

Japanese Political History

Introduction An organized political system was slow to emerge in Japan. China had seen four different political dynasties rise and fall before the end of the iron age and Korea enjoyed no less than three identifiable dynasties in the same era. When Pimiko, the first known monarch in Japan set up her kingdom called Yamatai in the 3rd century CE, Japan was following well established patterns for leadership in East Asia. From the very beginning, however, Japan's governments were complicated. Power structures were murky and it is not clear whether or not even Pimiko reigned and ruled, or whether she was a spiritual figure only. In the Heian period (794-1185), emperors started out as strong rulers but later had that power diluted by the Fujiwara regents, who effectively ruled behind the scenes for 200 years. As Japan moved through the Kamakura period (1185-1333) there was a shōgun and a regent to the shogun (the Hōjō). Thus, by the 13th century, there were four different political institutions existing simultaneously: an emperor, a Fujiwara regent, a shōgun and a regent to the shōgun. It was very difficult to know who was in charge! Though each succeeding political and military dynasty changed the system they inherited, this sort of opacity continued to exist into the contemporary era. Even after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the emperors didn't actually rule and were more of constitutional monarchs or figureheads. Thus, distinctive patterns set long ago have continued to find expression almost two millennia after first appearing.

PREHISTORY-- The Neolithic age (10,000 BCE-2000 BCE)

Political Organization. As hunter-gatherers, the early people of Japan lived in small groups that were limited by the supply of food and other resources readily available to them. Settlements could be very small and often temporary because people groups had to move when resources began to dwindle. These settlements were also widely dispersed and though trade goods and marriage partners could be exchanged so as to not intermarry too closely within kinship groups, they were far enough apart to not compete for limited resources. In the brief, warmer periods, there is evidence of some settlements being large enough to accommodate several dozen people and even for villages to emerge. But for most of the era, people were grouped in significantly smaller bodies. Government, as we think of it today, therefore didn't exist. There is no evidence of a ruler, a central state, a bureaucracy, a set of written laws, a specialized military and the like. At most there was someone like a village headman because resources had to be administered. Association was likely based on kinship and was probably somewhat voluntary and potentially fluid. Clan, family or village leaders provided the only security and stability available. If one was exiled or became a sole survivor of an attack or epidemic, their future was extremely bleak. Life was tenuous and could be rather Hobbesian: nasty, brutish and short. Evidence for just how difficult life could be can be found in population numbers. According to Shuzo Koyama of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, the population of Japan grew very, very slowly in the neolithic period increasing from approximately 20,000 in 10,000BCE to 75,000 some 9000 years later. Population is believed to have been seriously affected by even small, periodic changes in climate because residents of Japan did not have the ability to store excess food stuffs for very long. During periods of hardship, several poor foraging outings in a row or failed hunting trips could lead to hunger, malnutrition and catastrophe for a small group.

The Military. Specialized military units didn't exist in the neolithic period. Small groups of hunter gatherers banded together for protection and safety. By definition, however, many members of hunter gatherer groups were proficient in the use of weapons that could take down large game. When threatened, the same skills and weapons used to hunt big game could be employed against enemies. These included spears and clubs, and mechanical devices such as bows and arrows and atlatl, which when used by an expert, could propel spears at significantly greater speeds and distances than by the simple throw of a spear. Small groups occasionally fought, likely over dwindling resources, abductions, and other perceived slights, but there is scant evidence of large scale warfare. Settlements and villages were extremely exposed if men were away hunting or fighting. Given the size of the population and the highly dispersed and isolated settlements, fighting was surely sporadic and also probably didn't result in the complete annihilation of an enemy. The taking of slaves and the abduction of women was more advantageous to the victor than the utter destruction of an enemy.

IRON AGE (1000 BCE-500 CE)

Political Organization. Though iron age (known in Japan as the Yayoi period—300 BCE-300 CE) Japanese had not yet developed writing, other nearby people groups had. The Chinese, in particular, had been writing for at least a millennium. In addition, the Chinese already had a high-functioning central government complete with an autocratic monarch, stable tax base, massive military, vast land holdings and a mature culture. Virtually all the specifics we know about government and culture therefore comes from Chinese sources. In this instance, the short-lived Wei Kingdom (220-265 CE) compiled and finally published a document in 297 CE entitled *Wei Zhi* (The History of the Wei Kingdom) in which mention is first made of a people from the “Land of Wa” (Japan).

According to Chinese documents, Japanese society in the late iron age years had evolved to include over one-hundred known groups. Each group had a leader. Sometime during the 2nd century CE, a great, but unnamed, chieftain emerged among the communities and ruled most of them for several decades, followed by a period in which the Chinese understood that there was no great chieftain. In the 3rd century CE, thirty communities banded together and came to be known as the Kingdom of Yamatai. They selected as their ruler a woman named Pimiko, who had as a part of her duties control of the people through supernatural and religious means. It is unknown the extent to which she actually ruled the people of Yamatai, but she appeared to be more than a figurehead. The Chinese conferred upon her the title of “Queen of Wa,” a designation she accepted and used until her death. She is said to have had many hundreds of female attendants and one male attendant. It is instructive that when she was buried, more than a hundred people were sacrificed and placed in her grave. This indicates that she was very powerful and ruled a significant number of people. After a few years of disorder, one of Pimiko’s female relatives, a girl of thirteen years, was placed on the throne. Her name was Iyo, but we know nothing more about her except that her position was subsequently endorsed by the Wei. Though Japan’s first chronicle, the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), published in 711 CE, mentions other monarchs during the period, they are still considered to be mythical. It should be noted that no connection has been made by scholars between Pimiko, a name that means “daughter of the sun” and could refer to one of several high-ranking spiritual leaders or monarchs and Iyo and any of the monarchs named in the *Kojiki*. Japanese archaeologists have not determined exactly where Yamatai was located. Options include Northern Kyūshū and the Yamato Plain (near what is today the city of Nara). Conclusive proof, however, remains elusive.

Military. The size, capability and shape of the Yamatai military is not known. Archaeologists believe that it must have been generally well organized but relatively small. Given the size and composition of the monarchy, it could likely field a thousand or so warriors in battle and sustain them there for a short period. This would have been a significantly larger force than any adversary. Soldiers would have used spears, swords, pikes, bows and arrows and other iron weapons. Most soldiers would have been peasants and hunter/gatherers who were called up for militia duty. Many would have been hunters with years of experience using weapons to bring down large game. The enemy of the Yamatai was other Japanese groups, most of whom could field only very modest forces, and the indigenous populations known as the Emishi.

POST-CLASSICAL AGE (500-1500)

Political Organization. In the early years of Yamato dominance in the 6th century, the extent of Imperial control over the country is not clear. It is believed that they started out ruling in coalition with other clans and slowly overwhelmed their rivals as conditions allowed. By the 8th century, most of Japan from the Kansai area (around present day Osaka) west and south is believed to have been subject to the throne. Western Honshū and most of Kyūshū, though not densely populated by today’s standards, was generally settled. Over time, ethnic Japanese colonists continued to migrate northward and by at least the 10th century, the Imperial family claimed all of Honshū. It is clear, however, that the area north of present-day Sendai was very sparsely populated and central control was tenuous. Indeed, the title of shogun first appeared when Japanese military units were sent to subjugate the north. Their commander’s title was *Sei-i Tai shōgun* (supreme commander for the subjugation of the northern barbarians). Nonetheless, as the Japanese emperors extended geographic control, they also continued to expand political control.

In the Nara period (710-794) and the early years of the Heian period (794-1185), the Emperor ruled as well as reigned. He named a set of advisors and ministers, most of whom were courtiers, to administer a discrete portfolio. The emperor ruled the provinces through governors, whose job it was to keep the peace, implement imperial decrees and laws—and most importantly see that taxes were deposited into the treasury. The chronicles tell us that many of these governors increasingly became less willing to leave the city, the only civilization in the country and began to spend more time in the capital rather than doing their jobs in the rural areas. During the last years of the Nara era,

they would appoint deputies to do their jobs, levy extraordinarily high taxes and sometimes behave in a coercive and intimidating manner. In the final years of Kanmu's (r. 781-806) reign, he cracked down on the worst abuses by creating "circuit inspectors," whose job it was to check on court appointees. Slowly, power became more and more centralized in the office of the emperor during the early years of the Heian period.

It was in the best interests of the monarchy during the Nara (710-794) and Heian (794-1185) periods for peasants to expand land under cultivation because it would enlarge the tax base, enrich the imperial treasury and provide additional calories for population expansion. After the Taika reforms of 7th centuries which set out a rational system of landholding, peasants were encouraged to engage in the very, very labor intensive work of transforming land into rice paddies. Few did. Before the first grain of rice could be planted, trees had to be cleared, land leveled, rice paddy levees built, canals dug, sluice gates built and water diverted. Because of the difficulty of the work, peasants would only do this if given tax abatements for several years. In due course, this was forthcoming and it is believed that agriculture expanded some in most years. This was facilitated by a period of domestic peace and the institution of central government. As a result, government budgets in the Nara and early Heian periods came to rely on constant growth decade after decade. However, this period of economic expansion did not last forever. There are many reasons for this. First, most land that could be easily brought under cultivation was transformed early on in the process. Second, land under intensive cultivation became exhausted of nutrients and was abandoned. Third, corrupt government officials demanded extortionist-rates of tax payments. At times these became so high that land was seized and brought under the control of aristocrats who did not pay tax. And then there was the curious phenomenon of aristocrats going to economically-strapped peasants with a promise of lower taxes (rent) if they gave their land to tax exempt aristocrats.

By the 9th century, the Fujiwara family had effectively seized control of the monarchy and whoever was head of the Fujiwara household effectively ruled Japan, a system that lasted for approximately 200 years. The Fujiwara leader married a daughter (or niece) to an emperor or crown prince, which resulted in the next generation being a Fujiwara emperor. Most often, a Fujiwara boy who had not yet reached the age of majority was placed on the throne and required a regent, which then became the Fujiwara head of household. This arrangement lasted long enough that the positions they occupied became hereditary and the Fujiwara came to be known as the premier court nobles.

Over the course of the Heian period, vast estates called *shōen* began to emerge which paid for the profligate lifestyles of Heian era aristocrats. The life of the peasant didn't change much. But for the Heian aristocrats who had found a way to finance their existence, they had also sown the seeds of systemic economic collapse. By the 12th century, the imperial treasury was nearly empty, which diminished the ability of the government to carry out its essential functions. The very rural areas which produced rice (and wealth) began to give rise to their own elites, many of whom were connected to one or more of the warrior clans.

The changes brought about by the Gempei War (1180-1185) were incremental. Even though there was a shogun, Minamoto Yoritomo didn't immediately move to seize absolute power and to completely replace the civilian structure. Instead, Yoritomo moved to control first his own clan and retainers with the creation of the *mandokuro* (which oversaw administration and finance) and then, over a decade or so, came to appoint additional officials in the provinces. One of his first moves was to appoint *shūgo*, a position best described as constable or military administrator. It is not entirely clear whether or not he was protecting the people in each province or protecting his own (new) prerogatives. Nonetheless, over the decades, the warriors in these positions came to work alongside governors appointed by the civilian administration. Many *shūgo* passed these positions down to their sons and successors and came to control the land in their own right. They became known as *daimyō*, a term best understood as regional lord in a feudal system. Another position Yoritomo created was *jitō*. These were "land stewards" or civilian administrators whose job it was to manage the finances of estates—some of which were quite large. They were, above all to oversee the collection of taxes and generally carry out the will of the shōgun in the provinces. Just like with many *shūgo*, a significant number of *jitō* transitioned from being representatives of the shōgun to being medieval *daimyō*. In this way, the old Heian system where courtiers working for the emperor in the provinces slowly became wealthy and powerful, transitioned to include a different set of elites. Though it took approximately a century, power and authority increasingly devolved away from the capital city of Kyoto to Kamakura—and more importantly—to the provinces in general. By the time of the Mongol invasions, both the central court and courtiers enjoyed power mostly insofar as it originated from Kamakura. Still, both the civil and military authorities continued to exist side by side, with overlapping legal and military jurisdictions.

Taxation. Rather than reinventing the wheel, the Japanese monarchs looked to the Tang Empire in China (618-907) for a deliberate system of landholding and its most important accompanying element, a rational basis for taxation. These were implemented in Japan and became known as the Taika reforms. In this system, peasants were initially

allotted 2 tan to farm (about ½ of an acre) per male over the age of 5 years old and 2/3rds of that amount for females over the age of 5. Given that in theory the emperor had provided land for the peasants, failure to pay taxes could result in expulsion from the land and quickly to starvation. Initially, the tax—which was based on crop production—was not too onerous and amounted to only 5%. That number later increased significantly. In addition to raising revenue for the Imperial treasury, this also removed the land from the control of local elites because the Emperor had to rely upon a bureaucracy to administer the system. This system broke down middle years of the Heian period and is credited with contributing to the collapse of Imperial rule—and the establishment of Japan's first shōgunate.

The Military. In the 7th and 8th centuries, the emperor established a military. Each province was to provide a certain number of soldiers for a standing army. The soldiers were to drill and be ready in case of emergency. After the period of unification was complete, however, there was little need for a large military, even one of dubious quality, because there were no known external threats after Tang China went into decline. The standing army therefore transitioned to a much smaller, more professional force positioned mostly in the rural areas and commanded by either a member of the Taira or Minamoto clan. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Japanese military came to be used as a tool for the suppression of the political enemies of the Fujiwara or a retired emperor.

A loyal, standing army controlled by a ruling emperor had ceased to exist long before the Gempei War ended in 1185. Powerful cliques in Heian Japan (794-1185) each called upon their own military units to protect their own interests beginning in the 10th century. In general, two families—the Taira—who had lost in the Gempei War and the Minamoto—who had won, were the most prominent. But others existed, mostly as retainers to one of the two great families. After the Minamoto victory, Yoritomo sent out a number of his most trusted lieutenants to act as *shūgo* and *jitō*. Some went back to their own home areas, others to completely new places. During the long period of the Hōjō regency (1203-1333), many of these families in the provinces emerged to exercise significant military influence in their own right. Under the titular command of the Hōjō regent, these armies controlled their own domains most of the time but could be called upon in time of national emergency. For example, the Hōjō called on the great families of Kyūshū and western Honshū during the first Mongol invasion in 1274 and 10,000 samurai responded. In the second in 1281, 40,000-50,000 samurai from all over Japan acted in defense of the realm. Japan was, for two decades, completely mobilized against foreign invasion. The military was rightly praised as the saviors of Japan and the myth of the samurai was born. It should be noted that these armies fought as small, independent units (and sometimes even as individual warriors) and not as one highly integrated, cohesive army. The structure of the military continued to devolve during the last years of the Hōjō regency and a sort of uneasy equilibrium came to exist. By the time of the Ashikaga shōgunate, no single family—not even the Ashikaga—could claim to be military hegemon of Japan without the consent and/or alliance of one or more of the other great families.

Jōei Code. In 1232, the Hōjō regent Yasutoki handed down a series of legal codes in the aftermath of the Jōkyū war (1221), the failed attempt by a retired emperor to regain some power from Kamakura. It contained a series of fifty-one articles which clarified many discrepancies which had arisen as the old Heian era *ritsuryō* legal system slowly became unworkable in the new age. Among other things, it effectively established the primacy of the shōgunal authority but required warriors to respect higher officials, in particular religious institutions and whatever remained of the civilian structures and court systems. It started as a relatively simple document which was mostly directed at the new warrior elites. However, over the course of time, it became extremely complicated and was expanded to include even non-warriors nationwide. It was superseded by the Ashikaga and other shōguns, but a number of basic concepts remained until 1868.

EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1500-1800 CE)

Political Organization. While the fighting for reunification raged during a two decade period under Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) and Hideyoshi Toyotomi (1537-1598), each daimyō more or less ran their own fief as they saw fit. It is understood that many used some form of martial law, with close control of all areas of life essential to the continued support of military units in the field. Nobunaga had begun to institute reforms, but his efforts were truncated because of his untimely death. When Hideyoshi proclaimed the ending of hostilities in 1583 (something that wasn't exactly true), he began the process of creating a state apparatus for the peacetime administration of Japan. Given that there had not been a central government in Japan for more than a century since the Onin War ended in 1477, there were many options. However, he didn't stray too far from the existing system. Hideyoshi governed as shōguns had in the previous era, but he never assumed that title. In general, he ruled through existing daimyō. Though he was more than the first among equals, as long as individual domain laws didn't interfere with his own decrees, each daimyō enjoyed considerable autonomy to govern. Hideyoshi had a council of elders, composed mostly of generals who had long served with him, and who advised him in matters of state.

The Military and Other Reforms. The two main governing initiatives nationwide that Hideyoshi is known for are the Great Sword Hunt (*Taikō no katanagari*) and the Land Survey (*Taikō no kenji*), both of which had long lasting and very far reaching consequences. In 1588, Hideyoshi issued a decree that required all peasants to turn over their weapons to the authorities. This demilitarized society and had the effect of giving the government a monopoly on the tools with which to commit violence and engage in uprisings. At the same time, all warriors who still had a lord were to move to castle towns and out of the rural areas. Rōnin, or masterless samurai, were to quickly find a lord or become a farmer and turn in their sword. This had the effect of removing the samurai from part-time farming and removing farmers from part-time soldiering. Peasants were not allowed to leave their domains without permission and all samurai were to be under the direct supervision of their lords. It is not entirely clear if it was intended or not, but this edict effectively created the upper two classes of society, a condition which would be codified into the four classes of society under the Tokugawa (1600-1868). The Land Survey was just as important for the health and wellbeing of Hideyoshi's government. All peasants had to return to their ancestral lands, register and recommence farming. This allowed the government to know who was on the land, and later, how much they were producing. Given that no survey had been conducted in approximately 500 years, this was sorely needed. Peasants had long resisted thorough land surveys and hid or camouflaged their land under cultivation while they waited for a different lord to take power. Hideyoshi, however, was persistent and sent the hated surveyors around several years running, and at unpredictable times. In this way, his government was able to determine with some level of accuracy who lived in Japan and how much to tax them.

The Tokugawa Consolidation of Power. After Hideyoshi's death in 1598 and subsequent Battle of Sekigahara in 1600, Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) very slowly moved to consolidate his own position. First, he removed all daimyō who opposed him at Sekigahara and confiscated their lands as spoils of war. This made him the single largest landholder in the country. In addition, those daimyō who remained neutral at the time of Sekigahara were understood to be of questionable loyalty. Second, he demanded the emperor name him shōgun, a title he made sure was given to his son, Tokugawa Hidetada, in 1605. Even though he didn't know he would live another decade, this had the effect of solidifying Hidetada as his successor upon Ieyasu's death in 1616. Third, he (and his successors) began to hand down edicts such as the *Buke sho hatto*. These were initially rather minor laws and addressed the behavior of samurai, appropriate attire for samurai, marriage guidelines, rules for turning in neighbors who might be lawbreakers and the like. Later expanded, they acted as the legal basis for increasing the power of the central authorities in the city of Edo (Tokyo) and the continued diminishment of the power of the daimyō in the provinces.

By the turn of the 18th century, the Tokugawa enjoyed a fully functioning government. Over a period of a hundred years, they had discovered through trial and error what was and was not working. The feudal system that the Tokugawa had inherited from Hideyoshi slowly evolved under the Tokugawa and came to be known by historians as "centralized feudalism." Though this would seem to be an oxymoron, it describes a system where local control was the ideal, but where the central government increasingly assumed more and more power.

19TH CENTURY

Political Organization. The new Meiji elites were in no hurry to transfer power to a legislature or any other democratically elected body after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Indeed, the Meiji Constitution finally took effect 22 years after the Restoration! This document, which was authored by Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) and Inoue Kowashi (1844-1895) was handed down by the Emperor Meiji in 1889. A key (and conscious) omission was the concept of God-given rights. Since the Emperor had given these rights, they were not inalienable and could be rescinded by the same method. In addition, though in theory, the people would have a voice based on their elected representatives in the Diet, real power resided with the oligarchs. For about two decades they decided who among them would form a cabinet and become Prime Minister. This was a position that changed hands quite frequently. It should be noted, however, that though these men didn't always agree with the specific policy decisions of their predecessors or successors, there was a great deal of continuity of vision.

In the early years of the Restoration, the old domains of the Tokugawa period were abolished and in their place governors loyal to the ruling oligarchs were named. A few of the old daimyō (feudal lords) remained in place during the transition. But they no longer owned or exercised control over the land in the way they had before. In a very short period of time, the old feudal system was dismantled and a modern system of local, regional and national authorities was created. Tax rates were determined by the oligarchs and revenue collected by representatives of the central government. A new police force was also required in the years immediately following the Restoration. When the samurai lost their jobs, many traded their swords for police clubs and began to enforce the new laws. Given that the samurai as a class had enjoyed great prestige in society, the police in Meiji era Japan came to be highly respected as well.

The Meiji system was designed to be parliamentary in nature (a Diet), with an upper and lower house. The upper house was composed of peers (a designation created during this period). The lower house was to be the people's house. Over the course of time, the lower house discovered that the only real power it possessed was the power of the purse. It got to decide on tax policy and, in this way only, was able to exert influence on the decision making process. It didn't much matter for most of the Meiji period (1868-1912) which party had a majority in the Diet because the initiatives of the late Meiji period were decided upon, by and large, by the ruling oligarchs. A national bureaucracy was also created to accompany the new system. It became the highest form of accomplishment to be able to serve the state in this way. Graduates of the new universities competed to enter one of the Ministries. The best and brightest all wanted to help in the creation of the new Japan. Those who could not compete went into the private sector.

The Military. In the years immediately following the Restoration, the oligarchs disbanded the old samurai system where warriors answered to their lords and not the central government. In this way, the samurai very quickly lost their status in society and their jobs as well. Field Marshall Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922) then was tapped to create a conscript army, one which was drawn from all across Japan and which used modern training and modern weapons. It was believed that some of the samurai would join the ranks. However, they were largely found to be unsuited and the ranks were filled mostly by young men from the rural areas of Japan. Nonetheless, many of the martial ideals embodied in the samurai were transferred to the new army. This army came to be led by an excellent officer corps and a series of outstanding generals and admirals. In the late 19th century, it proved to be very capable and dealt first with the remnant of the samurai during the Seinan War/Rebellion (1877) and then the Chinese in several small skirmishes and finally the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).

The Meiji Constitution placed the military outside of civilian control. It is not clear that the authors of the Constitution intended to give it this much autonomy, but by making it accountable to the emperor only, only the emperor could reign it in. Neither the Diet nor the Prime Minister could get the military to do what the civilian leadership wanted unless the military wanted to do it. The Constitution also required the military to name a general officer (Admiral or General) to become Minister of War. The general staff soon discovered that if they didn't name a man to the position, it was extremely difficult for a cabinet to be formed. By the turn of the 20th century, the military discovered that it had a great deal more power than was intended by the framers. It effectively had the power to veto the formation of a cabinet. It should be noted that they didn't exercise this prerogative for many years until party politicians began to try to form cabinets. In spite of its many weaknesses, the system worked fairly well until the Meiji oligarchs began to retire from public life.

EARLY 20th CENTURY (1900-1949)

Political Organization. The Meiji Constitution promulgated in 1889 was functioning quite well as Japan entered the 20th century. The Meiji oligarchs (the approximately two dozen men who had led in the Meiji Restoration and who later governed Japan in the late 19th century) had successfully transformed the government into a well-oiled and high-functioning machine. The Constitution had withstood the challenges of the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War, and the internal unrest associated with the Treaty of Portsmouth in 1905. Still, the greatest challenge was to come with the death and retirement of the Meiji oligarchs. By the end of the Meiji period in 1912, very few of the old leaders remained on the public scene and the transition to party rule seemed eminent. In 1918, the first party politician from the Diet (lower house), Hara Takashi, became prime minister. Soon thereafter, a series of military officers, alternating with party politicians, served as prime ministers until 1932, when the military began to supply the greatest number. Given that there were a total of 23 prime ministers from 1918 to 1945, each prime minister served only slightly more than one year on average. This means that real power was exercised elsewhere, behind the scenes with the remaining oligarchs and with the permanent bureaucracy. With the death of Yamagata Aritomo in 1922 and Matsukata Masayoshi in 1924, only Saionji Kinmochi survived among the old oligarchs and he wanted to retire. Stability was greatly desired in the political realm, but no one had the clout of the founding generation. Political cliques formed and were disbanded when a better situation presented itself. Things seemed unpredictable and there was a political power vacuum that left the Japanese government adrift until the early 1930s. The greatest strength of the founding generation, the oligarchs themselves, had been unable to find an effective way to replicate themselves in the Meiji Constitution. The military stepped into the void.

The Military. The Japanese army and navy were considered to be the spiritual inheritors of the samurai traditions. They understood themselves to be the protectors of all that was right, true and patriotic in the country. They did not answer to the civilian leadership and were accountable only to the Emperor. They came to consider it their highest calling to protect the person and prerogatives of the Emperor, who was a living embodiment of the spirit of Japan and a god himself. They took their duties very seriously and seldom compromised with the politicians whom they despised and whom they thought was leading Japan astray in the 1920s and early 1930s. When the civilian leadership of Japan called upon the Japanese army to pull back from various areas of Manchuria in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the military responded that they operated independently. They demanded that the Diet continue to appropriate additional funds for the military on the mainland, which the legislature sometimes did. When they did not, the military often manufactured a crisis in Manchuria and demanded funding because of a new threat. In short, the Japanese army manipulated the civilian leadership. When that didn't work, they brought down a cabinet, creating the very instability they said they despised. In Manchuria, the military operated as a semi-independent arm of the government. And as long as they stayed in Manchuria where they faced an unorganized and poorly funded foe, they could maintain the fiction of independence of command. However, when they blundered into North China proper and encountered a determined, Nationalist army and a Chinese people who understood themselves to be fighting for their very existence, the military and the rest of Japan found themselves in a war that they could not win, but a war that they also could not end. It is the very definition of "mission creep."

The Japanese military was extraordinarily well trained, well equipped and highly motivated. They had some of the best weapons available for the era. In particular, the Japanese navy sailed aboard some of the finest, most capable vessels ever to go to sea. But the Japanese military was thin. When four aircraft carriers were sunk in the Battle of Midway in June of 1942, the Japanese capacity to project power was severely diminished and they were unable to build more. They had great airmen and advanced aircraft, but there were too few of them to fight the Chinese and later to fight the U.S. and other enemies at the same time. As an island nation, they also had a large merchant marine, but when submarine warfare began to take its toll, Japan could not sufficiently supply its military in the field. Its industrial capacity was insufficient and its population too small.

LATE 20th CENTURY (1950-1999)

Political Organization. The Japanese government was not systematically dismantled during the occupation (1945-1952). Rather, occupation officials decided to purge militarists (about 220,000) from public life and government positions and work with the remaining permanent bureaucracy in an effort to maintain stability in the country. The highest official remaining in the country was, of course, Emperor Hirohito. He was forced to renounce his divinity and made a figurehead. But he was not tried as a war criminal. However, as Japan began to make some strides toward recovery, SCAP (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers) officials determined that Japan needed a new constitution to replace the old Meiji-era foundational documents. A new Diet was elected and given the task of preparing a document. After the first two attempts were deemed unacceptable by General Douglas MacArthur, SCAP officials themselves wrote a document that was ratified by the Diet. It is still the constitution used in Japan today.

The 1947 constitution created a bicameral legislature with a Prime Minister as the head of government. The party that holds the majority of seats (or works in coalition when in the plurality) in the lower house forms a government and administers the country. Since the new constitution has been in effect, there have been 24 different Prime Ministers. The Liberal Democratic Party governed Japan for all but a few years between 1955 and 1993. Since 1993, the Democratic Party, the Japan New Party, the Japan Renewal Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Democratic Party of Japan and the Liberal Democratic Party have all formed cabinets. Most of the Prime Ministers of Japan in the post-war era have governed from the center-right, center or center-left. There have been very few post-occupation Prime Ministers who could be described as radical or reactionary.

Given the high number of Prime Ministers in the post-war era, most government administration has taken place within the permanent bureaucracy. The bureaucracy in Japan is staffed by highly educated, motivated university graduates. Until quite recently, these have been some of the most highly sought-after positions for university graduates from some of Japan's finest universities. The Japanese government functions efficiently and is understood to carry out essential state functions. Those who enter government service are highly respected members of society.

The Military. The 1947 Constitution is distinguished by its so-called "Peace Clause," which is Article 9. This article goes so far as to "forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation." However, by 1954, the Japanese government decided that it, in fact, needed a small military and came to call it the Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF). This force is divided into the Ground Self-Defense Forces (Army), the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (Navy) and the Air Self-Defense Forces (Air Force). In its early form, the JSDF was quite small, seriously underfunded and not very capable. Most of the weapons they had at their disposal were US surplus items from the Korean War and even WWII. More recently, the JSDF has enjoyed a very large budget, one of the largest in the world, and now has an extremely capable but still small force. Though they do not yet have a large blue-water navy, recent Chinese actions have caused the Japanese to begin the process of creating a navy capable of projecting power abroad. Unlike the situation before the Pacific War, the current Japanese military is answerable to the civilian leadership. With the exception of a few deployments, most of which were UN peacekeeping missions, Japan has managed to avoid using its military abroad since the end of the Pacific War.

Over the course of the last two decades, calls in Japan have grown louder for the abandonment or modification of Article 9, and policy makers appear to be more receptive than in the past. There is a growing perception in Japan that the US government might not be as reliable a military partner as had been the case. In addition, Japan increasingly wants to set its own foreign policy agenda and to feel free to protect its own international interests.

Readings

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Questions for Discussion

1) Questions about national origins, migration patterns, ethno-genesis and cultural beginnings have often dominated Japanese historical, archaeological and anthropological scholarly discussions. Why might this be the case? Why do you think that Japanese scholars were so keen to prove where their distant ancestors came from? What difference, if any, does it make to contemporary Japan culture and identity?

2) Amid the glories of the Heian period, historians recognize a system that slowly became unsustainable. What weaknesses in the system might those be? What was slowing going wrong that later played a role in the collapse of civilian rule and its gradual replacement by the military? Was there an economic or agrarian downturn, an ecological problem, or a series of natural disasters? Was the fragmentation of the political elites the problem, or was it the usurpation of power by one or more people? What about the tax base and the system of landholding? In short, what caused the collapse of the Heian system and could it have been averted with strong, decisive and farsighted action?

3) The process of reunification in Japan during the 16th and early 17th centuries took many decades to complete. Why did it take so long? Which of the three great unifiers do you think did more than the others to complete the process? In order to answer this question you will need to give me a narrative of how it occurred and provide details of the various struggles/battles/movements which made it possible. Which of the three great unifiers was the least important? In other words, how should historians of East Asia consider the legacy of the three men?

4) The Meiji Restoration has been described by historians as a *coup d'état*, a successful rebellion, a military *junta*, and a number of other positive and negative labels. All of these are correct in one way or another. However, what the Meiji leadership achieved was nothing less than revolutionary. Why do you think that historians are reluctant to call it the "Meiji Revolution?" Is there something about that term that is difficult to apply to Japan in the late 19th century? Or is there a better moniker that describes the actions of the Meiji elites after they seized power? In order to answer the question, you will need to understand the word "revolution" in its historical context and know which events in post-Meiji Restoration Japan can be applied to it. You will also need to understand the historical context for the word "restoration" in East Asia and why historians use that term instead.

5) Historians have struggled to discern a meaningful narrative for post-war era Japan that didn't rely on economics. And there have surely been a significant number of other events, movements and narratives that deserved attention over the past 70+ years. What might some of those events have been? What might be a good alternate narrative for the post-war years? Given that military history would be extremely difficult to approach, should historians focus on cultural or social history? Diplomatic or intellectual history? Or should historians investigate something altogether different?

Texts

1) From *History of the Kingdom of Wei (Wei zhi, 297 CE)*, found in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Edited by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene, (Columbia University Press, 1958), pp 4-7.

The people of Wa [Japan] dwell in the middle of the ocean on the mountainous islands southeast of [the prefecture of] Daifang. They formerly comprised more than one hundred communities. During the Han dynasty, [Wa] envoys appeared at the court; today, thirty of their communities maintain intercourse with us through envoys and scribes. ...

In their meetings and in their deportment, there is no distinction between father and son or between men and women. They are fond of liquor. In their worship, men of importance simply clap their hands instead of kneeling or bowing. The people live long, some to one hundred and others to eighty or ninety years. Ordinarily, men of importance have four or five wives; the lesser ones, two or three. Women are not loose in morals or jealous. There is no theft, and litigation is infrequent. In case of violations of the law, the light offender loses his wife and children by confiscation; as for the grave offender, the members of his household and also his kinsmen are exterminated. There are class distinctions among the people, and some men are vassals of others. ...

The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko. She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance. ...

In the sixth month of the second year of Jingchu [238 C.E.], the Queen of Wa sent the grandee Nashonmi and others to visit the prefecture [of Daifang], where they requested permission to proceed to the Emperor's court with tribute. The Governor, Liu Xia, dispatched an officer to accompany the party to the capital. In answer to the Queen of Wa, an edict of the Emperor, issued in the twelfth month of the same year, said as follows:

Herein we address Pimiko, Queen of Wa, whom we now officially call a friend of Wei. The Governor of Daifang, Liu Xia, has sent a messenger to accompany your vassal, Nashonmi, and his lieutenant, Tsushi Gori. They have arrived here with your tribute, consisting of four male slaves and six female slaves, together with two pieces of cloth with designs, each twenty feet in length. You live very far away across the sea; yet you have sent an embassy with tribute. Your loyalty and filial piety we appreciate exceedingly. We confer upon you, therefore, the title "Queen of Wa Friendly to Wei," together with the decoration of the gold seal with purple ribbon. The latter, properly encased, is to be sent to you through the Governor. We expect you, O Queen, to rule your people in peace and to endeavor to be devoted and obedient. ...

When Pimiko passed away, a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter. Over a hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave. Then a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed; more than one thousand were thus slain.

A relative of Pimiko named Iyo, a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored. Zheng [the Chinese ambassador] issued a proclamation to the effect that Iyo was the ruler. Then Iyo sent a delegation of twenty under the grandee Yazaku, General of the Imperial Guard, to accompany Zheng home [to China]. The delegation visited the capital and presented thirty male and female slaves. It also offered to the court five thousand white gems and two pieces of carved jade, as well as twenty pieces of brocade with variegated designs.

2) From the *Nihongi, 720 CE (The Chronicles of Japan)*, translated by W. G. Aston, 1896, pp. 278-279. The Emperor Nintoku. In the public domain.

4th year, Spring, 2nd month, 6th day. The Emperor addressed his ministers, saying: we ascended a lofty tower and looked far and wide, but no smoke arose in the land. From this, we gather that the people are poor, and that in the houses there are none cooking rice. we have heard that in the reigns of the wise sovereigns of antiquity, from everyone was heard the sound of songs hymning their virtue, in every house there was the ditty, "How happy are we." But now when we observe the people, for three years past, no voice of eulogy is heard; the smoke of cooking has become rarer and rarer. By this we know that the five grains do not come up, and that the people are in extreme want. Even in the Home provinces there are some who are not supplied; what must it be in the provinces outside of our domain?

3rd month, 21st day. The following decree was issued: "From this time forward, for the space of three years, let forced labor be entirely abolished, and let the people have rest from toil." From this day forth his robes of state and shoes did not wear out, and none were made. The warm food and hot broths did not become sour or putrid, and were not renewed. He disciplined his heart and restrained his impulses so that he discharged his functions without effort.

Therefore, the Palace enclosure fell to ruin and was not rebuilt: the thatch decayed, and was not repaired; the wind and rain entered by the chinks and soaked the coverlets; the starlight filtered through the decayed places and exposed the bed mats. After this the wind and rain came in due season, the five grains produced in abundance. For the space of three autumns the people had plenty, the praises of his virtue filled the land, and the smoke of cooking was also thick.

7th year, summer, 4th month, 1st day. The Emperor was on his tower and looking far and wide, saw smoke arising plentifully. On this day he addressed the Empress, saying: "We are now prosperous. What can there be to grieve for?" The Empress answered and said: "What dost thou mean by prosperity?" The Emperor said: "It is doubtless when the smoke fills the lands, and the people freely attain to wealth." The Empress went on to say: "The Palace enclosure is crumbling down, and there are no means of repairing it; the buildings are dilapidated so that the coverlets are exposed. Can this be called prosperity?" The Emperor said: "When Heaven establishes a Prince, it is for the sake of the people. The Prince must therefore make the people the foundation. For this reason the wise sovereigns of antiquity, if a single one of their subjects was cold and starving, cast the responsibility on themselves. Now the people's poverty is no other than Our poverty; the people's prosperity is none other than Our prosperity. There is no such thing as the people's being prosperous and yet the Prince in poverty."

3) "Kusunoki Masashige: A Guerrilla of Unflinching Loyalty." Found in *Legends of the Samurai*, compiled and translated by Hiroaki Sato, (New York: Overlook Press, 1995), pp. 186-187.

Captain of the Imperial Police Kusunoki Masashige turned to his brother, Sword bearer Masasue, and said, "Our enemies have cut us off from front and rear, and we've been separated from our command post. We now have no way of getting out of this. Let's first smash into the enemies in front and drive them around, then fight the enemies behind us!"

That's a good idea," Masasue agreed.

Then, with their 700 horsemen in front and back, they galloped into the great mass of enemies. The soldiers under Chief of the Imperial Stables of the Left Tadayoshi saw the banners with the crest of chrysanthemum and water, thought these were worthy enemies, and tried to isolate and kill Masashige and Masasue. But each brother cleaved through them from east to west and drove them from north to south. Each one, when he saw a worthy enemy, would gallop side by side with him, wrestle him down, and take his head; when the enemy was unworthy, he would strike him with a swing of the sword and run him down. Masasue and Masashige met seven times and separated seven times. Each one's sole aim was to get close enough to Tadayoshi, wrestle him down and kill him.

Tadayoshi's 500,000 horsemen were pushed around so badly by Kusunoki's 700 that they started to turn back toward Ueno, of Suma. As they did, the horse Tadayoshi rode stepped on an arrowhead with his right foreleg and began limping. The Kusunoki force swiftly caught up and was about to strike at Tadayoshi, when Yakushiji Jūrō Jirō turned back and, as he met Tadayoshi on the bank of Lotus Pond, jumped off his horse and, brandishing a thirty-inch blade halberd held at its metal handle, slashed at the neck and chest straps of the oncoming enemy horses, in no time felling seven or eight of them. In the meantime Tadayoshi switched horses with Jūrō Jirō and escaped into the distance.

When General Takauji saw Chief Tadayoshi being drive back by Kusunoki and withdrawing, he issued an order, "Send in reinforcements! Don't let Tadayoshi be killed!"

At once, 6,000 horsemen of Kira, Ishitō, Kō, and Uesugi galloped to the east side of the Minato River and encircled the Kusunoki force to cut off its rear. Masashige and Masasue turned back and attacked these forces, killing or wrestling the enemies down as they galloped in and out of them. In about six hours they had sixteen engagements. Their force was reduced gradually, until only seventy-three riders remained.

Even with the small force they could have broken out of the enemy and escaped, but since leaving Kyoto, Kusunoki had had a mind to bid farewell to the world there, so he fought without retreating a step. But their spirit now drained, he and his men hurried into a house in a village north of the Minato River. When he removed his armor for disembowelment, he found eleven sword wounds on his body. Each of the remaining, seventy-two men also had five to ten wounds. The thirteen members of the Kusunoki clan and their sixty retainers sat in two rows in the guest room with six pillars, chanted a Buddhist prayer ten times in unison before disemboweling themselves.

Masashige, sitting at the head of the group, turned to his brother, Masasue, and asked, “They say your thought at the last moment determines whether your next life is going to be good or bad. Tell me brother, what is your wish in the Nine Realms?”

Masasue laughed cheerfully and said, “I’d like to be reborn in the Human Realm seven times so that I may destroy the imperial enemy.

Masashige was pleased to hear this and said, “That’s a truly sinful, evil thought, but I think exactly as you do. Well then, let us be reborn in the same way and realize our wish.”

With the vow the two brothers stabbed each other and died side by side. The eleven other principal members of the clan, including Governor of Kawachi Usami Masayasu, Jungūji no Tarō Masamoro, of the Middle Palace Guards, and Wada Gorō Masataka, as well as the sixty retainers, disemboweled themselves all at once, each sitting in the place of his choice.

Kikuchi Shichirō Takeyoshi, who had come to observe the battles in Suma as the representative of his older brother, the Governor of Higo, happened upon Masashige’s death. Perhaps he thought it would be a disgrace to see something like this and return. He also killed himself and fell in the fire.

4) “Text of the Sakoku, or Closed Country Edict of June 1636.” Found in *The Christian Century in Japan 1549-1650*, by C.R. Boxer, (University of California Press, 1967), pp. 439-440.

1. No Japanese ships may leave for foreign countries.
2. No Japanese may go abroad secretly. If anybody tries to do this, he will be killed, and the ship and owner/s will be placed under arrest whilst higher authority is informed.
3. Any Japanese now living abroad who tries to return to Japan will be put to death.
4. If any Kirishitan believer is discovered, you two (Nagasaki bugyō) will make a full investigation.
5. Any informer/ revealing the whereabouts of a bateren will be paid 200 or 300 pieces of silver. If any other categories of Kirishitans are discovered, the informer/s will be paid at your discretion as hitherto.
6. On the arrival of foreign ships, arrangements will be made to have them guarded by ships provided by the Omura clan whilst report is being made to Yedo, as hitherto.
7. Any foreigners who help the bateren [Christian missionary] or other criminal foreigners will be imprisoned at Omjra as hitherto.
8. Strict search will be made for bateren [Christian missionary] on all incoming ships.
9. No offspring of southern Barbarians will be allowed to remain. Anyone violating this order will be killed, and all relatives punished according to the gravity of the offence.
10. If any Japanese have adopted the offspring of southern Barbarians they deserve to die. Nevertheless, such adopted children and their foster-parents will be handed over to the Southern Barbarians for deportation.

11. If any deportees should try to return or to communicate with Japan by letter or otherwise, they will of course be killed if they are caught, whilst their relatives will be severely dealt with, according to the gravity of the offence.
12. Samurai are not allowed to have direct commercial dealings with either foreign or Chinese shipping at Nagasaki.
13. Nobody other than those of the five places (Yedo, Kyoto, Osaka, Sakai and Nagasaki) is allowed to participate in the allocation of ito-wappu.
14. Purchases can only be made after the ito-wappu is fixed. However, as the Chinese chips are small, you will not be too rigorous with them. Only twenty days are allowed for the sale.
15. The twentieth day of the ninth month is the deadline for the return of foreign ships, but latecomers will be allowed fifty days grace from the date of their arrival Chinese ships will be allowed to leave a little after the departure of the (Portuguese) galliots.
16. Unsold goods cannot be left in the charge of Japanese for storage or safekeeping.
17. Representatives of the five (shōgunal) cities should arrive at Nagasaki not later than the fifth day of the long month. Late arrivals will not be allowed to participate in the silk allocation and purchase.
18. Ships arriving at Hirado will not be allowed to transact business until after the nineteenth day of the fifth month of the thirteenth year of Kwanei (June 22, 1636)

5) Prime Minister Kono Fumimaro, September 6, 1941, Liaison Council of Japan. Found in Nobutake Ike's *Japan's Decision for War: Records of the 1941 Policy Conferences*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1967), 138.

May I call the conference to order. With your permission, I will take the chair in order that we may proceed.

As you all know, the international situation in which we are involved has become increasingly strained; and in particular, the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands have come to oppose our Empire with all available means. There has also emerged the prospect that the United States and the Soviet Union will form a united front against Japan as the war between Germany and the Soviet Union becomes prolonged.

If we allow this situation to continue, it is inevitable that our Empire will gradually lose the ability to maintain its national power, and that our national power will lag behind that of the United States, Great Britain, and others. Under these circumstances our Empire must, of course, quickly prepare to meet any situation that may occur, and at the same time it must try to prevent the disaster of war by resorting to all possible diplomatic measures. If the diplomatic measures should fail to bring about favorable results within a certain period, I believe we cannot help but take the ultimate step in order to defend ourselves.

The government and the Army and Navy sections of Imperial Headquarters have discussed this matter on numerous occasions. They have now reached an agreement, and have drafted "The Essentials for Carrying Out the Empire's Policies," which is on today's agenda. I would like you to consider this proposal carefully.