

Introduction

In 1568 the powerful regional baron Oda Nobunaga marched his army from a castle near modern-day Nagoya into the ancient imperial capital city of Kyoto. There he compelled the powerless emperor Ōgimachi to recognize the hapless thirty-year-old Ashikaga Yoshiaki as fifteenth—and last—shogun, or military dictator, of the Ashikaga lineage.¹ Just three centuries later, in 1868, Kyoto was seized again, this time by leaders of powerful baronial armies from Satsuma and Chōshū in southwest Japan. They compelled the boy emperor Meiji to designate their forces imperial armies with the duty of crushing the hapless thirty-year-old Tokugawa Yoshinobu, fifteenth—and final—shogun of the Tokugawa lineage.

Between those two moments of imperial puppetry the people of Japan left a 300-year record of agonies and accomplishments that is instructive even today. Commonly called Japan's early modern period, these three centuries divide, in largest terms, into a century and a half of extraordinary growth and a century and a half of equally extraordinary stasis. The ingredients of that growth strike us as familiar because they generally conform to our notions of “progress,” “development,”

1. Japanese names are given in the usual order, surname first, in the text of this book. Some individuals are subsequently identified by surname but many by given name, especially when the surname is common. In the footnotes and Suggestions for Further Reading in English, Japanese authors' names are given as they appear in the works cited, sometimes surname and sometimes given name first. Birth and death dates of Japanese historical figures appear in the index.

or “social growth”: the polity was elaborated, scholarly and other higher cultural production flourished, the human population grew, cities and towns proliferated, economic output and material consumption rose, and exploitation of the ecosystem intensified enough to make all that possible.

The ingredients of stasis are more complex. In some sectors, they constituted near-absence of growth, but mostly they involved processes of displacement and transfer, with “more” in one area being offset by “less” in another. Overall, Japan’s human population almost ceased to grow after about 1720, but in regional terms a near-balance was achieved, which involved population reduction in some regions, particularly the northeast, that offset continuing growth elsewhere, mostly in the southwest. Artistic and literary creativity continued, with an array of new genres developing, while others atrophied. The increased affluence of some social strata was offset by losses in others. To characterize the latter half of the early modern era in terms of stasis is not, moreover, to deny areas and eras of absolute growth, and one of our tasks will be to explore the types, timing, and logic of such growth.

These large-scale rhythms of growth and stasis reflected human rhythms of polity, economy, society, and culture, but they involved far more than just people. They also entailed a ceaseless interplay of people and their environmental context, which fundamentally determined the scope and nature of early modern Japan’s growth and the necessity and shape of its stasis. To explain the dynamics of this history requires, therefore, much more than an examination of the human record. It also requires scrutiny of farmlands, forests, wetlands, and the sea, and of the creatures living therein. Unfortunately, it is impossible at present to study this broader history satisfactorily because much of the story, particularly that of the nonhuman players, is barely recorded. And where the record does exist, most of it is only beginning to be explored by historians, whether writing in Japanese or in foreign languages such as English. The reconstruction of this ecological experience attempted here thus inevitably has its gaps, which are bridged by suggestion and deduction when possible, but are as often as not left for others to explore and fill in coming years.

Even the human story has been told unevenly.² The era of growth

2. Footnotes identify the sources of quotations, as well as supplying data not commonly available and some opinion. They are also intended to guide readers to additional works, recent scholarship in particular. Considerable factual material also derives from

long received the lion's share of attention, especially in foreign languages.³ The customary interest in political history encouraged that focus because it enabled one to concentrate on the drama of the early modern order's formation while sketching lightly the tedium of its later stability and deterioration. The study of intellectual and cultural history similarly focused on seventeenth-century thinkers and creative artists, who were seen as delineating an ideological order and creating cultural precedents that persisted thereafter.

During recent decades, however, more and more scholarship has focused on the latter half of the early modern period, and that monographic work makes it possible to treat the era of stasis more fully than do earlier historical overviews. Indeed, the present study gives considerably more attention to the latter half of the period than to the former.

This shift in temporal emphasis reflects a shift in interpretive premises. Today our society's belief in the limitless linear process commonly called progress is increasingly being challenged by rising awareness of the constraints a finite ecosystem imposes on human choice. As a result, the vision of history as a story of progress and the view that the historian's task is to construct narratives of that progress—images of politics becoming more structured and rational, economies becoming more commercialized, standards of living rising, literacy spreading, life spans lengthening, populations growing, cities burgeoning, intellectual life becoming more rational, political consciousness more widespread and informed—this sense of the historian's task seems less and less adequate.

Rather, we wonder how human social systems have functioned in their environmental contexts, how sustainable particular arrangements have been, and how the costs and benefits of those arrangements have been distributed among both the human and the nonhuman participants in the system. The present study endeavors to incorporate both

Japanese reference works, of which the following were particularly helpful: *Daijinhmei jiten* [Biographical encyclopedia] (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1958), 10 vols.; *Nihon rekishi daijiten* [Encyclopedia of Japanese history] (Tokyo: Kawade shobō shinsha, 1961), 22 vols., including *Nihonshi nenpyō* [Chronology of Japanese history] and *Nihon rekishi chizu* [Atlas of Japanese history]; *Nihon annai bunken chizu* [Atlas of Japan] (Tokyo: Shogakukan, 1965); and *Konsaisu chimei jiten: Nihon hen* [Concise geographical dictionary: Volume on Japan] (Tokyo: Sanseido, 1975).

3. The standard treatment in English is volume 3 of George Sansom's monumental *History of Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), covering the years 1615–1867, in which Sansom devotes 150 pages to the century between 1615 and 1715 and 90 pages to the following 150 years. The 1560–1615 period is covered in 135 pages in volume 2.

the older perception of history as progress and the newer one of history as equilibria that form, fail, and form anew into an understanding, albeit incomplete, of Japan's early modern history.

In one specific sense the current state of scholarship encourages greater emphasis on the later Tokugawa period. Much of the early English-language work on Japanese history concentrated on diplomatic relations, leaving domestic developments badly underreported. During the past half-century, however, that imbalance has been redressed; indeed, scholarship of the recent past has tended to slight diplomacy in favor of internal affairs. Accordingly, the later chapters of this study devote substantial space to the impact of foreigners during the nineteenth century.

In a broader sense, too, the times invite a sharper focus on the diplomacy of those years. The two former "superpowers," having squandered their resources on their arms race and the comforts of the socially advantaged, now seem less and less able to enforce the post-1945 global distribution of power and privilege. One potential casualty of this changed situation is the fixedness of Japan's territorial boundaries, notably those of the far northeast. For years the Japanese government has, to no great effect, claimed sovereignty over a number of islands east of Hokkaido, including the two large and economically significant islands of Kunashiri and Etorofu, which were seized by military forces of the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.⁴ That northern boundary may now be subject to renegotiation, and this book devotes several pages to tracing the early history of Russo-Japanese relations in the northerly region once known as Ezo.

This study's shift in temporal emphasis from early to later Tokugawa history does not, however, overcome all problems of imbalance and omission. Quite apart from the tentativeness of the environmental history, readers will find some aspects of the human story inadequately covered, despite the book's attempt to view its subject broadly. Perhaps the most disturbing lacuna relates to women, but family history as a topic, the truly poor, and pariahs as a group are also scarcely noted, and children, the elderly, and the handicapped escape almost untouched. Some facets of human culture—for example, music, folk dance, *gō*, *shogi*, *sumō*, flower arranging, attire—are untreated, and the Oki-

4. Kunashiri and Etorofu are Japanese pronunciations. Kunashiri is 577 square miles in area; Etorofu, 1,207. For comparison's sake, Oahu island (with Honolulu) has 598 square miles; Luxembourg, 999; Rhode Island, 1,067; Corsica, 3,367. Fisheries are an important part of the islands' economic value.

nawan and Ainu peoples and Japanese-Korean relations receive only cursory comment.

Finally, acknowledgements are due. Yale University granted me a year's respite from teaching to complete the manuscript. Even with time to write, however, the book simply would not have taken shape without the dedicated and careful monographic work of scores of scholars. Wherever possible I have relied on English-language works, citing some 350 of them in footnotes so that readers may explore topics further. In selected areas, such as fisheries and river policy, foreign scholarship scarcely exists, and I have accordingly relied on the work of Japanese scholars. I hope this volume will make scholarly accomplishments in both languages more widely known and inspire future scholars to enrich the corpus. The University of California Press has been generously cooperative and the comments and corrections of press readers wonderfully helpful.