

3 Japan

Introduction

Something of a geographic anomaly, Japan is a string of four main islands (from south to north—Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu and Hokkaido) and thousands of small ones that stretch over 3,000 km southwest to northeast. The Sea of Japan (East Sea) separates the Japanese archipelago from the Asian mainland. At 377,000 km², the country is larger than Germany and Great Britain. Japan is divided into 8 regions and 47 prefectures or administrative districts. Its northern tip lies at a similar latitude to southern Quebec, or slightly above that of Detroit, Michigan; the most southerly point is at the same latitude as the Bahamas, or central Mexico. Japan's nearest neighbours are South Korea to the west (the Tsushima Strait off Kyushu is only 200 km from the Korean peninsula), China to the west and south and Russia to the west and north (see Figure 3.1).

Over half of the country is mountainous—the Japanese Alps, a series of mountain ranges, bisect the island of Honshu—and covered with forests. As a result, the population is concentrated on the plains and along the coast. The capital of Tokyo is the world's most populous metropolitan area with more than 38 million residents. Japan has limited arable land; a good portion of the arable land it does have is on the northern island of Hokkaido. The country sits quite literally on shaky ground, at the confluence of four major tectonic plates, which created a land of mountains, volcanoes and ancient craters. Since a remarkable 10 percent of the world's active volcanoes are in Japan, it is hardly surprising that the nation has a long history of earthquakes, landslides and tsunamis.

In 2019, Japan had the 11th largest population in the world at 126.8 million. Since 2011, following years of slow growth, Japan's population began to decline sharply, caused by a low birth rate, minimal immigration and an ageing population. In 2020, about 27 percent of the Japanese population is over 65 years old. Japan is one of the most ethnically homogenous countries on the planet: 98.1 percent Japanese, 0.5 percent Korean, 0.4 percent Chinese, and 1 percent other (CIA World Factbook, n.d.). This homogeneity is maintained at least partially by the country's nationality law, which determines nationality according to that of one's parents not to one's nation of birth. Because of this law, children born to foreigners in Japan do not automatically receive Japanese citizenship. The law has major implications for the majority of the 800,000 Koreans who live in Japan who are *Zainichi* Koreans. Although *Zainichi* means "Japan resident" and implies a temporariness, *Zainichi* Koreans are long-term Japan residents who have descended from people who came to Japan before 1945, many as forced labourers during World War II. (The other ethnic Koreans living in Japan emigrated to Japan from South Korea post 1945.) *Zainichi* Koreans—second, third or later generations



Figure 3.1 Map of Japan.

of children born and resident in Japan for their entire lives—must apply to become Japanese citizens. Unfortunately, Koreans in Japan often face discrimination, racism and prejudice.

Japan has several other minority groups, including the Ainu, Indigenous peoples only officially recognized as such in 2019. The approximately 25,000 Ainu people (there are up to 200,000 people of Ainu ancestry) live in Hokkaido, the Kurile Islands and the southern part of Sakhalin Island. Other minority groups include the Ryukyuans, who have their own language and a distinct culture, with 1.3 million living on the Okinawan islands and another 300,000 in other parts of Japan. Less well known are the *burakumin*, ethnically Japanese people whose ancestors worked as butchers or leather workers and who continue to face hostility and discrimination. In the 1990s, South Americans (mainly Brazilians) of Japanese descent came to Japan as contract workers. The government believed that their Japanese ancestry would allow them to easily integrate into Japanese society. Although this did not turn out to be the case and many returned home, approximately 275,000 Japanese Brazilians remain in Japan primarily working in automotive and electronics factories (Textbox 3.1).

Textbox 3.1 Different periods in Japanese history

- Jomon period (14,000–300 B.C.)
- Yayoi period (300 B.C.–A.D. 300)
- Kofun period (c. 300–538)
- Asuka period (538–710)
- Nara period (710–794)
- Heian period (794–1185)
- Kamakura period (1185–1333)
- Muromachi period (1338–1573)
- Sengoku or Warring States period (1467–1568)
- Azuchi-Momoyama period (1573–1603)
- Tokugawa/Edo period (1600–1868)
- Meiji period (1868–1912)
- Taisho (1912–1926) and early Showa period (1912–1945)
- Showa period (1926–1989)
- Heisei period (1989–2019)
- Reiwa period 2019–

Early Japanese history

Ancestors of the current Japanese people are thought to have inhabited the Japanese islands tens of thousands of years ago. Human fossil remains have been found that are 30,000 years old. Evidence of a more settled and organized society in what is now Hokkaido and the northern regions of Honshu dates from about 3200 B.C. These early peoples likely came to the Japanese islands from mainland Russia via Sakhalin Island and the Kurile Islands. They began cultivating rice; hunting deer, bear and boar; gathering nuts, fruit and roots; fishing; and making pots and figurines. Primary evidence of this early habitation lies in the pottery they left behind, which was made with rows of rolled clay. This first era of Japanese history was named for the pottery, which is called Jomon, meaning cord/rope pattern. The Jomon

stone and clay figurines are striking: many have bulging eyes, some are pregnant females and others appear to be broken, perhaps on purpose by the artist. Stocky with broad faces, the Jomon people looked somewhat similar to the Ainu of today, and anthropologists confirm that the Ainu are descended from the Jomon.

About 300 B.C., immigrants arrived on the southern island of Kyushu, most likely from the Korean peninsula. These people were taller with more narrow faces. They were named the Yayoi after the district in Tokyo in which archaeologists first found a reddish pottery different from the Jomon. Although little is known about the Yayoi, archaeological evidence shows evidence of wet rice paddy cultivation, a style of pottery smoother and more elegant than that of the Jomon and a mastery of metalwork. Bronze and iron were used to make tools, armour, weapons and other items. The Yayoi appear to have spread from the southwest to about the middle of Honshu. Excavated Yayoi settlements show houses with thatched roofs and sunken floors. By the middle of the Yayoi period, villages had built raised wooden storehouses to protect crops from insects and rodents. The Yayoi period lasted until about the 3rd century A.D. Along with the Jomon period that preceded it and the Kofun period (A.D. 300–538) that followed, and during which the leaders of the Yamato clan began to establish control over large parts of the country, the Yayoi period made up what is considered to be ancient Japan. The Kofun period got its name from the enormous keyhole shaped Kofun burial mounds constructed for the ruling elite of the day between the 3rd and 7th centuries.

Classical Japan (538–1185) comprises three periods: Asuka, Nara and Heian. During Asuka (538–710), Japan transformed from a loosely structured tribal land into a more organized society. The Yamato clan gradually gained considerable authority over the 4th and 5th centuries, and by the early 6th century, they were the ruling family. (The Kofun and Asuka periods are collectively referred to as the Yamato period.) In the mid-6th century, Buddhism came to Japan from Korea. Prince Shotoku, who ruled from 594 to 622, was a strong Buddhist and spread Buddhism throughout the land. He commissioned the construction of many Buddhist temples in the Kansai region, including Shitenno-ji in Osaka and Horyu-ji in Nara prefecture. Prince Shotoku established a centralized government with a merit-based civil service. He also authored a 17-article constitution that focused on the morals and virtues expected of government officials such as loyalty, harmony and dedication to government. These core values became deeply embedded in Japanese society.

Japan remained open to external influences. Confucian ideas and philosophy entered Japan from China, and in 645, Emperor Kotoku implemented a series of doctrines called the Taika Reforms. Based on Confucian beliefs and the Chinese example of a strong imperial court and centralized government, the Taika Reforms transformed land holding arrangements, produced a household registry and implemented a system of taxation. Thus, the Chinese idea of an all-powerful centralized government remained in place in Japan for the next five centuries. Interest in learning from China incorporated everything from architecture to literature. Technologies, institutions, legal systems and Chinese characters originated in China and were adapted to Japanese conditions.

A country built around a centralized political system needed a capital city. The first capital was established in Nara in 710, where it remained as the seat of government until 784. Nara was a carefully designed city, laid out in a Chinese checkerboard plan, and host to a large court bureaucracy. During the Nara period (710–794), the first Japanese histories were written: the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki*. These books chronicled Japan's early history, including legends, songs, myths and oral traditions. Japan's creation story (see Textbox 3.2) was first widely shared in the *Kojiki*. In fact, the *Kojiki* was commissioned in part to solidify the position of

the emperor by linking him directly to the creation story (see Textbox 3.2) and the unbroken lineage claim. The first poetry anthologies were also published in this time. The *Manyōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves) is a collection of 400 poems published in 759.

Textbox 3.2 Creation story

Japan's creation story explains the origins of the Japanese islands, describes the emergence of the celestial and earthly worlds and recounts the birth of the first Gods. The Gods Izanagi and Izanami leaned down from the floating bridge of heaven and stirred the ocean with a jewelled spear. The droplets of water that dripped from their spear formed into an island and the Gods descended onto it. Izanagi and Izanami gave birth to a large number of Gods, including Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess, from whom Japan's imperial line is said to descend. The story, chronicled in the *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Things), described how Amaterasu was sent by Izanagi to rule over the heavens. Her younger brother Susano'o was to rule over the seas but he was disobedient, so Izanagi banished him. On his way to exile, he visited Amaterasu. He teased and tormented Amaterasu so much that she hid herself in a cave, thereby plunging the world into darkness. Eventually, the other Gods enticed her out of the cave using a bronze mirror (in which she sees her reflection) and some curved beads also described as jewels. Once Amaterasu is out of the cave, the door is shut behind her. Light is restored to the world. Later, Susano'o gave Amaterasu a sword as an apology. Amaterasu sent her grandson down to earth to rule. He carried with him the mirror, the sword and the jewels, which now form the Japanese imperial regalia. Amaterasu's great-grandson, Jimmu, became the first emperor of Japan.

In 794, Japan's capital moved from Nara to Kyoto, where it remained until 1868. Heian (an early name for Kyoto) was also laid out in a Chinese grid style. The Heian period (794–1185) is celebrated as the golden age of Japanese culture. Japan's classical art, culture, poetry, music and painting all flourished, and institutions and culture borrowed from China took on a Japanese life of their own. The Japanese created two sets of phonetic *kana* syllabaries from the Chinese characters, enabling people to write in Japanese. Ladies of the Heian imperial court kept diaries. One of the most famous works of Japanese literature, and considered to be one of the world's first novels, was written at the start of the 11th century. The *Tale of Genji* was written by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady-in-waiting, and tells of the life of Hikaru Genji, the son of an emperor. The book gives great insights into the refined and gentle court life of the Japanese elite of the time.

During this time, the emperor held official sovereignty, but the Fujiwara family wielded the real power and controlled most government posts. Branches of the imperial family moved from the capital to the provinces to make their fortunes and establish political power. The guards and soldiers of imperial families and the Fujiwara and other noble families gradually formed into a warrior class, which was the predecessor of the samurai of later fame. Rivals within the imperial family, supported by military groups, the Taira and the Minamoto, pushed for control of the royal court. In 1156, a four-year civil war broke out. The Taira clan ruled the country until they were destroyed by the Minamoto clan at an epic battle in 1185. Minamoto Yoritomo¹ established military rule and became the first all-powerful *Shogun* (generalissimo) (Textbox 3.3).

Textbox 3.3 Shogun

Shogun became the word used for Japan's military dictators from Minamoto Yoritomo's rule until 1868. (Prior to this, *Shogun* had been a temporary title the emperor bestowed on a loyal military commander for the duration of a military campaign.) The Shogun was notionally appointed by the emperor and was the ruler of Japan. His officials were called the *bakufu* or tent government (implying the Shogun's role in the field doing the work of the government for the emperor) and were responsible for the administration of government. This military government is referred to as the shogunate. In the 12th century, under this first shogunate, the samurai or warrior class began to develop. The samurai would serve the daimyo or feudal lords who supported the Shogun (see Figure 3.2).



Figure 3.2 Portrait of Minamoto, Yoritomo, the first Shogun.

The Kamakura period (1185–1333) marked the beginning of Medieval Japan. Yoritomo made his base at Kamakura (about 50 km southwest of present-day Tokyo) and built a military government. (The court remained in Kyoto.) Loyal warriors from throughout the country collected taxes, administered the area under their control and maintained law and order. This was a feudal system with strong and personal lord-vassal relationships. In the late 11th century, Japan faced its first serious invasion from overseas. Twice (in 1274 and in 1281) the Mongols, under Kublai Khan, tried to invade Japan. On both occasions, the Mongol fleets were destroyed by typhoons, prompting the Japanese to call the storms *kamikaze* (or *shinpū*, which is another reading of the same kanji characters) meaning divine winds.

As military loyalties wore thin, the Kamakura military government system eventually broke down. In 1333, Emperor Go-Daigo attempted to regain control of the country. Ashikaga Takauji, a Kamakura general sent to stop him, joined him instead, and the two were able to restore Imperial rule, at least temporarily. However, Ashikaga broke with Emperor Go-Daigo (because the emperor would not grant him the title of Shogun) and set up another member of a rival branch of the Imperial family as emperor in Kyoto. This emperor anointed Ashikaga Shogun. This was the beginning of the two and a half century Ashikaga or Muramachi period (1333–1573). However, establishing lasting unity among the warrior class under one ruler did not appear possible. Instead, a ruler controlled one group of leaders and expected them to control others in their region. But the strategy often failed. Emperor Go-Daigo, for example, set up a rival imperial court in the mountains 100 km south of Kyoto, and for almost 60 years, there were two courts. Japan eventually disintegrated into what was referred to as the Warring States period (1467–1568), a time of great instability and bloody conflicts as rival daimyo fought for control of Japan.

In 1543, three Portuguese traders, the first Europeans in Japan, landed on the south coast of Japan. The Portuguese introduced the Japanese to many new things but most significantly to guns. The traders were soon followed by Society of Jesus (Jesuit) missionaries. In 1549, after successful missions in India, Francis Xavier, later sanctified, arrived. Very quickly, the missionaries won close to half a million converts to their austere version of Christianity.

In the second half of the 16th century, power gradually consolidated at the local level. Feudal lords or *daimyo* emerged. *Daimyo* formed regional alliances, castle towns were built and two warlords, Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, gradually brought the country together. [The Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1600) takes its name from Nobunaga's Azuchi castle and Hideyoshi's Momoyama castle.] In 1568, Oda Nobunaga seized Kyoto, subjugating lesser lords and destroying the power of the Buddhist monasteries. Oda was making great progress towards unifying the country when he was killed by one of his own officers. By 1590, his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, had established control over the whole country, including Shikoku and Kyushu. Toyotomi implemented a land survey to determine taxes, confiscated swords from the peasantry and persecuted Christians. Although Toyotomi successfully invaded Korea twice, he was unable to defeat the Chinese and Korean armies on the peninsula. When he died in 1598, war broke out between his former allies and those loyal to another leader, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Tokugawa and his daimyo coalition emerged victorious at the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600; they unified the country and launched over two and a half centuries of Tokugawa family rule.

A fun description of the role of the three main samurai (Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu) in uniting Japan likens their roles to the making of mochi, a Japanese pounded rice cake: Oda pounds the rice cake, Toyotomi kneads it and Tokugawa sits down to eat it.

The Edo/Tokugawa era (1600–1868)

Tokugawa Ieyasu chose not to move to Kyoto, although the emperor remained there. Maintaining his base of power in eastern Japan in Edo (present-day Tokyo), he consolidated his family's supremacy, and his heirs ruled Japan until the mid-19th century. Calling himself Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu set up a new structure to administer the country. Roughly 25 percent of the land belonged to the Tokugawa family, amassed during their rise to power, including all the important mines, the major seaports of Osaka and Nagasaki and the city of Kyoto. The Tokugawa holdings extended throughout the country but were primarily in

central Honshu; all of these were ruled by the family directly. The remaining three-quarters of the country was governed indirectly through the *daimyo* (feudal lords), all of whom swore allegiance to Tokugawa.

A *daimyo's* domain produced a minimum of 10,000 kokus of rice. One koku was approximately 180 litres of rice, enough to feed a person for a year. A daimyo's rice production determined the tax he paid and the number of soldiers he could be required to contribute to a battle. During the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule, there were between 245 and 295 daimyo. The Tokugawa government maintained its power by commanding the allegiance of the daimyo, thereby avoiding the emergence of an anti-Tokugawa alliance.

The daimyo were generally left relatively autonomous, although expected to follow the shogunate's guidelines, unless they exhibited signs of disloyalty, in which case they would be punished by losing part of their domain. They had to swear allegiance to their lord and promise to keep order over their domains. In general, they managed their local affairs and retained vassals, who were paid in rice. The Tokugawa shogunate developed policies to control the daimyo. Firstly, they divided the daimyo into three categories. The first of these were the *shimpan* daimyo, members of the Tokugawa extended families. If the main line of the family died out, a Shogun would be chosen from among these 23 lords. The second category was the *fudai* lords. These daimyo had pledged their loyalty to Tokugawa prior to the Battle of Sekigahara, and so were considered trustworthy. The third category, the *tozama* daimyo, had pledged their loyalty only after the battle and thus were considered less trustworthy. Members of the *tozama* daimyo were given remote domains or domains near Edo and played no role in the Tokugawan government. The *fudai* and *shimpan* daimyo and their samurai kept watch over the *tozama* domains for possible threats to the Tokugawa authority. Interestingly, two and a half centuries later, daimyo from two of these remote domains (Satsuma in southern Kyushu and Choshu in western Honshu) would eventually be part of the successful effort to topple the Tokugawa shogunate.

The daimyo domains were carefully arranged, with potentially disloyal daimyo located in remote parts of the country or in domains surrounded by loyal daimyo. Regions in which Christianity had found converts were given to daimyo who were decidedly not Christian. To prevent alliances from forming, members of a daimyo who wished their children to marry had to ask permission from the Shogun. A daimyo believed to be amassing too much wealth would be ordered to spend funds repairing a castle, shrine or bridge.

To ensure that *tozama* lords with coastal territories far from Edo did not benefit from trading or form military alliances with foreign countries, the Tokugawa regime eliminated almost all contact with the outside world. This policy of seclusion was called *sakoku*, meaning closed country. Japanese were prohibited from travelling abroad, and foreigners could not enter Japan. Japanese who were outside the country were prohibited from returning to the country for fear that they might reintroduce Christianity or bring in foreign ideas. Ships were limited to those unsuitable for open ocean voyages. There was some limited contact, including some trade with China and Korea. The Dutch were permitted a small trading station on the island of Dejima (sometimes written as Deshima) in the Nagasaki harbour. Missionaries were expelled, and those who had converted to Christianity were persecuted and forced to convert (people were forced to step on a picture of Christ's face to test their faith.) By 1638, Christianity had been virtually eliminated. For over two centuries, Japanese society developed in almost complete isolation at a time when the rest of the world was being integrated through the intertwined processes of exploration, conquest, colonization and international trade.

A particularly effective form of Tokugawan control was the alternate attendance system (*sankin kotai*). All daimyo were obliged to move their residence between their home domain

and Edo every year. They were required to reside in Edo every other year under the watchful eye of the Shogun. When they returned to their domains, they left their wives and their children behind in Edo as hostages. Maintaining two residences and travelling back and forth (with a large entourage, of course) was a major drain on the economic resources of the daimyo. Some daimyo spent half of the taxes they collected on the alternate attendance system. This system had an enduring impact on Japan. Five major roads connecting the various regions of the country to Edo were built, with two of them, the Tokaido and the Nakasendo, stretching from Kyoto to Edo. Over time, roadside stations developed every 5–10 miles along the highways as merchants provided food, lodging, fresh horses and entertainment to the daimyo and their entourages travelling between their home domains and Edo. The daimyo travelled in processions of between 100 and 1,500 people, a large number to feed, house and generally support. There were 53 stations along the Tokaido road and 67 along the Nakasendo. Over time, regional food and craft specialities developed along the route. This regional specialization and interest in the unique products of particular areas of Japan remain today.

Tokugawan society was feudal and hierarchical, designed to prevent social chaos and rebellion. Each of the four classes—samurai, peasants, artisans and merchants—had specific rules of behaviour and dress. Tokugawa Ieyasu “is said to have defined ‘rude behaviour’—for which a samurai could lop off the miscreant’s head—as ‘acting in an other-than-expected manner’” (Henshall, 2012, 55). There was little mobility between the classes, which was a way of enforcing stability and conformity. About 6 percent of the population was samurai. Only they were allowed to have surnames, wear their hair in a topknot and carry swords. Bushido, the unwritten code of samurai conduct, emphasized loyalty, courage, truth and honour. A samurai was to have the utmost loyalty to his lord and be willing to die for him. Samurai were required to lead frugal and disciplined lives, to be adept at martial arts (including archery and sword skills) and to appreciate literature and the arts. As the Tokugawa era was one of peace, gradually most of the samurai became bureaucrats, some of whom were involved in policing. The peasant class consisted of farmers who made up over three-quarters of the population. To ensure that there were adequate amounts of food and income for the nobility, peasants were permitted to work only in the agricultural sector and could not sell their land. They also lived frugally, wearing only cotton. Peasants were ranked higher than the artisans and merchants as the peasants produced essential goods. Coming after peasants in the hierarchy were artisans who produced needed goods such as clothes and cooking utensils. They were organized into guilds based on their craft. At the bottom of the social order were merchants, who due to their dealings with money and the belief that they contributed little to society, were at the bottom of the social order. Beneath the merchants were other small communities of outcasts such as the burakumin, whose death-related occupations (butchers, leather workers, undertakers) were considered unclean.

Over the 250 years of the Tokugawan era, society gradually changed. Artisans became well known for their beautiful silk, paper, ceramics and sake. At the bottom of the social hierarchy, merchants amassed great wealth as they sold more and more goods to the daimyo and their entourages as they trekked to and from Edo. The samurai, ostensibly warriors, had no battles to fight and instead did administrative work for their lords. Although they were paid monthly stipends of rice by the daimyo they served, agricultural production failed to keep pace with the growth in the rest of the economy, and the samurai began to suffer financially. Many samurai became indebted to the merchants. As samurai unrest and peasant uprisings rocked the country in the early 1800s, the carefully constructed feudal society began to fray at the edges.

Overall, however, the Tokugawan era was a time of remarkable stability and peace. Between 1600 and 1721, Japan’s population doubled, and Edo became a city of over 1 million inhabitants, one of the largest cities in the world. (London at that time had approximately 625,000 people.) The shogunate established an effective system of government to collect taxes, manage society, develop the country and exert control over other potential competitive centres of political power, like the imperial court and Buddhist temples. The economy grew dramatically but without the intense poverty and disruptions of early stage industrialization. At the same time, the country developed a strong national identity. Numerous Japanese cultural forms—literature, poetry, *ukiyo-e* (wood block prints), *bunraku* (puppet theatre), *kabuki* (theatre)—developed and flourished. Among young men, literacy was 40 percent, higher than in many European countries.

However, by the mid-1800s, dissatisfaction within Tokugawan society had grown and festered. Young, able samurai felt frustrated by the rigidity and hereditary nature of the system and the expenses for the daimyo were soaring, cutting into their quality of life. Seeing merchants become much richer than they were added to the samurais’ discontent. The system began to crack from within. It was pressure from the outside, however, that would force Japan to change. By the mid-19th century, European maritime powers controlled much of East Asia and were now in China, while Russia dominated Siberia, pushing towards islands north of Japan. Between 1791 and 1849, Russia, Britain and the United States each tried repeatedly, but always unsuccessfully, to persuade Japan to open relations. The shogunate realized that the Western powers were not going to leave Japan alone but worried by what had occurred in China (e.g. the Opium Wars), was determined to keep other countries at a distance. However, in 1853, anxious to expand its global presence having settled its North American conflicts with Great Britain, the United States sent one-quarter of its navy under Commodore Matthew Perry to try to establish relations with the Japanese government. One goal of the U.S. government was to acquire protection for shipwrecked American sailors and acquire access to ports where their ships could be supplied with provisions. Most of all, however, because they were constrained by a relatively small domestic population, the Americans were seeking trade with the heavily populated countries of East Asia.

The Japanese recognized their vulnerabilities. Perry’s Black Ships—so-called by the Japanese because of the black coal smoke they emitted—with their large cannons could have destroyed Edo. Perry arrived in July 1853, made his proposal and promised to return in a year for an answer. He returned to Tokyo Bay with a larger fleet in early 1854, much sooner than promised, where he was greeted by sombre and resigned Japanese authorities. The Americans and the Japanese, the latter reluctantly, signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, ending Japan’s period of seclusion by opening two ports to trade and allowing the Americans to establish a consulate in Japan. The United States paved the way for other Western countries to establish relations with Japan. Britain signed a similar treaty in 1854, Russia in 1855, followed by France and Holland. Concessions granted to one country were granted to all of them. The Westerners were granted the right of extraterritoriality, a policy in which foreigners would be tried in their own countries for crimes committed in Japan. As this implied a distrust of Japan’s legal system, this concession rankled the Japanese.

Among the Japanese, popular feeling ran strongly against opening the country. Many felt that Japan was sacred ground and that the Shogun was responsible for keeping the barbarians out. “Honour the Emperor, expel the barbarians” became a popular saying. Protests erupted throughout the country, and samurai leaders, especially from the domains of Satsuma and Choshu, killed prominent foreigners, including translators and diplomats. The Tokugawan system was badly shaken by these events. In 1867, an alliance between Satsuma and Choshu

seized control of the court, and, in the name of the emperor whom they controlled, they announced direct Imperial rule. In 1868, they took the 16-year-old emperor to Edo, renamed Tokyo (Eastern Capital), where they installed him as ruler. His era was known as Meiji (Enlightened Rule). (After his death, an emperor is referred to by the name of the era of his reign.)

Meiji period (1868–1912)

The teenage emperor was installed in power, but a group of samurai, including Saigō Takamori (Satsuma), Ōkubo Toshimichi (Satsuma), Yamagata Aritomo (Choshu) and Itō Hirobumi, provided the real leadership and direction for the country. All these men were young and came from lower ranks within the samurai. They wanted to do their best for their country, and they hoped to improve their own lot in life, which had been limited under the Tokugawan feudal system, at the same time. Fortunately for Japan, these young samurai proved themselves to be wise and mature leaders as they sought to create a country that could hold its own among the Western powers.

The new government quickly worked to calm the population, which was understandably shaken by all of the changes that had occurred. Any pockets of resistance were quickly put down. The imperial court was moved from Kyoto to Tokyo, which was now officially the capital city. The city's population had declined dramatically over the previous two decades as daimyo and their families were no longer obliged to live there. Without the daimyo, those who catered to them were without work and suffered economically. The Meiji Restoration—the term for the return of the emperor to power and this time period—brought life back to the city. The government took over the samurai district, built administrative buildings and army barracks and began to transform Tokyo into a more modern city.

The Meiji leaders initially planned to expel all the foreigners, but they soon recognized that the Westerners would fight to defend their access to Japanese ports. The Meiji leaders also realized that Japan technologically lagged far behind the West. To be strong enough to oust the barbarians, Japan would first need to catch up technologically. They therefore set out to modernize Japan, launching one of the world's fastest, most intense and successful efforts at national modernization and industrialization. The old catchphrase of "Revere the Emperor, Expel the Barbarians" was replaced by a new one "Japanese spirit, Western learning."

They replaced the feudal system with more centralized rule and built a more professional administrative structure. The daimyo handed over their land to the government, and, in return, they were reissued prefectures of roughly similar size and government bonds to make up for any losses. The financial precariousness of many daimyo made this daunting task less formidable. The Meiji oligarchs also put in place a system of Western-style laws and courts. By demonstrating that Japan had a fair and open judicial system, the Japanese sought to convince Western powers to give up extraterritoriality. A modern banking system and a mint were established, as were Ministries of Finance and Army and Navy. A massive infrastructure initiative brought lighthouses, ports and railways, laying the foundation for a globally competitive industrial economy. The railway was a particularly significant and important accomplishment. The first railway (between Shinagawa and Yokohama) was completed in 1872; by 1900, the country had 8,000 km of track. The railway system had an enormous impact on the movement of people and goods. Telegraph and postal systems were put into place. National compulsory education was established up to grade 4, and by 1900 almost

all primary age children were attending school. The University of Tokyo was established as Japan's first national university in 1877.

The restrictive Tokugawan class system was abolished. Most dramatically, the Meiji leaders set out to destroy their own class, the samurai. In 1871, samurai were no longer required to wear their swords in public; by 1876, they were prohibited from wearing them. Samurai rice stipends were gradually reduced, and, by 1876, almost completely eliminated. In less than a decade, the samurai lost almost all their special privileges. The transformation was all the more significant because it was led by samurai themselves. Recognizing the need to look more broadly for talent, the Meiji leaders knew they could no longer rely on a hereditary system. The separate samurai armies of the various domains were replaced with one national army, and national conscription was implemented. Many peasants resented the changes as the combination of conscription and compulsory education took badly needed help from the family farms.

Not all the samurai were happy with the situation either. Frustrated samurai launched several major uprisings, the largest of which was the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877, led by Saigō Takamori, the commander of the army that had toppled the Tokugawa shogunate and one of the Meiji oligarchs. He had resigned from the government after it had refused to agree to his plan to invade Korea. When the government abolished the right of samurai to wear swords, he led a rebellion against the government. The rebellion was decisively defeated, and Saigō committed *seppuku* (ritualized suicide) in true samurai fashion.

Meiji Japan embraced the need for Western technological skills, as well as for Western dress, hair styles, fashion, dance and ideas. Eating beef became popular, leading supposedly to the "Japanese" dish of *sukiyaki*. Official missions of political leaders went to Europe and America, students in the hundreds were sent abroad to study and Western experts were brought to Japan. One of the most famous proponents of learning from the West who now graces the 10,000 yen note, Fukuzawa Yukichi studied Dutch and English, travelled to the United States and Europe and wrote a series of books on Western learning. Strong interest developed in Japan on Western-style democracy, the idea that everyone was equal and that individuals could control their own destiny. Almost overnight, common people were studying translations of Western books and learning about democracy and Western ways. These ideas were a shock to people who had grown up in a fixed society in which rules prescribed how one should behave. Popular rights societies sprang up; there were about 150 of them by 1880. Soon after, two political parties (the Liberal Party and then the Constitutional Reform Party) were founded, and the idea of a national assembly gained popularity. The Meiji leadership wrestled with the push for democracy. While not unsympathetic to the ideals of democracy (and recognizing that it would impress the Western powers and placate any anti-government feelings out there), "(I)t had to be democracy on the oligarchs' terms, an 'authoritarian democracy'" (Henshall, 2012, 90).

In the 1880s, the Japanese leadership embraced the idea of a Constitution, believing it would lend credence to the notion that Japan was a "civilized country" and appease the popular rights movement. Itō Hirobumi, one of the leaders of the early Meiji government, took charge of drafting the Constitution. In 1882, he went to Europe to study constitutional systems and drew on other constitutions, particularly those of the German empire and Prussia, in drafting the Japanese Constitution. Proclaimed in 1889, the new Constitution outlined the obligations that subjects had to the nation and the emperor, who was to exercise all authority. The Constitution created the bicameral Japanese Parliament or Diet. The Lower House was elected by male taxpayers, who represented slightly more than 1 percent of the total male

population. Ministers reported to the emperor not to the Diet, and the emperor had command of the Army and Navy. (In reality, the emperor was not expected to rule but to validate decisions made by his ministers.) Certain rights like freedom of speech were guaranteed but with limits. The first elections for the Diet were held in 1890 and the first Diet assembled later that same year. Nonetheless, while the Constitution represented a step towards democracy, the oligarchs remained in charge.

In 1890, the government issued the Imperial Rescript on Education and distributed it to schools across the country and later the Japanese empire. Signed by the emperor, the Imperial Rescript was a statement of Japan's guiding principles of education. It told students to honour their parents, respect the Constitution and work hard for the state and the emperor. It was designed to build patriotism and national unity. Students were required to memorize the Rescript and it was often recited on special occasions. This continued until the Occupation at the end of World War II when the American authorities forbade it; the National Diet officially abolished the Imperial Rescript on Education in 1948.

Japan began to industrialize rapidly. The emergence of the industrial society depended on agriculture, as farming provided the foreign exchange necessary to buy industrial machinery and raw materials from abroad. Farmers also contributed money through the land tax, which funded the infrastructure necessary for industrialization. The tax was now linked to the assessed value of the land rather than, as before, the value of the harvest. Aside from agriculture, priority was given to strategic industries producing weapons and ammunition for the expanding Japanese military. Trade in silk and tea expanded. Sub-contracted to the private sector, state-built factories were subsidized until they were making money. Japan had fallen behind the West in technology, so the country imported foreign technology and consulted with Western technical experts in an effort to catch up. Japan lacked entrepreneurs at that time, so the government started industries that it then sold to individuals with entrepreneurial potential or to private companies. Meiji thus established the roots of Japan's military industrial complex and of the industrial conglomerates known as *zaibatsu* (see Textbox 3.5). After a slow start, progress was rapid but the price in human terms was high. Factory life was miserable for the workers, and pollution and urban blight were early side-effects of economic growth.

Japan's swift modernization combined with a nationalist drive to catch up with the West. This, following the European and American models, created a desire among Japan's leaders to acquire an empire. Japan needed access to raw materials and global markets, and it wanted to take its place among the great powers, a remarkable transition for a nation that only half a century earlier had blocked itself off from the world. In 1894–1895, Japan started a war with China over influence on the Korean peninsula, easily defeating the larger country. In the Treaty of Shimonoseki, which ended the conflict, China was forced to pay Japan a war indemnity (money as a form of compensation), renounce any claims to Korea and cede the Liaodong peninsula in Manchuria (although within a week Russia, France and Germany forced Japan to give it back), the island of Taiwan and the Penghu Islands, to Japan in perpetuity. (Japan occupied Taiwan from 1895 to 1945. For more information, see Chapter 5.) In response to being forced to return the Liaodong peninsula, in 1902, the Japanese leaders negotiated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, a pact with the British to guarantee that Britain would not unite with other European powers to oppose the Japanese. This was the world's first military pact between a Western and non-Western nation. Japan was earning the respect from the West that it wanted. Britain gave up its right of extraterritoriality in 1894, for example, and other countries soon followed suit.

The government expanded its army and navy and raised taxes to pay for them. In 1904, Japan and Russia went to war over interests in Manchuria and Korea. Japan won and acquired the southern tip of Manchuria, the southern half of Sakhalin and complete control over Korea. However, Japan did not receive an indemnity from the Russians, which it had very much wanted to make up for the huge expenses it had incurred waging the war. In 1905, Korea became a Japanese protectorate with Itō Hirobumi as Resident-General. The Koreans assassinated Itō in 1909, but the following year, Japan annexed Korea completely. (For more on the Japanese occupation of Korea, see Chapter 4.) With the emergence of Japan as a potent international force, exemplified by the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese war and, even more, after the Russo-Japanese war, a growing fear of East Asia became embedded in the racist concept of the "Yellow Peril." Westerners demonized the East Asians, believing that their shockingly large populations, growing industrial wealth and military might represented an existential threat to the economic, social and political well-being of the democratic nations of the West. The cartoonish concepts of the "Yellow Peril" became imbedded in Western imagination and in immigration laws and racially discriminatory policies across the Western world.

The Meiji period came to a close in 1912 with the death of the emperor, concluding a remarkable transition from isolation to global competitiveness and demonstrating to the world the country's resilience, intensity and determination. Little known a half century earlier, Japan was now the most dominant non-Western nation, a military victor over Russia in a major war, and a rapidly expanding industrial power with ready access to hundreds of millions of Asian consumers. Moreover, Japan had learned its Western lessons well, adopting democratic institutions, the rule of law and central government programs and services. But imitating aspects of the West did not strip the nation of its inherent Japaneseness. By controlling the nature and pace of change and by adapting to the West without surrendering to a European or American colonizer, Japan stepped into the world on its terms, with its own agenda and with Japanese values, religion, language and culture intact.

Taisho period (1912–1926)

The era following Meiji was called Taisho after the new emperor. Emperor Taisho struggled with illness throughout his life. During the Taisho period, power shifted from the old world of the oligarchs to the new world of elected representatives (Diet members). During this era, often referred to as the Taisho democracy, efforts were made to build a Japanese democracy: competitive political parties emerged, public interest in democracy surged, a commoner was elected as prime minister (PM) in 1918 and universal male suffrage was granted in 1925 (women received the vote in 1947). The economy grew rapidly, and government foreign policy focused on ensuring access to markets and to the raw materials needed to fuel the fast-growing industrialization. While in 1870 Japanese imports were almost exclusively manufactured products and its exports primary products, 50 years later, the situation had reversed. Ninety percent of Japanese exports were now manufactured goods, particularly textiles.

The Great Kanto Earthquake struck Tokyo and its surrounds in September 1923. The earthquake had a magnitude of 7.9 and killed over 100,000 people. Many large fires broke out, fanned by high winds, which were responsible for many of the deaths and injuries and the loss of homes and other property. In the aftermath of the quake, false rumours spread that ethnic Koreans were looting and even that they had set some of the fires. Anti-Korean sentiment was high at that time in response to the Korean independence movement taking place

in Japan-occupied Korea. Mobs in Tokyo and Yokohama attacked Koreans and an estimated 6,000 Koreans were murdered.

Showa period (1926–1989): The militarist era—Japan's pursuit of global power

Hirohito became emperor at the end of 1926 upon the death of his father. His reign began in a time of difficulty. The Great Depression and accompanying global protectionism were challenging for Japan, which had begun to rely on international trade. Silk and rice prices fell, the economy weakened and domestic unrest grew. At the same time, tensions increased between the elected representatives and the Japanese military. As the last vestiges of samurai culture and intense nationalism clashed against the forces favouring industrialization and global integration, an all-out conflict brewed behind the scenes. Many felt that the West's influence had been bad for Japan and questioned the benefits of democracy.

The military pushed for territorial expansion. In 1931, the Japanese army brutally annexed and established a puppet regime in Manchuria, a large section of northeast China, partially to acquire Manchuria's abundant resources. The following year, the elected Japanese prime minister was assassinated by junior naval officers for failing to promote an aggressive military agenda. As democracy disintegrated, political dissent was repressed, political parties banned, the press censored and opponents of the military government imprisoned. The military steadily expanded its influence, and Japan moved progressively from a democracy towards a military dictatorship.

In 1937, Japan waged war against China, after years of working to dominate it economically and politically for its resources, agriculture and labour. From the Asian remnants of the rapidly declining post-World War I European empires, the Japanese military leaders intended to carve out their own empire, which they called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Japan had first sampled expansionism after World War I when it acquired Germany's Pacific colonies—the Marshall, Mariana and Caroline Islands. In 1940, Japan signed a tripartite pact with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy and formed the Axis military alliance against the Allied Powers organized by the United States and the United Kingdom. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a surprise attack, which they still regard as a pre-emptive strike of protection against American aggression, on the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. The United States declared war on Japan, and its Axis allies launched a counteroffensive. This was the beginning of the Pacific War, the Asia Pacific theatre of World War II. The Americans were convinced by their allies to focus their efforts first on the European front while they planned for the complex challenge of retaking the Pacific Islands and pushing the war to Japan.

Why did Japan go to war? Japan wanted to be a great power. Like all the Western powers that had taken territory around the world, Japan saw its new empire as a matter of national pride and international recognition. In 1933, a Japanese diplomat described the West's response to Japanese imperialism this way: "the Western Powers had taught the Japanese the game of poker ... but after acquiring most of the chips," as Matsuoka Yosuke, a future foreign minister put it, "they pronounced the game immoral and took up contract bridge" (Lamb and Tarling, 2001, 70).

The Japanese leaders desperately wanted to avoid the fate of China, which after being a formidable economic power for centuries had been reduced to widespread poverty and political powerlessness due to Europe's interventions and an increase in opium addictions. In an effort to limit Japanese aggression and force the Japanese military to withdraw from

China, the United States imposed economic sanctions and restricted access to crucial industrial supplies. With few natural resources of its own and almost no sources of energy, Japan quickly felt the pain of the sanctions. War with China had proved costly, and Japan rapidly ran out of oil, rubber and other raw materials. The only obvious way to obtain desperately needed resources was to invade Southeast Asia. Between 1941 and 1942, Japan seized or invaded Indochina (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia), Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaya, Burma (now called Myanmar), the Dutch East Indies, most of the Philippines and parts of New Guinea, while also expanding its presence in China and in the South Pacific Islands. Well-armed, highly motivated and superbly trained, Japan's armed forces seemed unstoppable. Both Singapore and Hong Kong, the United Kingdom's strongholds in the region, fell in a matter of weeks. Australia and New Zealand prepared for an imminent invasion, while the Japanese quickly island-hopped across the Pacific.

Believing and supporting the Japanese slogan of "Asia for Asians," many people in Southeast Asia welcomed the Japanese as liberators and celebrated them for freeing the population from European colonial rule. The Japanese occupations, however, were exercises in cruelty. Tens of thousands (estimates are as high as 200,000) Korean women, along with women from other countries Japan occupied during the war, were coerced into sex slavery. Euphemistically called "comfort women," they were compelled to service Japanese soldiers both before and during World War II. Feelings that there has not been a sincere official apology and appropriate compensation for these women has remained an issue of ongoing tension between South Korea and Japan (see Chapter 9 for more information).

The sustained mistreatment of women was only one part of a horrific legacy of Japanese expansionism. Early on, the Japanese army established a pattern of brutality towards occupied lands that has few parallels in world history. In December 1937, the Japanese attacked and captured the Chinese capital city of Nanjing. Not content with a decisive military victory, Japanese troops turned their attention to the civilian population and the captured Chinese troops. What became known as the Nanjing Massacre or the Rape of Nanjing included the callous murder of thousands of civilians, the rape of uncounted thousands of Chinese women and the unprovoked destruction and theft of private property. Nanjing and its citizens were completely devastated, the first major victims in what would become the Pacific War.

News of the Nanjing massacre spread, creating the stereotype of Japanese military brutality, a lack of concern for civilian life and a disregard for the basic tenants of civilized warfare. Over the next few years, fuelled by aggressive American wartime propaganda, stories of Nanjing and other atrocities accelerated the demonization of Japan and, particularly, its military. In the following years, debates proliferated about the scale and severity of the Nanjing attacks, with most estimates asserting that approximately 300,000 people had died. These historical debates, fuelled by unofficial Japanese attempts to deny the events took place, created severe discord, bordering often on hatred, between China and Japan.

Although subsequent Japanese occupations were not quite as terrible as the tragic precedent set in Nanjing, Japan's presence extracted a significant price on civilian populations throughout East Asia. If the local people were believed to be disloyal to the Japanese or overly supportive of American forces and their allies, the Japanese treated them abysmally. Meeting the needs of Japan's forces took top priority, often leaving civilians with little food, medical goods or other supplies. Any signs of insurrection or interference with Japanese military operations were met with brutality. In some areas, notably the Philippines, locals launched guerrilla attacks on the Japanese, even though their actions often led to vicious

reprisals. In total, the Philippines suffered close to 1 million deaths during the Japanese occupation. Even on the Pacific Islands, where local residents were often disconnected from the politics of war and lived traditional harvesting lives, many became forced labourers and endured serious food shortages and other indignities. At the end of the conflict, as the Allies took back island after island and country after country and as the Japanese fought ferociously for each piece of land, the occupiers typically scorched the countryside, leaving little of value for the Allied troops or the local population.

One of the greatest legacies of World War II was the treatment of prisoners of war. In Japan's military culture, surrender was deemed unforgivable, a sign of personal failing. Fighting to death in aid of the war effort or committing *seppuku* (ritualized suicide) was viewed as much more honourable than surrender. When the Japanese captured Allied troops, they viewed the military survivors with contempt, basically considering them to be "non-people." The treatment of the prisoners by the Japanese ignored international military conventions and resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands. Many Allied prisoners were relocated to Japan, where they lived in squalid conditions, with many subjected to brutal treatment by their Japanese captors or starved to death. Torture was commonplace, and hundreds of thousands of military personnel and civilians endured months of forced labour, with many dying at the hands of their Japanese handlers. Of the close to 140,000 Allied troops captured by the Japanese, almost 40,000 perished before they could be liberated. In one infamous case, over 100,000 forced labourers and Allied prisoners died during the construction of the Burma Railway, immortalized in the acclaimed 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. When the Allies rounded up large numbers of Japanese prisoners of war after 1945, the Allies resisted the temptation to match brutality with equal aggression.

Gradually, and at enormous cost, the U.S. military pushed Japan out of most of the lands they had conquered. By 1944, the aerial attacks started on the Japanese islands themselves, while the Americans and their allies prepared for a land assault. Tokyo, all the major cities except Kyoto (initially protected because the city had few military targets and then because it was on the initial list of potential targets for the atomic bombing) and most medium-sized cities were firebombed and utterly destroyed (Textbox 3.4).

Textbox 3.4 Kamikaze

Kamikaze refers to the Japanese pilots (and also the aircraft they flew) who, under orders during World War II, deliberately flew their airplanes loaded with bombs or extra gasoline into enemy aircraft and ships. The word kamikaze (divine wind) was first used in reference to typhoons that were credited with saving Japan from Mongol invasions in 1274 and 1281. Sometimes the planes used were regular planes but often they were very crude—little more than bombs with wings and steering. The planes did not have enough fuel for a return trip.

The Americans prepared for an all-out assault on the main Japanese islands, anticipating that the casualties would be counted in the hundreds of thousands. The last major conflict, the deadly Battle of Okinawa, raged from April to June 1945, providing proof that the Japanese intended to fight to the death, with a ferocity that the Allied forces found terrifying. Worried

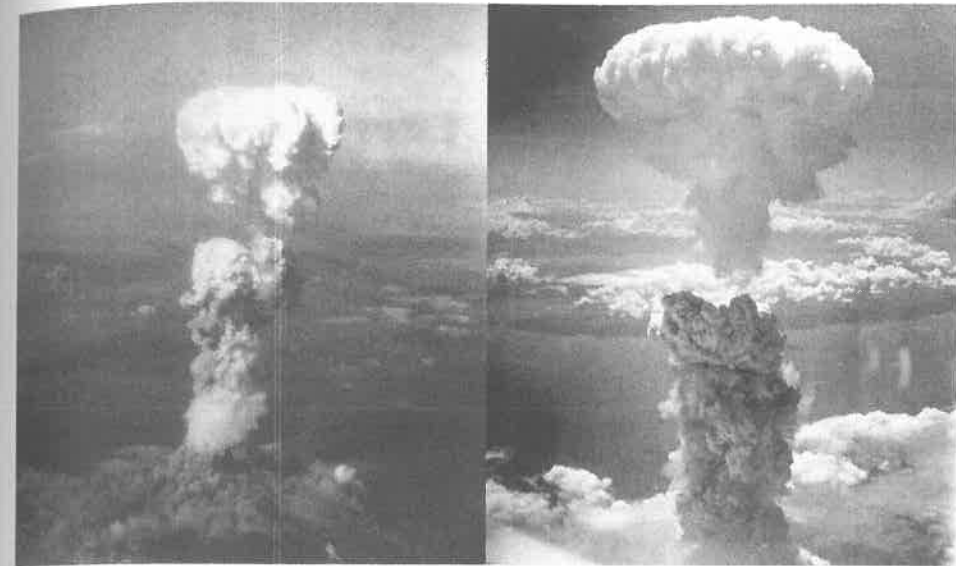


Figure 3.3 Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

about the now-inevitable massive loss of life through armed combat, the United States looked to its unfolding secret weapon, developed through the Manhattan Project. America now had the world's most powerful bomb at its disposal. As the prospect of the further invasion of Japan loomed, debate about the bomb raged among leading authorities in the United States. In early August 1945, ignoring suggestions that a demonstration bomb be exploded away from settled areas or that the weapon be used only on military targets, the U.S. Army Air Force dropped atomic bombs, first on the city of Hiroshima on August 6th and then on Nagasaki three days later (see Figure 3.3). Between 130,000 and 230,000 people died in the initial explosion or later from radiation exposure. The vast majority of the victims were civilians.

All told, by the end of the Pacific War, there had been about 2.2 million Japanese military casualties, between 500,000 and 800,000 Japanese civilian casualties and 25–30 million civilian and military non-Japanese deaths (including 110,000 U.S. military deaths). On August 14, 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced on the radio that Japan had been defeated. Few Japanese had ever heard the emperor's voice before, and the formality of his speech together with the poor quality of the broadcast meant that many did not understand him. He told his people that Japan "resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable" (Nisei Veterans Legacy, n.d.). Japan's formal surrender to the United States, Great Britain and the Soviet Union (which declared war on Japan shortly before the end of the conflict in order to gain a role in the peace negotiations that followed) took place on September 2, 1945 (see Figure 3.4). Japan was deeply broken: millions of people were dead or injured; almost all major cities lay in near ruins; the country's industrial and agricultural infrastructure was completely destroyed; starvation was widespread; and the civilian population was physically and emotionally exhausted.



Figure 3.4 Signing the Japanese Instrument of Surrender on the USS Missouri—September 2, 1945.

The Occupation

The Occupation of Japan began in the fall of 1945 and ended seven years later in the spring of 1952. Although officially an Allied Occupation, in reality the Occupation was almost entirely American, led by the Supreme Command of Allied Powers (SCAP) under General Douglas MacArthur. Despite their initial fears that the American occupiers would be vindictive and cruel—a fair assumption given the intensity of wartime hostilities—the Americans helped the Japanese gain a path to a better future. Ultimately, the Occupation forces helped Japan rebuild and implement a wide range of economic reforms. To encourage business activity, they disbanded the *zaibatsu* (industrial conglomerates—see Textbox 3.5), established a Free Trade Commission, implemented land reform and stripped power from absentee landlords, passed an Anti-monopoly law, supported union organizing and made education up to grade 9 compulsory.

Textbox 3.5 Zaibatsu and Keiretsu

The *zaibatsu* (meaning financial clique) were the industrial and financial combines that developed during the Meiji period. At that time, the government promoted industries that it then sold to private companies, which had the money and skills to operate them. As Japan was just emerging from its feudal past, there were not many potential buyers. Wealth and power therefore became concentrated in a few hands. By the time of the Pacific War, over three-quarters of the country's economic wealth belonged to just 12 families.

There were a number of smaller *zaibatsu* and four big ones: Mitsui (roots in dry goods and money lending), Mitsubishi (shipbuilding), Sumitomo (copper mining) and Yasuda (banking). The *zaibatsu* were controlled through a central holding company owned by the original family. The holding company controlled numerous corporations, each of which in turn controlled a series of other companies. Not all the affiliate companies were owned by those above them, but they were connected. Each *zaibatsu* had its own financial institution, assuring member companies preferential access to capital and thereby allowing companies to expand. Each *zaibatsu* also had its own general trading company (*sogo shosha*). During the Meiji period, the *zaibatsu* companies were small and had little experience with the outside world. People with international experience were concentrated in the *sogo shosha*, which provided services to member companies, helping them procure raw materials and sell products internationally.

By World War II, the *zaibatsu* had grown very large. For example, Mitsui had approximately 300 companies. The member companies were closely linked, sharing directors and executives, and prices charged within the *zaibatsu* were lower than those imposed on non-member companies. The family maintained tight control of the holding company and of the most important companies within the combine. Shares in the companies were not available for purchase until the Japanese went into Manchuria in the 1930s and the companies needed money for expansion.

Although the *zaibatsu* concentrated wealth and power in only a few hands, the system was not a monopoly because the *zaibatsu* competed with one another in many business fields. The concentration of capital allowed the *zaibatsu* to invest in and reinvest with an eye to future growth. Having developed a strong industrial base for Japan, the *zaibatsu* were also key players in Japan's war effort. When the war ended, the Occupation ordered their dissolution, arguing that the *zaibatsu* had helped the government carry out the war. Although SCAP talked a great deal about breaking up the *zaibatsu*, it did not actually do that much to do so. As a result, after 1945, Japanese companies were able to reorganize themselves into a different version of the *zaibatsu* called the *keiretsu*.

Like the *zaibatsu*, *keiretsu* are a group of companies across a wide range of industries from food to electronics to chemicals. The six large horizontal *keiretsu* are Mitsui, Mitsubishi, Sumitomo, Fuyo, Sanwa and Ikkan. The first three are former *zaibatsu*. The *keiretsu* all include a bank, allowing easier access to capital, and a trading company. There are other enterprise groups, often called vertical *keiretsu*, which are not based around a bank and tend to be in one industry. With their wide range of suppliers and distributors, Toyota and Sony are good examples of vertical *keiretsu*s, which are characterized by interlocking share holdings and preferential business practices.

The presidents of the key firms within a *keiretsu* attend regular Presidents' Club meetings at which the strategic decisions for the *keiretsu* are made. These presidents represent the stock their company holds in the other member companies. In the mid-1990s, Mitsubishi, as an example, consisted of 185 companies, which produced approximately 9 percent of all Japan's corporate profits, and Mitsubishi's Presidents' Council consisted of 28 firms. Since the 1990s, the *keiretsu* changed and inter-firm ties weakened. Banks and other firms from different *keiretsu* have merged, and member companies do much more business with non-member companies than in the past.

Two fundamental beliefs underlaid the Occupation: the universality of American values and the conviction that democracy could curb militarism. Confident that the United States



Figure 3.5 Japanese war crime trials—International Military Tribunal for the Far East.

was the most advanced nation in the world, the Occupation planners intended to remodel Japan (and the former Nazi Germany and Italy) in the American image. Although General MacArthur had a large staff of civilian and military personnel, few of its members had any knowledge or understanding of Japan or Japanese, making it difficult to implement reform through the Japanese government.

The first step in the Occupation was demilitarization. The Japanese army and navy were demobilized; Japanese troops and civilians from all over Asia were rounded up and brought back to Japan; and ships, weapons and tanks were destroyed. All the land Japan had taken was repatriated. At trials in Japan and overseas, thousands of members of the Japanese military were tried and convicted of committing atrocities. From 1946 to 1948, the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal tried 28 Japanese military and political leaders, including former prime ministers, cabinet ministers and military generals, for war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace. Sixteen defendants were sentenced to life imprisonment, and seven were sentenced to death and executed (see Figure 3.5).

A key goal of the Occupation was to build a Japanese democracy. To this end, political prisoners (many whom had been Communist sympathizers) were freed, and repressive laws were rescinded. But the occupiers had to decide what to do with Emperor Hirohito. Should they try him as a war criminal? Should he be forced to abdicate? Ultimately, General MacArthur decided not to do either. The Americans kept the emperor as a constitutional monarch, the symbolic head of Japan. A crucial change eliminated the discussion of the emperor's divinity, which had been enshrined in the 1889 Constitution because of the Shinto belief that the emperor was directly descended from the Sun Goddess. The decision to exonerate the emperor and his family from responsibility for the war remains controversial inside and outside Japan.

The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers also decided that the Meiji Constitution had to be rewritten. Initially, the Japanese government was tasked with rewriting this foundational document, but General MacArthur rejected the Japanese draft. Turning to his own inexperienced staff of young Americans who had little constitutional expertise and even less knowledge of Japan, MacArthur gave them six days to draft a new constitution. That the document they produced remains Japan's Constitution three-quarters of a century later is little short of astonishing. The most significant article in the new Constitution was Article 9, the peace clause, which forbade Japan from having armed forces with war potential (for more information on the Constitution and Article 9, see p. 78).

During the early years of the Occupation, Japan was economically extremely weak and much of the population was starving. The Supreme Command of Allied Powers initially obliged Japan to pay reparations and restricted the industries in which it could invest. However, mid-way through the Occupation, fears about the spread of communism convinced MacArthur to focus on rebuilding Japan as an economically strong ally. MacArthur and U.S. leaders were concerned about the intensifying Cold War between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), as well as the growing power of the Communist Party in China. The Occupiers were also concerned about the potential popularity of Communism in Japan, as the newly released Communists, leftists and labour unions created a role for themselves in business and government. As a result, the Occupiers slowed or reversed some of their democratic reforms and focused instead on Japan's economic recovery. They supplied the Japanese with substantial reconstruction aid, and Joseph Dodge, a Detroit banker, was brought to Japan to advise MacArthur on how to help Japan's economy and to control inflation. Dodge was able to reduce inflation, stabilize the exchange rate and curtail government subsidies. The government was able to present a balanced budget but bankruptcies and unemployment increased.

In January 1946, the Occupation issued a directive prohibiting anyone who had played a role in the promotion of Japanese aggression from participating in public life, making them ineligible to run for political office or run a corporation. This ruling affected about 200,000 people, many of whom had been the backbone of Japanese political and commercial leadership. The "purge," as it was called, opened the way for a new generation of leaders. However, with the onset of the Cold War, the Occupation forces became nervous when left-wingers and Communists began to gain influence. As part of a "reverse course" shift from a focus on democratization and demilitarization towards reconstruction and remilitarization, the Occupation began to soften and rehabilitate many wartime leaders. At the same time, the Occupation launched the "Red Purge," the firing of thousands of people from the government, the education system and the business sector for being "Red." The "Red Purge" occurred between 1949 and 1951 and targeted not just communists and labour union activists but also those who dared criticize the Cold War and the Occupation's reverse course. As Japanese historian Tetsuo Hirata wrote, "the event directly called into question the foundations of the freedom and democracy guaranteed by the Japanese constitution" (Dower and Hirata, 2007).

The Japanese economy received a big boost from the Korean War (1950–1952). Japanese firms supplied the United States with \$2–3 billion worth of war supplies over the three years, allowing domestic companies to invest and expand. Mazda Motors, for example, made jeeps for the American forces, giving the company its start. A logistics hub for the Americans, Japan was also a prime location for American G.I.s Rest and Relocation leaves. From the Korean War onward, Japan's economy boomed. Remarkably, by 1955, only 10 years after the utter devastation of the Japanese economy, industrial production had returned to pre-war levels. As many of the Occupation forces were now in Korea, General MacArthur decided Japan needed a National Police Reserve. Given the constraints of the new Constitution, it had

to be clear that the Reserve was for self-defence. The name was changed to the Self-Defence Forces in 1954 (for more information on the Self-Defense Forces, see pp. 84–85).

Japan's sovereignty was returned, and the Occupation ended with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which came into force in April 1952. The treaty outlined Japan's acceptance of the judgements of the various military tribunals and its commitment to compensate Allied civilians and prisoners of war and the Allied Powers for damage and suffering. At the same time the San Francisco Peace Treaty went into force, the United States and Japan signed a bilateral security treaty. Japan agreed to allow American military bases on Japanese soil in exchange for a commitment by the United States to defend Japan.

Post-war development (1950s–1980s)

Once sparked by American spending during the Korean War, Japan's economy grew rapidly. Leaders in both government and business were obsessed with catching up with other industrialized countries. Average growth rates in the 1960s were in the double digits, far exceeding even the government's ambitious five-year GDP growth plans. In 1964, the country hosted the successful Tokyo Olympics, drawing the world's attention to Japan's successful economic transition. In 1945, Japan had been a pariah state, despised for its wartime and colonial aggression and held responsible for millions of deaths and mass devastation. Less than 20 years later, in a transition rivalled only by the Allied-driven revitalization of West Germany in the same time period, Japan re-entered the circle of respected and successful nations, its wartime aggression largely forgiven but not forgotten.

Plaza Accord and the bubble economy (1980s)

As the 1970s and 1980s progressed, Japan developed a large trade surplus with the United States. In a situation similar to the Trump presidency's difficulty with China's economic role, the United States became increasingly concerned, believing that the root of this trade surplus was the strong U.S. dollar and the weak Japanese yen, which made Japanese goods relatively inexpensive. In 1985, the Americans proposed to the G5 (the United States, Japan, Germany, France and Britain) meeting of finance ministers and Central Bank presidents that the U.S. dollar was too strong, especially relative to the yen and the German mark. The resulting agreement, the Plaza Accord, signalled a commitment to funding interventions to reduce the value of the dollar and increase the value of the yen and the mark. The logic behind the agreement was that as the value of the U.S. dollar declined, American goods would become less expensive, while as the yen increased in value, Japanese goods would become more expensive as Japanese manufacturers would be forced to raise their prices. The expected result was that Japanese and U.S. consumers would buy more products from the United States and fewer from Japan. These actions, it was thought, would adjust the trade balance.

However, this was not what happened. The yen escalated dramatically in value but with no corresponding reduction in Japan's trade surplus with the United States. There were several reasons why this occurred: firstly, Japanese companies chose to take very little or no profit in order to maintain market share; secondly, the resources and other inputs for Japanese manufacturers were now less expensive; thirdly, the Japanese government made sure that its industrial sector received the financial backing it needed to remain globally competitive. Japanese companies found the adjustment difficult initially, but over time they learned how to cope with a much stronger yen.

One of the impacts of the Plaza Accord was that, in international terms, the Japanese were suddenly rich. While the yen did not buy more at home, it suddenly bought a lot more overseas.

The Japanese began buying precious art, gems and foreign real estate, especially in Hawaii, California and Australia's Gold Coast. People borrowed money using hyper-inflated Japanese real estate as collateral, and because Tokyo's property values were so high, small properties in Tokyo allowed for the purchases of huge properties abroad. Japanese homes, previously disparagingly called "rabbit hutches," were now worth more than Hollywood mansions. Commercial real estate in particular skyrocketed in value between 1986 and 1991. At the height of the bubble economy, as this period came to be called, Japanese companies and individuals owned a good portion of the Los Angeles skyline, the Rockefeller Centre in New York and MGM Studios. Stories of wild Japanese spending and excess circulated widely.

The prosperity could not last. Eventually, Japanese real estate prices peaked and fell, and the banks began to call in loans as the land held as collateral lost value. As a result, the banks found themselves holding unpaid loans worth trillions of yen. When the bubble finally burst in late 1991, Japan's economy ground to a halt. Over the next decade, Japan's GDP grew only 1.14 percent, below that of other industrialized countries.

Japan's political heritage

Japan's political culture emerged from its history, culture and values. Whereas the political system of Western countries is rooted in concepts like individual rights, the importance of representation and the rule of law, Japan's political heritage is based in Confucianism and the relationship between the lord and his retainers. Until Meiji, there was no systematic Japanese discussion of inalienable rights or representative bodies. Confucianism, though, taught the importance of formal education and the ethical basis for government, resulting in high levels of literacy and strong administrative standards. For hundreds of years Japan had been open to learning from other countries (building on writing and administrative systems from China, Buddhism from India and weaponry from the Portuguese). This openness ended during the Tokugawa era but restarted with the desperate desire during the Meiji period to learn from and catch up with the West. Tokugawan seclusion greatly contributed to the development of regional identities, and gradually as the work of philosophers, poets and playwrights spread throughout the country, a strong sense of national unity and identity developed.

Political and government structure

Government

Japan is a unitary state with most power in the hands of the national government. The country is divided into 47 prefectures, each with its own governor and legislature. These prefectural governments focus on local issues and are dependent for most of their budget on the national government.

The head of state

As Japan is a monarchy, the emperor is the country's head of state. After the adoption of the 1947 constitution, the emperor's position became symbolic but nonetheless significant. The Constitution states that the emperor is "the symbol of the State and of the unity of the People, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power" (Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, n.d.). A hereditary patrilineal (following the male line) position, the emperor performs ceremonial tasks such as appointing the prime minister (once he or she has been elected and selected by the Diet) and the chief justice, receiving foreign ambassadors and representing the nation abroad. The current emperor, Naruhito,

ascended to the Chrysanthemum throne on May 1, 2019 after the abdication of his father, Emperor Akihito. Emperor Naruhito is 126th in an unbroken line, which legend traces back to Emperor Jimmu in 660 B.C., a descendant of Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. Prior to 2006 and the birth of Prince Hisato (the son of Emperor Naruhito's younger brother Crown Prince Akishino), a lack of young male heirs sparked much discussion about whether to change the laws of succession to allow a woman to ascend to the throne.

Head of government

Japan has a parliamentary system of government. The prime minister is the head of government, chosen by the elected members of both Houses of the Diet. The prime minister is almost always the leader of the majority party in the Lower House. In the case of a minority government, the PM could be the leader of the dominant party in a ruling coalition. The prime minister chooses the members of his or her cabinet, who serve as ministers and heads of agencies.

Constitution

As discussed earlier, Japan's Constitution was drawn up by the Americans during the Occupation. Traces of American values and constitutional priorities are evident. For example, the Constitution begins with "We, the Japanese people ...;" it includes universal suffrage, a parliamentary legislature and an independent judiciary, and it guarantees fundamental rights such as freedom of religion, thought, assembly and residence. The Constitution's most famous and controversial clause is Article 9, the peace clause, which states that "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized" (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, n.d.). Current Prime Minister Abe, many conservative politicians and a significant percentage of the Japanese public would like to rewrite Article 9 to allow Japan to have a military like all other "normal" nations. A constitutional amendment must pass both the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors with a two-thirds majority. It must then be approved by a majority in a national referendum and promulgated by the emperor. Even if a proposed amendment (and exactly how to revise Article 9 would first have to be decided) passed both the Houses of the Japanese Parliament, it is not clear it would pass a referendum. In the meantime, the government has been gradually expanding the boundaries of what the country's well-funded and large Self-Defence Forces (SDF) are able to do. In 2015, the government passed legislation allowing Japan to engage in collective self-defence, which means the SDF could go to the aid of Allied troops if Japan was at risk.

The legislature

The Japanese Parliament is bicameral (meaning it has two houses) and is called the Diet (from the Latin *dieta* or "assembly"). The Lower House (House of Representatives) has 465 members elected for four-year terms. It is more powerful than the Upper House (House of Councillors) which has 242 seats. Its members serve six-year terms, with half elected every three years.

Electoral system

Japan has a complex electoral system. The 465 seats in the House of Representatives are elected through a mixed system. There are 289 seats elected in a first past-the-post system from single seat constituencies; the other 176 seats are elected through proportional representation (a closed list system with the political parties identifying their preferred candidates in order) in 11 districts. Voters vote twice—once for their constituency representatives and once for the party of their choice. The party supplies a list of candidates ranked in order. The higher the percentage of the vote a party receives, the further down the list of candidates the party is able to go. In June 2016, the country's voting age was lowered from 20 to 18.

The electoral system for Japan's House of Representatives changed to this mixed system in 1993 when an opposition coalition was in power. Previously, it resembled the multi-member district (MMD) system used for House of Councillors elections in which multiple members were elected in a single district. Voters have one vote. Each district returns between one and five members. One of the drawbacks of the previous system was that people competed against members of their own party, leading to the creation of factions within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and other larger parties and reduced party loyalty. Because they could not rely entirely on the support of their party (as it was supporting multiple candidates), politicians formed local support networks called *koenkai* to help them generate support and money. Candidates were loyal to the leader of their faction, rather than the national party. In exchange, the politicians received various forms of assistance from the faction leader.

The electoral system for the House of Councillors or Upper House is also mixed. In this case, 96 members are elected using proportional representation in a nationwide election. The other 146 are elected from 47 multi-member districts matching the nation's prefectures. Since the proportional representation system is based on an open list, it is a little different from that in the Lower House elections. Under an open list system, electors vote for either a candidate or a party. The parties receive seats based on the share of the vote received by the candidates or the party; however, the candidates who receive the most votes are prioritized in the seat allocation. To increase the votes they receive, parties often try to recruit celebrities to run.

Japan's electoral districts, especially those for the House of Councillors, are troublingly malapportioned. Some prefectures have up to three times as many registered voters as others. Japan's constitution gives the Diet the authority to determine how districts are drawn but also states that all people are equal under the law. Under the current arrangement, however, some people's votes count much more than those of others. The courts have ruled against this malapportionment and have indicated that in the Lower House, "the biggest constituency should not have more than double the number of voters of the smallest" ("Japan's electoral," 2019). Part of the challenge is the desire to have a member of both the houses of the Diet in each of Japan's 47 prefectures. As the populations of the rural prefectures are shrinking while the urban areas grow, the disparity in population among the regions is likely to increase.

Election campaigns

Japanese election campaigns are very short, usually about 12–17 days. Candidates are not permitted to campaign outside this time. Elections are always on Sundays, and there are numerous election financing and campaign restrictions designed to discourage corruption and inequities among candidates. Lawn signs, buttons and bumper stickers, door-to-door solicitation, parades or dinners and negative campaigning are not permitted. Instead, loudspeaker-equipped vans

drive around blaring out messages encouraging people to vote for their candidate. As election campaigns are so short, the *koenkai* (local support networks) play an important ongoing role by sponsoring “cultural and educational events” for their candidates.

Since the beginning of the post-war period, Japanese politics have been very personal. Historically, village groups would vote together as a block; a number of blocks would collectively elect a member to the Diet election after election. The seat might eventually be turned over to the son of the Diet member or his delegate. In return for this support, constituents expected the Diet member to bring economic development, jobs and infrastructure to the community. As block voting disappeared, the *koenkai*, personal support groups, developed. To encourage people to join their personal support groups, candidates offer favours like helping a child get accepted into a good school or secure a good job. They attend, often with a cash gift, weddings, funerals, graduations, store openings and other important events of their constituents. Some candidates attend as many as 30 such events a month. The personal nature of Japanese politics can spill into a system of money politics, with people voting in exchange for benefits. This in turn has led to numerous corruption and bribery scandals. It was public disgust with the corruption in the long dominant Liberal Democratic Party that brought an opposition coalition briefly to power in 1993. During their 11 months in power, this coalition government tried to eliminate the personalized factional nature of Japanese politics by removing the multi-member district electoral system for the House of Representatives, for example. They also started to re-engineer electoral districts, which had been designed to favour the LDP, to allow for the development of a stronger two- or multi-party system.

Japanese political parties

Liberal Democratic Party

One of the most successful democratic political parties in history, the LDP ruled continuously from 1955 until 2009, except for 11 months in 1993. In 2009, it lost to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) but returned to power in 2012. Although without a well-defined unified ideology or political philosophy, the LDP is generally considered conservative, leaning to the right on economic and foreign policy issues. The LDP has numerous factions, formal sub-groups of politicians organized around a senior political leader. (Factions also exist in other Japanese political parties.) These factions, usually named after the leader, try to secure power for themselves within the party. As the LDP has been in power for so long, instead of the fight for power being with other political parties, the most intense battles have been within the LDP itself. The fight is not usually over particular policy positions but for political power. There are usually 4 or 5 factions within the LDP, but, over the years, there have been as many as 13. Some factions have been as large as 120 members in both the Houses combined, bigger than the largest opposition party but not large enough not to need to form an alliance with another faction. Other factions have been as small as four members. Recently, factions have become larger and therefore more powerful. In fact, a strong faction leader can have more influence than the prime minister.

Faction leaders expect loyalty from their members and support during party elections. In return, leaders help members raise funds and build up their *koenkai* or personal support networks, offer financial assistance and assist members to obtain positions within the party and the government. The importance of factions has declined somewhat since the 1990s due primarily to electoral reforms. Nonetheless, they still play a significant role within the LDP and Japanese politics more broadly. As of 2019, there were five main factions and three

smaller ones. Factions play a significant role in the selection of the party leader and, therefore, the prime minister. During the mid-2000s, factional in-fighting resulted in an almost annual change in prime minister. The most famous faction leader was Tanaka Kakuei, who served in the House of Representatives from 1947 to 1990 and as prime minister from 1972 to 1974. Even after he was convicted of bribery and put in prison, his political influence expanded, and his faction grew to 150 members. Tanaka is credited with engineering the selections of the next three prime ministers.

Former Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (2012–2020) served a one-year term as prime minister in 2006–2007 and then resigned due to ill health. Non-consecutive two-term leaders are very rare, but Mr. Abe was elected in 2012 and re-elected in 2014 and again in 2017. In November 2019, he became Japan's longest serving prime minister. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe comes from a political family; his father and grandfather were both politicians and his other grandfather, Kishi Nobusuke, was prime minister of Japan from 1957 to 1960. Prime Minister Kishi tried unsuccessfully to change Japan's Constitution, particularly Article 9, in the 1950s. Nationalistic and focused on recovering Japan's pride and dignity, Abe would have liked to accomplish what his grandfather did not: change the Japanese constitution to allow Japan to have a proper military or, as this looks unlikely, adjust the wording of the Constitution to specifically authorize the existence of Japan's Self-Defense Forces. Prime Minister Abe resigned suddenly in September 2020 due to ill health. Yoshihide Suga, former Cabinet Secretary under Prime Minister Abe, became the next Prime Minister (see Textbox 3.6 for a list of Japanese prime ministers).

Opposition parties

For nearly four decades Japan had a very stable “one and a half party system.” But in 1993, the bursting of the economic “bubble” and frustration with the LDP led to a short-lived opposition coalition. This coalition used its short time in office to implement electoral reform. Until the 1990s, the Japan Socialist Party (JSP) was the largest opposition party, formed as a merger of leftist parties in 1955. In 1996, the JSP changed its name to the Social Democratic Party. Some of the JSP's more centrist members joined with some centrist politicians from the LDP to form the DPJ. Two other small parties merged with the DPJ in 1998, retaining the same name. From 1998 to 2016, the DPJ was the main opposition party. The DPJ won Upper House elections in 2004 and 2007, and, then, in response to growing voter frustration with the LDP, in September 2009, the DPJ swept to power by winning a strong majority in the Lower House.

The 2009 victory was hailed as the rebirth of Japanese democracy. It appeared that the 1993 electoral reforms had created the opening needed for a party to be strong enough to rival the LDP. There would now be two strong political parties. However, the DPJ government was plagued by numerous controversies and challenges, including the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. It suffered the same “revolving door” of prime ministers as had the LDP. Three years after they were elected, the DPJ lost badly to the LDP, first in the 2010 Upper House elections (giving Japan what was referred to as a twisted Parliament in which the LDP had a majority in the Upper House and the DPJ had the majority in the Lower House) and then in the 2012 Lower House elections.

Since then, the Japanese opposition has been fragmented with numerous smaller parties being created, merging and dissolving on a regular basis. In 2016, the DPJ merged with two smaller parties to form the Democratic Party (DP). Over the next two years, the DP merged and then dissolved, with many centre-left members forming the Constitutional Democratic Party and centre-right members forming the Democratic Party for the People. In 2019, these two parties had the largest number of seats after the LDP and in 2020 the two parties merged.

Some DPFP members reused to merge and created a new party but maintained the same name and branding as before.

Komeito, the “Clean Government Party,” was started in 1964 by members of the Sokka Gakkai, a Buddhist lay organization and new religion, which claims one member in each of 8 million households across the country. A pacifist party, Komeito focuses on human rights, education, welfare and the environment. From 1999 to 2009 and again from 2012, the Komeito has been part of a ruling coalition with the LDP. Although the junior partner in the coalition with an ideological platform somewhat distant from the LDP, Komeito has managed to be independent, able to negotiate support for a series of small policies and willing to act as a brake on some LDP policies.

Textbox 3.6 Post-war Japanese prime ministers (last name first)

Yoshida, Shigeru	1946–1947, 1948–1954
Katayama, Tetsu	1947–1948
Ashida, Hitoshi	1948
Hatoyama, Ichirō	1954–1956
Ishibashi, Tanzan	1956–1957
Kishi, Nobusuke	1957–1960
Ikeda, Hayato	1960–1964
Satō, Eisaku	1964–1972
Tanaka, Kakuei	1972–1974
Miki, Takeo	1974–1976
Fukuda, Takeo	1976–1978
Ōhira, Masayoshi	1978–1980
Suzuki, Zenkō	1980–1982
Nakasone, Yasuhiro	1982–1987
Takeshita, Noboru	1987–1989
Uno, Sōsuke	1989
Kaifu, Toshiki	1989–1991
Miyazawa, Kiichi	1991–1993
Hosokawa, Morihiro	1993–1994
Hata, Tsutomu	1994
Murayama, Tomiichi	1994–1996
Hashimoto, Ryūtarō	1996–1998
Obuchi, Keizo	1998–2000
Mori, Yoshiro	2000–2001
Koizumi, Junichiro	2001–2006
Abe, Shinzo	2006–2007, first time
Fukuda, Yasuo	2007–2008
Asō, Tarō	2008–2009
Hatoyama, Yukio	2009–2010
Kan, Naoto	2010–2011
Noda, Yoshihiko	2011–2012
Abe, Shinzo	2012–2020, second time
Suga, Yoshihide	2020–

Japanese political economy

In the 1980s, U.S. political scientist Chalmers Johnson labelled Japan (and South Korea and Taiwan, which followed in Japan’s footsteps) a “capitalist development state,” by which he meant a partnership between government and business. In using this term to describe Japan,

Johnson was arguing that Japan’s government focused pointedly on economic development and the policy steps needed to achieve sustained growth. From the 1950s through the 1970s, in particular, the Japanese government played a very strong role in the development of the Japanese economy. Rather than trying to control or limit the private sector, the government worked with it, guiding businesses and industries by developing and promoting policies that support their long-term development, especially those with the most potential to create wealth and jobs. The origins of this model came from the Meiji period when the oligarchs started new industries and then sold them to private sector companies. The tight linkages between the elected politicians, the government bureaucracy and the corporate sector have been commonly referred to as the *iron triangle*. The role of the bureaucracy in the *iron triangle* is particularly significant as the Japanese bureaucracy has enjoyed greater influence and respect than its Western equivalents. Politicians, busy attending constituent events and strengthening factions, have little time for day-to-day governing. Japan’s bureaucrats, selected from the top university graduates and extremely hard-working, are tasked with developing and implementing policies and programs in pursuit of economic growth.

Connections among the three groups in the iron triangle are facilitated by the education system. Graduates from Tokyo University and a handful of other well-known public and private universities that are notoriously difficult to enter dominate the leading positions in both government and business. Relationships formed at university facilitate interactions between the government bureaucracy and the corporate world. The loop closes again through a process called *amakudari* (meaning descent from heaven) by which mid-level government managers retire early and are given positions as advisors or board members of companies with which they worked while in government. The companies benefit from the skills and connections of the retired civil servants, and both the government and the corporate sector gain from an enhanced understanding of the priorities and constraints of the other.

In the latter half of the 20th century, Japan’s Economic Planning Agency (EPA) and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) (in 2001, the name changed to the Ministry for Economy, Trade and Industry or METI) were the key architects of Japan’s capitalist development state model. The EPA formulated broad economic objectives and announced five-year economic plans and forecasts for the GNP growth rate. MITI was the ministry responsible for industrial policies. In the early post-war years, MITI supported industries that showed potential for quick growth and those that could employ large numbers of workers. It began by targeting iron and steel, chemicals, metals and shipbuilding and later moved to automobiles, motorcycles, computers and high technology. Using a variety of tools and policies during the high growth period from the 1950s to 1970s, MITI controlled foreign exchange and the licensing of foreign technology, supervising new technology acquisition to ensure the best deal for the country. MITI tried to steer companies into the sectors it believed would be the most productive through tax strategies and other means, at the same time working to avoid overcapacity in a sector and to prevent the creation of monopolies. The MITI bureaucrats have a great deal of power and influence because it is they, not the politicians, who develop, lead, implement and enforce the ministry’s policies. When it was in power from 2009 to 2012, the DPJ intended to shift political power from the bureaucrats to elected politicians. This goal turned out to be more difficult to achieve than the DPJ had anticipated, as the bureaucrats had decades of experience and expertise on various files: alienating them had negative consequences.

A detailed study of Japan’s industrial policy in action can be seen in Japan’s efforts to build its own computer industry starting in the late 1950s. As Marie Anchordoguy points out in her study *Computers Inc.*, to help Japanese companies develop a computer industry and eventually compete with IBM, MITI used a variety of methods: from assisting with financing

to pressuring Japanese companies in the early days to buy inferior Japanese computers to encouraging cooperative research and development projects to establishing a computer rental company (Anchordoguy, 1989).

Proponents of Japan's industrial policy argue that Japan's economic development was extremely successful, pointing out the country's high growth rates and its success at building the sectors it selected and nurtured. However, not all analysts give credit to MITI and the Japanese government for the Japanese miracle of economic growth that took place from the 1950s to the 1980s. While the key industries grew as planned, other companies and sectors (e.g. cameras, bicycles, televisions, watches and robotics) grew and developed a strong export presence without government assistance. MITI made mistakes. For example, MITI initially planned for Japan to have one or two auto producers and intended to set standard specifications for cars. Manufacturers pushed back and numerous Japanese auto manufacturers became successful. Some economists argue that MITI actually restricted economic activity by not allowing completely free competitive markets, suggesting that Japan might have even been more successful without MITI's interference. As Japan's success grew in the late 1970s, the country's trading partners, particularly the United States, argued that Japan was protectionist and that its industrial policies were really unfair trade practices. Nonetheless, MITI/METI focused on policies and programs it considered necessary to support Japan's economic development. To this day, the government continues to fund and organize cooperative research projects that bring together scientists and technicians from a range of universities and corporations to work on cutting edge projects with commercial potential.

Over the decades, Japan's industrial policy approach changed. Throughout the 1960s, there was a "growth at all costs" mentality, resulting in environmental degradation, trade problem and other challenges. Japan's larger cities struggled with serious pollution problems. Osaka, for example, was known as the "Smoke Capital" for its pollution-producing factories. As well, many bodies of water were severely contaminated, with Kitakyushu's Dokai Bay even known as the "Sea of Death." Japan experienced four major pollution-caused disease outbreaks related to the improper disposal of industrial waste by Japanese companies. As a result of these environmental and health disasters, public concern escalated, and gradually local, prefectural and finally the national government began to enact legislation around pollution and environmental damage; this weakened the corporate-government bond. In the 1970s and 1980s, trading partners began to complain about Japan's practices, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade rules were more broadly followed. As Japan's industrial sector matured, companies began moving production offshore to take advantage of lower labour costs and to deal with rising protectionism. The need for an activist industrial policy began to decline. By this time, the corporate sector was much stronger and wealthier than it had been 40 years earlier.

Japan's Self-Defense Forces

The majority of Japanese are pacifists. Article 9 of Japan's Constitution renounces war and declares that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." Japan was thereby prohibited from using force beyond the minimum required to defend itself from attack. At the demand of the United States, Japan began to rearm in 1949; in 1954, the Self-Defense Forces (Japan Ground Self-Defense Force, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and Japan Air Self-Defense Force) were created. Until 1992 and the passage of the International Peace Cooperation Act, which permitted Japan to participate in UN-sponsored peacekeeping missions, the Self-Defense Forces stayed home. However,

Japan did not like being criticized for sending only financial not military support to international conflicts. During the 1990 Gulf War when a coalition of countries drove Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, Japan contributed \$13 billion but no Japanese soldiers participated, for which the administration was severely criticized by the United States and other countries that supplied troops.

Since then, the SDF have participated in nine peacekeeping missions, including in Cambodia, Mozambique, the Golan Heights, Timor-Leste and Haiti. The SDF participation in these missions was constrained by several rules: there had to be a ceasefire in place; the parties to the conflict had to agree to the UN mission; the peacekeeping mission had to be impartial, and SDF members could only use force in self-defence (later expanded to include the defence of non-SDF members). After 9/11, Japan adopted the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, which allowed the SDF to engage in various support activities. They dispatched the Maritime SDF to the Indian Ocean for an oil-fuelling mission supporting the United States in Afghanistan. SDF personnel were also sent to Iraq and Kuwait between 2003 and 2009 for humanitarian and reconstruction work. In 2007, the Japan Defense Agency (which has responsibility for the SDF) was upgraded to become the Ministry of Defense.

In 2015, then Prime Minister Abe, intent on changing Article 9 (see Textbox 3.7), passed new national security laws. These push the constitutional bounds of Article 9 even further by stating that SDF personnel have the right to exercise collective self-defence (defending an ally) under certain circumstances, such as when not doing so could jeopardize Japan's safety. In the past, this kind of intervention could only occur on or near Japanese territory. Examples of the kinds of activities that the SDF can now carry out include protecting vessels, removing mines and even providing munitions if a war was to occur on the Korean peninsula, thereby threatening nearby Japan.

Japan consistently spends about 1 percent of its GDP on the SDF, much less than Russia's 3.9 percent, the United States' 3.2 percent, France's 2.3 percent and China's 1.9 percent. However, as Japan's GDP is the third largest in the world, 1 percent is actually a significant amount of money. In fact, Japan's military spending in 2018 was \$46.6 billion, making it the ninth highest spender worldwide, a long way behind the spending of the United States and China but not far off the United Kingdom and Germany.

Textbox 3.7 Change Article 9?

When Prime Minister Abe came to power in 2012, he campaigned to change Article 9 in Japan's Constitution. Arguing that renunciation of war does not preclude the right to self-defence, Prime Minister Abe was intent on adding a section that defines the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces to ensure that they are constitutional, and, in fact, would prefer even more drastic changes that would allow Japan a full-fledged military. It is extremely unlikely that he or his successor would be able to garner enough political or public support for the change. However, over the past three decades, the government has been stretching the boundaries of the Article. Many constitutional scholars argue that Japan's 2015 national security changes are unconstitutional.

Japan can be considered a pacifist nation; the vast majority of its citizens are opposed to any militarization. However, some Japanese, as well as many Americans, concerned about China's burgeoning military budget and North Korea's missile tests, believe that it is time for Japan to become a "normal nation" and possess a fully developed

military. That some North Korean missiles have flown right over Hokkaido has added to the sense of unease. But if Japan were to make any steps towards a more robust military, Japan's neighbours would be deeply concerned and would likely object. Despite Abe's commitment to constitutional revision, in 2020, it still does not appear likely. A constitutional amendment requires two-thirds support in the Diet, which an LDP government could manage with the support of their coalition members, but it also requires majority support in a national referendum. A 2019 Kyodo News poll showed only 40 percent of the Japanese population is supportive of revising Article 9, with over half opposed.

North Korean abductions of Japanese citizens

During the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea abducted Japanese citizens to teach Japanese language and culture to North Korean spies. In some cases, there may have been other reasons for the kidnappings (e.g. to obtain the Japanese people's identities or have the women become wives to North Korea-based Japanese terrorists). The North Korean government has admitted to abducting 13 Japanese citizens, whereas the Japanese government has identified 17 people they believe were abducted and think there may have been many more. The abductees disappeared from Japanese coastal areas, and most were in their 20s. The youngest was Megumi Yokota, who was only 13 when she disappeared.

Until the first Japan-North Korea summit in September 2002, North Korea denied the abductions. In order to facilitate the normalization of relations with Japan, Kim Jong Il admitted to 13 abductions and apologized. The Japanese government and general public were outraged. North Korea provided death certificates for eight of the 13 people but later admitted these were forged. The five abductees North Korea admitted to be alive were allowed to go to Japan but only on the understanding that they would return to North Korea. The Japanese government agreed, but, under pressure from the families and the public, did not have the victims return. Indicating that this had broken the agreement, North Korea abruptly ended the talks. Later the children of two of the abductees' families were permitted to join their parents in Japan.

The North Korean government now claims that the issue is resolved as all the 13 abductees have been identified. The Japanese authorities, however, do not agree. They point to forged death certificates and indicate that the remains of Yokota and another abductee returned to Japan by North Korea had, according to Japanese DNA testing, been misidentified and were the remains of others. In response, in 2004, Japan restricted trade with North Korea and submitted a resolution condemning North Korea for "systematic human rights violations" to the United Nations General Assembly. In 2006, Yokota's mother testified about the abductions to a sub-committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and met with then President George Bush to ask for his help in resolving the issue. In 2013, victims' families testified at a United Nations hearing. For years, Japan has imposed sanctions on North Korea, hoping this would lead to a resolution of the abduction issue, meaning a complete accounting of the Japanese abducted, what happened to them and where their remains are. In April 2018, Prime Minister Abe asked President Trump if he would raise the issue with Chairman Kim. President Trump agreed and did so, but the issue remains unresolved.

Japanese society

Despite the relatively slow growth in the last two decades, Japan is one of the world's wealthiest countries, with the third largest economy. Both students and workers are known for their hard work and long hours at their desks. Salary men (Japanese male white-collar employees) work up to 60 hours a week on top of long commutes and frequent late nights spent drinking with customers or co-workers. As a result, men often do not see much of their families during the week.

About 70 percent of Japanese women quit working when they marry or at least when they have children and do not return to the workforce for at least 10 years. When they do return, it is usually to part-time, poorly paid jobs. As a result, for most Japanese families, the husband earns the bulk of the family income, and the wife does the vast majority of the housework and childcare. There are a variety of reasons for this situation, including lack of childcare, expectations of maternal involvement in children's education, advantages for men in promotion and opportunities and the intense work culture, which rewards the length of time a person works for a company. It is difficult to leave a job temporarily and would be very hard for both parents to work the number of hours Japan's work culture requires. Only 25 percent of mothers are employed full time, with most young women choosing instead to be full-time housewives, a more respected calling than in some other industrialized countries. In an effort to attract more women into the workforce to offset the shrinking labour force, in 2013, the Japanese government launched *Womenomics*, policies obliging large companies to outline their plans for hiring more women and raising the "dependent exemption" (the amount of money a wife can earn before the family income is taxed). *Womenomics* also involved opening up more day care places. This economic impetus may help change the deep-rooted sexism that limits female economic participation.

A record number of women, 30.03 million, are now working in Japan. However, 55 percent of women are in non-career track jobs compared with 23 percent of men (Mishima, 2019). In 2018, at medium and large Japanese companies, only 5 percent of the senior roles were held by women (Baird, 2018). Only 7.8 percent of company presidents and only 4.2 percent of the appointments to corporate boards were women (Baird, 2018; Deloitte, 2017). In the 2019 Japanese Diet, women comprised only 10.2 percent of the Lower House and 20.7 percent of the Upper House ("Gender Imbalance," 2019). And despite Prime Minister Abe's commitment to creating "a society in which women will shine," there is only one woman in his 2020 cabinet. However, the governor of Tokyo is a woman, Yuriko Koike, as is the mayor of Yokohama.

Education

Despite a difficult written language with two alphabets and Chinese characters, Japan boasts near-universal literacy and high levels of educational performance—at least on standardized tests. Interestingly, however, compared to other industrialized countries, Japan spends a smaller percentage of its GDP on education. Until middle school, children of all abilities remain in the same class. Performance differences among children are viewed by parents and teachers as due more to a lack of effort than to a lack of ability, so even weaker and less interested students feel pressured to work hard. The education system also teaches students to think of themselves as part of a group, to be aware of their impact on others and to conform, making it difficult for students who are different or do not fit in easily.

The high school system focuses on merit. The 9th grade high school entrance exam system is designed to identify the brightest and most motivated. Students can choose to take entrance exams either for an academic, vocational or comprehensive public high school or for an elite or a low-ranked private high school. Although grades and teacher recommendation letters are also required for admission, the emphasis at all institutions is on the entrance exam score. These high school entrance exams require mastery of a great deal of material. To be accepted by an excellent high school means one stands a much better chance of entering a highly ranked university, as well as securing a high-status job. Thus, students intending to attend an excellent high school must study long hours. University acceptance is also based on demanding entrance exams. The most serious students spend the better part of a year studying during almost every waking moment they are not in class. For most students (unless in medicine, engineering or the physical sciences), however, university life is much easier. During these four years, students enjoy a break before joining the working world. Japanese companies recruit students in their final year of university, and new employees begin their new jobs on April 1st.

The goal of the intense studying is to find a good position at a major Japanese corporation or within the Japanese government, both of which can mean career-long employment. In the post-war period until the bubble burst, the Japanese corporate world (primarily the large companies) was known for providing life-time employment and a seniority-based pay system. Since Japanese companies were growing rapidly during most of the latter half of the 20th century, it was relatively easy for companies to commit to their workers. Once hired, they would be employed for their career even if there was not enough work and even if they were not hard workers. Japanese companies were looking at and planning for the long term, knowing that company loyalty would serve them well. But the bursting of the bubble in the early 1990s severely tested this commitment: companies began to lay off middle managers. This came as an enormous shock for men who had devoted their whole lives to their companies and had expected to be taken care of for life.

Japan's seniority-based pay system means that employees generally move up the ranks at the same pace and pay for at least the first 10 years of their career. Only after a decade with the company are some individuals promoted over others who joined the company at the same time. Eventually, all will reach the first level of promotion but some of those promoted to the first level may be promoted to a subsequent level sooner. Because people seldom work for someone their same age or younger, nobody is forced to take orders from someone who was once their equal or junior. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, some companies experimented with changes to the seniority-based wage system, implementing various forms of merit-based compensation, but most Japanese firms today continue to have a seniority-based pay system.

Japan faces many of the same labour problems as other parts of the world. Although the ageing and declining population has kept the country's unemployment figures low (in 2018, it was 2.4 percent) ("Japan's Unemployment," 2020), over one-third of the Japanese workforce is in non-regular employment, which means in temporary, part-time or contract work. Non-regular work is clearly much less secure and usually less well paid than full-time employment. As a result, the gap between those who are well off and those who are not has been widening, and a class of working poor has emerged. In the past, those making low wages were primarily women in non-regular employment, especially those who returned to the workforce part time after their children graduated from high school. Now male workers are also part of the new precariat.

Textbox 3.8 *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseness)

Nihonjinron is a genre of writing that debates the essence of "Japaneseness." *Nihonjinron* was first seen in the pre-war years, and since the 1980s, books and articles with titles like *What is a Japanese?* (Shichihei Yamamoto 1989) and *What is Japan?* (Taichi Sakaiya 1991) became very popular as they attempted to analyse and explain specific aspects of Japanese culture and ways of thinking. Nakane Chie's book *Japanese Society* discussed the strength of Japanese interpersonal relationships. *Nihonjinron* literature covers a number of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, history, linguistics and even biology, chemistry and physics. Although some Western authors have written books that could be considered part of the genre, most of the authors are Japanese.

The first *Nihonjinron* books were published in the early post-World War II period and discussed Japanese uniqueness quite negatively and critically. Recently defeated Japan was described as backward, if somewhat exotic. As Japan grew economically stronger in the 1960s, the writings began to discuss strengths and weaknesses in both Japanese and Western traditions. Since the 1970s, *Nihonjinron* writings have discussed Japanese uniqueness in a positive light. As Japan became the second largest economy in the world, the Japanese became more confident; at the same time, the rest of the world began to consider that perhaps there were lessons that could be learned from Japan. Japan's management programs, industrial relations and education systems were all praised. Ezra Vogel's 1979 *Japan as Number One* was one of the best known of the Western books championing Japan's unique qualities. When the economic bubble burst and Japan's economy slowed in the early 1990s, Western writers began to call instead for the globalization of Japanese society and the structural reform of Japan's corporate sector.

Japanese *Nihonjinron* writers focus on their belief in the uniqueness of the Japanese race: of the consequences of being an island country, of the importance of the Japanese language and, especially, of the particularities of Japanese thinking and behaviour. These authors believe that Japan is a uniquely homogenous society. Their writings dissect Japan's group orientation; hierarchical structure; belief in *ganbari* (persistence and endurance); and focus on harmony, loyalty and consensus. The *Nihonjinron* literature tends to assume that all Japanese possess the characteristic under discussion (and that all possess it to the same degree) and that if non-Japanese have that trait, it is only to a marginal or limited extent. At the root of *Nihonjinron* is the belief that there is something genuinely unique about being Japanese.

Religion

While most Japanese would say they are not religious, both Shintoism and Buddhism play a large role in Japanese life. Part of Japanese culture since ancient times, Shintoism (Shinto means "the way of the Gods") is an animistic religion whose roots lie in the worship of natural phenomena like the sun, water, rocks, mountains and even human ancestors. The spirits of these phenomenon, known as *kami*, are worshipped at 80,000 shrines throughout Japan.

(see Figure 3.6). Marking the entrance to these shrines are Torii gates, usually red or vermilion, signifying the transition from the secular world to the sacred one. The Ise Grand Shrine is the most important shrine as it honours Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess.

Lacking a founder, particular theology or sacred texts, Shinto is primarily concerned with keeping away evil spirits and restoring purity through purifications, offerings and prayers. Before visiting a Shinto shrine, people wash their hands and mouths so that they are clean before approaching the kami. There is often a long rope with bells on that visitors pull to call the kami. This is followed by two bows, two claps and one bow. Shinto priests perform complicated purification rituals, often involving scattering salt and shaking sacred tree branches with white paper strips. Shrines host various annual festivals at which the kami are thanked and celebrated through dance and musical performances, and people pray for prosperity and good harvests. At many festivals, the *kami* are carried through town in an *o-mikoshi*, sacred palanquin, on people's shoulders. Shintoism deals primarily with life's happy occasions like marriages or the blessings of a child. It is not concerned with the afterlife. Buddhism generally focuses more on death, suffering and the afterlife. This difference in emphasis has allowed Buddhism and Shintoism to coexist peacefully.

Shinto was subordinate to Buddhism through the premodern period but revived during the Meiji Restoration. A key goal of the Meiji oligarchs was to create a sacred foundation for this new stage in the country's development. Shinto became the official state religion, and state financial support was given to the most important shrines. As freedom of religion was guaranteed in the Meiji Constitution, the government defined Shinto as a non-religious patriotic ideology, now sometimes referred to as State Shinto. Worship at shrines was enforced, as was reverential respect for the imperial family, particularly for the emperor. His divinity, that he was descended directly from the Sun Goddess, was emphasized.

The emperor's divinity was a particular focus for Japanese soldiers, who were expected to fight in his name. In addition to respect for the imperial family, the importance of education was also promulgated. The Imperial Rescript on Education, which had been issued during Meiji, described the central purpose of education as the cultivation of loyalty and commitment to nation and parents and was read at all school events, and students were required to memorize it. State Shinto reached a peak preceding and during World War II.

In January 1946, the emperor, at the request of SCAP, issued what has since been called the Humanity Declaration, in which he renounced his divinity. This was the precursor to the new Constitution, which would describe the emperor as the symbol of the country and the unity of the people but made him a figurehead with limited power. In Japan today, Shinto is paradoxically an important yet peripheral part of Japanese life. Few people would say they are Shintoist but almost 80 percent participate in Shinto practices. Most Japanese visit shrines for major festivals, New Year's Day and other occasions. Marriages happen at shrines as does the November 15 *Shichi-Go-San* (Seven-Five-Three) traditional rite of passage celebration for three- and seven-year-old girls and five-year-old boys. Many Japanese homes have a *Kamidana* (God-shelf), a small shrine at which offerings are made.

In around the 6th century, Buddhism was introduced to Japan from southern India via China and Korea. Buddhism teaches that life is suffering and that people can end that suffering by letting go of attachments through Buddha's teachings. The branch of Buddhism that came to Japan was Mahayana (Great Vehicle or Way) Buddhism. Mahayana emphasizes the worship of Buddha but also of Bodhisattvas, people who are on their way to enlightenment but have stayed back from Buddhahood to aid others to reach salvation. Within Mahayana Buddhism, there are a variety of schools that teach different paths to enlightenment. The three main schools in Japan are Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren. In Zen, enlightenment is



Figure 3.6 Shinto Shrine.

achieved through self-discipline and meditation. Pure Land focuses on submitting oneself to the Buddha completely, chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha and believing one will be reborn in the Pure Land where life will be easier. Based on the teachings of Nichiren, a 13th-century Japanese Buddhist priest, Nichiren Buddhism focuses on the chanting of *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo* and on the writings from the Lotus Sutra, an important Buddhist text.

At Buddhist temples, there is no clapping or bell ringing. Hands are held together in prayer, and purification is conducted with incense. People often have a *butsudan* (Buddhist altar) at home to remember a deceased relative. Some Japanese worship at Buddhist temples, and most Japanese funerals are conducted by Buddhist priests. There are special memorial services held after a certain number of days and then years after someone dies. Only about 35 percent of Japanese would identify themselves as Buddhist if surveyed, but Buddhist traditions and festivals play an important part of life in Japan (Allen, 2018).

Christianity was first introduced to Japan in 1549 by the Portuguese. Francis Xavier and his fellow missionaries quickly made close to half a million converts. However, in 1587, Toyotomi Hideyoshi banned missionaries from the country. They were not allowed back until the Meiji period, almost 300 years later. Although freedom of religion was allowed under the Meiji Constitution, the number of Christians grew slowly. Today, only about 1 percent of Japan's population identifies as Christian, most likely at least partly because of the exclusive nature of Christianity, which demands the rejection of other religious ideas and practices, specifically Shintoism and Buddhism both of which are ingrained in Japanese life. Even so, Christianity has still had a great deal of influence on Japan. There are a number of important Christian kindergartens, private high schools, universities and hospitals in Japan.

Many couples like to marry in Christian weddings even if they are not Christian. Millions of Japanese eat chicken from KFC on Christmas Day!

Japan's challenges

Japan faces a number of major challenges, including an ageing population, government debt and its relationship with the United States. These are discussed below. Other important issues for Japan are relations with China, South Korea and North Korea, which are addressed in Chapter 9.

Japan's ageing population

The percentage of Japan's population over 65 is increasing rapidly relative to the rest of its society. The percentage of seniors in 1990 was only 12 percent. It is now close to 27 percent and could climb as high as 35 percent by 2050 (see Table 3.1).

Demographers point out that by 2050, at current projections, Japan's population could decline by 30 percent, with 1 million more people dying each year than being born. There could be 1 million Japanese over 100 years old. There are implications for an ageing and declining population. People cost their governments the most during their later years as health care needs rise. Seniors generally are no longer working and paying taxes but are instead drawing pensions and using the health care system. This, however, is beginning to change in Japan. The age of retirement is increasing. For large companies, the retirement age is 60 but smaller companies are keeping staff much longer. A 2017 government survey showed that over 60 percent of Japan's citizens over the age of 65 would like to stay employed. The OECD estimates that the actual retirement age of Japanese men is closer to 70 years.

While Japan is not the only country with an ageing population and a low birth rate (Italy, Germany and some other European countries are in similar situations), the fact that Japan accepts few immigrants and has a limited number of women working in full-time career jobs has left Japan with a serious labour situation. Japan's workforce is 2 million people smaller than it was in the 1990s. New efforts to alleviate the labour shortage include Prime Minister Abe's *Womenomics* initiatives, new immigration rules allowing for the admission of 345,000 foreigners by 2024 in certain sectors (farming, nursing, construction and hospitality) and the

Table 3.1 Japanese population over age 65 compared with the equivalent population in other countries (%)

Year	Japan	United States	Germany	France	United Kingdom	China
1990	12	12	15	14	16	6
2000	17	12	16	16	16	7
2010	22.5	13	20	17	17	8
2018	28	16	21	20	18	11

encouragement of the elderly to stay employed. Technology, robotics and artificial intelligence will also be used to eliminate work currently done by people.

Government debt

After the bubble economy collapsed, the government continuously poured money into the economy to act as a financial stimulus. In the process, the Japanese government racked up enormous government debt. Japan's government debt is approximately 240 percent of annual GDP, the largest of any major economy. One advantage Japan has is that a high percentage of this debt is held domestically by the Bank of Japan and Japanese investment companies. Over the past five years, the government has begun to stabilize and even reduce the amount of debt slightly.

Japan and the United States

Japan and the United States have had a complicated relationship focused primarily on two issues: trade and security. During the Occupation and in the years afterward, it was a senior-junior relationship, which gradually became more equal as Japan's economy strengthened. By the 1970s as Japan became a powerful economic rival, tensions between the two countries escalated. There were a series of trade disputes and mounting financial frustrations. As Japanese products flooded the United States and world markets, the Americans complained about Japan's trading practices. In the 1980s, with trade tensions at their highest, Japanese auto producers agreed to voluntarily limit the number of vehicles they exported to the United States. To overcome rising trade protectionism, Japanese companies began to move their production overseas, especially to the United States. Trade relations between the two countries have generally been free of serious issues over the past two decades. However, since 2018, President Trump has been complaining about Japan's large trade surplus with the United States.

Non-trade issues are also a concern. The 1952 Security Treaty and Article 9 in the American-written Japanese Constitution set the parameters for the security relationship between Japan and the United States. The Security Treaty made Japan's military dependent on the United States, and the United States agreed to help defend Japan from outside attack in return for permission to have the U.S. military on Japanese soil. As the Constitution forbade Japan from having military forces with the potential to wage war, U.S. protection was vitally important. The Security Treaty was revised and renewed in 1960 despite major public opposition in Japan centring around fears that Japan was too dependent on the United States and the potential consequences of this dependency. The 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, which included provisions for the stationing of the U.S. forces in Japan, remains in force today. Along with American troops, Japan is the home base for the aircraft carrier *Ronald Reagan*. Public opposition in Japan gradually died away (although there remains criticism of Japan's place under the U.S. nuclear umbrella rooted in Japanese efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons). Disputes and tensions about the treaty have arisen over the years but overall both the United States and Japan have benefitted significantly from it.

When it comes to defence, there have been two main areas of friction over the decades. The first has been the United States' intention for Japan to bear the cost of more of the burden of its own defence and to participate more fully in regional and global peacekeeping operations. Through the 1980s and 1990s, critics both inside and outside Japan expressed

frustration with the country's dual personality—an economic giant but a military and political dwarf. It was time, they argued, for Japan to become a normal country. Japan, limited by Article 9, tried to compensate by contributing large amounts of money instead of soldiers to international conflicts like the 1990 Gulf War. This effort, however, did not appease the critics. In response, the Japanese government began pushing the bounds of what the Constitution would allow it to do under the rubric of self-defence. Japanese SDF troops began participating in peacekeeping operations and anti-terrorism support, and the government even passed legislation enabling collective self-defence. President Trump urged Japan to pay a higher proportion of the costs of hosting the 54,000 American troops currently stationed in Japan. He also criticized what he believes to be the one-sided nature of the security treaty, which requires the United States to come to Japan's aid but does not oblige Japan to defend the United States (because of the constitutional limits imposed by Article 9). The president raised both of these topics again at the January 2020 celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.

The other difficult challenge in the U.S.-Japan security relationship has been the American military bases on Okinawa in southern Japan's Ryukyu Islands, one of the country's poorest prefectures. After World War II ended, Okinawa remained occupied and administered by the United States until 1972. Although it only constitutes 0.6 percent of Japan's total land area, almost 71 percent of the lands used exclusively by U.S. forces in Japan are in Okinawa. There are 25,000 American troops at 33 military installations on the island (see Figure 3.7). With such a large number of soldiers close to a civilian population, problems are inevitable. Between 1954 and 2000, over 200,000 violent crimes, including rapes and vehicular homicides, involving U.S. troops and Japanese civilians were reported. Until 1995, under an extraterritoriality agreement, all U.S. suspects were taken to the United States to stand trial. The horrific gang rape of a 12-year-old schoolgirl by three American servicemen led to a new agreement, and now members of the American military stand trial in Japan for crimes committed on Japanese soil.

A current issue for Japan-U.S. relations is the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma base currently located in the centre of Ginowan City. Thirty-eight percent of the city of Ginowan is occupied by military bases used by the United States, and the Futenma base is surrounded by a crowded residential area. Planes landing and taking off multiple times an hour shake windows and make a great deal of noise. Even worse, the presence of the military threatens the safety of the city's residents: in 2004, a military helicopter crashed onto the campus of Okinawa International University, and in 2017, a helicopter component fell onto the grounds of an elementary school. When the DPJ took power in 2009, the then Prime Minister Hatoyama tried to fulfil his election promise to move the base, but the challenges of where to move it proved insurmountable, frustrating the U.S. military leadership, who waited for months for a decision. A year later, Hatoyama resigned over his inability to move the base. Numerous subsequent prime ministers have also tried to solve the base problem without success. However, despite strong opposition from the Okinawan governor and the Okinawan public, in 2015 the Abe government began work on a replacement site at Henoko in the northern part of Okinawa. The construction of Henoko requires a great deal of land reclamation work and the creation of a runway into the sea. Many Okinawans have concerns about the environmental impact of Henoko, especially its impact on dugong (a relative of the manatee) habitat. In February 2019, a non-binding referendum was held in Okinawa asking if voters were in favour of the relocation plan, opposed it or were neutral. More than 70 percent voted against the relocation. Unfortunately for the Okinawans, the referendum results have not swayed the national government, which argues that Henoko is the only viable option and construction will go ahead.

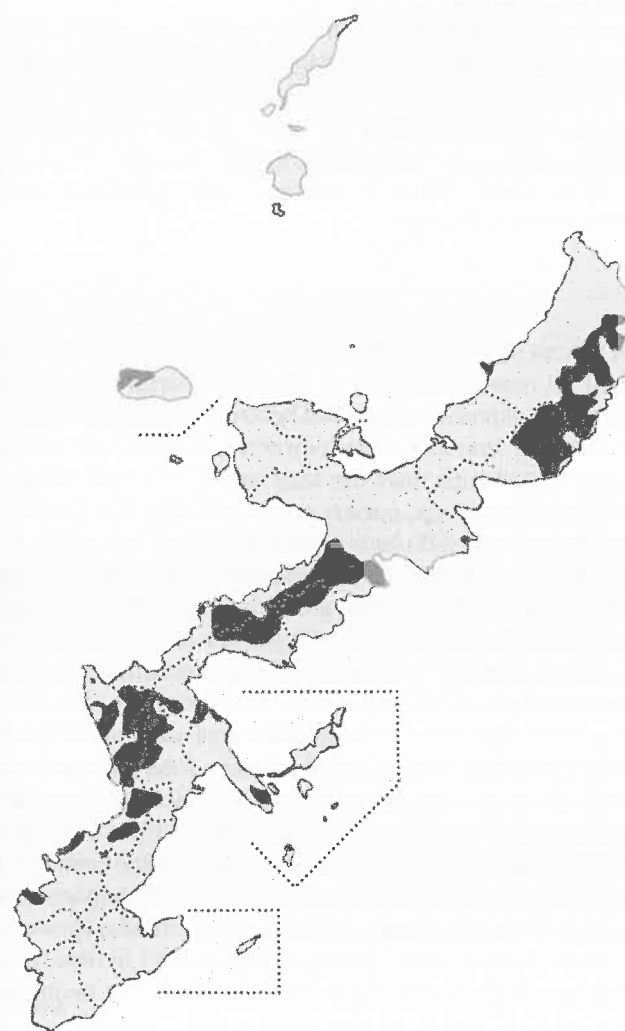


Figure 3.7 U.S. military bases in Okinawa.

Natural disasters

Japan is especially susceptible to natural disasters. In 2018 alone, Japan suffered a 6.1 earthquake near Osaka (five fatalities, many injured); Typhoon Jondari (16 injured, 37,000 evacuated); a heavy rain event (all-time precipitation records and widespread flooding, 200 fatalities); a prolonged heat wave; Typhoon Jebi (11 fatalities, 600 injured); a 6.7 earthquake in Hokkaido (40 fatalities, 400 injured); and Typhoon Trami (four fatalities, 200 injured, transportation and electricity disrupted for millions).

Seismologists indicate that there is a 60–70 percent likelihood of a major magnitude earthquake within the next 30 years along the coastal regions of western Japan and in Tokyo. The

impact of a major earthquake in such densely populated regions could be enormous in terms of casualties, property and infrastructure damage.

Despite Japan's familiarity with earthquakes and other natural disasters, the country was not prepared for the Tohoku earthquake that struck on March 11, 2011. The epicentre of the quake was 40 miles off the northeast coast of Honshu and about 20 miles under the ocean's surface. The biggest of the quake's tremors reached 9.0 on the Richter scale, making it one of the five most powerful earthquakes ever. The shaking generated waves 40 metres high, and the water travelled up to 10 km inland. The earthquake and resulting tsunami caused over 20,000 deaths and \$360 billion worth of damage.

Energy

Japan has little in the way of natural energy sources and has long been dependent on Middle Eastern oil. When the price of oil rose dramatically in the 1970s, Japan became painfully aware that it needed to diversify its sources of energy and become as energy efficient as possible. The country did both, investing heavily in solar power and fuel cell technologies and constructing nuclear power plants. Although there has long been public ambivalence about nuclear power because of the atomic bombings, nuclear power offered a way for the country to gain a greater measure of energy self-sufficiency. Once the causes of global warming became better understood and the Kyoto Protocol was signed in Japan in 1997, the Japanese government saw nuclear power as a way to reach its greenhouse gas reduction targets. By 2010, Japan had 55 reactors, which produced almost 30 percent of the country's energy. Government plans called for this to reach 50 percent and Japan was on track to reach its 6 percent greenhouse gas reduction target.

The Tohoku earthquake and tsunami caused the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant, resulting in the evacuation of a 30 km zone around the plant and concerns about the threat of radiation. Japan's nuclear plants were gradually shut down for safety checks. A few were restarted in June 2012 to much protest. From 2013 to 2015, all the 54 reactors were shut down to undergo safety checks. Losing 30 percent of the country's energy supply was a major challenge. The government dramatically increased imports of natural gas and encouraged its citizens to reduce their use of electricity. A *setsuden* (power saving) campaign started in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster in March 2011 in order to prevent blackouts. Although the campaign officially ended later that year, the power saving commitment has continued.

Gradually, nine nuclear plants have been restarted as of early 2020. Many Japanese objected to a return to nuclear power, arguing that it is too dangerous in a country like Japan that is so prone to earthquakes. The government argues, however, that it has no choice in order to keep up with consumer and industrial demand. The government's target is for nuclear power to comprise 20 percent of Japan's energy supply by 2030.

Rural decline

Like much of the world, contemporary Japan has become much more urban (see Table 3.2). Combined with Japan's now declining population, many smaller and more remote parts of the country have been left with few young people or families, many senior citizens, an eroded economic base and little potential for a return to prosperity. Hundreds of thousands of private rural homes sit abandoned. A 2014 Japan Policy Council report stated that a third of

Table 3.2 Urban-rural population in Japan by percentage, 1950–2050

Year	Urban Population	Rural Population
1950	53.4	46.4
1960	63.3	36.7
1970	71.9	29.1
1980	76.2	23.8
1990	77.3	22.6
2000	78.6	21.4
2010	90.8	9.2
2020	91.8	8.2
2030	92.7*	7.3*
2040	93.7*	6.3*
2050	94.7*	5.3*

*projected

Japan's 1,800 municipalities were at risk of collapse and that quite a few would disappear. Although concern over the collapse of villages and the declining and aging farming population has been around for decades, this concern has now spread to the small towns and cities that had prospered based on agricultural and regional industrial activity.

While much of rural Japan likely faces a future of slow and painful decline, individual communities are fighting for their futures with creative measures and investments from local entrepreneurs. One interesting government program to help struggling small towns is a hometown tax (*furusato nozei*) system. It gives taxpayers the option to direct a percentage of their tax monies to districts outside where they live. In 2017, 13 million individuals transferred \$2.5 billion in tax funds to villages and towns. Local communities began to incentivize tax transfers by sending gifts in return, typically regional items like foodstuffs (e.g. meat, seafood or fruit), crafts or certificates to local attractions. However successful, this is only a small step in defeating the forces of urbanization and rural decline.

Conclusion

Japan is the third largest economy in the world. It has remade itself multiple times in the modern age from the Meiji period to post-World War II to the aftermath of the bubble economy. The country is nothing if not resilient. Over the last decade, Japan's annual GDP growth has been slow but steady, averaging 1–2 percent.

Japan is one of the largest producers of automobiles, electronics, machine tools and a range of other manufactured and processed items. Since 1995, it has been building its future on science and technology, investing heavily in innovation, new technologies and high-risk high-reward economic possibilities. Japan is a country focussed on the future. Thirty years ago, Japan was accused of being an imitator, expert at turning the ideas and products of others into commercial sectors. The country is now widely understood to be among the most technologically advanced and innovative in the world. Japan led in miniaturization; was a pioneer in the mobile Internet; has superb animation and digital content initiatives; is a world leader in products and service for the elderly; has the best industrial and service robotic

implementations; a deep interest in the Internet of Things (IoT); and extensive investments in nanotechnology, sensors, environmental technologies and integrated energy systems.

Japan was the first country to ratify the Trans-Pacific Partnership despite the political risk associated with the agricultural concessions included. When the United States withdrew from the agreement, Japan played a key role in bringing the remaining 11 countries together to ratify a renamed modified agreement (the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership). Japan signed an agreement with the European Union on an Economic Partnership Agreement in July 2017. Both accords should be ratified in 2020.

Japan's situation is complicated. The country's population is declining, which some believe is a crucial failing. Forty years ago, however, observers worried that the population was growing too fast and that cities were too crowded. Japan's economic growth slowed in the 1990s, seen internationally as a serious problem. But worldwide there is now discussion about the need to lower expectations for sustained economic growth as there is intense concern about the negative environmental effects of rapid growth. Looking after the elderly and paying for their health care is a significant and looming challenge. But demographic forces will lower housing prices, reduce the size of cities, lower demand for energy and lessen the cost of continual growth. Rapid technological change could replace the "missing" workers, suggesting that the technological dislocation could be less of a crisis in Japan than in other countries.

Like all nations, Japan is in transition, buffeted by global pressures and propelled by technological innovations and economic opportunities. As one of the leading countries in East Asia, deeply connected to and engaged with the other nations in the region, Japan is one of the key pillars of East Asia's emergence as the most influential area in the world. The country is rooted deeply in its past and its culture, connected to the Western industrial world but not dominated by it. Japan captured the world's attention negatively during its years of military colonialism in the 1930s and 1940s and again, more positively, during the economic boom of the 1980s and 1990s. Its global standing declined when the bubble burst, and it now attracts less international attention than in the past. But the tendency to disparage or underestimate Japan's accomplishments is wrong, for the country remains among the most creative, economically strong and culturally rich in the world.

Note

- 1 In Japanese, it is customary to put the family name first so this will be followed in this chapter.

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