigation works, rice cultures tend toward centralized control of group labor rather than individual labor for individual gain. WARNING: This is an older theory which does not have as many adherents today as it did in the past. While it is true that most if not all societies based on rice cultivation have been less than egalitarian, it is also true that many non-rice based cultures have been (and are) totalitarian. Whatever. Fact is that the rice entered the Japanese isles and has had a profound effect on Japanese culture.

Despite the presence of iron and rice, we are still not into historic times yet—these people didn’t write anything down either. Lucky for us that the Chinese did. Chronicles from the third century A.D. tell us that a queen named Pimiku (or Himiko) united “Japan” (it wasn’t called that yet) after a period of civil warfare. No one really knows exactly where Himiko’s queendom was since the Chinese directions are rather vague (it was either on Kyushu, Honshu, or Oahu⁴). It is also unknown whether Himiko’s family is the same one that emerges into the light of history as THE imperial family (the one that has continued as the ruling house until the present day—they even were allowed to govern once or twice, but more on that later).

You may have noticed how young the ‘ancient’ Japanese nation is. Here we are, about to embark on the fourth century after the death of Jesus and Japan barely exists. Rome was well past its prime before the “Japanese” were advanced enough to qualify as barbarians. Compared to the USA, civilization in Japan may indeed be old, but much of European (to say nothing of African or Middle Eastern) civilization is older still. The reason for this is simple—being basically at the end of the world, the Japanese had to wait a long time for civilization to reach them. When it finally did, it was Chinese and it came to Japan through Korea.

2.1.2 The Yamato Period

The Yayoi period lasted until another wave of immigrants came in and started building big tombs for their (dead) leaders. It was during this, the Yamato Period, (about 300-710 A.D.) that Chinese and Korean culture came flooding into Japan, bringing the benefits of civilization with them. Prince Shotoku is the big name to know here. He was instrumental in bringing in elements of Chinese culture, including political institutions and Buddhism. The Chinese

²I have no idea where Yayoi, Japan is, but there is a Yayoi district in Tokyo that might be the place.

³Compared to the rest of Eurasia, this is very late. Iron was already in use in Mesopotamia in the second millennium BC and bronze about a thousand years earlier than that.

⁴The Oahu part is a joke. No one actually thinks the Chinese texts were talking about Hawaii.

writing system was imported and Japan was finally literate. As some of you might know, however, the Japanese and Chinese languages have almost nothing in common. Chinese is monosyllabic and not inflected (no verb endings and things of that sort) while Japanese is polysyllabic and most definitely inflected. Imagine trying to write English in kanji - that's what the literate Japanese of this time were doing with their own language. No surprise then that literacy was severely limited and highly prized.

Also during the Yamato period, the founder of the most famous aristocratic family of early Japan, the Fujiwara family, gained control of the imperial court. He kept control by marrying his daughters to emperors and princes and always providing regents for underage (and sometimes adult) emperors. Some people used to say that the emperors of the time had more Fujiwara than imperial blood. Whatever the case, the Fujiwara family remained the power behind the throne for about two centuries. They controlled more than just the emperors: with the other aristocratic families, they dominated the culture of the country until the samurai (strong men with sharp swords) decided the aristocrats were effete snobs and took control. But that is still a few hundred years in the future. Now we turn to the Nara Period—so named because the national capital was located in Nara—and the Heian Period.

Chapter 3

The Nara and Heian Periods

3.1 The Nara and Heian Periods

From 710 to 784 the capital was at Nara. After a short stay in the suburbs, the capital was moved, in 794 A.D., to Heiankyo (a.k.a. Kyoto) which was to remain the imperial city until 1868. The Heian Period didn't make it that long, however. It and its culture fell victim to competing samuarai clans during the twelfth century.

In many ways, the Heian period is the good old days for Japan. Culture and refinement were everything. The ability to compose a good poem and a good hand at calligraphy were essential aristocratic skills. No self respecting lady would be seen without twelve correctly coordinated and layered kimonos. Of course, letters and even food had to follow the proper form and contain the proper reference to the season and the weather. In short, form, appearance and decorum were cardinal virtues. As boring as this might sound, the Heian period was the first of several cultural high points in Japan. This is almost painfully obvious in literature. Because Chinese characters were believed to be too hard for women to learn, the women were forced to use some simplified kanji phonetically as an alphabet. These letters allowed them much more freedom than the constricting use of Chinese. Ironically, although the “superior” men did write some world-class poetry, a few women created masterpieces of world literature. The most important person to know in this regard is Murasaki Shikibu—she wrote *The Tale of Genji*, one of the first and longest novels in the world. She wrote it around the year 1000 AD and it is about 1,000 pages long. It deals with life at the court and the love affairs of the Prince Genji and his friends and family. Most Japanese high school students enjoy it about as much as American high school students enjoy Shakespeare.

The continental culture which came flooding in during the Yamato period, continued to come into the islands during the Nara and Heian periods. Of course, the Japanese changed it, adapted it, and generally made it their own; Chinese culture became Japanese culture. A major reason that the court aristocrats were able to so completely dominate the culture of the era is simply because they had a monopoly on it and they did little to try to spread it to other

classes. The only other theoretically powerful group, the samurai, were off in the hinterlands fighting the Ainu. However, by pushing the Ainu east and north, the samurai opened up new lands which they used to build up their own power. Nobles and monasteries already possessed large estates of tax-free land and when the samurai began to acquire their own, they used their wealth not for religious purposes, but to maintain and enlarge their armies. Two families became exceptionally strong and ambitious: the Taira (also known as Heike) and the Genji (a.k.a. Minamoto). They fought for supremacy of the sacred islands during the early 1180's. Minamoto Yoritomo finally defeated his Taira rivals, but rather than overthrow the emperor, which would give everyone, friend and foe alike, an excuse to exterminate his clan, as well as removing any legitimacy he had to rule, Yoritomo compelled the emperor to accept his services as Shogun. This was in 1185 and Yoritomo's base camp in Kamakura became the actual center of power in Japan. The era of the cultured aristocrats was over and they would never again possess any real power.

Chapter 4

The Rise of the Samurai

Japan's elite during the Heian period were the creators and consumers of high culture. The peasants did not partake of any poem parties. Nor did they write any pillowbooks. They lived their lives within their own class culture, and most had no contact at all with anyone from the court, except indirectly, through court appointed local officials.

The samurai are a different story. At the lowest level, a samurai might be no better off than most peasants. These samurai might not own very much. A little land with a few peasants working it, providing him just enough income to maintain a few horses and his weapons and armor. Of course, he would have a family name, something most peasants would have to wait until the 19th century for. But with a family name come family aspirations. Not winning is okay, but for god's sake, don't do anything that might imperil the existence of the family name. For the highest ranking samurai were stresses were the same but the stakes larger, for they were literally the sons of emperors.

Every monarchy faces the same simple problem—ensuring an heir. The king or queen must have at least one child survive to adulthood, preferably one who is mentally fit to rule. Queens are in a bit of a bind since they have to actually produce the child. Lots of stress and effort for a maximum payoff of (roughly) one child per year. Kings have it better. Assuming no pesky religious issues about the number of wives or concubines a monarch is allowed, a king is limited only by physical constitution and the number of women he can find. Five or ten potential heirs a year is quite possible.

So you have a baby-booming king trying to literally be the 'father of his country'. Problem: You only need one heir and maybe a backup heir for insurance. Court intrigue being what it is, having too many people with royal blood running around can be almost as bad (from the monarch's point of view) as having too few. So what do you do with the rest of the king's / queen's kids after you have decided on an heir?

In Nara and Heian Japan, it was common to send young men with royal blood off to the hinterlands, where they could set up a new

Chapter 5

The Kamakura Period

5.1 The Kamakura Period

They may have beaten the Taira, but the Minamoto soon fell victim to the same ploy they were using on the emperor. After Yoritomo died in 1199, his widow's family (the Hojo clan) exercised power by always providing regents for the shoguns. Thus the head of the Hojo clan would tell the shogun what to do (in very polite language), the shogun would then tell the emperor what to do or sign or say (again, in very polite language). This setup lasted until 1333.

During the roughly 150 years that the shoguns lived in Kamakura, several important events took place. The most interesting were the Mongol's two attempts to invade Japan. The Mongols started their conquests in 1211 against neighboring horse peoples before joining the big league by taking on and then taking China. By 1258 they had taken Baghdad and were beginning to worry the Christian crusaders and the Middle Eastern Muslims. In September of 1260, the Mongols clashed with the Mameluke army of Egypt just outside Jerusalem and for the first time, the Mongols lost. After that battle, Mongol expansion into Europe and the Middle East was over, but they continued to go south and east. In 1274, for the first time in history, Japan was invaded, and for the second time in history, the Mongols lost. They lost again in 1282 when a typhoon destroyed their invasion fleet. The weather played a role in the repulse of the Mongols in 1274 as well, but both times the samurai had to fight and they held their own both times until the typhoons came and swept the invaders away. Relieved Japanese believed that the gods had sent the typhoons to protect their islands and this is the origin of the "kamikaze" myth which played a small but painful role in the Second World War.

Two other important events during the Kamakura period involved the imperial court. The Hojo were able to consolidate their power after an emperor attempted (with a spectacular lack of success) to regain control of his government in 1221. Then, between 1333 and 1336, the Emperor Godaigo actually managed to rule more than whatever room he was in. He did this with a lot of help from his friends—friends who didn't like the Minamoto / Hojo government. When one of these 'friends' turned against him in 1336, Godaigo fled south to the Kii mountains and set up a court there. The disloyal friend, Ashikaga Takauji, merely put another member of the imperial family on the throne

and went ahead with the business of ruling in the name of the “emperor.” Eventually, the southern court was lured back to Kyoto by promises that the two branches would alternate on the throne. That was in 1392 and the southern branch is still waiting for their turn. (Actually, I think they gave up on ever getting their turn long ago.)

Chapter 6

The Warring States Period

6.1 The Nutshell Version

6.1.1 Oda Nobunaga

The man who ended Ashikaga rule was Oda Nobunaga. In 1568 he took Kyoto (and therefore the Emperor) and destroyed the last Ashikaga shogun a few years later. Before Nobunaga could finish his conquest of the country and be named shogun, a treacherous general assassinated him (in 1582).

6.1.2 Hideyoshi

Hideyoshi stepped forward to revenge his lord. Hideyoshi soon finished conquering, subduing and / or making allies of the remaining lords. Japan had a strong centralized government for the first time in close to two hundred years. Hideyoshi then set about consolidating his power over both the daimyo and the ordinary people. In 1588, Hideyoshi commanded all commoners to turn in their weapons because he was planning to build a really, really big statue of the Buddha (we are talking bigger than the Statue of Liberty). Obviously turning over your sword so that it could be melted down to provide metal for a religious statue must be a very good thing to do, right? Maybe, if you're an idiot. Hideyoshi didn't care about building a statue, he just wanted to disarm the peasants (kind of hard to rebel without weapons, isn't it?). Around the same time, Hideyoshi also decreed that from then on, no one could change status. A boy born to a peasant was a peasant and could never change his status. Thus, a man who owed his position not to birth but to luck, skill, and achievement was forever forbidding anyone else from ever doing it again. Just to be absolutely sure about the people (and thus his tax income), Hideyoshi also carried out a nationwide land survey.

In foreign affairs, Hideyoshi showed less intelligence. In 1592, he invaded Korea with the intention of going all the way to Beijing. If this seems to border on the megalomaniac, keep in mind that Japan was brimming over with veteran troops who, after unification, suddenly had no more wars to fight. Hideyoshi sure didn't want them all hanging around making trouble in Japan. So why not ship them off to fight somewhere else? (I should point out that this sort of thing was also a factor in the Spanish conquests in the Americas.) Still, even

considering the danger of restless samurai at home, there was a bit of insanity in the idea of Japanese samurai conquering all of East Asia; when Hideyoshi died in 1598, the invasion was abandoned and Japan peace made with her neighbors. (They never had a chance anyway, not after the Ming Dynasty in China sent troops to help the Koreans.)

6.1.3 The Europeans and Their Guns

We need to backtrack just a little bit for a moment to touch on some events which had monumental results for the direction of Japanese history. In 1543 a Chinese cargo ship arrived in Tanegashima harbor (a little south of Kyushu) with about a hundred men aboard. This was not at all an unusual occurrence. The three Portuguese adventurers on board the ship, however, were very unusual - they are the first Europeans known to have visited Japan. Almost as important, the Portuguese men brought their guns with them. Within a few weeks, the lord of Tanegashima bought two of their guns for a whole lot of gold and gave them to his chief sword smith to study the weapons and make more. Soon orders were coming in from all over Japan as the more flexible daimyo sought to exploit the new weapon's power on the battlefield. After some initial adjustment to the new strategies required for musket warfare, the daimyo were using guns successfully in their battles. Also, after making some improvements to the European model, some daimyo profited from the selling of arms to the rest of Asia.

Europeans brought more than just firearms. Hot on the heels of the original three Portuguese came merchants and missionaries. The Japanese immediately labeled them barbarians, but this shouldn't be too great a surprise. Uneducated, unwashed, and rude is probably a fair description of the majority of early visitors to Japan. After all, these men were not diplomats and only a few were missionaries. Most were sailors or adventurers arriving in tiny ships after months at sea. Not the kind of guys you take home to meet the folks. However, as already mentioned, a few missionaries did go to Japan, the most famous being Fr. Francis Xavier of the Jesuits. This was the first face to face meeting between Japan and Christianity. It says something about the quality of the missionaries that they made quite a few converts (considering that the religion they were preaching was totally alien to everything in Japanese culture). At first Christianity suffered from few overt barriers, but after Spain took the Philippines, some fool Spanish man bragged that missionaries were always sent in first to soften up the enemy and that Japan would be next. Obviously, this didn't sit well with the guys in power in Japan and they issued several edicts against the missionaries, finally just expelling them all and outlawing Christianity. Later on, the ruthless suppression of Japanese converts who would not renounce their faith created a sickening number of martyrs. But that is later on.

6.1.4 Tokugawa Ieyasu

Hideyoshi left five of his most powerful "allies," in charge of the country and his young son. He hoped that none of the five daimyo would be able to successfully rebel against the other four and thus the stalemate might last long enough for his son to grow up and assume power. Nice plan, but it didn't work. Tokugawa Ieyasu, one of the most powerful daimyo and a member of the ruling council, defeated his enemies (all of them) and the supporters of Hideyoshi's heir at the

Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. He did not unite the country so much as just destroy the power of the other daimyo (there were several hundred of them) to disturb the peace. Ieyasu's reward was the shogunate - that is, the emperor named him shogun in 1603. He moved the government (again, the emperor and his court remained in Kyoto) to Edo, which would be renamed "Tokyo" in 1868. Between 1600 and 1868, the Tokugawa family ruled a more-or-less feudal Japan.

6.2 The Warring States Period

6.2.1 The Decline of the Ashikaga

6.2.2 The Daimyo Families

6.2.3 Matters Martial

The Battles

Strategy and Tactics

Weaponry

6.3 Alliances

6.4 The Europeans

6.5 The Unification of the Country

Chapter 7

Cultural Influences

This chapter describes some of the influences on Japanese culture.

Chapter 8

The Tokugawa Period

8.1 The Tokugawa (Edo) Period in a Nutshell

Basically, the period of more-or-less peace from 1600 to 1867 is called the Tokugawa Period or the Edo Period (Edo was the Shoguns' capital during this period). With peace came economic and cultural development. In other words, free from the fear of random warfare, the peasants could grow more crops, the townspeople could engage in more business, and artists and intellectuals had more opportunities to do whatever they did. Thus the history of the Edo period is mostly economic and cultural. Of course there were peasant rebellions, famines, scandals, and all the other problems facing governments anywhere, and well look at a few of them here. In international relations, the Edo period is the famous period of seclusion. The government closed the country in the mid-1600s and didnt open it again until the 1850s. Only a handful of Dutch, and some Chinese and Koreans, were allowed to enter the country, and that was solely to trade (and it was a small part of the national economy). For Japanese, trying to leave the country or, conversely, trying to reenter the country were capital offenses. This anti-social behavior continued until the middle of the nineteenth century. Commodore Perry of the American Navy is credited (mostly by Americans) with finally forcing open Japan. Shortly afterwards, internal problems combined with external pressures to end the Tokugawa hold on power and initiate the age of "modern" Japan. Thats the nutshell version of Japans Tokugawa Period. Now, on to the prelude.

8.2 Prelude: The Unification of Japan

Of the major civilizations on the planet, Europe has usually ranked as one of the most warlike. The only major culture that compares to Europe is Japan. China never had much use for warriors. Neither did Egypt. Attila the Hun did, but he wasnt very civilized. Both Europe and Japan idealized them (warriors, not Huns), and, in Japans case, for good reason - the samurai were some of the best fighters on the planet. Just ask Kublai Khan and his army. Ask the Koreans. Unfortunately for the Japanese, Mongol invasions were rare, as were Japanese wars on mainland Asia (although Koreans might say they werent rare enough). So guess who these world class fighters got to fight against? Thats right, the

samurai beat the hell out of each other. Japan was in a state of chronic warfare from about 1467 until 1600. The daimyo (local lords) fought each other and even their own families in the pursuit of power. Kyoto was destroyed more than once. Entire families were exterminated. Legendary heroes were born. It was a real exciting time if you enjoy death and destruction. Eventually however, somebody won. By making allies or vassals of defeated enemies, winners of battles got stronger and the losers got a second chance (or at least their families did). Finally, a handful of powerful lords had reestablished stable governments of sorts over the country. To become, and remain shogun, however, you needed to control the whole country, not just a large part of it. Like the movie says, "in the end, there can be only one." In the end the one was Tokugawa Ieyasu, an ally of Oda Nobunaga and then of Odas successor, Hideyoshi. After Hideyoshi died, the five major co-rulers he had appointed, (Ieyasu was one of them), quickly prepared for war. In 1600, Tokugawa and his vassals met and defeated the armies of the anti-Tokugawa coalition at the battle of Sekigahara. This is one of the most important (and famous) battles in Japanese history because for over 250 years after Sekigahara the daimyo were subordinate to the central government (with minor exceptions). In other words, peace prevailed. It was the Pax Tokugawa.

8.3 Tokugawa Ieyasu and his Bakufu

What happened at Sekigahara was that Ieyasu forced his defeated enemies to acknowledge him as their lord. As Tokugawa vassals, they could expect grants of land in fief in which they ruled. They in turn taxed the peasants who lived on the land and gave some of the rice to samurai families as stipends. Larger samurai families might then give part of their stipend to their own vassal samurai. End result is a pyramid of loyalties extending from the ruler down to the common foot soldier. Sound familiar? The system is very similar to European style feudalism. (A big difference is the stipends - in Europe vassals were given land instead.) By making everyone subordinate to him, Ieyasu completed the pacification of the daimyo which Oda and Hideyoshi had started. In 1603 the Emperor gave Ieyasu the title of shogun and thus the right to rule in the name of the Emperor. Now Ieyasu could legitimately make laws for the whole country.

And make laws he did. First he moved the government to Edo (modern day Tokyo), at that time a really small town. Although the Emperor stayed in Kyoto, the real power was with the shogun and his Bakufu (tent-government). Like Hideyoshi before him, Ieyasu outlawed all social mobility. He used the Confucian system of four classes - inserting warriors in place of scholars. The classes (from highest) were warriors, peasants, artisans, and at bottom the greedy, good-for-nothing merchants. Warriors rule and peasants and artisans make things but merchants make nothing but profit from other peoples labor (hence the "greedy, good-for-nothing" part). Of course, there was limited downward mobility. If a samurai really wanted to, he could renounce his status and become a commoner. Often this was done by artists who could support themselves without their stipends. Ieyasu did Hideyoshi one better though; he made it legal for any samurai to kill any commoner who was rude to the samurai. A bit extreme but not his most important legacy.

As shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu controlled Japans international relations, coinage,

and relations between the various han. His primary concern in the early years of his shogunate was the preservation of his family's rule. Thus, although the daimyo ruled their individual fiefs independent of the Bakufu, their behavior in matters national was under Ieyasu's control and the shogun had a very wide view of what constituted national matters. For obvious reasons, castle building was a very efficient method of pissing the shogun off. Building or even repairing castles required government permission. In addition, the daimyo were required to assist with public works projects such as dams, roads, bridges and the like. This was partially for pragmatic reasons (you need good roads to move troops quickly) and partially as a drain on the daimyo's treasuries (since they had to pay for the work). Also, marriages between daimyo families required the Shogun's okay, lest a couple of daimyo try to seal a pact with the exchange of daughters. So, what happened to the mentally deficient daimyo who decides not to obey the shogun? For serious offenses, Ieyasu could dispossess a lord of his lands, effectively destroying that family forever. Another popular punishment was seppuku - also known as hara-kiri. The offending lord had to ritually slit (kiri) his belly (hara) open in order to make amends. This was considered to totally restore the man's honor and was also occasionally used to show sincerity or to show one's loyalty by following one's lord in death. A less drastic punishment was to move a daimyo to a smaller han. Punishments and rewards also depended on what kind of daimyo was involved.

A lord is not a lord is not a lord. In English that means that lords were divided into three groups, depending on their relationship with the Tokugawa family. The inner group was composed of branches of the Tokugawa family and were known as *shimpan* daimyo. Next was the daimyo who were vassals of the Tokugawa before the battle of Sekigahara. These were called *fudai* daimyo (hereditary lords). The final group was the *tozama* (outside) lords - daimyo who did not submit until after Sekigahara. Shockingly, the *tozama* daimyo were believed to be of unreliable loyalty and thus given fiefs far from Tokugawa lands and usually separated from each other by more reliable *fudai* daimyo. However, some *tozama* - such as the Shimazu in Satsuma han (present day Kagoshima-ken) - were strong enough that the Tokugawa left them alone as long as they didn't cause any problems.

8.4 Interlude: Bushido

Bushido was to the samurai what chivalry was to European knights: a myth created to channel and control the destructive energies of strong men with sharp weapons. During the chaos of the warring states period, myth took a back seat to the practicalities of killing one's enemies. Of course what constituted good and bad behavior for samurai had been defined long before 1600 but with the enforced inactivity of Tokugawa peace, the samurai had a lot of time to think about the moral development of their class. The samurai code of conduct they developed is known as bushido (the Way of the Warrior). Basically it combines the self-discipline of Zen Buddhism with Confucianism's emphasis on loyalty and knowing your place. According to bushido, a samurai must be ready to die at every moment and put the good of his lord above all else. In theory, the samurai must also be a medieval boy scout: compassionate, honorable, pious, etc. In reality, constantly thinking about death made many samurai rather

cold-blooded. Samurai ethics were not confined to the samurai. Bushido also deeply influenced the peasant population. Townsfolk resisted this temptation by enjoying life in the cities and just saying "no" to living austere lives. Even many of the samurai forgot about self-discipline after 200 years without war, but bushido remained important even after the end of the Tokugawa era because of its firm hold on the peasant class.

8.5 Ieyasu's grandson Iemitsu

Ieyasu died in 1616, but the continuity of Tokugawa rule was not in much doubt since he had transferred his titles - including that of shogun - to his son Hidetada in 1605. Until his death however, he continued to rule through his son. Hidetada followed this hallowed Japanese tradition by transferring formal power to his son Iemitsu in 1623 but remaining in charge until dying in 1632. Although Hidetada was no wimp, Ieyasu was a hard act to follow and poor Hidetada doesn't get much credit for anything. Iemitsu, however, does. It was his decision to close the country. He also required the individual daimyo to spend every other year in Edo and when not there, their families (wife and kids) had to be there. Somehow, I doubt that the thought of Mrs. Joe Daimyo buying it acted as too much of a deterrent, but maybe I'm just old-fashioned. By the way, this alternate attendance is called *sankin kotai* and is very important. We will talk some more about it later. Ieyasu was fairly tolerant of Christianity until 1614 when he began enforcing a ban on foreign religions (a.k.a. Christianity). Iemitsu continued the persecution and of an estimated 300,000 Christians in 1614, between 5,000 and 6,000 were martyred by 1640. Ieyasu and Iemitsu believed that Christians were a threat to their absolute control, a not unreasonable view given Christianity's emphasis on God's law being above human law. A peasant rebellion, the leaders of which were Christian, confirmed Iemitsu's worst fears. The rebellion (in the Shimabara Peninsula) lasted from 1637-38 and it was only one year later that Iemitsu closed Japan off from the rest of the world. This policy of national isolation is known as *sakoku* and lasted until Commodore Perry. It included foreign (read Western) books, but that ban was lifted in 1720 for books of a non-religious nature. Of course, since nobody in Japan knew anything about European culture or religion, some books, predictably, were banned just for mentioning religion.

8.6 Interlude: Old Books, National Learning and other -isms

As I mentioned before, some samurai had a lot of time to sit around and think. To a small degree, the government encouraged it - as long as you were thinking of ways to buttress Tokugawa power. Early on, Ieyasu made use of Shinto, Buddhism, and Confucianism to legitimize his rule, but as time went by, he made greater use of Confucianism. We don't need to get into all the various schools of Confucianist thought but we do know that there was not just one school and that several of these different ones were influential during the Tokugawa period. The government's official favorite was the Chu Hsi school, which placed great emphasis on duty and acting according to your station in life. Not too

hard to see why the Tokugawa family liked it; Chu Hsi Confucianism was very conservative.

A rival school was the Wang Yang-ming (cool name!) school. This school stressed intuitive knowledge of right and wrong and personal responsibility. A famous, though possibly bogus, Wang Yang-ming saying is "to know and not to act is not to know." Since morality is subjective, if you think something is wrong, it is and you must act on that knowledge. Subversive thinking this. This school greatly influenced the men who destroyed the Tokugawa regime in the 1860s.

One last important school was the Ancient Learning school. These Confucianists believed that to understand Confucius's true message you had to go back and critically examine the old books. If you can separate the garbage from the original then you know what Confucius really meant. Aside from developing powerful tools of linguistic analysis, this school is important for Japan because it caused some Japanese guys look at their old books and try to separate the "pure" Japanese elements from the "corrupting" Chinese elements. Combine this regard for old Japanese books (primarily the Kojiki and the Manyusho) with Shinto (the Way of the Gods) and you get the School of National Learning. Of course no self-respecting National Learning scholar would be caught dead concluding that China (or anywhere else) was better (in any way) than Japan. On the contrary, as the myths in the Kojiki were increasingly taken as facts, it became obvious that Japan was the Land of the Gods. This nationalistic version of Shinto was "taught in schools right up to 1945." Draw your own conclusions.

There is another branch of Tokugawa scholarship which we need to look at, namely Western Learning. After the ban on western books was partially lifted, some men began learning as much as they could about what was happening in the West. Unfortunately, the only Westerners around were the Dutch and they were not always entirely honest. Several generations of Western Learning scholars spent a lot of time learning Dutch because the Dutch told them that it was the major international language of learning. Not having any evidence to the contrary, the Japanese went ahead and learned Dutch and then studied and translated Dutch books on medicine, math, and the hard sciences. Medicine was the first to really gain acceptance, since it could easily be proved more effective than Chinese medicine. Math ran afoul of the native mathematical tradition. You occasionally hear about how some Japanese mathematicians invented a calculus independently of Europe and this is true. However, it was never much more than an sophisticated toy. Unlike in Europe, math was never a tool of the hard sciences in Japan because the hard sciences did not exist. Thus, western math was viewed as just another foreign intellectual pursuit and not as a useful tool. It was not until Britain and others flexed their military muscles that the government understood the power of Western Learning and began to actively encourage it. Until then (the mid-nineteenth century) Western Learning was viewed with suspicion.

8.7 My Koku is Bigger than Your Koku

Jump (mentally) back to the 1580s. Why? Because that is when Hideyoshi did his William the Conqueror impersonation - a complete land survey of the entire

country. When it was finished, all the daimyos lands could be quantified and compared, meaning it was now possible to move them to different lands with more or less value. Land was graded on how much rice it could produce, measured in koku. One koku is about equal to 180 liters. In early Tokugawa times the country produced about 30 million koku of rice a year and the Shogunate directly controlled about 7 million of it. To be classified as a daimyo, you had to control at least 10,000 koku. Most daimyo paid their vassal samurai in koku or rice rather than land. This was mentioned above but it needs to be repeated because it had very important consequences.

A huge weakness of the Tokugawa Shogunate was its Confucian disdain for commerce. The Tokugawa economy was robust and grew substantially during the prolonged peace but as good Confucianists, the government regulated the economy but did their best to avoid taking part in it. As if such a thing were possible. Usually they just got screwed by it, especially the individual samurai. He had to sell his rice stipend to the rice merchants each year so that he would have money to buy other things ("a samurai does not live by rice alone" was not a Tokugawa era proverb, in fact, I just made it up). So what happens to poor Joe Samurai when there is a bumper harvest? He loses money because the price of rice plummets like a cat thrown into a lake wearing a necklace of stones. Ok, you say, so doesn't he make a lot of money when there is a famine? Maybe, but if there is a bad crop then there is less rice for the daimyo to use to pay all his retainers and so Mr. Joe Samurai probably gets less rice than usual. Thus he loses money but, unlike the peasants, he doesn't starve to death or sell his daughters into prostitution. Lucky guy.

So what is a robust economy? Well, thanks to sankin kotai the daimyo were required to spend a large portion of their income going back and forth to Edo. They also had to maintain a house appropriate to their status in Edo. Of course the daimyo had to take many of their samurai with them as well. All these daimyo and samurai living in one place naturally had to eat and buy clothing and the such, so they supported a large number of merchants and artisans and other hangers-on. Edo was soon one of the largest cities on the planet and also, therefore, one of the largest markets on the planet. But a market for what? Well, basically, the han competed with each other and over time many became famous for a product; pottery, iron tools, sugar, or a type of fish, for example. Many areas today are still famous for products going back to the Tokugawa period or earlier. Wajima, in Ishikawa-ken, is a good example. During the Tokugawa period, Wajima became a center of laquerware production and actively competed with one or two other areas for the laquerware market. While keeping an eye out for advances in production "technology," the Wajima laquer artists developed their own style. Today, Wajima-nuri (Wajima style laquerware) is famous throughout Japan. Each han has a similar story for some product. This specialization helped each han increase its income and also linked the han and the country together through trade. Several merchant houses became quite rich and had to occasionally donate money to the government. Why? Because by the 1860s, many samurai - including many daimyo - were deep in debt to merchants. Income was fairly static since it was based on taxing the rice harvest. Outflow was not static. Natural disasters, famines, and peasant rebellions all played their part in draining the Bakufu and han treasuries. Although technically samurai were not supposed to engage in the decadent night life of the cities, most did to some degree, patronizing the theater, drinking houses

and the famous geisha houses. This, plus the expense of "keeping up with the Joneses" and the occasional "voluntary" reduction in stipend, put many individual samurai deeply in debt. The expansion of the economy thus benefited the merchants but in the long run bankrupt the government and their samurai because they were dependent on the agricultural sector. Farmers and townsfolk were also living in poverty and during hard times - such as periods of famine or inflation - blew off some steam by rioting and destroying the homes and factories of merchants and landlords.

8.8 Interlude: No Women on the Stage

The Tokugawa period witnessed a remarkable flowering of almost all the arts. To be sure, even during the Warring States period the arts never died: Hideyoshi, for example, was a major patron of the tea ceremony. But peace and (for some) prosperity allowed many more people to enjoy going to the theater, reading and writing poetry and novels, and drawing some really world class pictures. Unfortunately, the Confucianist Tokugawa regime was rather prudish and did their best to encourage morality, diligence, and proper thinking and actively discouraged anything that might be fun. So people (including the rulers) had fun and just didn't tell the government. Literature, theater, the fine arts, as well as more "Japanese" arts such as tea ceremony and the martial arts, all prospered and reached new heights under the Tokugawa. Pre-Tokugawa literature was mostly an upper class pursuit, but in Tokugawa times, many lower class townspeople types read and enjoyed literature written for them. Several authors made their livings from writing novels and plays for the masses. Their stories dealt with love and sex and the conflicting demands of duty versus human feeling, often in humorous fashion. Have you been to a kabuki play? Did you stay awake through it? Kabuki actually makes ballet look exciting. Many Japanese proudly and loudly boast of the refinement and "Japaneseness" of Kabuki, which can get annoying if you know it originated as a way for itinerant prostitutes to display the goods to prospective clients - mostly young samurai. Yes, you read that sentence correctly. After a fight broke out at one of the shows, the government confined the performances to certain locations. When continued attempts at moral persuasion failed to keep samurai (and others too of course) from flocking to the shows, the Bakufu finally just forbade women to appear on stage. From then on, Kabuki featured men in all the roles and therefore had to depend on the plays story to attract customers. Real distinguished origins, aren't they? No matter, since once the writers got a chance to do some real scripting, some of them came up with masterpieces. Once the kabuki theater had gotten its act together, it and the puppet theater competed for the same audience and both were quite innovative in their attempts to lure the others audience away. End result was high quality theater that was very popular. (Think of the modern movie industry: some very popular movies, lots of garbage ones, and occasionally *Gone with the Wind*.)

East Asia had the movable-type printing press before Europe, but making all those kanji was too time consuming a task to make it worthwhile, so most printers used block printing instead. Block printing involves carving (in reverse) the entire page into a block of wood, which is then used to make prints. No one said you have to carve words into the block though. Japanese artists became

very good at making prints of just about anything, from handbills for theaters to the latest best-seller to multi-colored pictures of nature scenes or the newest Kabuki star. After nature - always a favorite of the Japanese - pictures of the "floating world" were the most popular. The floating world is the world of the pleasure quarters, the areas of the major cities where everyone went to have fun. (Everyone except for the girls who were sold to the houses of prostitution. I dont know where they went to have fun.) Ukiyo-e, as these pictures are called, are generally colorful and full of life and action. Because they were carved in wood, they could be used to make prints until the wood wore down too much. This meant that even samurai or merchants of moderate means could afford to have a print from a master hanging in their house. Finally (yeah), everyone has probably heard of haiku, the 5-7-5 form of poetry. Well, it reached its final form and its zenith during this period. Matsuo Basho is without a doubt the most famous of haiku poets of this period or any other.

The Tokugawa period saw either the creation or refinement of most of the major "traditional" elements of modern Japanese culture. The tea ceremony, poetry, and literature all predate the Tokugawa era but none stagnated during it. Kabuki and ukiyo-e were new but quickly reached maturity. The most important break from the past was the role the townspeople played in new and old cultural pursuits. They were both the producers and the consumers of the culture, buying the books and prints and going to the plays. Of course many samurai did these things too, but never in the past had the regular people had such a large role in the culture of the day.

8.9 Introverts, Extroverts and Black Ships

As usually happens with hereditary rulers, the Tokugawa family did not always produce competent men for the top job. Sometimes these men were so weak or distracted that they were practically prisoners of their advisors, which tended to encourage corruption. Corruption, of course, does not help a worsening financial situation. The Bakufu and daimyo several times canceled their debts to merchants and sometimes restructured them - for example giving themselves 200 years to pay back a loan with no interest charges. The merchants were powerless to do anything about this. Of course, as North Korea proves every day, a bankrupt country can survive if there are no other catalysts to light the revolutionary fires. Fortunately, in Japan there were two major catalysts for change. First was the internal factor: the rise of the National Learning school caused men to question their loyalty to the shogun. After all, wasnt the Emperor the proper focus of loyalty? The shogun was merely the Emperors servant, supposedly working on the Emperors behalf. As you can see, this is not immediately fatal for the Tokugawa. They were still the most powerful daimyo and the appointed servants of the Emperor. Had it not been for the return of the Europeans, the Bakufu could have survived National Learning, at least for several more years. It even had the strength to survive the civil disturbances and peasant revolts. But the Europeans came back and this time they had science on their side. They were the second factor.

8.10 The End of "Feudal" Japan

The Dutch presence at Nagasaki was small and the shogunate did its best to learn nothing from them. Although several people, both Japanese and foreign (Dutch) warned of the danger posed by the West, the Bakufu for a long time turned a deaf ear. Seeing what was happening to China, however, the Japanese in the know could not help but feel on the defensive, and rightly so. But what form should the defense take? After a few "incidents" (naval bombardments of towns, raiding parties sacking towns and destroying coastal defenses) it was obvious to the people in the ports that Japan could not hope to compete militarily with the West, but the more remote and sheltered Imperial court believed (was told) otherwise and pressured the government to repel the foreigners. In the middle were the moderates who advocated learning from the foreigners in order to control them and ultimately expell them with their own technology. As more and more European and American ships entered Japanese waters and tried to enter Japanese ports, the government was put into the precarious position of having to try to keep the barbarians out with nothing but words. Finally, they could delay no longer and in 1854 gave in to Commodore Perrys demand for a treaty. This opened the door for every other country and soon the foreigners had their own areas in a handful of Japanese port cities. The enemies of the government loved this state of affairs and took full advantage of it. Two of the largest, most powerful tozama han, Satsuma and Choshu, joined forces. By manipulating the Imperial court and general anger at the treaties, they managed to force the Shogun Keiki to "voluntarily" restore power to the Emperor Meiji (a teenager at the time). Even after the Emperor accepted this show of loyalty, the Tokugawa clan was still the largest landowner and most powerful family in the country. This was not acceptable to Satsuma and Choshu (among others), who managed to heap insult upon insult until the Tokugawa finally responded with force and were branded traitors. A very short civil war followed in which the peasant conscript Imperial Army (read Satsuma-Choshu Army) armed with rifles and canon easily destroyed the Tokugawas sword-bearing samurai army. Thus did the Tokugawa period end in 1868.

The new government was composed of young samurai who "advised" the Emperor Meiji. My next article will deal with the extraordinary period of "modernization" that took place under the new government. During the Meiji period, Japan catches up with the West for the first time and becomes a major power.

Chapter 9

The Meiji Restoration

The Meiji Restoration is a huge and complex topic. We will only scratch the surface here.

Chapter 10

Intellectual Influences

10.1 Shinto

Shinto (meaning “Way of the Gods”) is the native religion of Japan. It is not so much concerned with an afterlife as it is with this life. Although that may sound similar to Confucianism, they are in fact very different. Shinto evolved from the animistic, shamanistic ideas and practices of the stone age inhabitants (and later immigrants as well) and stresses the importance of nature and cleanliness. In contrast to the rules, rituals, and concern for propriety which characterize Confucianism, (and Christianity for that matter) Shinto has no well developed theology. It prefers that we just live naturally. Thus, what few rituals there are with life’s important events - birth, marriage, harvests, and the such. When Buddhism was introduced into Japan, it managed to coexist religiously, if not always politically, with Shinto because the Japanese saw them as complementing each other rather than competing with one another. Shinto is for this life and Buddhism is for the next. Even today, when many Japanese today are about as religious as many Americans—that is, not very—most Japanese get married in Shinto ceremonies and buried (well, cremated) in Buddhist ones.

For the record: like most other people on the planet, the early Japanese believed that their land was created by the gods and that they were therefore special. Like many other societies, their rulers were considered descendants of those same gods - the sun goddess in the case of Japan. Unlike most other societies, however, the Japanese never had to face the spectacle of their semi-divine ruler losing the kingdom to some barbarian horde. Thus, Japan was never given a reason to doubt the divine origin of their land (at least, not until the Second World War, but that is something for a later article). Since it is a myth, and not a terribly interesting one at that, and because I don’t know it that well, I will not reproduce it here. There are two good books to read if you are interested in the early Japanese version of ancient Japanese history. The first is also the first extant Japanese book, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), dated 712 AD and the other is the *Nihongi* (I don’t remember), dated 720 AD. The dates on both books are misleading since they were compiled from oral sources and added to over hundreds of years. Both have been translated into English, so knowledge of ancient Japanese is not necessary.

10.2 Buddhism

The man known as the Buddha lived around 550 B.C. in India and before he died he started a religion whose impact on Asia cannot be measured. Although it eventually died out in its native India, Buddhism spread to Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan, as well as the countries of South East Asia. Buddhism was already over a thousand years old when it reached Japan and had changed considerably in those thousand years.

The Buddha was concerned with just one thing - how to end suffering. Indians back then, like many today, believed that all living things are reborn in a constant cycle of birth and death. The Buddha also believed this and concluded that if we could break free from this cycle, we could end the suffering that goes with living. His Four Noble Truths sum it up better than I can:

1. All existence is suffering
2. Suffering is caused by desire
3. If you end desire then you end suffering
4. Following the Eight Fold Path will enable you to end desire

The Eight Fold Path describes the proper way to live to achieve enlightenment. It is not an easy path, and in theory it could take you several lifetimes to finally transcend the cycle of birth and death. The path demands great sacrifice and discipline. Obviously such a seemingly pessimistic and difficult religion is going to have some public relations problems. Joe (and Jane) Layman doesn't have enough spare time to spend hours sitting on his butt meditating. Neither are most people real interested in giving up married life. So why has Buddhism been so popular? The answer is simple: in Tibet and China it mixed with local shamanistic ideas and practices to become a "Big Vehicle" offering rituals and prayers to comfort the common people and offer them some hope of salvation in this lifetime. The Buddha himself was deified. Eventually there were a multitude of schools (sects) in East Asia each stressing some element of the Buddha's teachings or those of popular priests after him. In Southeast Asia Buddhism was not exposed to Tibetan or Chinese practices and so has remained much closer to original Buddhism. The Buddhism which came into Japan was of the "Big Vehicle" sort. Each class found a school of Buddhism that suited its outlook and station. Thus, the imperial court was drawn to sects heavy in ritual and philosophy. Commoners generally went for the simpler sects which promised them salvation. The samurai found Zen Buddhism perfectly suited to their needs - the need to die at anytime without any hesitation.

10.3 Confucianism

Confucius lived in China about 500-and-something BC. He gave lots of thought to the proper way of living in this world. In fact he more or less invented the system of thought that has dominated Asian society until, well, today. Of course, over the last 2,600 years many people have interpreted, re-interpreted, and re-re-interpreted him, but Confucius' impact on Asia has arguably been more profound than that of Jesus on Europe. In any case, Confucius ranks up

there with Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha as one of the most influential thinkers ever. Confucius, unlike the other three mentioned above, was not interested in the afterlife. He is reputed to have said that he would worry about the next world only after figuring out the proper way to live in this one.

What is the proper way to live in this one? Confucius believed that everyone had their role to play based on their relationship to others. If everyone fulfilled their duties and kept their place then society would be stable and harmonious. Obviously, this is a rather conservative philosophy. There are five basic human relationships in Confucianism: (1) ruler to ruled; (2) father to son; (3) husband to wife; (4) elder brother to younger brother; and (5) friend to friend. For Confucius and his followers, the relationship between father and son was the most important. You've no doubt heard of "filial piety" and with good reason - it is THE virtue for Confucianists. Confucius also incorporated the notion of the four classes: the scholar, the peasants, the artisans (a.k.a. craftsmen), and the lowest of the low, the merchant. Notice two things, the place of the peasant and the absence of warriors. Confucianism had no need of war, because if everyone is following their proper role then there should be no war. If there is war, then Confucianism is out the window anyway. China never glorified the warrior as much as Japan and Europe did. Also, the class order put peasants second since they provided the food that everyone else needed to live. Artisans at least make useful things, but merchants were viewed as parasites whose only purpose was to live (and get rich) off the sweat of others' labor.

Why is the father-son relationship more important than the ruler-ruled relationship? Good question. Because the ruler is supposed to set a moral example for his people and rule with a paternalistic attitude toward his subjects. Thus, he is expected to rule like a father rules his family. If he had to use his position (rather than personal example) to keep the others in line then he obviously wasn't a worthy ruler. Here's the kicker: the Chinese came to believe that Heaven didn't recognize the right to power of an unworthy ruler. Thus, if there are rebellions and natural disasters in the land, it is because the Emperor is not fulfilling his proper duties. For Confucianists this is a much greater sin because the Emperor, as head of the household, has more responsibility in addition to more power. A second son has little responsibility and less power, so his sins are correspondingly less destructive to the family. End result: if you rebel and win then society views you as the legitimate ruler, since if the previous ruler had been fulfilling his Confucian duties properly you could never have successfully rebelled. (Kind of twisted logic, but who said human societies are logical?)

All this is really nice, but what does it have to do with Japanese history? A lot actually. After establishing his government, Tokugawa Ieyasu consciously encouraged the study and spread of Confucianism. However, in Japan a few little elements were dropped. First, the idea that a ruler could be legitimately overthrown wasn't real popular with the Tokugawa family. Also, since the samurai had a monopoly on power they inserted themselves at the top of the list of classes—"scholars" became "samurai." However, most samurai had a decent education and during Tokugawa rule they were expected to be well educated as well as good with a sword. To accommodate the change in policy against rebellion, the most important relationship was changed from father-son to ruler-ruled. The father-son relationship was still quite important, but it became secondary. Confucianism continued to be stressed and taught to children in Japan right up to 1945.

Chapter 11

The Meiji Period, Part 2

Chapter 12

The Taisho Period

Chapter 13

The Early Showa Period

This chapter deals with the early part of the Showa period, specifically the early 1920's to the beginnings of World War 2.

Chapter 14

World War 2

“World War Two” is a Western term and as such doesn’t fit so well into Asian history. Usually it is accepted to mean the war between Japan and America, Britain, Australia, and a few other ‘Western’ countries. It started in December of 1941 with the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, and, soon after, on various British and Dutch holdings (read ‘colonies’) in South-East Asia. Thus, World War Two is generally considered separate from the Japanese war in China, although it should be understood more as an expansion of that war. In this chapter, we will follow general practice and start World War 2 in Asia with the events leading up to Pearl Harbor.

14.1 The Pacific, December of 1941

By late 1941, most people in the know anywhere, knew that war was coming soon. The Japanese army was bogged down in China, going nowhere fast. The Japanese Navy needed a dependable source of fuel and was also worried about the American embargo on scrap metal — without such things, navies are just really expensive, well-trained floating tourist attractions. It was a catch-22 for Japan:

- Give in to American demands and lose pretty much everything they had spent the last ten years working for.
- Do nothing and lose everything when the Army and Navy ran out of materiel.
- Expand the fight in hopes of getting what they need so they can then defend what they had against their now much expanded roster of enemies.

The decision to expand the fighting is really not that hard to make, given the alternatives. There is room here to argue that American diplomacy, by failing to give Japan a way out, facilitated the coming of war. There is also plenty of room for reflection on how war begets war. Regardless, the real question for Japanese planners was how to get what they needed. They could go north, into Siberia, gambling that the Russians would be too preoccupied with the German Army to react effectively. The other option was to go south, into the oil- and mineral- rich areas of South East Asia.

The admirals and generals decided to go south. They believed that, like Russia, the European nations concerned would be too busy with Nazi Germany to do much about Japan taking their colonies.

Two things of note here:

1. The Japanese government decided to go south for the minerals, their decision had nothing to do with respecting their non-aggression treaty with Russia, although that treaty was one factor that they considered. There is every reason to believe that had they viewed Siberia as a better place to get what they wanted, the Japanese leaders would have sent their armies to make war on Russia.
2. Despite the PR noises, the goal of Japanese leaders, especially military leaders, was not the liberation of Western colonies in Asia. Japan had its own Asian colonies that it was not about to liberate, and had been fighting for years in China against the Chinese. Although there might have been some in the government who believed that Japan should liberate Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philipines, and other Western colonies, the fact is that the military was after raw materials and those Western colonies were either where the material was or were strategically important for defending the colonies.

The problem the Japanese military faced was how to grab the lands they wanted and then have time to entrench, prepare for possible counter-attacks, and set up governments, all the while making use of their new supplies.

Chapter 15

The Occupation of Japan

Chapter 16

Recent Event in Japan

Chapter 17

Recent Event in Japan

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