

Japan

PAST AND PRESENT

BY

EDWIN O. REISCHAUER

Foreword by Sir George Sansom



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ALFRED A KNOFF · NEW YORK

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T*o my brother, Bob*

FOREWORD

Few countries have been more copiously described than Japan, and perhaps few have been less thoroughly understood. In the last century there were a number of works dealing with the picturesque or the exotic aspects of that country, most of which, though sometimes a trifle deceptive, were passable books of travel. During the same period there were written a few important studies of Japanese political and social history which are still standard works, though they are used only by a few specialists. But it is a remarkable fact, which I think will be accepted by any teacher who has been responsible for instruction in schools or colleges, that before the outbreak of the war in the Far East there was no single short book which gave a lucid and tolerably complete picture of Japan's early history and her development in modern times. There were plenty of learned treatises on this or that, but nothing to give the average educated reader what he needed.

After the outbreak of war, there appeared in profusion a flood, or at least a considerable stream, of books about Japan, chiefly of topical interest. Some of these

were interesting and useful. Others, however, were of a different type. Understandably, but regrettably, they belonged to that class of historical work, all too common in the last few decades, of which the purpose is not to discover or expound truth but to promote one of those perversions of systematic thought which are known by the suitably ill-sounding name of 'ideologies.' Now that the war is over, the average reader has a right to expect something more rational, more readable and more reliable.

I think that Dr. Reischauer's book fulfils these requirements. He has excellent qualifications for his task — familiarity with the country he describes, a first-class linguistic equipment, a good training as an historian, and most important of all an approach to his subject which is neither prejudiced nor sentimental. He narrates the leading facts of Japanese history from early times, with just and interesting comment. He explains easily and competently the evolution of modern Japan to the conditions described in his concluding chapters. I can truthfully say that I do not know of any short book on Japanese history which gives so much useful information in so brief and simple a form.

G. B. SANSOM

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this brief description of the Japanese and their history I have of necessity omitted the great mass of small factual details of which history is made, and have attempted to clarify the picture for the reader by concentrating on salient features and by treating the whole in general and broadly interpretative terms. In doing this, I have been acutely aware of the dangers of oversimplification and of misplaced emphasis. If I have avoided these pitfalls, the credit is in no small measure due to several friends who very kindly read my manuscript and made many extremely helpful and valuable suggestions. Sir George Sansom, whose masterful *Japan — A Short Cultural History* is an inspiration to all students of Japan, not only was kind enough to read my manuscript but also has written a foreword. My special thanks for much valuable aid are also due Professor Serge Elisséeff, under whose excellent guidance I first started my study of Japanese history. I wish to express my appreciation also for the helpful comments and corrections given me by Dr. Hugh Borton, Dr. Edward Kracke, Mr. Richard McKinnon, and by my parents

and my parents-in-law, Dr. and Mrs. George H. Danton. I take this opportunity also to thank my sister-in-law, Jean Reischauer, for her skillful and painstaking work in preparing the maps which accompany the text.

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Japan
Past and Present

日本古今史

[*The Japanese title by William R. B. Acker*]

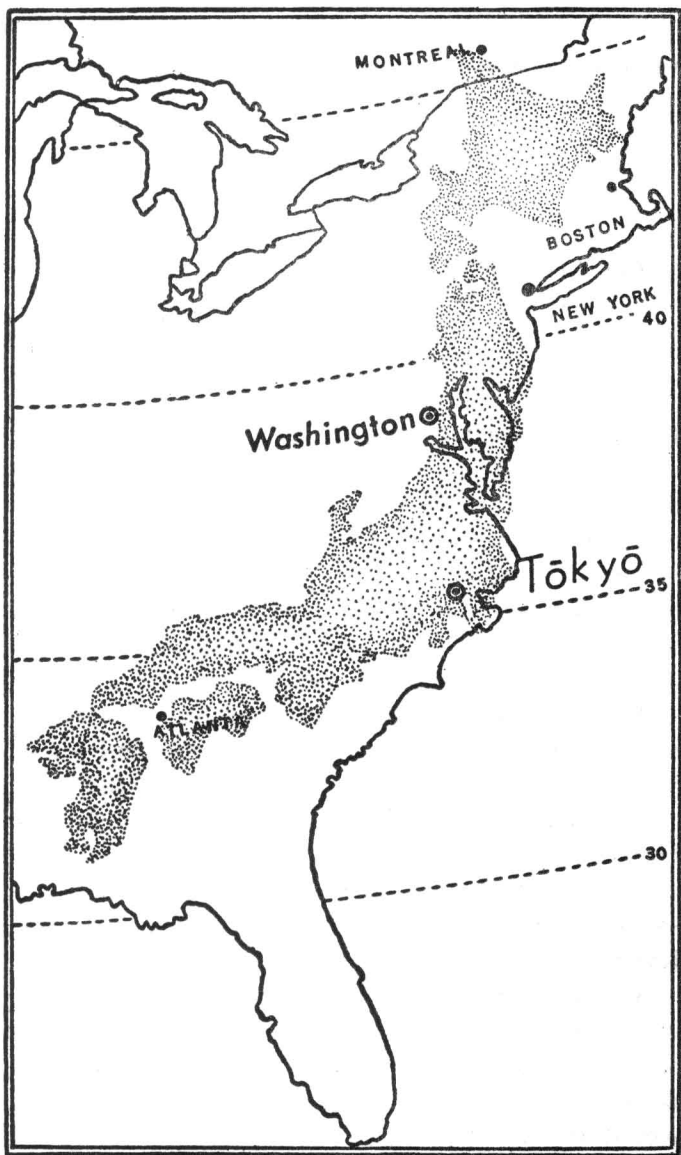
Chapter I

GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

In the islands of Japan nature fashioned a favored spot where civilization could prosper and a people could develop into a strong and great nation. A happy combination of temperate climate, plentiful rainfall, fairly fertile soil, and reasonable proximity to other great homes of civilized man predestined the ultimate rise of the inhabitants of these islands to a place among the leading peoples of the world.

The four main islands of Japan, strung out in a great arc along the coast of East Asia, cover the same spread of latitude and the same general range of climate as the east coast of the United States. The northern island of Hokkaido parallels New England; the heart of the country from Tokyo west to the Inland Sea corresponds to North Carolina; and the southern island of Kyushu parallels Georgia.

Americans have often tended to overemphasize the smallness of Japan, contrasting it with the vast stretches of our own country, or to other geographic giants like Russia and China. A more reasonable comparison would be with the countries of western Europe. Japan is smaller than France or pre-war Germany but slightly



JAPAN SUPERIMPOSED AT THE SAME LATITUDE
ON THE EAST COAST OF THE UNITED STATES

larger than the British Isles or Italy, the homes of the two greatest empires our Western world has ever seen.

Like Italy, Japan is a mountainous country. Throughout all four of the main islands are great stretches of towering mountains and jumbled hills. The combination of rugged coast line and precipitous mountainsides makes of the whole country one of the beauty spots of the world, but it leaves little land for the Japanese farmer, who finds only about twenty per cent of the land surface of his islands level enough for cultivation.

The mountains of Japan have pushed the Japanese out upon the seas, making them the greatest seafaring people of Asia. Sea lanes have been great highways within Japan; sea routes have beckoned the Japanese abroad; and the cold and warm sea currents which bathe the shores of the islands have always provided rich fishing grounds for the hardy Japanese fishermen.

Nature has been rather niggardly with Japan in mineral resources. Coal the islands have in some abundance, but few other sub-soil riches in significant quantities. The mountains of Japan, together with the heavy rainfall, have, however, given Japan one great asset in the modern world — water power, all the more important in a land comparatively poor in other respects.

Next to its favorable climate, the geographic factor of greatest importance in shaping the history of Japan has been the factor of isolation. Japan is a part of the Chinese zone of civilization, that zone in East Asia centering around China which has been dominated by the culture developed in ancient times on the plains of North China.

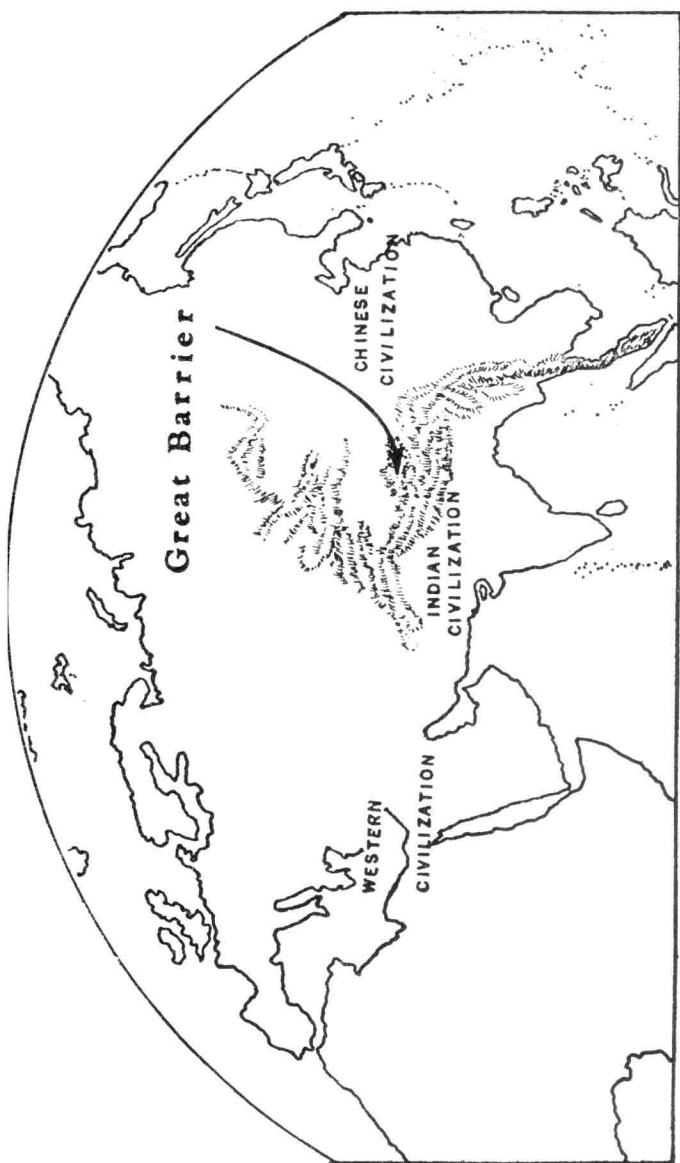
The Chinese sphere of civilization is itself the most

isolated of the great spheres of early civilization, cut off from the centers of early culture in India, the Near East, and the Mediterranean world by the great land barrier of the mountain ranges and vast deserts of Central Asia, and the jungles and rugged terrain of South-east Asia and the Malay Peninsula.

In this relatively isolated zone of Chinese civilization, Japan was in the past the most isolated area of all. Like England, Japan is an island country, but the straits between western Japan and Korea, the nearest continental land, are well over 100 miles wide, many times the width of the Straits of Dover; and some 500 miles of open sea stretch between Japan and China, the home of civilization in East Asia. In days of primitive navigation these water barriers were very broad, and made of Japan the most isolated of all the older countries of the world.

Culturally Japan is a daughter of Chinese civilization, much as the countries of northern Europe are daughters of Mediterranean culture. The story of the spread of Chinese civilization to the alien peoples of Japan during the first millennium after Christ is much like the story of the spread of Mediterranean civilization to the alien peoples of northern Europe during the same period. But the greater isolation of the Japanese from the home of their civilization and from all other peoples meant that in Japan the borrowed culture had more chance to develop along new and often unique lines, and to grow into distinctive patterns of civilization.

One popular concept is that the Japanese have never been anything more than a race of borrowers and imitators. The truth is quite the contrary. Although



ANCIENT CENTERS OF CIVILIZATION IN ASIA AND EUROPE