

SECOND EDITION

CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

HISTORY, POLITICS, AND
SOCIAL CHANGE
SINCE THE 1980S

JEFF KINGSTON



 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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SOCIAL CHANGE
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Editorial Offices

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The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

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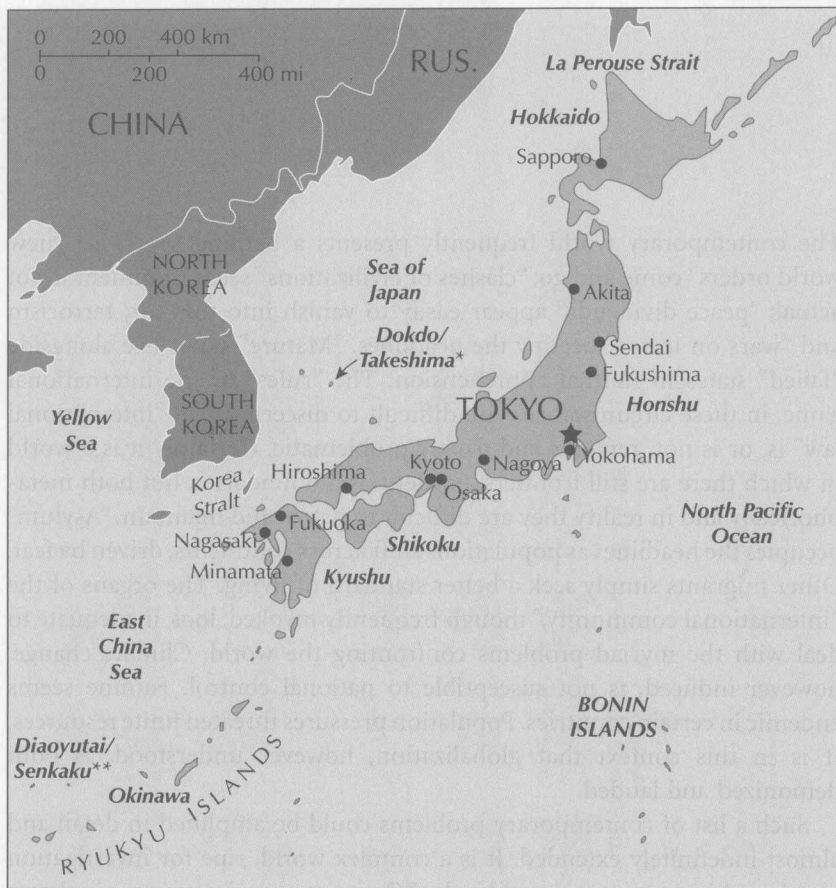
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Map of Japan

*These are the Korean and Japanese names for this disputed territory

**These are the Chinese and Japanese names for this disputed territory



Series Editor's Preface

The contemporary world frequently presents a baffling spectacle: "new world orders" come and go; "clashes of civilizations" seem imminent if not actual; "peace dividends" appear easily to vanish into thin air; terrorism and "wars on terror" occupy the headlines. "Mature" states live alongside "failed" states in mutual apprehension. The "rules" of the international game, in these circumstances, are difficult to discern. What "international law" is, or is not, remains enduringly problematic. Certainly it is a world in which there are still frontiers, borders, and boundaries, but both metaphorically and in reality they are difficult to patrol and maintain. "Asylum" occupies the headlines as populations shift across continents, driven by fear. Other migrants simply seek a better standard of living. The organs of the "international community," though frequently invoked, look inadequate to deal with the myriad problems confronting the world. Climate change, however induced, is not susceptible to national control. Famine seems endemic in certain countries. Population pressures threaten finite resources. It is in this context that globalization, however understood, is both demonized and lauded.

Such a list of contemporary problems could be amplified in detail and almost indefinitely extended. It is a complex world, ripe for investigation in this ambitious new series of books. "Contemporary," of course, is always difficult to define. The focus in this series is on the evolution of the world since the 1980s. As time passes, and as the volumes appear, it no longer seems sensible to equate "the world since 1945" with "contemporary history." The legacy of the "Cold War" lingers on but it is emphatically "in the background." The fuzziness about "the 1980s" is deliberate. No single year ever carries the same significance across the globe. Authors are therefore establishing their own precise starting points, within the overall "contemporary" framework.

The series treats the history of particular regions, countries, or continents but does so in full awareness that such histories, for all their continuing distinctiveness, can only rarely be considered apart from the history of the world as a whole. Economic, demographic, environmental, and religious issues transcend state, regional, or continental boundaries. Just as the world itself struggles to reconcile diversity and individuality with unity and common purpose, so do the authors of these volumes. The concept is challenging. Authors have been selected who sit loosely on their disciplinary identity – whether that be as historians, political scientists, or students of international relations. The task is to integrate as many aspects of contemporary life as possible in an accessible manner.

This volume on Japan rises to the challenge. The country's history conspicuously illustrates the interactions that have been alluded to. The first half of the twentieth century saw its engagement with “the world” collapse in catastrophe. The country started thereafter on its “new beginning” under outside direction. Yet its proud and self-contained past still continued to send somewhat ambivalent messages into a Japan which proceeded to make itself a “modern miracle.” This account, however, is no bland narrative of a “success story.” It is, rather, an account of decades in which the reconciliations – economic, cultural, demographic, political – which appeared to have been solid achievements all began to unravel. The earthquake of March 2011, followed by the devastating tsunami and the impact of these natural disasters on the Fukushima nuclear reactors, brought these matters to crisis point. It is this process of renewed self-examination, visible across so many areas of both private and public life, which this book treats as an interconnected whole. There can be no better example, to begin this series, of a country seeking anxiously both to adjust and to retain its own culture and identity in a changing world.

Keith Robbins



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Please note that in Japan, Japanese names begin with the family name, but here are cited according to Western convention: given name followed by surname.



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Part I

Introduction



Chapter 1

Transformations After World War II

Japan's recovery from the war devastation that left its cities and factories in ruins was surprisingly rapid, but nobody in the late 1940s could have foreseen that its economy would one day become the second largest in the world. In the aftermath of defeat, Japanese experienced unprecedented socio-economic upheaval during what has to be regarded as one of the world's great success stories in the second half of the twentieth century. Japan was reconstituted during the US Occupation (1945–52), generated an economic miracle in the late 1950s and 1960s, weathered the oil shocks in the 1970s, and saw an extraordinary asset bubble burst at the end of the 1980s, setting the stage for the Lost Decade of the 1990s. This was a time of what is often termed one-party democracy under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that ruled Japan as a partner of the bureaucracy and big business in what is known as Japan, Inc. or the Iron Triangle. It was also a time when the long shadows of wartime deprivation and dislocation shaped a national consensus prioritizing stability, security, and policies aimed at minimizing risk.

In post-WWII Japan, there was massive migration from rural areas to the cities, pulled by the lure of jobs and pushed by the limited opportunities of small-scale farming. The ensuing growth of cities, with housing developments, train lines, and highways, created a mass commuting culture with a rhythm very distinct from traditional rural life. The salaryman lifestyle became iconic, a way of life rooted in the breadwinner model, with a work-driven husband, a full-time housewife, and at least two children, usually living with some of their grandparents. Signs of growing affluence became

more conspicuous in an expanding middle class. Women were nominally freed from patriarchy with the abolition of the *ie* (patrilineal family) system, and gained the right to vote and other constitutional guarantees, but in the workforce they remained largely marginalized. The rapid growth of the 1960s did not generate large income disparities as was common in Western industrialized societies, and the relatively egalitarian distribution combined with job security strengthened social cohesion and a sense of shared destinies. This social capital remains one of the foundations and strengths of post-WWII Japan, but is under threat due to widening income disparities and declining opportunities for young Japanese.

The spread of mass media, especially television, helped nurture a strong sense of nation even as overt displays of nationalism remained taboo, tainted by war. Emperor Hirohito was transformed from a wartime leader into an avuncular and soft-spoken symbol of the nation. Japan was visibly welcomed back into the community of nations at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, a sign that it had been rehabilitated under the auspices of the US.

While neighbors may have found the continuing presence of the US military reassuring, Japanese remained divided and ambivalent about this encroachment on their sovereignty. Mass demonstrations against renewal of the US–Japan Security Treaty in 1960 revealed a surprising depth of anger, not only directed against Washington. Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, who negotiated the renewal, was a suspected Class-A war criminal, one of those senior leaders deemed responsible for orchestrating Japan's military rampage through Asia 1931–45. He was never indicted, and was released from prison for reasons that remain unclear given his culpable record in Manchuria and later as the wartime Minister of Commerce and Industry. Many Japanese, with the horrors of the war fresh in their memories, deeply resented Kishi's rise to premier through backroom political maneuvering; he represented an unacceptable link to a thoroughly discredited past. In those days, nobody was trying to glorify or justify Japan's wartime exploits, as some do now, and anyone associated with Japanese militarism was *persona non grata*, making it especially galling that such a key figure in the wartime cabinet was suddenly the leader of a country that was trying to reinvent itself by repudiating this past.

Occupation 1945–52

Allied in name, but an American show in practice, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP, a term often used to refer more generally to

the Occupation authorities) was personified in the larger-than-life, dominating presence of General Douglas MacArthur. General Headquarters (GHQ), the administration under SCAP, governed indirectly through the existing Japanese bureaucracy; this was a significant contrast to the situation in a divided Germany where the Allied powers ruled directly.

The US presided over Japan in the aftermath of war in order to demilitarize and democratize its former enemy.¹ SCAP acted on the perception that the military had derailed democracy and hijacked the nation into war, and that the high concentration of political and economic power made Japan vulnerable to such a scenario. With Germany and the two world wars it precipitated in mind, the US sought to inoculate Japan from a militarist revival. Thus, SCAP focused on eliminating the military and dispersing political and economic power more widely.

Demilitarizing Japan started with demobilizing the troops, confiscating their weapons, and eliminating military institutions. This was followed up by a ban on war, and the means to wage it, in Article 9 of the Constitution authored by SCAP and adopted by Japan in 1947. Martial arts were also banned and SCAP authorities censored the media and films in clumsy efforts to stifle non-existent militaristic sentiments. People were war weary and the military was widely blamed for the destruction and suffering the Japanese people endured.

The war in the Pacific (1941–5), inflamed by racial prejudice and fears, was a “war without mercy.”² Given the extent of excesses and atrocities committed by Japan, the US, and its allies, the mutual accommodations and relative beneficence of the Occupation are striking. The arrival of the Americans sparked fears of retribution, and soon after the surrender the Japanese authorities were already recruiting women to provide sexual services to the troops. Throughout the Occupation, American troops did commit serious crimes against the civilian population, including murder, rape, and assault, but not on the scale that many Japanese had feared, knowing as they did how the Imperial Armed Forces operated in the territories it had occupied.

In late 1945 and early 1946, the Americans helped avert a famine by bringing in food supplies. They were also importing all sorts of commodities that were illicitly diverted to the thriving black markets where almost anything was available for a price. Soldiers used their PX (Post Exchange, a store operated by the military) privileges to advantage, discovering just how valuable nylon stockings, among other sundries, could be in a barter economy. Rationing was in force, but few people survived without supplementing their diet by other means. Those without enough money for

black-market purchases traveled to the countryside where they would barter kimonos or other valuables for rice and vegetables. Making their way back home on crowded trains, they took pains to evade police who often confiscated the food they were bringing back to their families.

Japan in the early postwar years was not the relatively crime-free haven it has become, and violence was common. There were bloody gang wars and turf battles between Japanese mobsters and rivals from Korea and Taiwan, a legacy of empire. Demobilized soldiers had useful skills and few options, providing the *yakuza* (organized crime) with a large pool of potential recruits. Prostitution flourished because many women had few other ways to support themselves and their families. Nonetheless, there were recriminations against these so-called *pan-pan* girls brazenly soliciting GIs, men who were attractive because they were flush with cash and had access to the prized goods available at the PX. Drug use was also at epidemic proportions as many people had addictions to amphetamines that they had developed during the war as soldiers or factory workers. In the hard scramble for survival, theft and robbery were common crimes of desperation.

Unions flourished under SCAP because it released union organizers held in prison during the war years and because of labor reforms that made it easier to organize workers. SCAP believed that strong unions would help spread political power more widely and strengthen democracy. Harsh working and living conditions, along with wages that failed to keep up with galloping inflation, also helped unions grow increasingly powerful. When SCAP banned a general strike in early 1947, unions felt betrayed – while companies understood that the authorities would tolerate union-busting tactics. Management targeted union members with the help of mobsters, undermining the *yakuza*'s self-styled image as protectors of the weak and vulnerable. Workers came to understand that joining the moderate company-sponsored unions and renouncing membership of the more radical unions was their best, or at least safest, option, providing valuable context for understanding how labor relations became harmonious as Japan made the transition to high-speed economic growth in the late 1950s.

In 1946, SCAP convened the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), prosecuting 28 high-level leaders deemed most responsible for orchestrating the war, the so-called Class-A war criminals that were charged with crimes against peace. Emperor Hirohito was notable for his absence, disappointing US allies such as the UK and Australia who demanded he be held accountable. This also disappointed many Japanese who felt that the war was fought in his name and mourned the loss of some 2.1 million soldiers who died at his behest in addition to some 800,000