HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

JAPANESE CULTURE

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Contents

PART I : ANCIENT PERIOD

Geography Japan's status as an archipelago relatively accessible to the Asian mainland has surely conditioned its emergence as a civilization. There are four main islands—Kyûshû, Honshû, Shikoku, and the northern island of Hokkaidô. The terrain is generally rugged and mountainous, with ample rainfall and lush vegetation. Bamboo groves are a ubiquitous— and beautiful— feature of the landscape. The expanses of habitable land, generally along the Pacific Coast and in the vicinity of the inland sea, would become the cradle of civilization and, in modern times, the site of dense, interconnected urban agglomerations.

The Japanese archipelago sits atop one of the earth's most active tectonic zones; earthquakes are common and occasionally catastrophic. The northern lands, especially those facing the Sea of Japan, are cold and snowy. The southern island of Kyûshû is subtropical. Further south, the Okinawan island chain, which was historically an independent kingdom, only recently came under Japanese national sovereignty. Today, most Japanese (there are around 125 million) live in the urban 'megalopolis' along the Pacific coast; it comprises a small proportion of a land mass roughly the size of California.

Early Stages and Mainland Influence Japan's aboriginal people, the Ainu, are Caucasians who migrated across glacial ice many millennia ago. They were gradually absorbed by subsequent waves of Asiatic migration from the mainland and the southern island chain. Although exact dating is unclear, an early epoch originated around 10,000 years ago. This is the so-called Jômon period, named on account of the distinctive rope-imprinted pottery artifacts of its nomadic peoples. What brought this millennia-old period to a close was the gradual absorption of influences from the mainland. In particular, the introduction of paddy-field rice cultivation led to the spread of agrarian villages and more stable, cooperative societal arrangements. The cumulative impact of Chinese influence,both material and intangible, beginning around 300 BCE gave rise to a more sophisticated stage of civilization, referred to as Yayoi, whose artifacts reflect greater technical sophistication and a more refined aesthetic sense. However crucial to Japan's emergence as a civilization, the assimilation of foreign influences occurred in the context of well-established native practices and beliefs. The native and the foreign would achieve a remarkable degree of complementarity, and this capacity to hybridize and 'domesticate' outside influences would henceforth come to define Japan's emerging civilization.

Shinto Japan's native belief system, Shinto is an animistic faith predicated upon the existence and efficacy of *kami* deities, the sacredness of the land, and strict requirements regarding ritual purity and ceremonial lustration. The divine *kami*— which included 'awesome' natural phenomena such as ancient trees and great mountains (Mount Fuji, for example)— were widely worshipped and honored in communal ceremonies known as *matsuri*. And according to the Japanese creation myth, the *kami* generated a lineage of divine humans, who would comprise a succession of Emperor/*kami* traceable to the mythical Emperor Jimmu. The most sacred site in Shinto is the Grand Shrine at Ise, dedicated to the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and allegedly housing the Sacred Mirror, one of three imperial regalia mentioned in the mythical record. Rebuilt since time immemorial every twenty years, in order to maintain its purity and pristine beauty, the Ise Shrine has long served as a cultural mecca and a wellspring of national identity, to the present day.

In short, a strong connection with nature, the natural cycle, and native place has long marked Japanese society and culture. The contact with mainland civilization— both material and intangible— served to advance the sophistication of Japan's own civilization and, thanks to Shinto, helped deepen a sense of connection to the native land, the local community, and the world of ancestors and deities.

Rise of the Yamato State A key development of around 300 CE was the spread of new weaponry and martial techniques among dominant clans (*uji*) in what would lead to the consolidation of power and the extension of control over the region near modern-day Nara— the so-called Yamato state. This process eventually yielded an emperor-centered aristocratic class that would rule the land and, in one form or another, would survive well into the 20th century. The Yamato roots of Japanese civilization— and its national identity— have been both celebrated and contested. But the appearance in the 5th century of a new, more powerful clan is evident, given the massive tombs (*kofun*) that were built in the area of modern-day Osaka. The so-called '*kofun* period' is thus an immediate precursor to Japan's emergence as a historical civilization in the 6th century. In sum, the civilization of Japan constitutes an amalgam of deep native roots and transformational borrowings from its East-Asian neighbors, China and Korea.

Readings

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Varley, Paul, *Japanese Culture* (Hawaii, 2000), 1-18

Discussion Questions and Topics

How are we to assess the contribution that 'prehistory' makes to the formation of a historical civilization? Give thought to the proposition that the notion of 'roots' and 'native traditions' is highly subjective, reflecting cultural memory and national identity in the modern era. How might you conceive of— and express— your own origins?

How would you argue for the influence of geography and topography as civilizational 'drivers'? Is the fact of Japan's insular circumstance an inevitable contributing factor? How might you substantiate such a claim?

What do archaeological artifacts say about the societal qualities of prehistoric peoples? How have Japanese artifacts been used to construct a portrait of its pre-historical communities? Give thought to the ways in which museums and exhibitions display and interpret their collected 'things,' as a means of bringing ancient civilizations to life. What might be counterproductive about such a strategy?

Images

Map of Japan and environs (http://www.globalsherpa.org)

Jômon pottery vessel, 3000-2000 B.C. (Wikipedia)

Yayoi vessel, 1st-3rd century C.E. (Wikipedia)

Ise— Inner Shrine (Wikipedia)

PART II : EARLY MODERN PERIOD (TOKUGAWA JAPAN (1600-1868))

Overview The outcome of the late 16th-century reunification process enabled Ieyasu, the Tokugawa clan chief, to establish a new regime— the third and final Shogunate. Tokugawa Japan, with its nearly three centuries of stable political order, witnessed the emergence of an urban-based society, a dynamic and productive domestic economy, and many iconic cultural products. A samurai-centered social hierarchy and authoritarian regime sought to pacify the populace and eliminate threats to those in power. And a wealthy merchant class, essentially challenging the prerogatives of the samurai 'overlords,' created a vibrant, free-wheeling culture of amusement and entertainment. The officially-espoused samurai virtues of self-restraint and austerity stood in stark contrast to the consumer tastes and hedonistic propensities of those with money to burn.

Tokugawa Japan was largely isolated from the world, owing to the shogunal policy of national seclusion (*sakoku*) that sought to stave off possible incursions by Western colonial powers and their proselytizing Christian religions. Yet the era is marked by significant economic, technological, and educational advancement, and it served as a chrysalis for Japan's emergence as a modern nation in the late 19th century. Many of the defining qualities associated with Japan and its people— including questions of identity and collective memory— can be traced to Tokugawa institutions and influences.

Shogunal Policies A brilliant strategist with a powerful base of support, Tokugawa Ieyasu and his forces were victorious at the pivotal Battle of Sekigahara in 1600. Having consolidated his power, Ieyasu established a new shogunal regime in Edo, a small town not far from the Kamakura site of Yoritomo's shogunate. He set about implementing the administrative program initially devised by Hideyoshi. The so-called *baku-han* system entailed the establishment of a strong shogunate (*bakufu*) with broad administrative powers, which would oversee a nation comprised of several hundred domains (*han*). The*daimyô* lords were accorded a degree of autonomy but were all subject to taxation and other policies aimed at forestalling insurrection or any organized threat to the center in Edo. A system of censorship was put in place, weaponry was confiscated, and movement along the major roads was strictly controlled. The Emperor remained in splendid isolation, together with his imperial entourage, in Kyoto. The Tokugawa political order, which thus shared both feudal and modern characteristics, has been termed 'pre-modern'— *kinsei*, in Japanese. It proved remarkably successful, despite internal contradictions and tensions.
Borrowing from Hideyoshi, Ieyasu put in place an idealized, Confucian-style social hierarchy, with the 'virtuous' samurai class at the top and the 'lowly' merchant class at the bottom. Schooling would be predicated on instruction in Confucian texts and instilling the virtues of duty and obedience— yet another way of reinforcing the regime's legitimacy. Elaborate rules and regulations governed virtually all activities, with the aim of achieving a peaceful and orderly society. The samurai, no longer required to serve in a warrior capacity, were 'repurposed' in administrative posts and as physicians and scholars. Their swords became mere status symbols, and the once-vaunted samurai martial virtues assumed an idealized form in the so-called 'warrior code' of *bushidô*.

The *sakoku* policy of national seclusion in effect relegated Tokugawa Japan to a marginal position in a newly-globalized world order. Among the foreign powers that had access to Japan during the prior period, it was the Dutch that managed to avoid summary expulsion. Their trading mission in far-off Nagasaki, in the form of a small headquarters— Dejima, by name— built in the harbor, would serve as Japan's sole window upon the West for centuries. Western learning— in the form of Dutch and German books on medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and so forth— was highly prized by the Shogunate, which sought a monopoly on this invaluable source of modern knowledge. But others managed to gain access to this scarce commodity, and gradually word spread of new medical procedures, scientific principles, and artistic techniques.

Cities and Merchants A burgeoning Japanese economy, unfettered by domestic strife and disorder, led to the rise of a merchant class— the*chônin*— and the expansion of cities and urban society. Edo, the shogunal capital, grew dramatically, ranking among the world's largest cities by 1700. And Osaka, in the Kansai region to the west, became a fiscal center and home to a vibrant urban market. Money talked, and those who had it were free— notwithstanding the strictures put in place by the authorities— to use it

as they chose. An irrepressibly secular spirit prevailed, and it gave rise to a culture of consumption, entertainment, and pleasure-seeking that inspired many iconic representations of 'traditional Japan.'

Tokugawa Culture and Arts Money talked in Tokugawa Japan. And the *chônin* merchants had plenty of it. Their quest for enjoyment helped foster a distinctive culture ofentertainment centering on thepleasure quarters (*yûkaku*), where fashionable geisha were available to those who could afford them, and kabuki actors plied their trade for the mass of paying customers. Being stylish and in-the-know was all the rage, and the reigning spirit of hedonism and materialism stood in stark contrast to the more lofty samurai values of stoicism and righteous self-denial.

A noteworthy renaissance in the Japanese arts began as of the late-17th century. The so-called Genroku years (1675-1725) are associated with three major figures in fiction, theater, and poetry. Saikaku (1642-93) was an Osaka-based writer whose tales of ill-starred lovers, crass merchants, and the comings-and-goings of ordinary folk caught in a web of desire and delusion earned him a lasting reputation. Chikamatsu (1653-1724) is known as the great playwright of the*bunraku* puppet theater, whose near life-size puppets are manipulated by masked puppeteers. (Together with *kabuki, bunraku* is still performed widely in Japan.) Chikamatsu's 'love-suicide' (*shinjû*) plays, which enact the tragic fate of lovers who must resort to suicide in the hope of rebirth in the Buddhist paradise, are masterpieces of Japanese drama.

The best-known Genroku figure is Bashô (1644-94), an Edo samurai who renounced his pedigree and became a professional poet. He mastered the seventeen-syllable *haiku* form, making it available to all who were moved by the lyrical spirit— not only the elites. Thanks to Bashô— and many generations of poetic disciples whom he has inspired— *haiku* poetry has become a fixture of world literature.

The Tokugawa arts extend in many directions. Woodblock printing achieved a remarkable level of virtuosity, and 'pictures of the floating world' (*ukiyo-e*)— depicting famous actors, courtesans, and scenes of everyday life— have been treasured by collectors around the world for over a century. Traditional residential architecture flourished, with the hallmark *tatami* mats and sliding *shôji* screens. Pottery, lacquerware, *ikebana* flower arrangement, tea ceremony, calligraphy— these and many other arts and crafts flourished during the Tokugawa. Practitioners generally belonged to a formal school, with its own hereditary lineage, and a rigorous master-disciple system of training and apprenticeship. Such training, part of the 'traditionalism' so strongly associated with Japan in the modern day, is still practiced by those devoted to the survival of these arts— including many foreigners.

The Question of Identity The isolation of Tokugawa Japan, together with the Shogunate's officially-sponsored ethical code, can be said to have fostered a distinctive mode of nativist identity and 'Japanese-ness.' Most notably, the so-called 'warrior code' of *bushidô*,and its credo of loyalty, honor, selflessness, and martial spirit, stood as a 'pledge of allegiance' that was built into the fabric of Tokugawa education and civic virtue. This is not to say, however, that these virtues were uniformly internalized by all Japanese.

The notion of samurai honor is most famously represented in accounts based on a historical incident in 1703, when forty-seven retainers of Asano, *daimyô* of the Akô domain, exacted revenge on the shogunal official responsible for the death of their liege lord, whereupon they were obliged to commit ritual suicide (*seppuku*). Collectively referred to as *Chûshingura* (Treasury of Loyal Retainers), accounts of this famous vendetta, which began to appear in the early 18th century, include famous *kabuki* and *bunraku* plays, fiction and poetry, and modern-day film and TV productions. This cultural trove has served both to reinforce the myth of samurai loyalty and self-sacrifice and to call into question its viability in the modern era.

An ideological current in the mid- and late-Tokugawa period sought to counter the dominance of Chinese-based Confucian studies and reaffirm claims to native cultural and spiritual roots. What emerged was the so-called 'Nativist Studies' (*kokugaku*) movement. Centering on the brilliant scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), this intellectual community argued for the crucial significance of foundational Japanese works such as the *Kojiki*, *Man'yôshû,* and the *Tale of Genji*. In addition to laborious textual study and

commentary, the *kokugaku* group also helped promote a discourse of Japanese uniqueness that drew upon Shinto mythology and imperial divinity. This renewed focus on the Emperor as Japan's true sovereign would eventually constitute a serious challenge to the Tokugawa regime itself.

***Bakumatsu*: The Demise of the Shogunal Order** The Tokugawa Shogunate, which had managed for two centuries to oversee a disparate and contentious assemblage of *han* domains and stave off potential challenges by rival *daimyô*, would face the existential challenge of Western expansionism in the 19th century. The *sakoku* policy was successfully enforced until 1853, when American steamships under the command of Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Edo Bay and in effect presented an ultimatum to the Shogun to open up the country. The so-called 'Black Ships' (*kurofune*) returned the next year to conclude their negotiations, and within several years the Shogunate had established diplomatic treaties with the U.S. and other Western powers.

No longer secure behind its 'bamboo curtain,' the Shogunate sent delegations of samurai to America and Europe in what amounts to a 'crash course' in Western civilization. Yet the shogunal system itself would prove incapable of staving off the Western powers and maintaining the status quo. The regime was beset by many challenges— to 'expel the barbarians' (*sonnô jôi*— in effect a thinly-veiled critique of shogunal ineptitude), which was utterly impossible, and to restore the authority and sovereignty of the Emperor, whose symbolic power had been greatly enhanced on account of the *kokugaku* movement. The opportunity was ripe for sworn enemies of the regime— chiefly from the far-off Satsuma and Chôshû domains— to combine in an overthrow of the Shogunate. Following a brief military campaign, the Imperial loyalists— the so-called *shishi*— brought an end to Tokugawa rule and ushered in a new era.

Yet the Tokugawa order, notwithstanding its inability to survive the Western challenge, did pave the way for the nation's transition to modernity. For one thing, its people had achieved a high rate of literacy, thanks to a de facto public education system comprised of schools that were housed in local Buddhist temples (*terakoya*) across the land. The samurai class, in their 'peacetime role' as scholars, physicians, and bureaucrats, helped set the stage for the establishment of modern universities, medical science, and political administration. And their strong work ethic and sense of duty would be recast as a civic value for all Japanese. Finally, the sophisticated and productive Tokugawa mercantile sector facilitated the establishment of modern business and marketing enterprises.

Thus, the Tokugawa period ended not in a revolutionary overthrow of a despotic regime but in an evolutionary restructuring that was the work of far-sighted samurai who willingly relinquished their swords and status in order to bring the nation into the modern era.

Readings

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Discussion Questions and Topics

Tokugawa Japan is a seeming mass of contradictions and incongruities— the official dominance of the samurai and their austere values, versus and the 'unofficial' rule of money and pleasure-seeking; a seemingly strong central authority, versus the fact of a divided and hostile aggregation of *daimyô* domains; the isolated, inward-looking nation, versus its fetish for information about the world; a code of male privilege and patriarchy, versus the reality of ambitious and successful women. What aspects of this fascinatingly complex society and culture most interest you?

The myth of samurai honor and valor is, paradoxically, a product of 'peacetime Japan' during the Tokugawa. How did the myth circulate in the pre-modern period and how would it be reinvented in modern Japan?

Which (if any) of the iconic Tokugawa arts are you particularly drawn to? Which do you find distasteful or simply pointless?

As is the case with samurai culture, the world of Japan's geisha is hierarchical and quite complex. What comparisons can be drawn between these two key domains of Tokugawa— and Japanese— civilization?

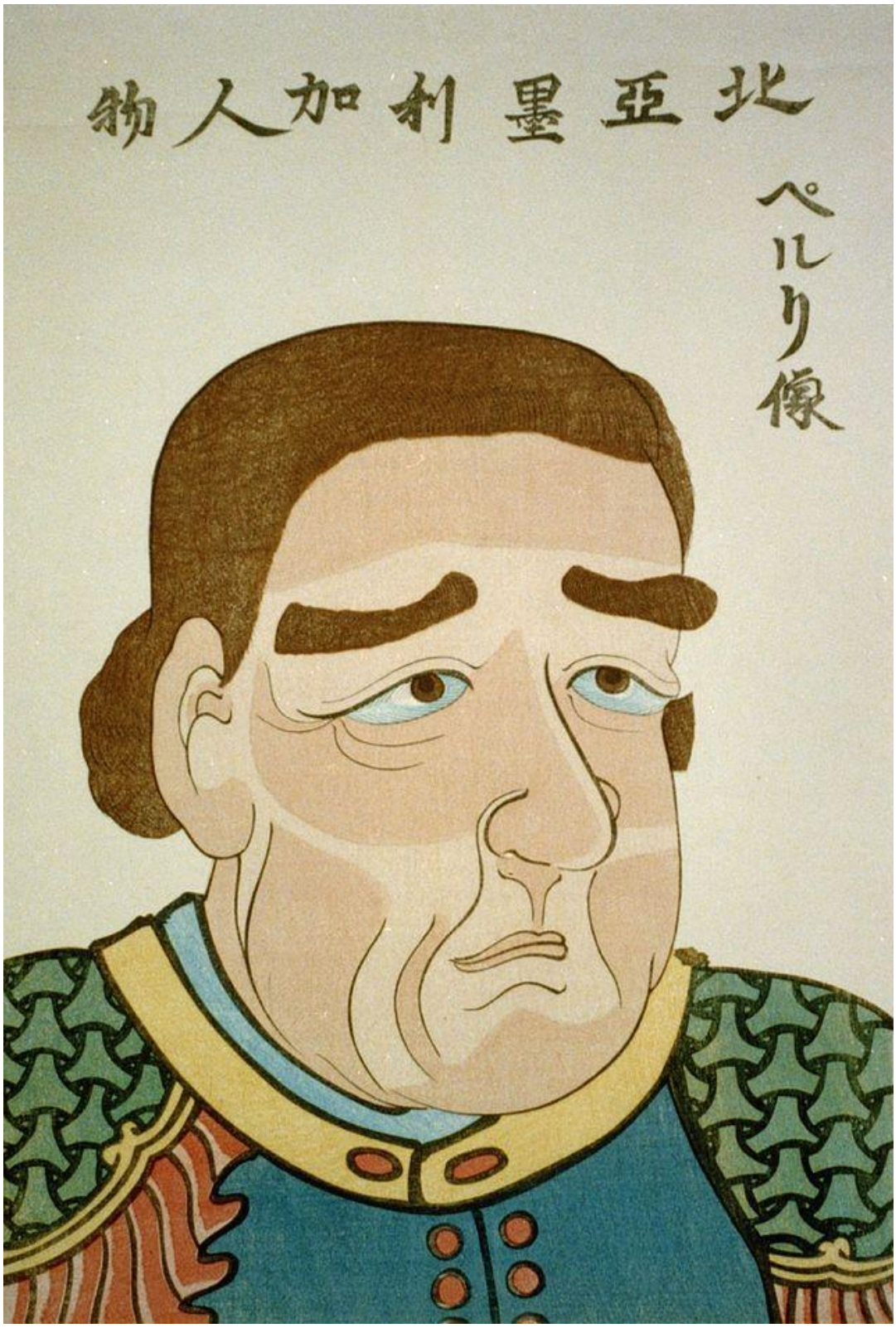
'The ancient pond/ A frog jumps in/ The sound of water' (*furuike ya/ kawazu tobikomu/ mizu no oto*). Some have exalted this haiku poem by Bashô as a gateway to enlightenment; others have dismissed it as seventeen pointless Japanese syllables. How do <u>you</u> 'read' this iconic product of the Tokugawa literary arts?

Images

Woodblock print depiction of a dramatic scene from the *Chûshingura* vendetta tale. (Wikipedia)

Kabuki actor print by the *ukiyo-e* artist Sharaku, 1794 (Wikipedia)

Ukiyo-e print featuring popular geisha, circa 1800 (Wikipedia)



1854 woodblock print of Commodore Perry (Wikipedia)

PART IV : 19TH CENTURY (MEIJI AND THE MAKING OF MODERN JAPAN (1868- 1912))

Overview The story of Japan's transformation in the 19th century from an exotic samurai-infested backwater, 'off the grid' of modern civilization, to a world-class imperial power is arguably unique in world history. The existential challenge presented by the incursion of Western powers was met by a cadre of samurai warriors who renounced their pedigree and exchanged their swords and topknots for tailored suits and Western know-how. With the 1870s, they set to work fashioning a modern nation that could compete on the global stage while retaining a native identity that would resist Western cultural hegemony. The Meiji period oversaw an extraordinary program of modernization, which left a legacy of industrial growth, great cities, modern transportation and communication, universal education, political liberalization, a vigorous economy, and a vibrant social and cultural scene. The nation's center, though, was occupied by a throwback to a mythical past— an Emperor worshipped as a living god. Early on, Meiji leaders promoted a code of ethics that stressed obedience and loyalty, together with a nativist ideology of Japanese exceptionalism and Shinto-inspired reverence. Thus, the Meiji reformulation of the national agenda— and the collective identity of its people— was predicated upon an uneasy marriage of tradition and modernity.

The Meiji Mission The so-called Meiji Restoration (*ishin*) began with the transfer of the imperial center from Kyoto to the erstwhile shogunal castle in Edo, renamed Tokyo— modern Japan's new capital. The Meiji Emperor (1852-1912), a lad in his teens, officially launched the new ship of state by issuing a Charter Oath in 1868— in effect a mission statement that emphasized the need for modern knowledge and broad-based education under the aegis of imperial authority. Here was the basis for a defining Meiji motto: 'Japanese Spirit, Western Know-how'— *wakon yôsai*.

The first order of business was to dismantle the outmoded *baku-han*feudal system, which was accomplished over a period of around five years. The *bushi* class was disenfranchised, and the erstwhile samurai— from lofty daimyo to lowly clerk— would now have to compete within the new economic order. Some succeeded, others failed. The yen was established as the national currency, and a modern postal system was established. The Western solar calendar was adopted, as was standard clock time, the modern work week, and other accommodations with international economic, political, and technological standards.

The erstwhile *han*domains were reconfigured as prefectures (*ken*), and these lands were placed under national jurisdiction. Tokyo was the new seat of government, and its reconstruction

as a Western-style capital became a tangible symbol of the Meiji vision for the new nation. On the economic front, the government invested heavily in order to stimulate industrial growth, trade, and business activity.

Bunmei kaika Under the rallying-cry of *bunmei kaika*— 'Civilization and Enlightenment'— Meiji leaders set about creating a nation that emulated and assimilated the institutions, expertise, and collective knowledge of the West. Technical specialists from Europe and the U.S. were brought in as mentors, and many Japanese went abroad to learn at the source. The 1870s witnessed the advent of modern transportation, in the form of a rail system that initially linked Tokyo and Yokohama and expanded to provide, by the turn of the 20th century, an unprecedented freedom of movement for the Japanese. Modern communications— telegraph, then telephone— were established, and the advent of mass media— newspapers, journals, and large-scale publishing enterprises— in effect created a nation of readers with a shared access to news, information, and ideas. The new Education Ministry— *Monbushô*— was tasked with creating a national educational system on the Western model, with up-to-date curricula that included math, science, history, literature, and the arts. Higher education was established in the form of both national and private universities— most of which were located in Tokyo.

A secular gospel of 'enlightenment' values was promoted by an important coterie of Meiji intellectuals. Its key proponent was Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), who established a leading private university and newspaper— in a manner reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin— and ardently espoused egalitarianism, rationalism, empirical science, and civil rights. Japan's avatar of modern civilization, Fukuzawa's image adorns the nation's 10,000 yen banknote.

In terms of consumerism and 'lifestyle,' the material culture of the West— from clothing and hairstyles to household goods, foods, and entertainment— was introduced and adapted to Japanese tastes. Overall, Western styles appealed mainly to the new urban middle class, and the divide between urban and rural society— in material, social, and cultural terms— became increasingly marked. The famous Ginza shopping street in central Tokyo became the nation's consumer showcase and a tangible symbol of the nation's drive to Westernize.

As for their political strategy, Meiji leaders adopted the Western parliamentary model— a constitutional government, a system of ministries and legislative body (the Diet, or *kokkai*) at the national level, political parties, and a modern judicial system. It took several decades to implement the full range of political bodies. The establishment of a party system, an electoral process (male-only), and the dissemination of the new political ideology among the Japanese populace proved time-consuming, insofar as the very notions of— and words for— liberty, freedom, civil rights, and social justice were essentially unknown prior to the Meiji period.

Behind the façade of Western political innovation, however, Meiji politics was heavily manipulated by a small oligarchy— the so-called '*genrô*'— who pulled the levers of power behind the scenes. This is a familiar pattern in Japanese political history, and it would have serious implications for the newly-modernized nation.

Fukoku kyôhei Meiji Japan was essentially the product of two overriding objectives—industrial and economic growth, and imperial expansion. This is the upshot of the famousmotto, *fukoku kyôhei*— 'Wealthy Nation, Strong Military.' Accumulation of wealth was indeed promoted among the rising middle class, in line with the newly-coined virtue of ambition and success-striving— *risshin shusse*. But it was the imperial nation itself that was to be the principal beneficiary of economic expansion. Moreover, the creation of a modern army and navy was a top priority, a military force that would be manned by conscripted soldiers drawn from the general population.

This 'democratization' of Japan's military was a radical departurefrom the age-old samurai monopoly of the martial domain. An early military engagement, the so-called Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, pitted the new conscript army against a recalcitrant samurai force under the leadership of Saigô Takamori (1828-1877). Refusing to be coopted by the new political regime and proudly hoisting the samurai banner in the face of the juggernaut of modernization, this force went down to defeat. And Saigô, its legendary leader, has since been immortalized as Japan's 'Last Samurai.' The Hollywood version, with Tom Cruise improbably leading the charge, is very loosely based on this important chapter of early Meiji history.

Meiji Culture and Arts Key to the Meiji cultural mission was the role of translation— with English having displaced Dutch as the target language. Gaining knowledge, across the spectrum of arts and sciences, required the translation of texts, and this in turn became a strong incentive for many to go abroad for their studies— and for first-hand experience of the West. What resulted was a new paradigm of cultural bifurcation— in place of the old *wa-kan* division of native and Chinese styles and genres, there emerged a '*wa-yô*' binary of native and Western styles and genres. An important contribution was made by the Christian missions that flourished during the Meiji, with the advent of a new openness to religious diversity. Mission schools became important outlets for modern education, English-language study, and a Christian humanism that derived from Bible study.

In the literary domain, Meiji writers were drawn to Western models of fiction, poetry, and drama, and some— for instance, Mori Ôgai (1862-1922) and Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916)— emerged as culture critics and public intellectuals in the periodical press, which expanded as of the 1890s.

The Meiji in Retrospect Meiji history is fascinating in many respects. It was punctuated by two wars of empire— against China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-05). Both involved military victory for Japan and the acquisition of colonial territories and concessions, although the Russo-Japanese War came at a great cost of blood and treasure. In retrospect, these wars were rehearsals for what proved to be the ultimate test of Japan's imperial ambitions. But the Meiji transformation is equally noteworthy on the economic

and social level— the advent of a new industrial and commercial order, with an educated and skilled urban-based citizenry. The death of the Meiji Emperor in July of 1912 was a watershed in the nation's history. And on September 13, the day of his state funeral, Japan's leading military figure, General Nogi Maresuke (1849-1912), took his life in an archaic gesture of samurai fealty known as *junshi*— ritual disembowelment to honor one's liege lord. This seeming anachronism fueled widespread debate concerning the character of the Japanese people, the specter of their samurai legacy, and the question of a modern national identity.

By 1912, Japan had emerged as a world power, albeit not on a par with the Western powers. The nation had achieved a remarkable level of modernization, leveraging Western know-how and fostering a strong sense of cultural uniqueness and national pride. The old Tokugawa order was initially spurned, in favor of rampant Westernization, but as of the 1890s there was a rebirth of nativist sentiment and a revalidation of traditionalism. The newly-imported individualism and egalitarianism vied with the strong collectivist values promoted by the state and its support for an imperialist ideology bolstered by Shinto symbols and myths. Foreign goods, ideas, and fads were widely popular, but foreigners per se were not easily integrated into the society. The Meiji Constitution of 1890, which set forth the framework for a free and independent citizenry, was in effect countered by a state-sponsored dogma of allegiance to the Emperor.

Much as the courtly splendor of the Heian Period was captured in Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*, the complex and conflicted 'spirit of the Meiji' is epitomized in Natsume Sôseki's 1914 novel, *Kokoro*, through its ill-fated protagonist, Sensei— a 'Meiji man' par excellence.

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Discussion Questions and Topics

In what sense is Meiji Japan a crossroads of traditionalism and modernity? What developments during the 1890s contributed to the emergence of Japan as a modern imperial state with a dual identity?

How does Meiji Japan most resemble the Tokugawa regime? How is it most different?

How did the Meiji leaders manipulate the Emperor as the defining symbol of the new nation? How did Shinto emerge as a state-sponsored religion? In what sense can the Meiji leaders be said to have adapted the *bushidô* code to a modern context?

Meiji writers and intellectuals have been seen as both complicit with, and critical of, the social and political order. Using Natsume Sôseki's *Kokoro* as a case in point, give thought to the character of individuals caught in circumstances that test their identity and values.

Compare Japan's two imperial wars fought during the Meiji period— first against China, then Russia.

Selection from Natsume Sôseki, *Kokoro* (1914)

“Don’t put too much trust in me,” Sensei remarked. “You will learn to regret it if you do. . .”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“The memory that you once sat at my feet will begin to haunt you and, in bitterness and shame, you will want to degrade me. I do not want your admiration now, because I do not want your insults in the future. I bear with my loneliness now, in order to avoid greater loneliness in the years ahead. You see, loneliness is the price we have to pay for being born in this modern age, so full of freedom, independence, and our own egotistical selves.”

(Based on Edwin McClellan’s translation of *Kokoro* (Regnery, 1957, p 30)

Images

Meiji Emperor, in a mid-1880s illustration (Wikipedia)

Fukuzawa Yukichi, as his image appears on the 10,000 yen Japanese banknote (Wikipedia)

Photograph of Natsume Sôseki (1867-1916) in his mid-40s (Wikipedia)

Model of the Ginza, circa 1880, housed in the Tokyo-Edo Museum (Wikipedia)

Woodblock print of Chinese surrender to Japanese forces, October 1894, during the Sino-Japanese War (Wikipedia)

SECTION V : 20TH CENTURY

PART I **: Early 20th Century (IMPERIAL JAPAN AND ITS FATE (1912- 1945))**

Overview The three decades that followed the end of the Meiji period witnessed dramatic economic and social advances and reversals, which reflected both the vicissitudes of the global order— for instance, World War One and the great depression of the late 1920s— and concurrent developments within Japanese society. These would culminate in a protracted military adventure that yielded catastrophic consequences. A product of the Meiji modernization project, Japan's imperial system and military establishment were a dominant presence. Yet the 1920s was a time of progressive political and social movements and a burgeoning marketplace for popular entertainment and leisure.

The contradictions and tensions inherent in Japan's imperial nationhood are in a sense entirely congruent with the nation's historical development— in particular, the legacy of the Tokugawa authoritarian regime and its enforced insularity. But the Japanese people understood their world and essentially wished no more than to be able to live good and comfortable lives. How, then, are we to make sense of this interesting 'first act' of a modern Japan typically presented as a drama in two acts— the prewar Act One (1868-1945) and the postwar Act Two, with its own complex history?

The Taishô Years (1912-1926) The fourteen-year reign of the Taishô Emperor was built upon the remarkable economic and industrial expansion achieved during the Meiji years. Of particular note is the rise of the great industrial cartels— the *zaibatsu*— which served as engines of development and, ultimately, military expansionism. Having acquired colonial territories— Taiwan and Korea, most notably— in the wake of the two Meiji-era wars, Japan had become a legitimate imperial state— Asia's first— and its leaders continued to promote the so-called *kokutai* ideology of Japanese exceptionalism. State-sponsored Shinto served as its chief vehicle. World War One brought important economic gains, but the resulting inflationary spiral resulted in serious rioting in 1918. A far more serious shock was the great Kanto Earthquake, which essentially leveled the city of Tokyo and environs on September 1, 1923. The massive rebuilding project eventuated in a city with a much-improved urban infrastructure— including a subway system that would spur the city's growth. On the diplomatic front, the 1924 Asian Exclusion Act signed into law in the U.S., which essentially barred Japanese migration, served as a serious affront and fomented anti-American sentiment.

On the domestic front, Taishô society was marked by distinctly liberal and progressive trends, together with a booming domestic economy and rising living standards. People's rights were advocated, and a relatively unfettered left-wing activism yielded a number of Marxist and socialist coteries and an active proletarian literature movement. Universal male suffrage was granted in 1925, whereby the electorate expanded from 3 million to 14 million. What became referred to as 'Taishô Democracy' was marked by a dramatic expansion of mass media and popular entertainment. Countering the Meiji-era ethos of female subservience, epitomized by the dictum of 'good wife, wise mother' (*ryôsaikenbo*), a liberationist discourse emerged during the Taishô era, inspired by the feminist Hiratsuka Raichô (1886-1971). But the nascent feminist movement was countered by deep-rooted norms supporting traditional gender roles.

Reminiscent of the Tokugawa-era pleasure seeking of the *chônin* townsfolk, Taishô society— principally young city dwellers with disposable income— reveled in leisure and self-indulgence. Modeling the American Roaring Twenties as represented in Hollywood movies and popular magazines, young people flocked to the popular dance halls, jazz bars, and coffee houses sporting stylish hairdos and the newest fashions. The so-called '*moga*'— modern girl— became a Taishô cultural icon, and Japan's obsession with the 'Western look' would be brilliantly satirized in TanizakiJun'ichirô's 1924 novel, *Naomi*.

Sports such as baseball, tennis, golf enjoyed widespread popularity, as did tourism. Mountaineering in the Japan Alps became a major attraction, and foreign visitors to Japan increased in number. Moreover, the arts scene was vibrant across the spectrum, with Japanese music, literature, painting, and theater reflecting the influence of international trends and fads. Moreover, a dramatic expansion of Japan's publishing industry in the 1920s led to the mass marketing of inexpensive books and periodicals, which fed a demand for lowbrow literature and trendy magazines.

In part as a reaction against the rising tide of Taishô popular-culture and liberal trends, the government passed a conservative Peace Preservation Law in 1925, which sought to reinforce nativist ideology and stem what was regarded as an alarming rise of individualism and political leftism. In retrospect, this would be an ominous development.

The Early Shôwa Years and the Fate of Empire

The death of the Taishô Emperor in 1926 ushered in a new era, overseen by the Shôwa Emperor Hirohito, whose sixty-three year reign would encompass an epochal period in the nation's history. The imperial state took a distinctly militarist turn in 1931, with a staged invasion of Manchuria that served as a prelude to the establishment of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo in 1932. Japan's colonial presence in Manchuria expanded dramatically, and an increasingly militarist political agenda on the home front impelled the nation toward war with China. The 1930s was marked by ultra-nationalist rhetoric, anti-Westernism, and the rise of patriotic organizations and propaganda.

A turning point occurred on February 26, 1936, when the ultra-conservative 'Imperial Way' faction (*kôdôha*) staged a coup— involving targeted political assassinations— that sought to purify the nation and restore the Emperor to his rightful place as sovereign. The attempted coup failed, but it both reflected and reinforced the relentless chauvinist agenda.

With the 1930s, the expressions of Taishô liberalism were systematically undercut by government decree. Left-wing activism was essentially banned, and those regarded as political radicals were essentially forced to renounce their subversive ideas, in a policy of 'conversion' called *tenkô*. Those who refused to do so suffered harsh consequences; for instance, the proletarian author Kobayashi Takiji (1903-33) was taken into police custody and ultimately murdered by the authorities.

Paralleling the situation in Weimar Germany prior to the rise of the Nazi regime, life in Japan during the early Shôwa years appeared surprisingly normal. The cultural and social scene was quite active, with crowded movie theaters, baseball stadiums, and the gamut of popular entertainments. Girlie shows and other erotic fantasies were in vogue, and the nation was gaga over the 1934 visit of the New York Yankees and Babe Ruth. This, however, would be the calm before the storm.

War In July 1937, Japanese soldiers crossed the Marco Polo bridge into Chinese territory and fomented a military encounter that led to a full-scale invasion of China— the second Sino-Japanese war. A national mobilization of troops ensued, and Japan embarked upon a war that would last eight years and expand well beyond the territory of China. The military regime essentially mandated the *kokutai* dogma of 'pure Japanese spirit' in 1937 and renounced Western influence and ideas— all the while building up its military arsenal. In 1938, the Konoe cabinet issued its plans for a 'Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere,' which sought to justify Japan's military expansionism under the rubric of a benevolent pan-Asianism.

In 1940, Japan joined the Axis powers, allying itself with Germany and Italy. A year earlier, President Roosevelt, concerned about Japan's military incursions into the South Pacific, had authorized a blockade of Japanese shipping. The stage was thus set for a confrontation between the two nations, which came in the form of Japan's preemptive attack on Pearl Harbor. December 7, 1941— the day that Roosevelt famously declared would 'live in infamy'— ushered in the Pacific War, and essentially sealed the fate of Japan's imperial adventure.

The Pacific War engaged the entire Japanese nation— both those on the front lines and on the home front. But despite the official ideology of superiority and invincibility, Japan was woefully outmatched by the resources of the American and Allied forces. Anti-Japanese sentiment in the U.S., together with serious security concerns, led to the internment of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast, as dictated by Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066— a regrettable chapter in American history.

For many, Japan is of interest only in the context of World War Two, and accounts of the Pacific theater— including a spate of war films that demonize the insidious Japanese enemy— are legion. Japan's wartime expansion into Burma, Indochina, Borneo, and the Philippines is well documented. The Battle of Midway (1942) can be said to have turned the tide, insofar as the Japanese navy would be rendered incapable of resisting the Allied naval forces. Japan's access to vital resources dwindled, and the homeland was subject to increased air attacks as of 1944. *Kamikaze* missions, invoking the time-worn invincibility legend, were doomed to failure. The carpet bombing of Tokyo by B-29 Super-fortresses in March of 1945 essentially laid waste to the Japanese capital; indeed, few major Japanese cities were spared. The Allied advance led to the horrendously bloody battle for Okinawa, as prelude to a strategic assault on the home islands. But rather than pursue what was judged to be an unacceptably protracted and costly war with a fiercely determined enemy, the product of the top-secret Manhattan Project— in the form of two atomic bombs— were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August of 1945. The 'shock and awe' of nuclear devastation brought to an abrupt end the war that Japan's military leaders had long known was lost. On August 14, the Emperor announced the nation's unconditional surrender in a memorable radio broadcast— the very first time the Emperor's voice was made public. The formal surrender documents were signed on September 2, aboard the U.S. battleship *Missouri.*

Having been comprehensively defeated, with its major cities laid waste, millions of its people killed and maimed, and the dreams of empire reduced to rubble and radioactive waste, the Japanese people faced an unimaginably bleak future at the hands of the enemy occupation force. The story of the nation's postwar recovery and reinvention is yet another chapter in the improbable Japanese saga.

Readings

Dower, John, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (Pantheon, 1986)

Gordon, Andrew, *A Modern History of Japan* (Oxford, 2014), 138-223

Varley, Paul, *Japanese Culture* (Hawaii, 2000), 235-303

Discussion Questions and Topics

In the same sense that the Tokugawa period can be said to have paved the way for the Meiji Restoration, Japan's imperial state can be said to be an outgrowth of Meiji ideology and institutions. Comment on this proposition.

In the final analysis, are we to regard imperial Japan an aberration, which required the 'corrective' of defeat in war? How are we to assess the role of the Emperor here?

Weimar Germany has been mentioned as an analogue of imperial Japan. How closely do they resemble each other?

Our obsession with the military history of modern Japan and its representation in film and other media has been noted. Do you agree with this view? What aspects of prewar Japan have you been drawn to? What areas would you want to pursue?

Excerpt from TanizakiJun'ichirô, *Naomi* (Chijin no ai, 1924)

> Naomi, who was only in fifteen when I met her, had a very Western name, and her resemblance to the motion-picture actress Mary Pickford made her look very Western as well. This isn't just my own biased view. Many others say so, even now that she is my wife. It must be true. And it's not only her face— even her body has a distinctly Western look when she's naked. I didn't learn this until later, of course. At the time, I could only imagine the beauty of her limbs from the stylish way she wore her kimono.
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> --Based on the translation by Anthony Chambers (Vintage International, 1985, p 4)

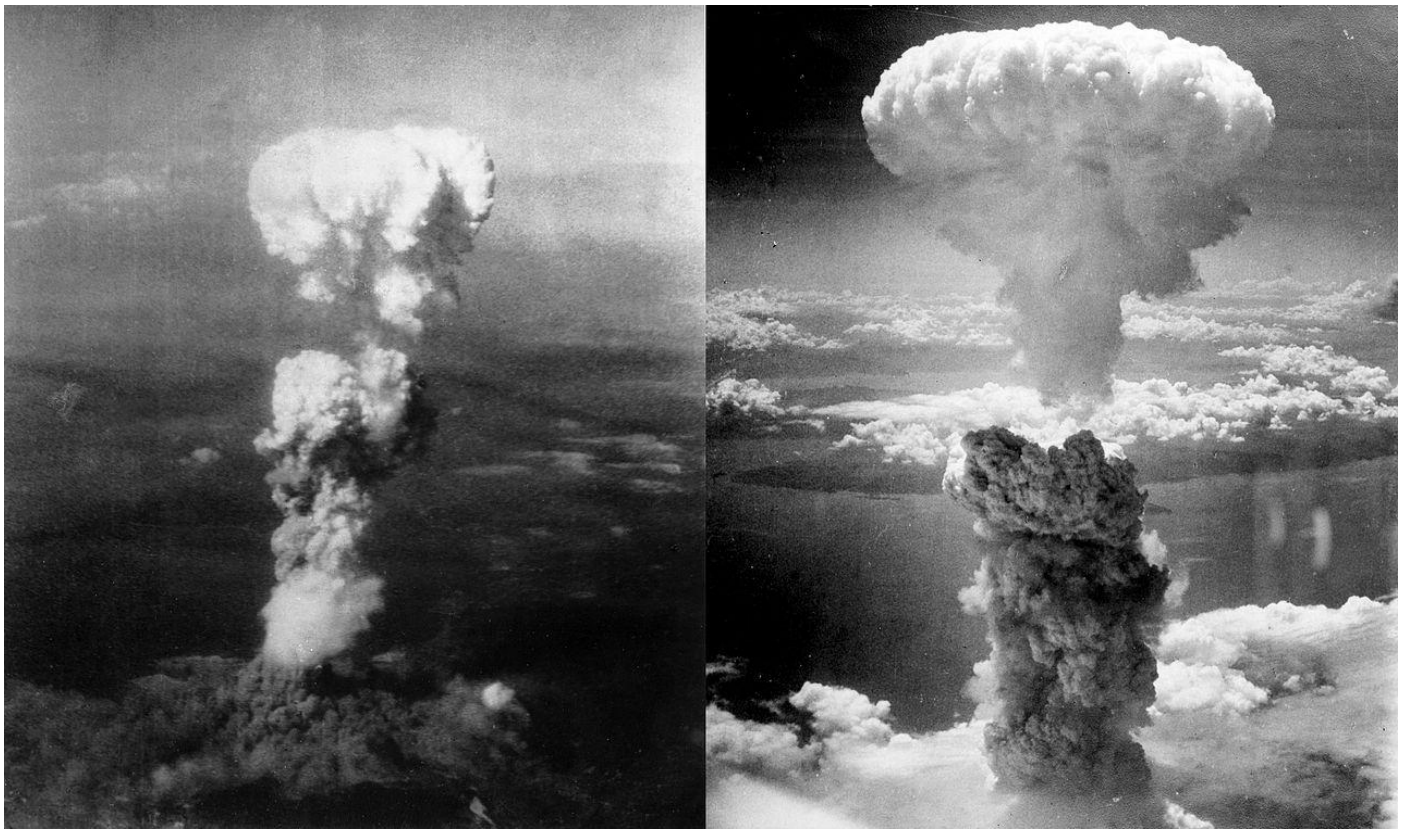
Images

View of central Yokohama following the catastrophic 1923 earthquake (Wikipedia)

Photograph of Ginza Line subway car, early Shôwaperiod (Wikipedia)

‘*Moga*’ (Modern girl) image, from a 2012 Japan Society exhibition, *Deco Japan: Shaping Art and Culture, 1920-1945*

Photography of Puyi, puppet emperor of Manchukuo (Wikipedia)



Twin nuclear mushrooms of August 1945: over Hiroshima (left) and Nagasaki (right) (Wikipedia)

PART II : LATE 20TH CENTURY (POSTWAR AND CONTEMPORARY JAPAN (1945- PRESENT))

Overview Comprehending Japan's remarkable trajectory since the cataclysmic fate of its empire in the Pacific War is no easy task. The nation required a fundamental 'reboot' in the wake of its comprehensive defeat, and this would be accomplished thanks to the terms of its postwar relationship with the erstwhile enemy. The American Occupation essentially set the stage for a recovery that, from the perspective of the late 1940s, was hardly imaginable. Yet the loss of empire and an 'imperial identity' took a spiritual toll. The rise of Japan as an economic power, then superpower, has been widely documented, as has its long stagnation following the bursting economic bubble in the early 1990s. The Fukushima catastrophe of 2011 has become yet another watershed in a fraught modern history, and the nation's future is clouded by the specter of a declining population, strained relations with its neighbors in East Asia, chronic fiscal and political malaise, declining educational standards, and what many regard as a dispirited outlook on the part of the Japanese people. Despite a productive economy and a basically sound civil society, the nation faces daunting challenges. For better or worse, Japan's future is inexorably connected with regional and global developments with which it must cope.

The Occupation (1945-1952) The seven-year American Occupation, overseen by Douglas MacArthur, reset the compass of postwar Japan. The authorities systematically dismantled the Japanese military and purged its upper echelons through the Tokyo War Crimes Trials (1946-48). A new constitution (1947), which radically revised the Meiji constitution, became the blueprint for a democratic society. Women now had the vote, political parties were revived, the prewar aristocratic class was disenfranchised, labor unions were reestablished, and the educational system was reformed. Article Nine of the constitution— still hotly debated— renounced Japanese belligerency, owing to fears of a resurgent militarism, and instilled a 'peace agenda.' In 1952, however, in the wake of the Korean War, a Self-Defense Force (*Jieitai*) was established, and this would gradually expand into a large and sophisticated military establishment. The demilitarization agenda, in other words, was rethought amid American concerns regarding its Pacific interests. These concerns resulted in a 'reverse course' policy, whereby Japan would be deployed as a bulwark against possible encroachment by the Soviet Union and Communist China. In short, Japan's postwar history has been conditioned by its critical relationship with the United States, and the question of the nation's military role remains unresolved.

Recovery and Resurgence: The Fifties With the formal end of the Occupation in 1952, the political and economic institutions were in place to facilitate the nation's rebuilding. The Korean War (1950-53) proved to be a windfall for Japanese industry, which provisioned the American military, and the 'made-in-Japan' label, initially derided as a sign of cheap, inferior goods, gradually became a mark of quality and state-of-the-art technology. The security treaty signed with the U.S. called for an indefinite American military presence, in the form of numerous bases located on Japanese soil. Party politics re-emerged, with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) assuming a dominant position, which it would maintain with several exceptions up to the present day. Japan's joining the United Nations in 1956 betokened its reintegration into the community of nations. And the 1959 marriage of the Crown Prince to a commoner stood as an unprecedented 'normalization' of the imperial line and the postwar status of the Emperor as figurehead.

Literary and Cultural Revival Thanks in part to the postwar democratization program, Japan witnessed a golden age of arts, culture, and intellectual activity in the Fifties. Freed from the constraints of the authoritarian order, cultural activity flourished across the spectrum. In the literary domain, 'old guard' writers whose careers were held in abeyance during the war— Kawabata Yasunari and TanizakiJun'ichirô, among others— reemerged on the literary scene. Noted film directors such as Kurosawa Akira, Mizoguchi Kenji, and OzuYasujirô produced some of their finest work at this time. A new genre of literature that reflected upon the nation's wartime experience and the horrors of nuclear devastation provided an outlet for unprecedented personal and political expression. Novels such as ÔokaShôhei's*Fires on the Plain* (1952) and IbuseMasuji's*Black Rain* (1964) brilliantly captured both the horrific 'endgame' of the Japanese empire and the qualities of endurance that sustain its people.

The postwar era also gave rise to a new generation of writers, both men and women, whose work explores the period from a variety of perspectives and depicts the new social order— in particular, the rise of an urban middle class centering on the nuclear family, and the liberation of women. Authors such as Abe Kôbô, Yukio Mishima, ÔeKenzaburô, and EnchiFumiko depicted the radically new social and cultural terrain.

Seeking to recognize the value of traditional arts and their practitioners and as a bulwark against the headlong postwar expansionism and consumerism, the Japanese government instituted a new program identifying 'Important Cultural Properties' and 'National Treasures'— including individual practitioners who have achieved distinction as craftsmen and performing artists— the so called 'Living National Treasures.' There are approximately one hundred and twenty current holders of this prestigious title.

Hence, postwar Japan witnessed a renewed interplay of traditionalism and modernization, which had characterized the Meiji and subsequent prewar period.

The Transformational Sixties and Seventies The juggernaut of progress and expansion picked up steam in the 1960s, a time of breathtaking economic and technological development that all but erased the specter of wartime privation and cataclysmic defeat. Educational achievement was expected to pay off in the form of a secure position as a white collar '*sarariman*' with a good company. Women were increasingly represented in the labor force, but social norms privileged marriage and child-rearing. Mothers were expected to handle the household economy, support their husbands, and serve as dedicated 'education moms.' Consumerism was rife, and improved living standards became the order of the day. Arduous household labor was steadily replaced by new and improved appliances— rice cookers, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, and washing machines. People aspired to owning an automobile and a private home. Televisions became ubiquitous. Increasingly, Japan became a nation of city dwellers. Rural areas were correspondingly less able to sustain a viable economic base, which hastened the pace of urban migration.

Japan's remarkable recovery is epitomized by two watershed events of 1964: The inauguration of the *Shinkansen* (Bullet Train) service, which became the world's standard; and the Tokyo Olympics, which showcased the nation's new face for a global audience. In the cultural domain, 1968 witnessed the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Kawabata Yasunari, a writer celebrated for his evocations of Japan's great lyrical tradition. But the erstwhile dominance of elitist, serious literature was challenged by the rising tide of popular culture and mass media.

The Seventies were ushered in with another spectacle that placed Japan's second largest city in the limelight— the International Exposition held in Osaka. 1970 also witnessed the shocking spectacle of the ritual suicide (*seppuku*) of Mishima Yukio, a brilliant and highly controversial writer. Mishima's suicide can be seen as a protest against the crass materialism and emptiness of postwar Japan, which had lost its spiritual core in the wake of its defeat in the Pacific War. And in 1972, Kawabata took his own life. For some, the demise of these two monumental figures marked the demise of a truly distinctive Japanese literature.

1972 also witnessed the reversion of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty— thereby marking the final phase of the postwar era. The extraordinary economic growth of the Seventies generated ever higher incomes and living standards, together with a renewed pride in one's nation and its qualities of endurance and achievement. A flood of publications touting the uniqueness of Japanese culture and its people— collectively referred to as '*Nihonjinron*'— or 'discourses on the Japanese'— reflected the exuberant and self-congratulatory spirit of the times.

Century's End: The Eighties and Nineties The 'miracle economy' continued apace through the Seventies and into the Eighties. Ezra Vogel's 1980 best-seller, *Japan as Number One*, in effect confirmed the nation's stature as global economic powerhouse and marked the dawn of 'Japan Incorporated.' The 1980s would give rise to huge trade surpluses, which many attributed to the rise of the *keiretsu* corporate cartels, the powerful trading companies, and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI).

Attention worldwide was paid to the 'unique' Japanese company— *kaisha*— and its cadres of dedicated and relentless corporate warriors. Japan observers also turned their attention to the nation's highly efficient and achievement-oriented educational system, in search of the key to the nation's remarkable successes and its stable, seemingly harmonious social order. Many Americans, resentful at what they

insisted were Japan's unfair, predatory business practices, resorted to'Japan bashing' and contributed to a souring of Japan-American relations.

The end of the decade witnessed several watershed events: the death of Hirohito, the Shôwa Emperor, in 1989, and the bursting of Japan's economic bubble, which set in motion a downward economic spiral and a gradual and painful fiscal restructuring. A troubling sense of societal drift was only aggravated by shocking events that occurred in rapid succession— the devastating Hanshin earthquake that leveled much of the city of Kobe in January, 1995; and the *sarin* gas attacks carried out by the fringe Aum sect in March of that year. The latter event, which involved the gratuitous murder of fellow Japanese, stunned a nation inured to facile notions of harmony and social order. The economic slump continued unabated, and political leadership proved incapable of reversing the tide. In the meantime, China's star was rising and tensions between the two nations, centering on territorial disputes, increased. This was true of relations with Korea (both North and South) as well.

In contrast with the economic and political challenges it faced, Japan assumed a leading role in the arts, crafts, fashion, and popular culture. Its preeminence in the world of *anime*, centering on the work of Miyazaki Hayao, was widely acknowledged. Yet there was a corresponding decline in the market for serious literature and a troubling sense that the burgeoning social media and incessant marketing schemes and consumer fetishism had adulterated the national discourse. Pessimistic assessments of the nation's aimless youth and eroding educational standards became standard fare in the public media.

The turn of the 21st century was met with dire demographic projections of an unsustainable future, stemming from the rapidly aging population and seemingly irreversible decline in birth rates. Yet the economy has remained strong, despite China's rapid ascent and the absence of a vigorous political agenda.

Then, on March 11, 2011, a major earthquake unleashed a giant *tsunami* that wrought unimaginable destruction along the Tohoku coastline of northeastern Honshu, wiping out entire villages and killing tens of thousands. The *tsunami* also disabled the nuclear power plant at Fukushima and rendered the surrounding area unlivable due to nuclear contamination. The material and intangible cost of this singular catastrophe has left an indelible mark on the affected region and the nation at large.

Yet the Japanese people have come together in strong, unqualified support of the Fukushima victims, once again evoking the '*ganbaru*' spirit of endurance and fortitude in the face of adversity. Japan today is anything but a defeated, dispirited nation, in spite of its daunting challenges and the chronic lack of creative and effective political leadership. The current Prime Minister, Abe Shinzô, has rallied the conservative base with his nationalist agenda, and there is strong support for Japan's candidacy for a seat on the UN Security Council. And Japanese commercial and technological endeavors have made impressive advances.

As for Japan's likely passage through the 21st century— this is anyone's guess, of course. But the energy, resilience, and determination of its people will serve the nation well, come what may.

Readings

Dower, John, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (Norton, 1999)

Gordon, Andrew, *A Modern History of Japan* (Oxford, 2014, 3rd edition), 224-354

Kingston, Jeff (ed.), *Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan* (Routledge, 2014)

Discussion Questions and Topics

Compare and contrast Japan's situation in the aftermath of the Pacific War and in the present day.

How might one assess the enduring influence of 'traditionalism' in present-day Japan, given the inexorable spread of globalizing forces, social media, and the internet?

How do postwar and modern literature and film reflect the nation's transformation in the second half of the twentieth century? How does Japanese society in the early twenty-first century compare with the early twentieth century?

In what sense can the Fukushima disaster be regarded as a 'watershed' event? Give thought to the range of ramifications that the disaster has generated. How can the impact be assessed?

What criteria should be used to judge the status of the Japan-America relationship? What of Japan's relations with its East-Asian neighbors?

Images

General Douglas MacArthur and Emperor Hirohito: September, 1945 (Wikipedia)

Mount Fuji with Tokyo-bound *Shinkansen*Bullet Train in foreground, 2006 (Wikipedia)

Night view of central Tokyo, 2014 (Wikimedia Commons)

Kawabata Yasunari, Japan’s first Nobel laureate in literature, at his desk, 1946 (Wikipedia)

What remains of a Tohoku coastal town in the aftermath of the March 11, 2011 *tsunami* (European Pressphoto Agency)