Tokugawa Period

Tokugawa Period, the years between 1600 and 1868, during which time political power in Japan was concentrated in the Tokugawa clan.

The home islands of Japan during the Tokugawa period were Honshu, Kyushu, and Shikoku, which had a combined population of about twenty million in 1600 and twenty-six million in 1720. The outlying islands, which served as frontier or buffer areas, were Ezo (also Yezo, i.e., Hokkaido) in the north, the Ryukyu archipelago in the south, and Tsushima and Iki islands, situated between southeastern Korea and northwestern Kyushu. Ezo was defended by the lord of Matsumae against Russian encroachments; the Ō family of Tsushima served as intermediary between Korea and Japan; and the Ryukyu kingdom was Japan's indirect contact with China, for it had come under the domination of the southwestern domain of Satsuma in 1609.

The office of shogun, which was held by the Tokugawa for over two and a half centuries, exercised power delegated by the emperor. Located in Edo (Tokyo) was the shogun's administrative organ, the bakufu, which administered territories directly controlled by the Tokugawa (about 23 percent of the total arable land of the country) and exercised general supervision over some 265 semiautonomous domains. The number of domains fluctuated with political exigencies. The "Great Peace," a term used appreciatively by contemporary writers, was perhaps the most notable achievement of the Tokugawa government. The long period of political stability enabled people to channel their energies toward economic and social developments and toward remarkable cultural achievements.

The Consolidation of Control

The founder of the dynasty was Tokugawa Ieyasu (1540-1616). With the Battle of Sekigahara in 1600 he emerged as undisputed leader of the country. In 1603 he received the title of shogun, and though he soon transferred the office to his son in order to provide for its continuity within the family, he ruled until his death and was the principal architect of the long-lasting political system. By the end of the reign of Iemitsu (1623-1651), the third shogun, all the basic institutions and policies of Tokugawa administration were in place.

Until the mid-nineteenth century there were only two serious military actions. In 1615 Ieyasu captured Osaka Castle, more by clever strategem than by force, in order to forestall a possible challenge by the son of the previous hegemon, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598). In 1637 the peasants of Shimabara revolted to protest economic conditions. The rebellion took on religious overtones as samurai retainers of dispossessed Roman Catholic daimyo in the region joined in, and its suppression required a major military effort in which the Tokugawa went so far as to request artillery assistance from the Protestant Dutch. In the latter half of the period there were innumerable peasant disturbances, but these were usually directed against local lords, corrupt local officials, moneylenders, or others who caused peasant misery. The Heihachirō Rebellion of 1837, however, was of some consequence, in that
it was led by a former bakufu official and revealed the serious nature of contemporary economic problems. It remained for the arrival of Commodore Matthew C. Perry in 1853 to expose the fact that the political structure of the preceding centuries had become greatly weakened, and this revelation led to the collapse of the regime fifteen years later.

A major policy of the Tokugawa, which contributed to domestic stability and enabled Japan to develop some of her unique qualities, was the decision to "close the nation" (sakoku), to prevent foreigners from coming into the country and Japanese from going out. The measure derived from fear that Spain and Portugal were using Christianity to facilitate the colonization of the country. Although the first of many anti-Christian decrees had been issued by Hideyoshi in 1587, it was the Shimabara Rebellion that provoked the drastic decision for Japan's seclusion policy. In 1640, the last Westerners except the Dutch were expelled from Japan. Moreover, Japanese Christians were forced to recant or were persecuted. From 1640 until 1853 Japan was in semi-isolation from the rest of the world.

However, Japan was not totally isolated. Through the Ryukyu kingdom, which sent occasional missions to Edo, indirect contact was maintained with China, and the king of Korea also sent missions to Japan, the SAdaimyo serving as escort. More important, Dutch and Chinese merchants were permitted restricted residence in Nagasaki, a port city administered by the bakufu. The Dutch were confined to the tiny man-made island of Deshima, while the Chinese were segregated in another section of the city. Through these limited contacts the shogun and his officials obtained what information they could about events in the outside world.

The shoguns also isolated the emperor and court nobility from the military class. Once appointed to office by the emperor, Ieyasu saw to it that competing military houses would not have independent access to the throne, its awards, and its prestige. A high Tokugawa official was stationed in Kyoto and other lords were kept out. The court nobility (kuge) consisted of 137 major houses whose residences clustered around the imperial palace. The greatest of these provided appointees to a court bureaucracy that continued to serve even though deprived of function. Except for one marriage early in the period (of Ieyasu's granddaughter to Emperor Go Mizunoo), the two successional lines of the imperial family remained distinct until the shogun, in the days after Perry, looked for support at court.

The major objective of Ieyasu was to establish permanent control over the many feudal lords, called daimyo, and thus consolidate Tokugawa authority. These daimyo possessed their own domains, or han, complete with local government, taxes, and army, but the shogun had the power to give, take away, reduce, or confirm the daimyo's right to his territory. Three categories of daimyo were established. Those who were related to the shogun were shimpan ("related han") daimyo; those who were Tokugawa allies at Sekigahara were fudai ("hereditary vassal") daimyo; and those who fought against the Tokugawa or did not participate in the conflict were tozama ("outside lord") daimyo. The shimpan held strategic territory guarding the approaches to Edo; the fudai were granted relatively small territories scattered about in proximity to the tozama; and the tozama were the powerful erstwhile enemy who occupied the outer areas of Japan, and, in the wisdom of Ieyasu, were better left with most of their territory than with thoughts of revenge.

The fudai, who had the least independent power, were given the most political authority, while the
territorially large domain holders, the *shimpan* and *tozama*, were excluded from the decision-making process in national affairs. *Fudai* daimyo monopolized the most important posts of the *bakufu*, namely membership in the Rōju ("council of elders") and in the Wakadoshiyori ("junior council"). The Rōju and Wakadoshiyori each arrived at decisions collectively, and their leadership rotated frequently. Each of the councils supervised several lower administrators, many of whom were liege vassals and bannermen of the Tokugawa.

The *shimpan* daimyo enjoyed great prestige as relatives of the shogun without commensurate political responsibilities. They did provide counsel to the main shogunal house in family matters, such as marriage and succession issues. Owari, Kii, and Mito, the major branch families (*gosanke*), were eligible to provide candidates to the shogunate should there be no suitable heir within the main house.

The *tozama*, among the most powerful and dangerous of lords, were accorded great respect and ceremonial status in the protocol of the shogun's court. They were also the most frequently and heavily burdened by the *bakufu* with costly projects, designed to drain their economic resources, such as flood control work or the maintenance of Tokugawa fortifications. The *tozama* lords did enjoy greater autonomy within their *han* than the *fudai* lords, who were more vulnerable to the shogun's wrath. Satsuma, a *tozama han*, made special efforts to keep *bakufu* spies out of the realm, and when official inspectors arrived from the capital, elaborate preparations insured that they saw and heard only what the local officials wanted them to.

The most effective means for maintaining the political status quo and Tokugawa supremacy was the *sankin kōtai* ("alternate attendance") system. This system required all daimyo, with few exceptions, to reside in Edo on alternate years and give tribute to the shogun on ceremonial occasions. When the daimyo returned to their domains their families remained behind in Edo as hostages of the shogun. The trips between domain and Edo were extremely costly, for, depending upon the wealth and prestige of the lord, several hundred to a few thousand samurai and servants accompanied him. Thus, the lord of Satsuma, the second largest of the *tozama* daimyo, was accompanied by three thousand or more retainers who had to travel for about forty days each way. The maintenance of residential and official establishments at home and at the capital also accounted for a sizable part of the *han* budget.

Daimyo were rated in power and prestige by the assessed productivity, or *kokudaka*, of their domains, expressed in *koku* (approximately five bushels of rice). Maeda of Kanazawa, the largest of the *tozama* daimyo, had a realm rated at over one million *koku*. The same ratings affected ceremonial requirements, permissible numbers of samurai in total and in attendance at Edo, location and size of estates maintained in Edo, and service obligations. Twenty-two lords had territories with populations and *kokudaka* between 250,000 and 800,000. But most daimyo administered small domains, many barely over the 10,000 *koku* threshold of daimyo status.

The warrior ethic of loyalty to one's master and the Confucian emphasis on filial piety to parents and respect for superiors were concepts useful to the Tokugawa for maintaining social order and stability. Each person was to know his place and role in society and to behave accordingly. In a Japanese variation of the Chinese social model of four classes, the Tokugawa divided society into the four classes: samurai, peasants, artisans, and merchants. Everyone belonged to one of these categories,
and the categories were hereditary and thus in theory permanent. There was also a hereditary
outcaste community, and entertainers and prostitutes were classed as hinin, subhuman. The samurai
were the privileged ruling class. Approximately 5 percent of the total Japanese population were
samurai. Below them were commoners divided into separate groups according to their economic
functions. Peasants rated high on the Confucian scale of values because they were indispensable to
society as producers of food. As in China, agriculture was considered basic to the national economy.
Artisans also were productive and useful. Merchants, on the other hand, were unworthy of esteem, as
they were nonproducers who took advantage of both producers and consumers by buying cheaply
from one and selling dearly to the other. The hereditary nature of this four-class system inhibited social
mobility in Tokugawa Japan both laterally and vertically, although the dynamic nature of the economy
gradually blurred this sharp division along class lines.

Social and Economic Developments

Perhaps the single most dramatic development of Tokugawa Japan was the rather sudden growth of
the cities of Edo and Osaka. The enforced residence of all daimyo and their families, along with their
numerous servants and samurai retainers, made Edo, with a population of nearly one million in the
eighteenth century, a leading city in the world. Although the social tone of the city was set by the ruling
samurai class, the stereotype of the Edo denizen was a cocky, self-confident merchant. The providers
of goods and services were assigned to different sections of the city according to specialization. One
that attracted and impoverished many a samurai who had more time on his hands than money in his
purse was the Yoshiwara district, the "gay quarters."

Osaka also became a direct beneficiary of the sankin kōtai obligation, and it quickly expanded to a
population of 400,000. To feed and supply the mammoth capital of the shogun, Osaka became "the
kitchen of Japan," a collecting point and distribution center for goods from all the han, with fleets of
ships transporting essential supplies to Edo. Because daimyo were constantly in need of cash, they
brought their surplus rice and other local products to this commercial center to exchange for money.
Compared to their Edo counterparts, the Osaka chōnin ("townsmen") were typically more serious in
their pursuit of business and profits.

Although supervised by bakufu magistrates, the Osaka merchants organized themselves into
monopoly associations of service specialties. These associations, called nakama, served a dual
purpose: they provided security for members through collective action against the politically potent
samurai who might be tempted to intimidate the chōnin and, by collectively agreeing to rules and
regulations governing business ethics and standards, they made external official intervention in city
affairs largely unnecessary.

Matching Osaka in population was the neighboring city of Kyoto, the centuries-old imperial capital.
Overshadowing the elegant and fragile architecture of the palace compound was Nijō Castle, a
massive fortification housing bakufu officials and samurai, who guarded the palace and city. In this city
of serene and ageless temples aristocratic aesthetes perpetuated the traditional arts such as the no-
drama, the tea ceremony, and flower arranging. Kyoto also was the fashion center of the country, and
its artisans produced the finest silk textiles. Until the mid-nineteenth century there was little to ruffle the
calm of Kyoto, but in the closing decade of the Tokugawa period it was to become the center of a
political maelstrom.

These major urban centers, but especially Edo and Osaka, greatly affected the way of life of both merchants and samurai, as did the capital of each domain, its castle town, or jōkamachi.

The separation of warriors from farmers and the disarming of the commoners that had been carried out at the end of the sixteenth century meant that daimyo collected their samurai at their headquarters, just as the shogun collected his daimyo at Edo. With the seventeenth century peace, the need to service and provision this ruling class brought on a network of castle towns that usually attracted one tenth the population of the domain. The Tokugawa years produced rapid urbanization; Japan was probably the only non-European country with 10 percent of its population in cities of 10,000 or more in the eighteenth century.

With samurai removed from agricultural production, their livelihood depended on salaries that took the form of rice stipends from the daimyo tax yield; these in turn frequently gave way to money payments. Urban life and needs found samurai hard put to maintain their position on a fixed and often declining income. Samurai salaries were depreciated by currency devaluation and price inflation and further eroded by enforced “loans” to their han during hard times. Thus, while their taste for city pleasures developed, their financial situation became precarious, sometimes to the point of compromising their samurai status.

Many merchants, by contrast, acquired considerable wealth by providing for the ruling class. Almost from the beginning of the Tokugawa period, some daimyo found it necessary to borrow funds from Osaka moneylenders, and in the latter part of the period even the bakufu resorted to coercing loans from merchants. Politically, the shogun or daimyo could arbitrarily cancel or reduce payments owed to merchants, but they could ill-afford to alienate the merchant associations and thus jeopardize future loans. Instead, many daimyo perceived the advantage of employing able merchants to repair the fiscal situations in their domains. For their services, several specially favored merchants received surnames and the privilege of wearing swords like the samurai.

Urbanization and the emergence of an affluent merchant class produced a new type of culture, full of vitality, color, and movement. In drama, the

chōnin preferred the lively and colorful kabuki over the restrained action and simplicity of the nō stage. Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724) wrote about townsmen’s lives and was the premier dramatist of the kabuki and puppet (jōruri) stage. Instead of the Zen-influenced monochromatic brush paintings favored by the elite, the townspeople snapped up the colorful woodblock prints by Harunobu, Utamaro, Hokusai, Hiroshige, and others who depicted scenes of the demimonde, favorite actors, commoners at work, or the famous views along the Tōkaidō, one of the national highways. Novels, also, were written for commoners. Ihara Saikaku (1642-1692), a leading writer of fiction, portrayed merchant success and, as frequently, profligacy in the licensed quarters. Poetry became simpler and more direct, especially in the hands of Matsuo Bashō (1644-1694).

Compared to the wealth being amassed in the cities, the economy in rural Japan was relatively static. Yet while the merchants paid only a business license fee (goyōkin) and were
occasionally dunned for a forced loan to the government, peasants annually turned over a large part of their crop to their lords, often on the formula of "four (parts) to the lord; six to the cultivator." In some han, the proportions were reversed. Ironically, the heavy reliance on the agricultural land tax was based on the esteem agricultural labor enjoyed over mercantile activity in Confucian ideology.

The nature of paddy rice cultivation required close cooperation among villages, since they typically shared water from a common irrigation system. Moreover, to facilitate tax collection, subunits of five or more households were formed within each village. The collective concern of these subunits, called gonin gumi, was to ensure that each household did its best to produce the rice tax and to provide the required number of days of labor service to the local administration. The close social relationships fostered by the collective responsibility system benefited the villagers in that they obviated the need for on-site official supervision. Thus, most villages were administered by their own leaders, who served as buffers between peasants and officials.

The fixed rice tax was a heavy burden on peasants, but in times of bad crops the government did provide tax relief. Where possible, peasants were encouraged to reclaim marginal land, which at least in the initial years of cultivation was tax free. If the situation became intolerable, peasants sometimes absconded from their villages or resorted to violent protests. However, overall agricultural productivity kept pace with population growth. (By the mid-eighteenth century the overall population had stabilized, but outlying areas continued to grow while urban growth, natural disasters, and famine brought declines in other areas.) New crops, better seeds, better fertilizer, and improved agricultural implements were introduced. Agricultural specialists employed by the han circulated among the villages to instruct peasants in the latest methods of cultivation, and instructive books on agriculture increased as the number of literate peasants grew.

An important development in many areas was the emphasis placed on cash crops, a reflection of the spread of the money economy to the villages. Money was used to purchase fertilizer, tools, and other commodities, and it also enabled the peasant to hire labor as needed. With hired labor the advantages of maintaining the large extended family as a labor pool diminished. Thus, many family members went on to become independent cultivators, tenant cultivators, or wage earners. The more successful peasants invested their wealth in rural industries that provided secondary employment for others.

Cash crops also were used by han governments to relieve their fiscal difficulties. Special local crops were made han monopolies, which might be administered by licensed merchants. With the commercialization of agriculture, merchants often contracted for the crop by advancing capital to the cultivators. By the nineteenth century, these rural merchants had broken the tight control of markets held by the Osaka merchants. All these developments generally benefited peasants, but inevitably many were reduced in respectability and wealth, and others became enmeshed in a web of loans and high interest rates.

The bakufu and han governments, however, were not beneficiaries of the new economic growth. Reassessment and higher tax demands were seldom successful. Instead, major reforms in the Kyōhō (1716-1733), Kansei (1787-1793), and Tempō (1841) eras, sponsored respectively by the shogun Yoshimune (r. 1716-1745), the Matsudaira Sadanobu (1787-1793), and the Mizuno Tadakuni (1834-1845), were implemented, but they were based on outmoded assumptions that there was a
fixed total of national wealth. These were initiatives to reduce spending, revalue currency, reclaim more land for agriculture, force peasants in the city to return to their villages, and provide relief to samurai by cancelling their debts to merchants. These measures did not address the fact that the Tokugawa economy had essentially changed and could not be forced back into a Confucian mold.

Only the economic program of the grand chamberlain and rōō Tanuma Okitsugu (1769-1786) adopted the positive approach of creating new sources of revenue. Regarded by his colleagues in the Council of Elders as an upstart, he was able to promulgate a number of reforms only because of the patronage of the tenth shogun, Ieharu (1760-1786). Besides encouraging land reclamation, he explored the possibilities of colonizing Hokkaido, increasing foreign trade, developing mines, setting up more government monopolies, and finding new taxable enterprises. Tanuma, however, was not a model of Confucian circumspection. When his patron shogun died Tanuma was brought down in disgrace and accused of unconscionable corruption, and his reforms came to naught.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a period of intense crisis brought on by the aggressive diplomacy of Western powers, the bakufu and most han were incapable of financial response. However, two tozama han, Satsuma and Chōshū, had been singularly successful in their economic reforms of the 1830s and 1840s. Chōshū had turned over monopolies of commercial crops to licensed merchants and had set up a savings office that systematically accumulated capital for emergencies and for key investments. Satsuma had established a han-controlled monopoly system over several products, among which sugar was the most valuable commodity. The domain also profited from the Ryukyu trade and from illicit coastal commerce with Chinese vessels, which conveniently "blew off course" into Satsuma's snug harbors. These two domains built up financial resources commensurate with the anti-bakufu leadership roles they were to assume in the closing years of the Tokugawa regime.

### Intellectual Developments

In intellectual activity, scholars of the Tokugawa period demonstrated independence and vigor of thought despite the long period of isolation. From an early point the bakufu tended to favor Confucianism of the Zhu Xi school as a desirable teaching, and Matsudaira Sadanobu made this preference official in 1790. He did so, however, in response to the popularity of other teachings. The teachings of Wang Yangming, or Aōmei as he was known in Japan, also had a wide following. The study of Confucianism and the injunctions of scholars such as Ogyu Sorai (1666-1728) to return to the study of the Chinese classics and of antiquity, led others to investigate Japan's own ancient past. This in turn revived interest in Shinto and provided the basis for a new ethnic nationalism.

An important contribution to the study of national history was made by Tokugawa Mitsukuni (1628-1700), lord of Mito, a major branch of the shogunal house. Mitsukuni ordered the compilation and publication of the *Dai Nihonshi (History of Great Japan)*, a mammoth project that began in 1657 and was completed in 1906. Because of this project the Mito han was especially respectful of the imperial family, whose unique and unbroken lineage traced back to the sun goddess Amaterasu according to the ancient literature. The reminder of past political centrality of the imperial family created problems for Tokugawa scholars. How should they explain the relationship of the powerful shogun to the reclusive emperor? What began as an intellectual issue became a highly emotional one in the last decade of Tokugawa rule.
Scholars of the Kokugaku ("national studies") school were impressed by what they perceived as the unique qualities of the Japanese when they analyzed ancient literature such as the Man'yōshū (a poetry anthology of the eighth century), the Kojiki and the Nihongi (official histories of Japan, dated 712 and 720 respectively), and the Genji monogatari (Tale of Genji, an eleventh-century novel). While scholars like Yamaga Sōō wrote of the manly virtues of bushidō ("way of the samurai"), others, like Motoori Norinaga, were impressed by the sensitivity of Japanese to the fleeting qualities of life and nature. Such introspective intellectual endeavors focused attention on the imperial tradition, the center of Japan's presumed uniqueness.

A different vein of thought was opened in 1720 when the shogun Yoshimune relaxed the ban on the importation of foreign books. Japanese interest in Western books was primarily pragmatic. The bakufu selected a few "interpreters" to study Dutch and translate items of interest for the government, but the communication gap was difficult to bridge. Individual scholars also acquired Western books, and by the early 1770s they had produced a translation of a Western work on anatomy. Thereafter, scholars studied Western works on a variety of subjects, such as mathematics, astronomy, navigation, surveying, mapmaking, and, in the nineteenth century, Western military science and industrial technology, including telegraphy, gas illumination, the casting of cannons, and the construction of steam engines and steamships. By the mid-nineteenth century those involved in Western studies were well aware of the technological and military superiority of the West and were eager to learn.

The lively competition of ideas in the Tokugawa period helped Japan adjust to the flood of new concepts, institutions, and technology that came in the nineteenth century. Essential to this intellectual vitality was the spread of education. This began in the seventeenth century with domain efforts to convert the martial and often illiterate samurai into peacetime bureaucrats. Han schools, normally restricted to samurai, were supplemented by networks of parish (terakoya) and private (shijuku) schools that provided basic literacy for growing numbers of commoners. Establishment of schools increased year by year during the last century of Tokugawa rule, with the result that by the end of the period almost half of school-age males and one-tenth of females had received some kind of schooling outside the home. These figures suggest the strong motivation for self-improvement throughout Japanese society.

**Collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate**

Between 1792 and 1818 Russian and British vessels intruded into Japanese waters several times at Hokkaido, at Nagasaki, and even at Edo. Alarmed by this challenge to the seclusion policy, in 1825 the bakufu ordered that any Western vessel in Japanese coastal waters be driven off by gunfire. Between 1844 and 1846 the British and French competed to establish relations with the Ryukyu kingdom, but with Satsuma backing the Ryukyu king refused to depart from past policy. American efforts in 1837 and 1846 to open relations with Japan also failed. Finally, in 1853 a show of naval force by Commodore Matthew C. Perry succeeded in forcing the Japanese officials to accept a letter from the president of the United States to the shogun. A second visit by Perry resulted in the Treaty of Kanagawa (31 March 1854), in which the bakufu agreed to open the ports of Hakodate and Shimoda and to treat shipwrecked American sailors humanely. The way was left open for assignment of an American consul to Japan, and Japan agreed that any privileges given other countries would extend to
Townsend Harris arrived in Shimoda as American consul in 1856. He convinced the Japanese that it was wiser to sign a commercial treaty with the United States than to risk the humiliation experienced by China at the hands of the British and French. The treaty signed on 29 July 1858 opened two additional ports, Kanagawa and Nagasaki, with Niigata and Hyōgo to be opened later; the right of Americans to residency at Edo and Osaka was promised; trade between the two countries was to be facilitated by low, fixed tariff rates; and the principle of extraterritoriality was accepted by Japan. The bakufu signed similar treaties with the Dutch, Russians, British, and French in the same year. These agreements were little different from the "unequal treaties" that had been signed under duress by China.

Perry's first trip to Japan caused Abe Masahiro, the senior rōju, to break with precedent by consulting with the imperial court and the leading daimyō as to the course of action Japan should adopt. Some, like Tokugawa Nariaki of Mito, argued for military action, which even if unsuccessful would serve to arouse the martial spirit of the Japanese. A few believed that commerce with the West was a way of making profits that could pay for the weapons required for national defense. Others suggested that some trade concessions should be made in order to gain time for Japan's defense effort.

The signing of the commercial treaties of 1858 aroused even greater furor in domestic politics than did Perry's appearance. Abe's idea of consultation was totally rejected by the new bakufu strongman, Ii Naosuke. Despite the imperial court's opposition, Ii signed the treaties; he also placed the powerful daimyō who disagreed with him under house arrest.

The uncompromising rule of Ii led to his assassination by Mito swordsmen in the spring of 1860. Thereafter, bakufu prestige and control deteriorated, and the political center of gravity gradually shifted to Kyoto. In 1862 the sankin kōtai system was relaxed, and daimyō families were allowed to return to their domains. The release of the hostages encouraged the more powerful daimyō to play a stronger political role in national affairs, and they turned to the imperial court as their stage. The political instability also enabled rōnin ("masterless samurai") to terrorize both foreigners and Japanese who supported the commercial treaties. The assassinations they committed and their cry of "Sonnō jōi" ("Revere the emperor; expel the barbarians") were further embarrassments to the bakufu.

Chōshū and Satsuma were two of the most powerful and ambitious of the tozama domains, and they competed for influence at the imperial court. Between 1861 and 1864 they competed for court favor, and in the process the politically dormant court became activated and a few aristocrats were radicalized. Under the influence of the Chōshū extremists, the court broke precedence by summoning the shogun to Kyoto and forcing him to sign an order for the expulsion of foreigners by 25 June 1863.

Inspired by this extremist rhetoric, Chōshū, on 25 June, fired on Western ships off its coast. American and French naval vessels retaliated by destroying Chōshū's forts and two gunboats. Moreover, in the summer of 1863 the domains of Aizu and Satsuma combined forces to expel Chōshū samurai from Kyoto. When Chōshū forces tried to regain control of the imperial court in
1864 they were driven off again. Soon after, a Western fleet destroyed all of Chōshū's coastal fortifications and imposed a heavy indemnity on the bakufu. Furthermore, the bakufu launched an expedition to punish Chōshū for her transgressions in October of 1864.

In the meantime, in September 1862, Satsuma samurai killed an Englishman and wounded his three companions. The following year British naval units set fire to Kagoshima, the Satsuma castle town. These encounters with Western military might sobered both Satsuma and Chōshū extremists, and their leaders reversed course by seeking support from the Westerners in their struggles with the bakufu. British minister Harry Parkes, while maintaining an officially neutral position in Japan's domestic politics, tacitly agreed by taking no action against his countrymen who sold ships and weapons to Satsuma.

In the first bakufu expedition of 1864 Chōshū faced disaster from an overwhelming force and negotiated a moderate settlement. Within Chōshū, radicals revolted and succeeded in negating that settlement. When the bakufu tried a second expedition in 1866 Chōshū's revitalized military units dealt humiliating defeats on bakufu units. Between the two expeditions, with the assistance of two rōnin from Tosa, Sakamoto Ryōma and Nakaoka Shintarō, a secret alliance against the bakufu had been negotiated by Saigō Takamori (1827-1877) of Satsuma and Kido Kān (1833-1877) of Chōshū.

After the military fiasco of the second Chōshū expedition, the new shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu (Keiki), with the counsel of the French minister, Léon Roches, tried to institute sweeping military, economic, and administrative reforms, but time ran out before these measures could bear results. Saigō and Tōbo Toshimichi (1830-1878) directed Satsuma strategy from Kyoto to counter Yoshinobu's moves. On 8 November 1867 the shogun was persuaded by the Tosa daimyo, Yamauchi Yōdō (Toyoshige), to resign his office. He did so with the assumption that he would take his place in a council of daimyo in which he would be first. He was outmaneuvered by a court order that he also surrender his lands, and on 3 January an "imperial restoration" was proclaimed.

A brief battle came at the end of the month when the former shogun tried to advance on Kyoto. Unsuccessful, he retreated by ship to Edo, while an "imperial" army made up of Satsuma, Chōshū, Tosa, and additional troops moved toward Edo. The city was surrendered to the coalition army by Katsu Awa (1823-1899), but the newly created Tokugawa navy escaped to Hokkaido. Northern daimyo, suspicious of the motives of the southern coalition, fought on into the late spring of 1869, when the Tokugawa naval units surrendered.

The transfer of power from Tokugawa to imperial hands was accomplished with relatively little rancor. Japan's dual government had proven incapable of dealing with the foreign threat, and its stratified society would soon give way to a more rational structure capable of dealing with the needs of a modern state. Yet the Tokugawa years had given Japan the cohesion, the discipline, the education, and the sense of nationality that would contribute to the speed of the changes that followed.

Further Readings


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