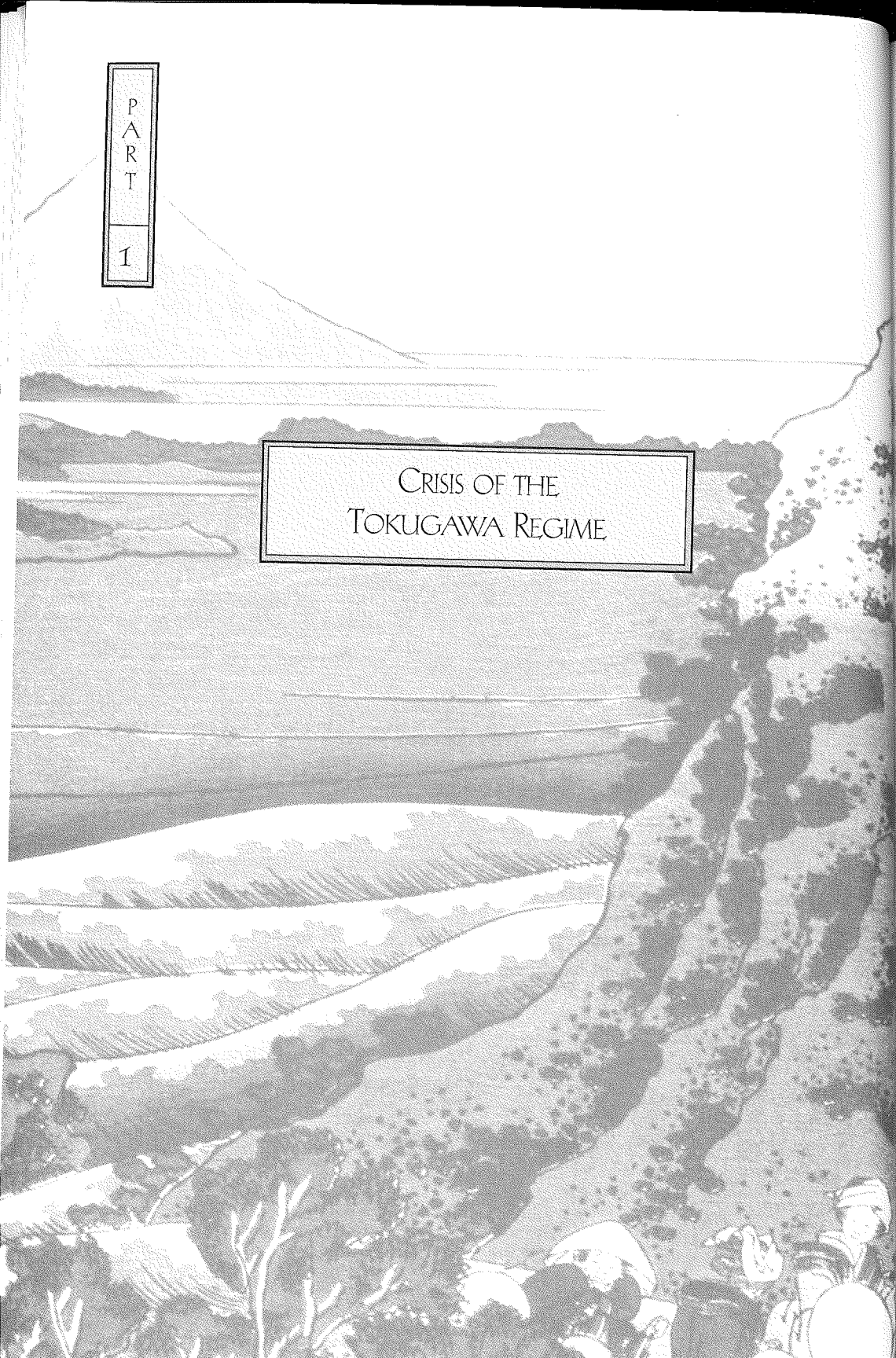




CRISIS OF THE TOKUGAWA REGIME

1

The Tokugawa Polity

The tumultuous changes of modern times in Japan unfolded against the backdrop of more than two centuries of unprecedented peace and social order. This era, called the Tokugawa period after the family name of Japan's military rulers between 1600 and 1868, has left a variety of images for later ages. The Tokugawa order was bolstered by harsh laws and restrictions on social and geographic mobility. Officials are said to have ruled by the motto, "Sesame seeds and peasants are very much alike. The more you squeeze them, the more you can extract from them."¹ At the same time, the Tokugawa centuries were an era of flourishing rural production and commerce and lively city life. One careful European observer wrote in the 1690s that "an incredible number of people daily use the highways of Japan's provinces, indeed at certain times of the year they are as crowded as the streets of a populous European city."²

Numerous formal restrictions coexisted with an energetic, at times rambunctious, population over the Tokugawa centuries. And important changes took place. These did not set the Tokugawa system on a smooth course toward modernity, but they were important nonetheless. By the nineteenth century, the regime faced grave problems. Underemployed warriors suffered a troubling identity crisis. Established institutions and ideas seemed inadequate to deal with new pressures at home and from outside. Rulers strongly committed to maintaining order faced social tensions and protests. A look at the origins of Tokugawa society and the emergence of these problems helps one make sense of the unexpected and hardly predictable modern transformations that began when the regime eventually collapsed.

UNIFICATION

The most important feature of Tokugawa history was the absence of warfare. The contrast to what came before was immense. From 1467 to 1477, the Ōnin War destroyed the ancient capital of Kyoto, the emperor's home since 794, a beautiful city of temples and aristocratic residences. For the next century, warfare was constant. Hundreds of thousands of samurai men in arms clustered around provincial military rulers called daimyō. These regional rulers jockeyed for control of land, people, and commerce.

Although war was a dominant theme of the age, this was by no means a century of unrelieved misery for all. Commerce flourished, and several cities emerged as relatively

autonomous international trading ports. Some devotees of Buddhism organized powerful communities called *ikkō* (single-minded) sects. They too won autonomy from daimyō control.

Then, between the 1570s and 1600, three remarkable, often ruthless rulers pulled together an enduring political order. From the 1600s through the mid-1800s, people in Japan enjoyed over 250 years free of war. The warrior elite of daimyō and samurai retained their place as political rulers, but the character of the warriors changed dramatically. Immense change likewise came to economic and cultural life.

The first of the so-called unifiers was Oda Nobunaga.* He began as modest lord of the Owari domain in the vicinity of present-day Nagoya. In 1555 Nobunaga began his rise to power, soon embarking on a ruthless campaign of terror. He laid waste to the Buddhist strongholds, killing thousands of monks and burning great libraries and temples. In 1580 he overcame the most important fortress-temple of the *ikkō* sect of Buddhism. By 1582, when he was assassinated by a treacherous underling, he had consolidated control over roughly one-third of Japan.

Viewed with fear and awe at the time, Nobunaga has not been remembered kindly by historians, who have called him "a magnificent savage," a "cruel and callous brute," even "a Japanese Attila."³ But Nobunaga was more than a butcher. He also fashioned political institutions that his successors used to good effect in establishing and sustaining the Tokugawa peace. He encouraged or allowed relatively autonomous village organization as long as villagers paid taxes. He developed a bureaucratic program of tax collection, so that his vassals did not collect revenue directly from villages. Instead, specialized tax collectors did this, and they gave the loot in part to the vassals, in part to Nobunaga. He simultaneously separated the thousands of petty military lords from their fiefs. He took "proprietaryship" from these men, and in exchange he guaranteed the petty lord an income reflecting the size and output of his land. In doing this, he established the right to reassign a subordinate lord.

For this system to work, a systematic survey of the land, its productive capacity, its size, and its ownership was crucial. Nobunaga pioneered in the use of surveys of the quality and quantity of agricultural land, and this constituted a foundation of the early modern political system. He also began the practice of disarming villagers and establishing a fairly sharp class boundary between warriors and farmers.

In the wake of Nobunaga's death, one lieutenant took up the banner as aspiring hegemon. This was Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a low-born foot soldier of unimposing appearance. His contemporaries dubbed him "the monkey." His wife is said to have called him a "bald rat." Epithets aside, he was a brilliant political strategist. In contrast to Nobunaga, who obliterated rivals and gave their lands to trusted underlings, Hideyoshi pursued a politics of alliance-building. He attacked enemies who resisted, but he accepted oaths

*A note on names: In the Japanese language people typically are identified with their family name first, followed by their given name (so-called first name), and we will follow this pattern in this book. Thus, Oda was this ruler's family name. His given name was Nobunaga. Historians refer to most important figures by their family name (for example, Prime Minister Ito), but a few especially famous or notorious figures in political or cultural life are called by their given ("first") names, much the way speakers of English refer to the British royal family members as "Charles" or "Elizabeth." Oda Nobunaga (as well as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu) are such figures in Japan. In these cases we follow the Japanese practice and use their given names.

of loyalty from those who came over to his side. In such fashion, he extended dominion over all of Japan by 1591.

Hideyoshi continued and systematized the institutions of Nobunaga, and he added some twists of his own. He took hostages from the daimyō to ensure their loyalty. In 1588 he extended throughout his lands the practice of disarming peasants through so-called sword hunts. He also launched two massive and disastrous invasions of Korea in 1592 and 1597, seemingly with the intention of conquering China as well. Hideyoshi simultaneously turned against the Jesuit missionaries who had been winning converts in Japan since they first arrived in the 1550s. At the time of his death in 1598, Hideyoshi stood unchallenged at the apex of a federation of daimyō that covered the entire territory of Japan. He left behind a council of his most trusted lieutenants, called regents. They pledged to rule on behalf of his young son until the boy came of age. This was an unstable plan for succession, and a power struggle soon broke out among the regents.

THE TOKUGAWA POLITICAL SETTLEMENTS

These decades of swift political innovation culminated in rule by the Tokugawa family's bakufu, or military government. The first Tokugawa ruler was Ieyasu. One of his foreign biographers, a British scholar writing in 1937 with a sympathetic eye on the programs of Adolf Hitler in Germany, excused his ruthless side by noting that "the virtues desirable in the ordinary farmer or bourgeois are hardly of much use to a military dictator."⁴

Ieyasu was a harsh ruler. He was also a patient tactician who knew how to compromise. He was a peer of Hideyoshi, and his strongest potential opponent, but he held back from challenging the "bald rat." Ieyasu rather consolidated a base in the region of the eastern Kantō Plain, and he waited. Following on Nobunaga and Hideyoshi's models, he built up an effective domain government in the 1580s and 1590s. After Hideyoshi died, Ieyasu—who was one of the regents—lost little time in gathering his allies. In 1600 he destroyed the forces of the other regents, loyal to Hideyoshi's son, in the famous battle of Sekigahara. This gave him essentially unchallenged hegemony. In 1603 he had the emperor grant him the ancient title of shogun.

In 1605, just five years after Sekigahara, while he was still energetic and healthy, Ieyasu "retired." He put his own son, Hidetada, in the office of shogun to ensure a smooth succession. He continued to rule from behind the scenes until he died in 1616. The son had only seven unchaperoned years as shogun until he retired in turn in 1623 to supervise his own son, Iemitsu, as shogun. Hidetada died in 1632.

Tokugawa Iemitsu, the third shogun and Tokugawa Ieyasu's grandson, was a ruler almost as important as Ieyasu. His long rule, from 1623 to 1651, represented the height of the Tokugawa dictatorship. It was Ieyasu and Iemitsu, in particular, who consolidated the institutions that remained in place when Western powers threatened to colonize Japan in the 1850s.

Ieyasu and Iemitsu built upon the achievements of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi to put in place a series of what we can call "settlements." These various arrangements secured the Tokugawa position at the apex of political power. They neutralized all possible opposition, from daimyō and the emperor's court, to samurai, peasants, merchants, and priests. These settlements eliminated tensions of previous decades, even centuries. They



Portrait of the Tokugawa regime founder Ieyasu. Although Ieyasu came to power by exercising military might, in this painting he is dressed in court robe and cap, which convey the message that his legitimacy also derived from the emperor's grant of the title of shogun, or generalissimo.

Courtesy of Nikkō Tōshōgū Shrine.

brought to Japan the most stable political order in its history. Of course, historical processes of creating or sustaining institutions are never entirely stable. The settlements of the 1600s generated new contradictions that eventually eroded the Tokugawa order, but this was a gradual process that unfolded over the course of more than two centuries.

The Daimyō

Most of the specific Tokugawa policies had precedents in Hideyoshi's institutions of rule or those of Nobunaga, but Ieyasu and his successors implemented them more systematically. The settlement with the daimyō was one of the most important. Ieyasu enforced an order limiting castles to one per domain. He required daimyō to swear oaths of loyalty to him. He forbade them from concluding alliances among themselves and dispatched

inspectors to make sure the daimyō were in compliance. Ieyasu further controlled the daimyō by mandating that all their marriages receive Tokugawa approval.

Ieyasu periodically required the daimyō to give him expensive contributions to building projects, including his great castle at Edo, which he established as his seat of power. But occasional coerced "gifts" of this sort were the closest Tokugawa Ieyasu or his descendants came to taxing the daimyō. The fiscal autonomy of domains was a significant limit to Tokugawa power. Following the precedent of Hideyoshi, Ieyasu opted to rule through a political system of alliances with weaker military rulers. He left roughly 180 daimyō in place as hereditary rulers of relatively autonomous domains as long as they showed respect and followed his orders.⁵

His grandson, Iemitsu, extended the Tokugawa reach considerably. Iemitsu established the right to confiscate daimyō lands and give them to other lords he considered more reliable. He also exercised power by ordering some daimyō to trade domains, which weakened them considerably. He confiscated portions of many domains and gave them to lieutenants under his direct command. These territories were called Tokugawa "house" lands. On other occasions he took the land of former opponents of the regime and granted them to his most loyal daimyō allies, called *fudai* daimyō. Through such steps, he was able to ensure the hegemony of the Tokugawa clan and its allies in other domains.

All told, Iemitsu redistributed control over about five million *koku*,⁶ fully one-fifth of Japan's arable land. In these maneuvers, Iemitsu was especially tough on the daimyō who had opposed his grandfather in the battle of Sekigahara. These were called the *tozama*, or outer, daimyō. He protected his power base by building a concentric pattern of Tokugawa house lands close to Edo, surrounded by lands of allied *fudai* daimyō and Tokugawa relatives called *shinpan*. He placed the former opponents—the *tozama* daimyō—in lands at the farthest reaches of the three main islands.

Iemitsu also put in place one extremely important innovation, actually a dramatic extension of a pre-Tokugawa practice. This was the system of "alternate attendance" (*sankin kōtai*). It completes the picture of Tokugawa rule at the peak of hegemony over once-dangerous rivals. It had roots in the treatment of some daimyō by an earlier shogun, in the 1300s. The daimyō of this era were required to "attend" in the capital of the time, Kyoto, rather than live in domains, so the shogun could keep tabs on them. On several occasions in the late sixteenth century Hideyoshi likewise required leading daimyō to remain close by in "attendance." But this early form of attendance was not ongoing, scheduled, or universal. Between 1635 and 1642 Iemitsu regularized the attendance system.

Iemitsu required all daimyō to maintain residences in Edo as well as in their home domain. They would have to attend upon the shogun by residing in Edo in alternate years. Their wives and children had to remain behind in Edo when they went home for a year before the next period of attendance. This was a most effective system of political control. It created what were essentially hostage neighborhoods of daimyō families (although the conditions of these "hostages" were quite comfortable as long as they did not try to leave the city). The attendance system led to the watchword at the guard posts of Edo: Beware of women going out, guns coming in. These would have been signs of rebellion in the making. But for two hundred years, there were no serious challenges to the Tokugawa.

In addition to controlling them, attendance dramatically weakened the daimyō. It forced them to spend great sums to maintain several households, one back home and two or three in Edo. They also had to pay for their grand processions back and forth between the home castle and Edo. Daimyō lords typically used up two-thirds of their annual tax revenues on staffing their Edo residences. Forced attendance weakened the daimyō politically by removing them from a hands-on role in local rule, since they were absent half the time. In addition, a daimyō's sense of identification with his home domain was often weak because he would be raised by his mother and her staff in Edo, never setting foot in his own domain until adulthood.

The Imperial Institution

A second critical settlement gave the shogun effective control over the potentially most potent Japanese political symbol, the emperor. Both economically and politically, the imperial institution fell on hard times during the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Ieyasu continued policies of economic support for the court, initiated by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, raising it considerably from the genteel poverty of the previous century. The position of supreme military ruler, or shogun, was in theory a grant from the emperor. For this reason, the Tokugawa family could raise their own legitimacy by simultaneously enhancing imperial prestige and carefully controlling the emperor. To this end, the shogun promulgated a set of "laws for nobles." The shogun claimed the power to make court appointments and grant land incomes. He held an imperial prince hostage at the Tokugawa family's own shrine at Nikkō. To monitor the imperial court, he stationed his own deputy at a highly visible outpost in Kyoto, the Nijō palace not far from the emperor's palace, while he flattered the court with minor courtesies.

These policies presented the shogun as a virtual equal to the emperor. One result was to create significant confusion in the minds of Westerners in the mid-nineteenth century as to who was, in fact, the sovereign ruler. In 1857, the American trade negotiator Townsend Harris presented the shogun a letter from President Pierce addressed to "His Majesty the Emperor of Japan."⁷ But at least among the samurai who joined political agitation against the Tokugawa in the 1850s and 1860s, the notion that legitimacy stemmed from the emperor remained powerful.

The Samurai

Several hundred thousand samurai warriors had been more or less permanently mobilized by hundreds of daimyō to fight the wars of the late 1500s. In a political system that closely resembled that of feudalism in Europe, these samurai had controlled small portions of land, called fiefs, as well as the peasants who farmed them. They had drawn tax income from this land to support their military endeavors. But controlling this land and its residents, and defending it from neighboring warriors, could be difficult. By pledging loyalty and offering military service to more powerful daimyō rulers, these samurai warriors gained protection from predatory neighbors as well as rebellious peasants. After the wars of unification ended, however, few of these samurai returned to supervise their lands directly. Instead, most became town- and city-dwellers. Many were instructed by their daimyō rulers to take up residence in the so-called castle towns that had sprung up around each domain's castle. Others were told to serve at the domain residence nearby the shogun's castle at Edo. Still others were posted as officers in rural

towns, who oversaw a complex bureaucracy that surveyed land, assessed output, collected taxes, and kept local order. The samurai's fief lands came to be administered by these specialized officers of the daimyō or the shogun. The officials would collect tax rice from the lands originally controlled by the samurai and forward the grain to the daimyō storehouse. Merchants would typically handle the sale of the tax rice on behalf of the daimyō, who would then pay out to each samurai an amount equivalent to the expected income from that man's original fief.

The samurai in the city retained the right to wear two swords. Some served as policemen and keepers of order, but the majority no longer had official military duties. Assigned to a variety of administrative positions, or sometimes to none at all, the samurai received from the daimyō their annual salaries, called "stipends," reflecting the value of a fief of origin. But over time, the samurai's sense of connection to this fief became increasingly abstract and weakened. Samurai were subject to Tokugawa or domain law. Private vendettas of honor or loyalty were harshly punished in the interests of a broader concept of social order.

At first, with the unification wars still fresh in living memory, these citified samurai were a rough-and-tumble lot. Samurai gang wars—a *West Side Story* in the shadows of Edo castle—were frequent in the early 1600s. Over time, however, most samurai turned in swords for calligraphy brushes. They came to occupy a theoretically privileged but often quite confined position as a hereditary elite that managed the business of bakufu and domain. Assignments to high office, and prospects for promotion, came to depend on literacy, especially for samurai sons born into the middle and upper ranks. The samurai were transformed from warriors into bureaucrats. Those on the bottom of the salary scale lived in very modest, often impoverished, circumstances. During the Tokugawa era, roughly 6 to 7 percent of the population was from samurai families.

Villagers and City-Dwellers

The fourth settlement that bolstered the Tokugawa peace was that imposed upon the remainder of the population, the commoners, who were divided into several subgroups. In the 1630s, Tokugawa Iemitsu ordered all commoners to register with a Buddhist temple. The system was tightened in 1665 when the shogun ordered the temples to guarantee each person's religious loyalty. Villagers were not allowed to change places of residence or even travel without permission. The system of registration was thus a tool of political and social control. It was also a means to enforce the ban on Christianity that had been inconsistently imposed on the population since the 1590s.

The statuses of farmer and of merchant or artisan townspeople thus became fixed and hereditary. Roughly 80 percent of the population was farmers. The remainder were townspeople of various sorts. But despite many restrictions on what people in each status group were allowed to do, the Tokugawa did not micromanage the lives of ordinary people. Within the confines of a circumscribed world, commoners had considerable autonomy. It is true they needed permission to travel and were not supposed to move to cities. But enforcement of such rules was often quite lax. In practice, the bakufu and domain governments kept out of the internal affairs of villages, as long as the villagers paid their taxes. The bakufu collected taxes from a whole village, not from individuals.

The village, in turn, retained the collective responsibility for managing internal affairs, maintaining order, and delivering criminals to the bakufu or domain authorities.

The settlement imposed upon city-dwellers, whether merchants or artisans, whether in bakufu centers of Edo or Osaka or in the hundreds of domain castle towns, was similar in broad outlines to that imposed upon villagers. As they had done with village headmen, samurai officials delegated responsibility for keeping order and regulating economic activity to councils of leading merchants. A group of city elders was given responsibility for enforcing laws, investigating crimes, and collecting taxes.⁸

The Margins of the Japanese and Japan

In the orthodox vision of the Tokugawa social order, which drew on Chinese Confucian ideas, society was divided into four classes arranged in a hierarchy of moral virtue as well as secular authority: warrior, farmer, artisan, and merchant. Many, however, did not quite fit into any of these groups. Some were people of respect or celebrity: Buddhist priests, actors, and artists. Others were subject to society's scorn, including prostitutes and various groups of outcasts. The main outcaste group was called *eta* (literally, "much filth," today a pejorative term). This was a hereditary group of unclear origins. Its members lived in scattered communities, where they performed tasks deemed unclean by mainstream society, such as burials, executions, and the handling of animal carcasses. The outcastes also included criminals assigned to a separate category of "nonpersons" (*hinin*), who were forced to subsist on jobs such as ragpicking.

In Edo in the 1600s, the entertainment quarters of brothels, theaters, and restaurants developed into a flourishing district called Yoshiwara, near the shogun's castle. Its presence offended moralistic officials and tempted samurai to neglect duty for the pursuit of male pleasure. But the rulers were practical men and were not inclined to ban prostitution. Instead, the bakufu authorities took the occasion of a fire that destroyed this district in 1657 to locate a new Yoshiwara on the far outskirts of the city. In addition to brothels, the district was home to teahouses, Kabuki theaters, and restaurants. Near the Yoshiwara district one found most of the city's Buddhist temples as well as its public execution grounds, which were supervised by the hereditary outcastes. All of these people—outcastes of various categories, as well as prostitutes and priests—were literally as well as conceptually relegated to the margins of society by the physical placing of their communities on the edge of cities.

The Tokugawa paid particular attention to religious institutions. Not only was the entire population required to register with temples, but the temples themselves were also closely regulated. Their numbers and locations were specified, and they were required to report annually to the bakufu (or the daimyō). Such rules were intended to prevent Buddhist temples from growing in strength, as they had in the past, to a point where they might challenge secular authority.⁹

Another important marginal status group were the Ainu people, who trace complex roots back to aboriginal inhabitants of the Japanese islands. For centuries preceding the Tokugawa era they maintained a relatively separate culture in the northern reaches of Honshu and the northern island called Ezo (present-day Hokkaido). In Tokugawa times the Ainu numbered roughly twenty-five thousand. For the most part, they subsisted by hunting and gathering. The northernmost daimyō, of the Matsumae domain, was given

the responsibility for trading with the Ainu, and also for keeping them at bay. The Ainu occupied an ambiguous status on the margins of society. In the Tokugawa order they were not viewed as fully part of the civilized world of Japanese people. But neither were they considered fully part of the barbaric world of foreigners.

Foreigners were the final key group kept carefully on the margins. The foreign relations of Tokugawa Japan are often summed up in a single word, "seclusion," or by two words, "closed country." Indeed, in the 1600s the Tokugawa did cut off trade with countries that insisted on selling religion together with material goods. This ruled out the Spanish and the Portuguese, who had been active in both pursuits since the 1540s. Their emissaries would not abandon missionary work for the sake of worldly profit.

From 1633 to 1639, the same years during which he initiated the policy of alternate attendance, Iemitsu issued a series of edicts that restricted the interaction of people in Japan with those outside. He prohibited the Japanese from voyaging overseas to the west of Korea or to the south of the Ryūkyū Islands (Okinawa). He banned the practice and teaching of Christianity and the travel of Catholics to Japan. In 1637–38, peasants in the Christian stronghold of Shimabara (near Nagasaki) rebelled, moved by a combination of economic grievances and a millenarian hope for spiritual deliverance. Bakufu forces viewed this as a challenge by traitorous Christians. They suppressed the rising brutally, killing perhaps thirty-seven thousand people, young and old, men and women. Iemitsu also expelled the Portuguese traders. Their last ships left Nagasaki in the summer of 1639. Finally, he forbade all remaining foreigners from traveling inland or from selling or giving books to anyone in Japan.

The English had already abandoned the Japanese trade in 1623. The Spanish followed in 1624. When the Portuguese were forced to leave, only the Dutch remained. They were content to keep their religious ideas to themselves and focus only on trade. They took up residence on a tiny outpost in Nagasaki harbor, a landfill island called Dejima.

These steps had a major impact. They sharply reduced Japanese ties to the West for over two hundred years, from the 1630s to the 1850s. This was a critical time in European history. It was the era of the industrial and bourgeois revolutions and the colonizing of the New World. It encompassed the entire colonial period in North America and the first seven decades of the history of the United States.

But to simply understand the Tokugawa foreign policy as one of seclusion is ultimately quite misleading. Not until much later in the Tokugawa era, in the 1790s, did people within Japanese society identify "seclusion" as the defining essence of the system. From the rulers' perspective at the time, by issuing these edicts the Tokugawa had simply ousted those Westerners who insisted on promoting a religion that appeared to be a political threat. They still tolerated some Western trade and continued to cultivate foreign relations in Asia, except to forbid private travel abroad. They promoted officially sponsored trade and diplomatic travel, both for its own sake and to maintain domestic hegemony.

Satsuma domain was allowed to trade with the Ryūkyū Islands (Okinawa). This was a source of Chinese goods throughout the Tokugawa era. Even in 1646, despite the uncertainty of wars in China as the Qing established their dynasty, bakufu officials in Edo decided that Satsuma should maintain this trade. The bakufu also continued trade with China through Nagasaki throughout the Tokugawa era. This provided access to intelligence as well as goods. Until 1635, in addition to trade with China, direct commerce between Japan and Vietnam flourished through the port of Nagasaki. Japanese traders authorized

by the Tokugawa exported coins, primarily copper, as well as ceramics, to Vietnam in exchange for silk and ceramics. In 1635, the Tokugawa banned this trade by Japanese, but Chinese merchants continued this commerce out of Nagasaki.¹⁰

The Tokugawa also maintained important economic and political relations with Korea. These links were reopened just about a decade after Hideyoshi's invasion. The Japanese set up an outpost in Pusan much like the Dutch trading house in Nagasaki. This trade reached a tremendous volume. The domain of Tsushima, a small island with almost no agriculture located about halfway between Kyushu and southern Korea, handled this trade. By 1700 it earned profits comparable to the rice tax revenue of the largest domains in Japan.

In addition, the Tokugawa made active use of foreign policy to shore up their political legitimacy, especially through the exchange of embassies with Korea. Diplomatic relations with Korea were carried out beginning in the early 1600s. The Koreans sent twelve major embassies to Japan between 1610 and 1811, roughly one visit each fifteen years. Each embassy brought from three hundred to five hundred members. They would come on occasions of congratulation, such as the birth of a shogunal heir or the accession of a new shogun. There were no missions in the reverse direction. While the Japanese actively sought to have Koreans come, the Koreans never invited the Japanese, and they rebuffed occasional Japanese inquiries.

A similar diplomatic relationship developed between the Ryūkyū Islands and the bakufu. The Ryūkyūans sent twenty-one embassies of congratulation between 1610 and 1850. With China, however, the Tokugawa established no official relations. The Japanese refused to conduct relations in a way that acknowledged Chinese superiority, as the Chinese wanted.

Through these several diplomatic initiatives the Tokugawa rulers rejected the premises of a China-centered order emblemized by the tribute system to which other Asian rulers submitted. They were attempting to develop a vision and a reality of a different regional order. This was not a blatantly hegemonic vision. The Koreans were treated with a certain respect. They were not expected to prostrate themselves or to convey symbolic servitude, as they were in visits to the Chinese court. They interacted more or less as equals (although the Japanese clearly placed themselves as superiors to the Ryūkyūans).

Through such diplomacy, the Tokugawa sought to legitimize its domestic position as the hegemon of Japan. It hoped in particular to impress the many daimyō with the respect shown by foreigners to the Tokugawa. This goal is most evident in the way the Korean embassies were used, especially in 1617 and in 1634 around the time of the so-called expulsion edicts. The *tozama* and collateral lords were all commanded to attend a reception for 428 Korean visitors, a grand procession, and a visit to Ieyasu's grave. They were to be impressed by the many gifts to the Tokugawa and the congratulations given by the Koreans on unification of the country. Over the ensuing decades, Korean missions served to show the elite daimyō and top samurai that Japan's domestic political order was respected by a wider world.

By the late 1700s, this system of foreign relations had implanted a firmly held belief among bakufu officials and daimyō, and many informed samurai and educated, wealthy villagers, that legitimate rule must exclude relations with the West. In the feisty words of Aizawa Yasushi, a very important critic of Tokugawa policies in the 1820s:

Recently the loathsome Western barbarians, unmindful of their base position as the lower extremities of the world, have been scurrying impudently across the Four Seas,

trampling other nations underfoot. Now they are audacious enough to challenge our exalted position in the world. What manner of insolence is this?¹¹

Three decades later, such views clashed head on with the Western belief in the universal validity of its civilization—backed by the force of gunboats. As this happened, the Tokugawa order fell apart.

The settlements described in this chapter were worked out in the main under Tokugawa Ieyasu. They were consolidated by his grandson Iemitsu. The settlements were described at the time as eternal reflections in social order of a natural hierarchy of cosmic or sacred origin. They constituted a system that one pioneering American historian of Japan, John W. Hall, called "rule by status."¹² By this phrase he meant that the separate statuses of daimyō, samurai, court noble, villager, merchant or artisan, priest or prostitute, and outcaste or Ainu all had their own laws. Each status had its own relationship to the Tokugawa rulers. People were in theory restricted to their status niche, but they were given responsibility for self-regulation as well.

Tokugawa rulers could be harsh and arbitrary in their efforts to uphold order and their own position. But the political regime of these centuries was durable, and it was able to accommodate considerable change over time. It brought unprecedented peace to the Japanese islands. The economy grew substantially. The cultural life of both city and countryside was often vigorous and creative. Judged against the standards of the previous centuries in Japan, these achievements were considerable.

But the flexibility and the reach of the Tokugawa order had limits. Compared to the Western nation-states that projected their military and economic power into Japan in the 1850s, the Tokugawa polity was a clumsy and divided structure. It was incapable of taxing the economic resources of the entire country, or of mobilizing human resources throughout the land, and it could not sustain a monopoly on the conduct of international relations. By the early nineteenth century, powerful underlying tensions, both socioeconomic and ideological, had significantly weakened the political and social control of the Tokugawa rulers.

was not in itself a revolutionary act, but it did heighten widespread expectations of change.

In sum, one thread running through the work of many Tokugawa thinkers and critics by the early 1800s was a widespread sense that the times were disjointed. Things were not as they should be. Action was needed to set them right. Setting things right generally meant returning to an idealized golden age of early Tokugawa times. Even Aizawa Yasushi intended his work to help the bakufu regenerate itself. But only slightly below the surface, many were drawn to the idea that an entity and interest larger than the bakufu, centered on the emperor, should be the focus of reform. In a dramatically new context created by Japan's humiliating, coerced entry into a Western-dominated world order in the 1850s, these calls for action mixed with the discontent and frustrated ambitions of many people. This proved to be a potent, increasingly nationalistic brew, in which reforming ideas had revolutionary consequences.

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The Overthrow of the Tokugawa

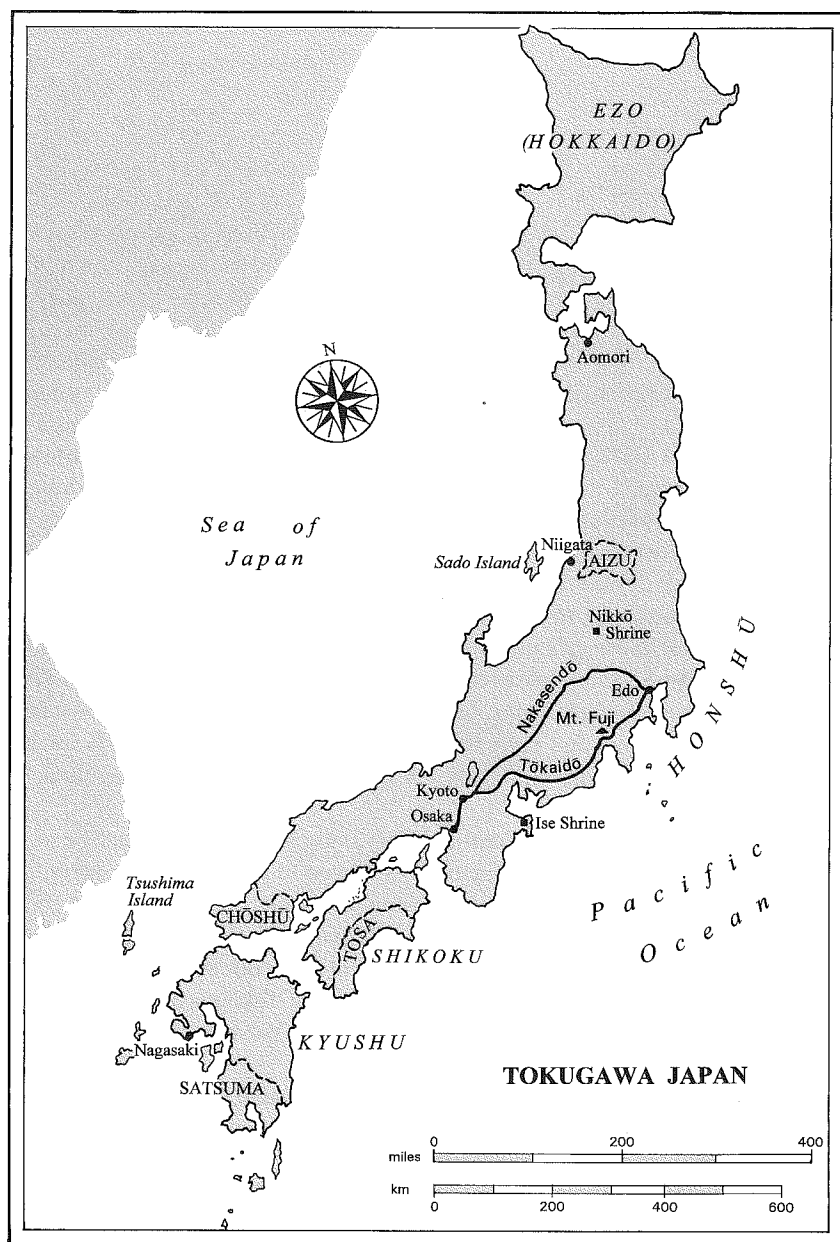
In the decades around 1800, whalers, merchant ships, and gunboats from Europe and the United States appeared in Japanese waters with alarming frequency, pressing their claims with increasing persistence. They were powerful symbols and emissaries of the capitalist and nationalist revolutions that were just then transforming Euro-American societies and reaching beyond to transform the world. In Japan they turned a chronic low-grade crisis into an acute, revolutionary situation. For decades, the superintendents of the Tokugawa order had been somehow muddling through. Shogun and daimyō managed to handle the combined pressures of social discontent among peasants and samurai and fiscal crisis in their own treasuries. Into this mix came heretofore unknown foreign power—military, economic, and cultural—raising unprecedented demands for a new sort of international relationship. Suddenly the Tokugawa bakufu's very legitimacy was called into question.

Even so, for some time it appeared that the Tokugawa system might bend without breaking. By the mid-1860s the bakufu had moved to remodel the military, adjust the balance between domain and shogunal power, and import new technology. Foreign diplomats divided their bets. The British were officially neutral, but their chief representative maintained unofficial ties with the insurgent outer domains, and some of their merchants offered direct support. The French backed the Tokugawa reformers seeking to superintend the process of integrating Japan into the Western diplomatic and economic order.

By hedging their bets the British turned out to be smarter gamblers. In the end, the Tokugawa rulers had too much of an investment in the old order. Rulers of outer domains were often cautious, as well, and they sometimes suppressed the rebels in their domains. But at critical moments they supported the initiatives of new actors, lower on the social scale. These were the "men of action," self-styled heroes hoisting a banner to "honor the emperor and expel the barbarians." They forced the Tokugawa from power and then launched one of the great revolutions of modern history.

THE WESTERN POWERS AND THE UNEQUAL TREATIES

The first harbingers of renewed Western interest in Japan came by land. Russian explorers had reached the far eastern shores of the vast Siberian forests in the 1780s. From



there, they charted the coastal waters while trappers and traders worked the northern islands of Sakhalin and the Kuril chain, and then Hokkaido. In 1792 in Hokkaido, and again in 1804 in Nagasaki, Russian traders asked the bakufu to grant trade privileges, but they accepted a polite Tokugawa refusal. These overtures marked the start of several decades of sporadic but increasing and occasionally violent incursions. In 1806–07, Russian naval officers led destructive attacks on Japanese settlements in Hokkaido, Sakhalin, and Etorofu islands.

One year later the British joined the chase. The warship *Phaeton* entered Nagasaki harbor in 1808 and threatened to attack the Dutch (the two nations were enemies in the Napoleonic wars). In 1818 a British ship sailed into Uruga bay, near Edo. The bakufu quickly rejected their request to begin trade relations. In response to such visits, the bakufu in 1825 issued an order that imposed the most extreme interpretation yet of “seclusion” policy: expel by force any foreign ship in Japanese waters. As a result, when the American merchant ship, the *Morrison*, made a similar plea for trade in 1837, it met an even harsher reply: a volley of harmless cannon fire. A few years later, in 1844, the Dutch made an overture from their long-established base in Nagasaki. They submitted a polite entreaty to the bakufu from King William II. They explained that the world had changed: The Japanese could no longer remain safely disengaged from the commercial networks and diplomatic order that the Western powers were spreading throughout the globe.

The Dutch argument was backed by the shocking evidence of the recent Opium Wars in China. The Chinese in 1839 had tried to ban the socially disastrous opium trade. The British defended “free trade” with force. By 1842 their gunboats had imposed their will on the Chinese. In a treaty that anticipated Japan’s future, the British forced open new ports to trade and forced the Chinese to accept tariff levels set by the British. They won the extraterritorial right to impose British law on Chinese soil, administered by British officials in cases involving British subjects.

Those Japanese who knew of this result were deeply troubled. The chief bakufu official, Mizuno Tadakuni, noted that “this is happening in a foreign country, but I believe it also contains a warning for us.” Tokugawa officials politely rejected the Dutch advice to avoid a future war by quickly signing trade treaties—first with the Dutch, of course. But they did make some changes. In 1842, the bakufu relaxed the 1825 policy of shoot first, ask questions later. Westerners adrift in Japanese waters were to be given fuel and provisions and sent peacefully on their way. In addition, the bakufu heeded some of the advice of protonationalist reformers such as the Mito scholars. Chief councillor Abe Masahiro implemented a gradual buildup of coastal defenses in the Tokugawa heartland after he took office in 1845. He also allowed other domains to do the same.

Foreign pressures and bakufu responses combined in ways that ultimately weakened the bakufu. At the same time, they strengthened an emerging national consciousness among a growing body of political actors. The Opium War confirmed the worst fears of all who viewed the Western barbarians as insatiable predators intent on conquest as well as profit. This gave the basic stance of seclusion a more powerful rationale than ever. Yet any effective practical response had to avoid war while domains and bakufu bolstered their defenses. At the very least, this required short-term retreat from hardline seclusion and the import of some of the Western technologies that enabled this threat in the first place. The bakufu was trapped between a rock and a hard place. It could hardly avoid the appearance of weakness as it tried to build strength.

It is tempting to dismiss the xenophobic arguments of so many Japanese at this time as both futile and irrational. In Asia, at least, the Western powers did not see territorial conquest as their only viable option. They wanted trade more than territory. But paranoid views sometimes rest on firm ground. Western ideologies of free trade were buoyed by a moral certitude and expansive reach that did not take no for an answer. They certainly did not rule out colonization. People in late Tokugawa Japan, who believed they had nothing to gain from any increased contact with the barbarians from the West, were correct to feel threatened. Their way of life, from the material to the political, was about to change irrevocably.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States arrived in Japan as the most determined carrier yet of this simple message: Agree to trade in peace, or suffer the consequences in war. His mission marked a new step in the American advance to the West. With Atlantic waters nearly exhausted, American whalers had been venturing far across the Pacific. Having taken California from Mexico in 1848, the Americans had a new sense of commercial and military ambition in the Pacific. They also wanted to compete with the British. Most immediately, Perry wanted the Japanese to sell coal to naval ships and allow provisioning stops to whalers.

His appearance in Edo bay in July 1853, and his return the following year, occasioned much baffled and excited interaction. During the return visit in 1854, the Japanese sought to intimidate the intruders with an exhibition of sumo wrestling. The Americans were not impressed. One described in his diary an event of "shoving, yelling, tugging, hawling, bawling, twisting, and curvetting about, with seemingly no aim whatever." He concluded, "It was a very unsatisfactory trial of strength, there were one or two falls, but after all, any wrestler that I have heretofore seen of half the muscle would have laughed at them."² On the other hand, the Americans brought some of their latest technology, including a one-quarter scale locomotive engine and a 370-foot circle of track. "Steam was up, an Engineer got on the tender and one of the [bakufu] Commissioners sat on the car, it was set going and ran round at a speed of 18 miles an hour."³ The Japanese official, his robe flapping in the wind, was reported to be delighted at the ride.

Such episodes notwithstanding, Perry was a hard-nosed and humorless man. He left a harsh message in July 1853 with a promise to come back for an answer: "The undersigned, as an evidence of his friendly intentions, has brought but four of the smaller [ships of war], designing, should it become necessary, to return to Yedo in the ensuing spring with a much larger force."⁴ This episode sparked panic among the population in and around Edo. It also sparked an extremely unusual step, indeed unprecedented, by the bakufu. Hoping to rally a consensus for its choice to make some concessions and avoid a war, the bakufu actually requested that daimyō submit their advice in writing on how best to deal with the Americans.

True to his word, Perry sailed back to Japan in early 1854 with a substantial fleet of nine ships, including three steam frigates. The bakufu agreed to allow American ships to stop over in the relatively remote ports of Shimoda and Hakodate. The Americans also won the right to station a consul in Shimoda. The terms of this Treaty of Kanagawa were extended to the European powers—France, Britain, Russia—as well. This bakufu concession stopped short of an immediate opening to trade, but the Western powers quickly pressed their advantage. The first American consul, Townsend Harris, took up residence in Shimoda on the southern tip of the Izu peninsula in 1856. Harris backed his

demand for a trade treaty with the plausible threat that the British would drive an even tougher bargain. This first comprehensive treaty of trade, he noted, would surely serve as the model for the other powers.

By February 1858, the bakufu negotiators signed a treaty that very nearly replicated the Opium War settlement with China, without a shot having been fired. They were well aware that their domestic opponents would take advantage of this step to attack the bakufu. But they believed they had no better choice. A war would be futile. Other negotiators would be no less demanding.

The treaty opened eight ports to trade. Most notably, the Japanese surrendered tariff autonomy and significant legal jurisdiction over the treaty ports. Tariffs on goods entering or leaving Japan were set in the treaty. Japan's government had no power to change them. Foreign nationals accused of crimes in Japan would be tried in consular courts presided over by foreign judges under foreign laws, a practice known as extraterritoriality. In short order, the bakufu made similar agreements with the other Western powers.

These "unequal treaties" were humiliating in theory and in practice. It is true, and worth mentioning, that the Americans accepted Japanese insistence that opium trade be outlawed, and the British did not object. Had opium entered Japan freely, it might have changed the subsequent course of Japanese history in significant ways. Nonetheless, the treaties imposed a semicolonial status upon Japan. Politically and economically, Japan became legally subordinate to foreign governments. Over the next few decades, petty insults were heaped one upon the other. Numerous nasty crimes went lightly punished, if at all. In the 1870s and 1880s, these injustices—a rape unpunished or an assault excused—came to be front page material in the new national press. They were experienced each time as a renewed blow to pride, yet another violation of Japanese sovereignty.

Yet it would be misleading to conclude simply that these treaties trampled a *preexisting* national pride and sovereignty. Rather, from the early 1800s through the 1860s, the very process of dealing with the pushy barbarians *created* modern Japanese nationalism. Among shogunal officials, in daimyō castles, and in the private academies where politically concerned samurai debated history and policy, a new conception took hold of "Japan" as a single nation, to be defended and governed as such. As this happened, the Tokugawa claim to be Japan's legitimate defender began to wither.

THE CRUMBLING OF TOKUGAWA RULE

The immediate economic impact of the new treaty-port trade was substantial. Foreign merchants discovered that gold in Japan could be purchased with silver coins for about one-third the going global rate. They were delighted. In the first year of trade they bought massive amounts of gold. They sold it in China for triple the purchase price. In 1860, the bakufu staunches this financial hemorrhage by debasing its gold coins to bring them in line with world standards. This expanded the money supply and caused sharp inflation. In addition, foreign demand caused silk prices to triple by the early 1860s for both domestic and foreign purchasers. At the same time, imports increased of lightly taxed, inexpensive foreign goods, especially finished cotton. This helped consumers but drove many Japanese producers out of business.

Consumers and producers alike responded with violent protest. City-dwellers were furious over rising grain prices. At the peak of inflation in 1866 they destroyed hundreds

of rice merchant shops in large food riots in Edo and Osaka. Similar protests hit smaller towns and villages in the regions surrounding each city. The year 1866 also saw a surge of unrest among silk producers. In the Bushū region to the west of Edo, about six thousand farmers and silk producers embarked on a weeklong campaign of violent protest. They marched from village to village, expanding their forces en route. They smashed the homes of their creditors, the rural upper class of village headmen, landlords, and moneylenders.⁵ Bakufu troops eventually subdued them.

The rioters usually targeted fellow Japanese as their exploiters. They blamed urban rice merchants and rural moneylenders in particular. But many people in the 1860s, including silk producers who might have profited from increased demand and prices for their product, blamed the difficult plight of the common people on foreign traders and by implication the Japanese government that agreed to trade in the first place. The poetry written by rural disciples of Hirata Atsutane's School of National Learning conveys this sentiment passionately. Consider these words of Matsuo Taseko, a woman who produced silkworms in the Ina Valley in mountainous central Japan:

It is disgusting
the agitation over thread
in today's world
Ever since the ships
from foreign countries
came for the jeweled
silkworm cocoons
to the land of the gods and the emperor
people's hearts
awesome though they are,
are being pulled apart
and consumed by rage.⁶

The popular anger reflected in riots and in such poems did not lead directly to the overthrow of the Tokugawa. But it certainly encouraged anti-Tokugawa activists who blamed the bakufu for impoverishing the people and dishonoring the emperor.

The forced opening of the treaty ports had a more immediate political impact as well. As it sought to keep the foreigners at bay, the manner in which the bakufu dealt with the daimyō and an expanding body of political activists around the country reduced the bakufu's legitimacy and hastened its demise.

In 1853, the bakufu's chief councillor, Abe Masahiro, had asked the daimyō to present their opinions on responding to Perry's first visit. Through consultation, he hoped to build consensus for a difficult decision. This was a domestic political "opening" that paralleled the more famous "opening" to the West. It had the unintended consequence of revealing bakufu weakness. It inspired dreams of power among leaders in key domains that had long traditions of frustrated political ambition. These included the outer domains of Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa, which had opposed the Tokugawa in their rise to power in 1600. Their daimyō and samurai still tended the flame of anti-Tokugawa sentiment over two centuries later. Closer to home, the powerful Mito domain—a branch of the Tokugawa family—emerged as a strong voice for change in both policy and the balance of power among bakufu, daimyō, and imperial court, as did other collateral domains such as Echizen and Owari. Mito was headed

by the staunch anti-foreign daimyō, Tokugawa Nariaki. It was home to the equally anti-foreign, pro-emperor (although nominally pro-Tokugawa) scholarship of men like Aizawa Yasushi.

The next dramatic sign of Tokugawa weakness came in 1857–58, in a tangled fiasco involving dispute over the shogunal succession and the signing of the treaty with the United States. The shogun himself, Iesada, was a weak and ailing young man with no heirs. His head councillor was the most important figure within the bakufu. In the face of daimyō criticism of his handling of Perry's demands, Abe Masahiro had resigned from this position in 1855. His successor, Hotta Masayoshi, faced two immediate challenges. With Iesada dying of illness, he had to oversee the choice of a new shogun. With Townsend Harris restless in Shimoda, he had to conclude treaties with the Americans and other powers without alienating the restive daimyō. His choice for shogun, and that of the inner circle of the *fudai* daimyō who monopolized the shogun's council, was a weak, controllable figure, a twelve-year old daimyō from the collateral domain of Kii. Arrayed against this, and also against the treaties, were the powerful reformist daimyō of Mito, Satsuma, and several other domains. They promoted the son of Tokugawa Nariaki (the Mito daimyō), a reputedly talented young prodigy named Yoshinobu.

At this juncture, Hotta decided to strengthen his hand in both foreign policy and the succession dispute by seeking the emperor's ratification of the treaty with Harris. Laden with gifts, he broke longstanding precedent with an elaborate visit to Kyoto to receive the imperial blessing. In response, the Emperor Kōmei took an equally unprecedented step into foreign and domestic policy decisions: He refused to support the bakufu. His own anti-foreign leanings were bolstered by court officials and reformist daimyō, Tokugawa Nariaki in particular. The emperor told Hotta that he disapproved of the treaty. He signaled his support for Nariaki's son as the next shogun.

Greatly humiliated on both counts, Hotta had no choice but to resign. The Tokugawa could no longer count on the support of the imperial court. Bakufu prestige had suffered a huge blow. With this episode, a complex three-sided political dance began. It would continue for ten years. Bakufu diehards, especially councillors from smaller *fudai* domains, wanted to bolster traditional Tokugawa authority by carrying out foreign policy and military and financial reforms on their own terms. They were opposed on the elite level by powerful daimyō of the outer and collateral domains and officials in the imperial court. These prominent contenders for power used anti-foreign, pro-emperor rhetoric as they sought to shift the center of political authority in their direction. The third party to this dance was of lower status. These were the so-called loyalist samurai, or "men of high purpose" (*shishi*). They propelled events forward with acts of political terror aimed at domestic opponents or foreign enemies.

These loyalists were most often angry young men from the middling to lower ranks of the samurai class. They were joined by a number of politically engaged members of the rural and urban elite, including a handful of activist women. These were crucial figures in the revolutionary history of ideas and political action in Japan. The samurai loyalists were fiercely proud people who understood themselves by virtue of birth and training to be servants of their lords and, beyond that, of a larger and vaguely defined realm of Japan epitomized by the emperor. In the tradition of Tokugawa officialdom, they combined civil and military cultivation. They schooled themselves in Confucian classics while they trained in fencing and swordsmanship. Reflecting this dual training,

they felt a twofold responsibility to think and to act: to propose solutions to the problems of the moment and to selflessly realize them in practice.

One harbinger of such sentiment and behavior was Ōshio Heihachirō. In the 1830s he was a samurai of low rank in the Osaka city government. Ōshio was schooled in a stream of Confucian thought that stressed the importance of righteous individual action. Outraged that top officials ignored his calls to help impoverished commoners at the time of the Tempō famine in 1838, Ōshio led a fierce uprising of Osaka residents. His forces burned down fully one-fourth of the city before being suppressed by bakufu troops.

In the 1850s, groups of similarly angry and action-oriented dissidents coalesced in domains throughout Japan. They were especially influential in several domains in which they enjoyed a sympathetic hearing from the daimyō and top officials, especially Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and Hizen. The most famous cluster of loyalists were the students of Yoshida Shōin, a charismatic scholar-samurai in Chōshū. Yoshida himself was executed in 1859 during a bakufu crackdown on dissent. His followers went on to play leading roles in overthrowing the Tokugawa and consolidating the new Meiji regime. The inns and temples in castle towns and in Kyoto that served as clandestine meeting places for these activists trace a path toward revolution similar to the “freedom trails” in American cities like Boston or Philadelphia that offer a sense of history to later ages.

The loyalists drew intellectual inspiration from an eclectic mix of idealism and practical reformism. They supported direct, violent action. They believed the existing system denied due respect and authority to “men of talent” such as themselves. They exalted the emperor, and they hated the foreigners who had forced their way into Japan. They put hate into action by assassinating not only domestic enemies, but foreigners as well. Among their victims were Townsend Harris’s Dutch interpreter and a well-known British merchant. But—and this is a crucial point—although they set off on their political path with crude and hopeless notions of standing up to foreign gunboats with razor-sharp swords and expelling the barbarians immediately, many loyalists quickly tempered their extremism with practical experience.

In particular, those who lived long enough to tell the tale came to see the need to learn from the West and perhaps even coexist with it. An archetypical case is that of Tosa loyalist Sakamoto Ryōma. In a scene that is a favorite of historical dramas to this day, Sakamoto charged into the residence of a bakufu official one day in 1862. With sword drawn, he stood intent on killing this man, who was modernizing the Tokugawa navy along Western lines. His target, Katsu Kaishū, convinced the would-be assassin to first hear him out. In the course of an afternoon Katsu saved his own life and persuaded Sakamoto that modernizing reforms were inevitable. Over time, people like Sakamoto developed a profound understanding of Western ideas, institutions, and technologies that would become deeply rooted in Japan.

POLITICS OF TERROR AND ACCOMMODATION

The Tokugawa bakufu thus faced a triple threat, from foreign powers, restive daimyō, and hot-headed samurai. It responded to this new situation with inconsistent policies. Its leaders lurched from accommodation to a hardline policy and back. They hoped all the while to strengthen the bakufu and share as little power as possible. Hotta’s successor as ranking bakufu official, Ii Naosuke, repudiated the politics of consensus seeking. He



Young samurai from Satsuma and Chōshū, who have just led a successful revolt against the Tokugawa shogun in the name of loyalty to the Meiji emperor, are here photographed in Tokyo in 1869. The two younger men in the middle are sons of the daimyō of Satsuma domain. It was long believed that the man seated at the left end is Itō Hirobumi of Chōshū, and the man standing on the right is Ōkubo Toshimichi of Satsuma, but this identification is no longer accepted by most scholars.

Courtesy of Ishiguro Takaaki.

tried to revive the traditional Tokugawa dictatorship. He went ahead without imperial approval to sign the Harris treaties in July 1858. He appointed the weak child-candidate as shogun. He told the court and outer daimyō to keep out of bakufu affairs, foreign policy and shogunal succession included. Ii carried out the dramatic Ansei Purge (after the era name) in 1858. He forced several reformist daimyō to resign, placed Tokugawa Nariaki under house arrest, and executed or imprisoned sixty-nine anti-bakufu samurai activists.

This crackdown proved too little, too late to put the anti-bakufu genie back in the bottle. In March 1860 a group of Mito loyalists assassinated Ii just outside a gate to Edo castle. They saw him as a hateful tyrant who had killed their comrades and betrayed the emperor. Ii’s worried successors in the bakufu council returned to an accommodationist line. Their goal was to win back the support of the court and powerful daimyō with strategic concessions, while cracking down on the extremist samurai. The emperor’s capital of Kyoto was the literal and symbolic battleground for all contestants.

The consensus-building policy of the new Tokugawa leadership sought “unity between court and bakufu [*kōbu gattai*].” This slogan meant different things to different people. For the bakufu, the idea was to make conciliatory gestures, such as arranging a marriage between the emperor’s sister and the newly installed young shogun. The powerful outer daimyō of Satsuma, Chōshū, and Tosa and the collateral houses of Mito and Aizu had other ideas. To them, unity of court and bakufu meant a major shift of decision-making authority to a council of lords centered in Kyoto. Such a system would have reduced the shogun to a position of first-among-equals, as a loyal imperial servant.

The bakufu concluded it had no choice but to accept some of these strong calls for reform. In 1862 it agreed to relax the venerable system of alternate attendance as an economic step to allow domains to save money. This also, of course, loosened the

bakufu's increasingly precarious grip on daimyō political activity. The bakufu agreed that the daimyō could spend these funds on strengthening "national" defense by building up their domain armies and navies, another step that could bolster the daimyō opposition. The bakufu also agreed to appoint three powerful daimyō as special advisors to the shogun.

The bakufu hoped that such steps would drive a wedge between samurai radicals and their domain leaders, allowing it to crack down on the former. This did not happen immediately. Instead, loyalist samurai from all over Japan converged on Kyoto in 1862 and 1863. The city became a hotbed of agitation among court officials and anti-foreign loyalists from many domains, people willing to sacrifice their own lives in the name of expelling the foreign barbarians and honoring the Japanese emperor. The supposedly pure motives of these devoted youths, and the sheer drama of their conspiracies and actions, left a potent legacy of political inspiration to later generations. They also forced the bakufu to take further controversial steps to regain control.

In 1863, the loyalists convinced the Emperor Kōmei to formally request that the shogun immediately expel the Western barbarians. The bakufu responded by sending the shogun to Kyoto (the first such procession since Iemitsu's grand visit in 1634) to discuss the matter. This trip represented a dramatic shift of geopolitical power. The bakufu expected that its new daimyō "allies" in the politics of court-bakufu unity would help persuade the emperor to revoke the expulsion request. Powerful daimyō, most notably the lord of Satsuma, understood that immediate expulsion was impossible. But they kept silent. Indeed, the Satsuma lord quietly left Kyoto at a crucial moment in the negotiations. With expulsion advocates in control of the court, the shogun had no choice but to return to Edo after accepting a certain date, May 10, 1863, as the exact moment to expel the barbarians.

The bakufu officials were well aware that their forces could not carry out this order. The deadline passed quietly in Edo. But in Chōshū at the far southern tip of the main island, loyalist soldiers in the domain army launched a cannon attack on an American ship. American and French warships immediately retaliated. They landed at Shimonoseki and destroyed several shore batteries, although the Chōshū attacks continued for some weeks. As the treaty powers considered further retribution, the bakufu and Satsuma forces finally joined hands to drive the Chōshū loyalists and the anti-bakufu court advisors out of Kyoto.

The bakufu moved to shore up control. It organized a militia under the control of the Aizu daimyō to keep a tight rein on activities in Kyoto. It promised to fulfill the "immediate" expulsion order in due course by closing the port of Yokohama in the near future. The court, shorn of its most radical elements, accepted this pledge. But the immediate crisis persisted for another year. In 1864 loyalist samurai from all over Japan retreated to Chōshū, where domain leaders allowed them to stay and conspire. From there, they mounted a new attack. They marched on Kyoto, with plans for a coup to capture the emperor and liberate him from Tokugawa control. They were met and routed by a combination of Satsuma and Aizu forces loyal to the bakufu.

The bakufu followed this advantage with a punitive expedition to Chōshū. As the price for allowing the Chōshū domain to survive, the bakufu demanded that the daimyō execute the leaders of the attack on Kyoto, and he agreed. Satisfied that Chōshū was now controlled by a more moderate faction of samurai, the bakufu armies returned home.

Advocates of a moderate politics of court-bakufu unity seemed to have regained the initiative.

BAKUFU REVIVAL, THE SATSUMA-CHŌSHŪ INSURGENCY, AND DOMESTIC UNREST

With hindsight, it is easy enough to see that the appearance of bakufu victory was deceiving. This was not obvious at the time, however. Chōshū was disgraced. Newly energetic leaders headed the bakufu. What was obvious was that the turmoil of the previous several years had set in motion a train of events that would transform Japan to some extent no matter who was in charge. Far-reaching social and political reforms were imposed both within the bakufu and in some key domains, especially in Chōshū. These centered on opening military and civil administration more broadly to talented men of various backgrounds and streamlining the larger political structure.

Within the bakufu, beginning in 1865, the finance and later military commissioner, Oguri Tadamasa, led a drive to reorganize the military along Western lines. Oguri even contemplated abolishing the domains entirely and creating a centralized national government. He received important advice and financial support for these efforts from the French minister to Edo, Leon Roche. But he also ran into opposition from conservative bakufu officials and from Tokugawa vassals anxious to protect their hereditary privileges. His programs of administrative and military reform did not go as far as those undertaken in some domains. In the summer of 1866 he received some powerful support when a new shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, took office. This was the same man whom reformist daimyō had promoted for the position of shogun in the political struggles of 1857–58. Now that he had the chance to rule, Yoshinobu resolved to work with Oguri and Roche to remake the bakufu into a Western-style national government. Conservative interests within the bakufu continued to resist change. But the reforms these men tried to introduce were quite similar to those implemented by the new Meiji regime several years later. Even had the bakufu "survived," it would have done so by transforming itself into a political system not unlike that which replaced it.

This did not happen for two related reasons. Given a taste of power, the leaders of the outer domains, above all Satsuma and Chōshū, were unwilling to return to a subordinate position under Tokugawa rule. And most important, samurai within their borders—at times in defiance of domain rulers—undertook dramatic reforms. They consolidated military strength sufficient to challenge and defeat the Tokugawa armies.

The Chōshū loyalists had been defeated and lost power in 1864, but the bakufu had not rooted them out completely. Surviving remnants continued to organize militia using Western arms and military techniques. In a breakthrough social innovation, the organizers of these militia, in particular Takasugi Shinsaku, allowed (and sometimes forced) peasants to join. After 250 years during which peasants were strictly forbidden from bearing arms and training as soldiers, they were given a chance to join battle. Whether they saw this as a chance for individual glory or a role in a grander cause, these farmer-soldiers and their samurai partners built units with high morale as well as skill. In 1865 Takasugi's forces fought a victorious civil war in Chōshū. They retook control of the domain government. As in Satsuma, the Chōshū treasury was well stocked owing

to effective fiscal reforms initiated decades earlier. This allowed the domain to purchase arms and ships from British merchants and build a formidable force.

Without such a drama of civil war, Satsuma had also been modernizing its military forces. Domain finances were healthy thanks to a mercantilist policy of promoting and taxing trade and the production of commercial crops, sugar in particular. In addition, Satsuma shared with Chōshū an extremely high ratio of samurai to commoners, a tradition of enmity to the Tokugawa, and the ability to escape close bakufu scrutiny because of its distant location. This made the two domains appear to be natural allies. In fact, it took much cajoling by outsiders to bring them together.

One key figure here was Sakamoto Ryōma, the Tosa samurai who had turned from anti-foreign assassin to open-the-country reformer after his encounter with the bakufu official Katsu Kaishū. Sakamoto helped broker a secret alliance between Satsuma and Chōshū in 1866. The two domains promised to support each other in the case of a bakufu attack on either one. This was not long in coming, for the Tokugawa could not tolerate the return of the loyalists to power in Chōshū. In the summer of 1866, the bakufu army embarked on a second expedition to the southwest to punish Chōshū. It demanded support from other domains, but Satsuma—bound by its secret alliance—and several others refused to send troops. The expedition ended in a stunning defeat for the poorly motivated bakufu forces.

The defeat and retreat of this large army across the length of the main island were public humiliations that made the fall of the Tokugawa regime inevitable and sparked widespread popular expectation of change, even of apocalyptic deliverance. Some peasants reacted to the impending collapse with uprisings to resist taxes or attack the authority of village elites. Such incidents were widespread in the final two years of bakufu rule. Especially in 1866, at least 35 urban riots and 106 peasant uprisings took place. They were concentrated in the months following the failed bakufu attack on Chōshū.

More unusual and intriguing was the carnival of dancing and celebrating that swept the central regions from Osaka to Edo in late 1867. In Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, and numerous other towns, small good luck charms somehow began raining down from the sky. Authorities in a few cases caught people tossing these from rooftops, in effect seeding the clouds. Whether or not the charms were of truly magical origin, they had powerful effect. In places where they fell, people took to the streets for days of drunken dance and carousing. They defied orders to cease. Their songs—written down by observers at the time—reveal a sharp awareness of the political contest underway and its likely outcome in defeat for the Tokugawa. One British writer described the scene in Osaka in 1867:

Crowds of people in holiday garb, dancing and singing “*ee ja nai ka, ee ja nai ka* (isn’t it good),” houses decorated with rice-cakes in all colours, oranges, little bags, straws and flowers. The dresses worn were chiefly red crepe, a few blue and purple. Many of the dancers carried red lanterns on their heads. The pretext for these rejoicings was a shower of pieces of paper, bearing the names of the two gods of Ise, alleged to have taken place recently.⁷

With such extraordinary outbursts in the background, key actors in the bakufu and major domains struggled over the precise manner in which the era of Tokugawa rule would end. At stake was the question of who would have a voice. Would the bakufu be replaced by an inclusive, in some rough sense “representative” form of government, perhaps a council of daimyō? Or, would a narrow group of insurgents be able

to monopolize power in a new regime? The issue was not quickly resolved. It would remain at the heart of Japanese political life for decades.

Once again, it was the Tosa daimyō, advised by Sakamoto Ryōma and Gotō Shōjirō, who played a crucial role as intermediary. The Tosa objective was to replace bakufu rule with a roughly British model: bicameral rule by a council of lords and a second council representing lesser samurai, and perhaps commoners. By November 1867, the shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, had been persuaded to accept this plan. He was to step down from his post and “return” ultimate power and sovereignty to the emperor. But the Tokugawa would retain control of their own considerable lands. Yoshinobu expected the Tokugawa house would continue to play an important role in the ruling council of lords.

This compromise, even with its huge reduction of Tokugawa power, did not satisfy the insurgent forces in Satsuma and Chōshū or their allies in the imperial court. In December 1867 the Satsuma and Chōshū armies marched on Kyoto. They took control of the imperial palace. In early January 1868 the insurgents prompted the Emperor Meiji, who had just recently taken the throne upon his father’s death in 1867, to announce an imperial “restoration.” The bakufu was to be abolished. It would be replaced by a new government of nobles and daimyō under the emperor. The Tokugawa would have no place at all. Yoshinobu resisted, but his troops were easily defeated in a battle just outside Kyoto. He retreated to Edo, but in April 1868 his military commander, Katsu Kaishū, turned over Edo to the insurgent forces without a fight. Katsu was convinced that peacefully setting up a new political order was preferable to fighting to the death for a lost cause.

Not all the Tokugawa supporters shared this commitment to a larger, national political order centered on the emperor. Samurai in several domains in northern Japan, in particular, did not trust the insurgents. They feared the new rulers from Satsuma and Chōshū would shut them out of the new regime. They resisted with arms and put up a stiff fight. The last pockets of bakufu and allied domain resistance were not crushed until eighteen months after the official “restoration” of the emperor in January 1868. As many as three thousand men died in the fiercest attacks, which targeted the holdout domain of Aizu.

The old regime thus collapsed, not without some turmoil and bloodshed, and with great political drama. Over the years of anti-foreign and anti-bakufu activism, participants on all sides had greatly shifted their visions of the desired political or social order. In the early 1860s, some had traveled to Europe or the United States on missions sent by their domains or by the bakufu. For the most part they abandoned crude plans for immediate “expulsion.” They developed a rather sophisticated appreciation of the potential of Western technologies and even political institutions.

Some had moved further by 1868. They had abandoned even the position of strategic concession, that one should learn from the barbarians to overcome and expel them in a decade or two. They had decided instead that Japan might permanently become part of a global order of nation-states. These activists were beginning to create a sense of a nation, at least in their own ranks. Beyond them, the masses of people, by no means as stupid or ignorant as many samurai believed them to be, held fervent expectation for change, perhaps deliverance. Few lamented the passing of the bakufu. But few identified themselves with the new order, either. Who would lead the new regime, and how would it be structured? Together with charms floating down from the skies, these and many fundamental questions seemed almost literally up in the air when the reign of the Emperor Meiji was announced in 1868.