



This is a quick read e-book for beginner learners on the History of Japan from the Jomon Period to the End of the American Occupation of Japan after the Second World War.

Second Edition (2.0)

Authored by: Benard Ochieng', Year 2024

Social @:

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Earliest Japanese Civilization

Earliest Japanese civilization is referred to as the Jomon who lived in the Jomon Period (15000BC to 300BC). They are known for their highly detailed artifacts pottery and statues.

They lived on the Japanese archipelago uninterrupted for over 10,000 years. This came to an end with the migration of the Yayoi into Japan (1000-300BC). They brought bronze and iron technology into Japan and also advanced farming techniques. This in turn led to high crop yields and rise in the human population on the Japanese archipelago. They also played a role in producing large amounts of wealth and power for the land owners.

Actually, Japan was initially divided into 100 kingdoms as per the accounts from The Book of Han completed around 82 AD. In 240 AD, the Yamato Clan had hegemony over other clans in Japan and began to be referred to as a single Kingdom by the Chinese, the Kingdom of Wa. This is true as per the accounts from a Chinese work of History, the Wei Zhi.

The Kofun Period

240-538AD marked the Kofun Period which saw the unification of Japan by the Yamato and construction of massive burial mounds, present to this very day.



Image Kofun burial mound (Daisen Kofun) in Osaka Japan, tomb of Emperor Nintoku Osaka.

The rulers of the Yamato gained power over all of Japan through military conquest and also convincing local clan leaders to bow to their authority and in exchange to receive influential positions in the Yamato government. These clans became known as the **uji**.

Rulers of the Yamato state, consisting of a hereditary line of Emperors still reign today as the world's longest dynasty.

Asuka Period

In 538 AD, Buddhism arrives in Japan, introduced by a Korean King, marking the beginning of the Asuka Period, which saw centralization of power. Buddhism managed to co-exist with Japan's initial religion, Shinto.



Images above: Buddhist monk meditating at the high mountain temples.



Image: Buddhist Temple of Kinkaku-ji declared World Heritage Site by UNESCO.



Image: Shrine in Kyoto, Japan. Fushimi Inari-Taisha Shinto shrine in modern-day Tokyo Japan.

In 587 AD, The Soga clan took over power and reduced the power of the Yamato Emperor and Japan's name was changed from Wa to Nihon, still in use locally to this day.

In 645 AD, The Soga Clan was overthrown by the Imperial Ruling Family (Prince Naka no Oe) in alliance with the founder of the Fuji-Wara Clan (Fujiwara no Kamatari).

The Fuji-Wara began to consolidate power in the Imperial Family not by use of military force but through marriage, offering their daughters to the Yamato Emperors. The Prince born from the marriage and raised in the Fuji-Wara's traditions by the mother, would grow up to become the Emperor who married another Fuji-Wara daughter and the cycle continued.

The Nara Period

The Nara Period (710-794) saw the moving of the capital to present day Nara and widespread drought and famine attributed to lack of morality in the society. This was followed by increased construction of Buddha temples in Japan and devotion. Other disasters in addition to drought and famine struck Japan during this period in the form of wildfires and disease outbreaks (smallpox) that took away nearly a quarter of Japan's population.

Heian Period

This lasted between 794 and 1185 AD. The capital of Japan was moved to **Heian-Kyo** (present day Kyoto) until 1868. This witnessed power struggles within the Imperial Courts in Heian-Kyo, and the rise of two powerful clans the **Minamoto** and the **Taira** all related to the Imperial Family. The clans consolidated power by hiring large samurai armies (horse-riding and archer barbarians from northern Japan-the **Emishi people**) and **shoens** (land owners).

The imperial court consolidated control over the **Emishi people of Northern Honshu**, who responded by creating networks of **semi-autonomous feudal domains across Japan**, that later acted as the foundations of the first Samurai warriors. The name "Samurai" was actually formulated by the central Heian government in Heian-Kyo meaning "servant/henchman".

The imperial court thus created the position of the Shogun (in Japanese seii tai-shogun) translating into "Great Barbarian- Subduing General" in English. The Shogun was to lead an imperial army in subduing the Emishi and bringing them under control of the Kyoto government. Otomo no Otamaro became the first Shogun in Japanese History.

The Emishi-Samurai (archers on horse-backs) later gained favor in the eyes of the Heian-Kyo imperial government and the Emperor used them to suppress rebellion and unrests.

The Imperial government also hired the two powerful clans, the Minamotos and the Taira, to suppress unrests and rebellion from clans opposing the imperial government.

In 1156, a power vacuum ensued in the Imperial court and two rival emperors **Go-Shirakawa** and **Sutoku** attempted to gain power by use of military force and therefore hired the Minamoto and Taira clans, who ended up fighting one another.

The Taira led by **Taira no Kiyomori** celebrated a victory over the Minamotos and a feud between the two began, resulting into the **Heiji Rebellion** of 1160, which the Taira won again.

The Taira clan therefore celebrated two victories over the Minamotos. An uprising led by Minamoto no Yoritomo, once exiled to Kamakura, was waged against Kiyomori, who died in 1181. The **Genpei war** (1181-1185) thus ensued and proved to be a bloody one with victory belonging to the Minamoto.

Minamoto no Yoritomo and his retainers rose to become the de facto rulers of Japan with a capital in Kamakura. Minamoto was made shogun (1192-1199) by the Emperor, ushering in the Kamakura Period and Shogunate.



Image: AI-generated art of a Samurai warrior.



Image: AI-generated art of a Senior Samurai officer.



Image: Samurai armour.

Kamakura Period and the Establishment of the Shogunate in Japanese History

Kamakura Period (1185-1333)

Minamoto no Yoritomo took power in 1185 and was declared first Shogun of Japan (1192-1199) and ruled with absolute power reducing the Emperor to a ceremonial figure. He created the first Shogunate that ruled all of Japan on behalf of the Emperor, which is the **Kamakura Shogunate** and Kamakura was made the official capital of Japan.

This period marked the beginning of Shogun rule of Japan as military dictators on behalf of the Emperor as mentioned above. Power became decentralized to Daimyos (land owners). During this period Japan suffered two invasions (1274 and 1281) by the **Mongols** led by **Kublai Khan** but manage to repel and survive the two invasions. In both the first invasion (1274) and the second invasion (1281), the Mongols first attacked and occupied islands like Tsushima, and moved to successfully occupy Iki island and landed on Hakata Bay in Northern Kyushu Islands. Kyushu became the main battleground until their **naval fleet was destroyed by typhoons** (in both invasions) known to the Japanese as “**Kamikaze**” meaning “Divine Wind”.

The war was costly to the Shogunate, despite the victory, and had little to pay as war-wages to the victorious samurai warriors. This led to poor relations between the samurai warriors and the Shogunate, which played a key role in bringing the Kamakura Shogunate to an end.

Between 1333 and 1336, the **Emperor Go-Daigo** attempted to restore power to the Imperial Palace from the Shogun, by organizing a rebellion. This became known as the **Kenmu Restoration** aimed at monopolizing power to the Imperial Court.

The Kamakura Shogunate sent **General Ashikaga Takauji** to stop the rebellion, but surprisingly joined the Emperor and they overthrew the Kamakura Shogunate. General Ashikaga and his samurai warriors began losing morale in Emperor Go-Daigo's Kenmu Restoration and rebelled after Go-Daigo declined appointing him shogun. Ashikaga overthrew Go-Daigo and installed a member of the imperial family to the throne, **Emperor Komyo**, who also failed to appoint him shogun.

Go- Daigo fled south to set up a rival government in **Yoshino City**. Ashikaga made himself shogun and set up a Shogunate based in **Muromachi district of Kyoto**, ushering in the Muromachi Period and the Ashikaga Shogunate. A long-lasting conflict thus ensued between the northern and southern courts.

The Muromachi Period and the Ashikaga Shogunate (1333-1568)

The Ashikaga Shogunate found itself in a challenging position in defending against Go-Daigo's southern court and maintaining authority on its own backyard. The Ashikaga Shogunate appointed rulers to rule over the provinces who grew to become feudal land lords known as the **Daimyos** and rebelled against the Shogun.

The Ashikaga Shogunate managed to pull itself together with time and fostered the unification of the northern and southern courts. Towards the final century of The Ashikaga Shogunate, the Shogunate gradually slipped into chaos again leaving the Daimyos ruling over the independent kingdoms.

This second period of instability in Ashikaga Japan became known as the **Sengoku –Jidai: The Age of Warring States** and marked the Golden Age of Samurai warfare. It began in 1467 with the **Onin War**, incited by power succession struggles over the seat of the Shogun. It also saw the battle for Kyoto between **Hosokawa Katsumoto** and **Yamana Sozen** (rival Daimyos) who led their respective clans-**the Hosokawa and Yamana clans** to a battle that led to the burning of Kyoto to the ground.

By 1477, a Shogun successor was found but was too weak to consolidate power over all of Japan and Daimyos grew stronger, ruling over hundreds of independent states over Japan. During the sengoku-jidai, it was the Daimyos, significantly, fighting against one another accompanied by their samurai warriors. Significant Daimyos of this era included **Uesugi Kenshin** and **Takeda Shingen**.

The sengoku-jidai also saw the rise of the Ninja assassins who also were great spies. They were hired by Daimyos in conflicts against other Daimyos.



Image above – Ninja Assassin

The popular **Japanese Tea Ceremony** found its first foundations on Japanese Culture during the Muromachi Period.



Image: Tea Ceremony in Kyoto in Japan.



Image: Artistic depiction of guests seated to receive tea.

During this period, European traders managed to find their way to Japan and introduced new items, most significantly, the musket gun. Through them (the Europeans), Christianity also managed to find its way in Japan.

Azuchi-Momoyama Period (1568 -1600)

This period began with the Daimyo, **Oda Nobunaga** capturing Kyoto bringing the Ashikaga Shogunate to an end. He was known for his strategic leadership, ruthlessness and encouragement of Christianity in Japan.

In the Azuchi - Momoyama Period, Oda Nobunaga, Daimyo of a small province (headquartered at Azuchi Castle), used firearms bought from European traders to force-unite most of Japan.



Image: Replica of Azuchi Castle in Ise City, Mie Prefecture, from the South. Azuchi Castle was built by Oda Nobunaga as his headquarters.

In 1582, he was betrayed in his path of conquest by a loyal general **Aketchi Mitsuhide**, who sent his samurai warriors to ambush him at his camp at Honno-ji , forcing Oda Nobunaga to commit suicide, this became known as the **Honno-ji Incident**.

Nobunaga's other loyal General, **Toyotomi Hideyoshi**, headquartered at **Momoyama Castle** (Chancellor of the Realm) from 1594 to 1598 after his retirement, and headquartered at **Osaka Castle** when still in office, fulfilled Oda's dream of a unified Japan and passed laws that prohibited slavery in Japan, especially the sale of Japanese people as slaves and also, he avenged Nobunaga's death by crushing Aketchi's uprising.

He embarked on a massive invasion of the Korean Peninsula (1592-1598). He was met with a strong resistance force of Korean and Chinese military forces. The fight went on to a stalemate and Hideyoshi died in 1598 and the invasion consequently aborted.

Civil strife ensued in Japan between forces loyal to Toyotomi Hideyoshi's five-year-old son (Toyotomi Hideyori) born in 1593 and Tokugawa Iyeyasu (a Daimyo) in the decisive **Battle of Sekigahara of 1600** and Tokugawa Iyeyasu was the victor and established the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1600 and became Shogun, appointed by the Emperor (1603 to 1605).

On June 4, 1615, Toyotomi Hideyori passed away during **the Osaka Siege**. Realizing that the Toyotomi clan's continued power would be a constant threat to his rule, Tokugawa Iyeyasu renewed hostilities in the summer of 1615, following the truce that ended the winter siege of 1614. The battle reached its climax during the summer campaign when Tokugawa's army broke through the fortifications of Osaka Castle.

Hideyori and his mother **Yodo-dono** made the decision to end their lives, following a custom among samurai to prevent dishonour from being captured, in response to the overwhelming might of the Tokugawa army and the **fall of Osaka Castle**. Their demise sealed the Tokugawa Shogunate's rule over Japan and brought an end to the Toyotomi lineage. This rule persisted until **the Meiji Restoration** in 1868.

The Edo Period and the Tokugawa Shogunate

The leadership of Tokugawa with the capital in Edo ushered in the Edo Period (1600-1868) which was a relatively peaceful and prosperous era marked with decline in Samurai warfare. The population in Japan increased, and Japan became one of the most populated in the world.

Economic decline ensued in Japan and isolationist policies followed limiting Japan from strong economic ties with the rest of the world. The Samurai became an economic burden to the State, since they were available in large numbers but with no wars to fight. The state reduced payments to the samurai warriors as a consequence and some fell into poverty, others sought alternative employment, others became bandits and others became **ronin** (meaning “drifters” or “wanderers”), who are samurai warriors who lost their masters due to the latter's death or loss of favor.

The Ronin Samurai has been romanticized and acted as an inspiration behind the Film – **47 Ronin**, starring Keanu Reeves released in 2013, based on the historical incident of a group of young samurai warriors left leaderless after their master is forced to commit suicide by law for having assaulted a court official. Another film inspired by the Samurai is Tom Cruise's **The Last Samurai** (2003).

Some of the samurai left the military and fell to ordinary jobs such as being watchmen and court clerks and some remained in the military. Regardless, all samurai were expected to follow an **ethical code of conduct** known as the **Bushido** (“The Way of the Warrior”) which included loyalty, honour and discipline (politeness and etiquette) as these values were necessary for their services in the civil service of the Shogunate. The Bushido ethical code of conduct has origins that can be traced back to the early history of the beginnings of the samurai in the Heian Period and became more prominent in the peaceful Edo Period when there was less large-scale samurai warfare, and the samurai were needed in the civil service/bureaucracies/administrative offices of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

It is during this Edo Period in Japan, that the popular sport Kendo as we know it today, developed. The samurai practiced martial training as an art to maintain their combat skills and for personal development rather than for war readiness in the peaceful Edo period. The practice became known as “Kendo” meaning the “Way of The Sword.” Kendo itself evolved from a traditional Japanese swordsmanship martial art known as **kenjutsu** which had been practiced for centuries before the Edo Period.



Image above- Japanese present day martial art students practice Kendo.

The Edo period also saw the rise of the popular Japanese drama, the Kabuki which remains practiced to this very day.

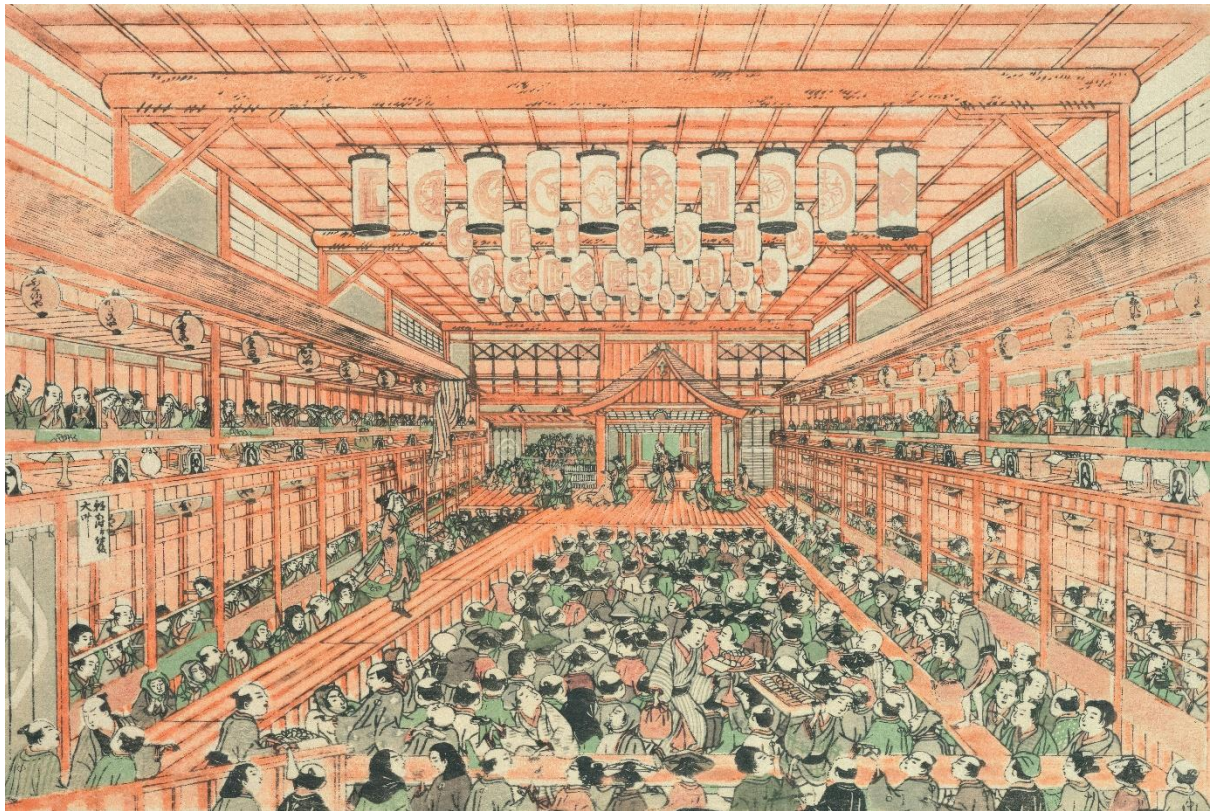


Image Above, Japanese Art depicting Kabuki Drama.

In 1853, the American Naval fleet under **Commodore Mathew C. Perry** arrived in Japan. The US government then forced Japan to open up trade to the rest of the world. The great western powers by then; Britain, Russia and the United States among others, imposed **the “unequal treaties”** on Japan, dictating that their citizens must be allowed to reside in Japan and be exempted from import tariffs and trial in Japanese law courts.

Japan after a period of internal strife (**Boshin War** of 1868 to 1869 which was a war between those seeking to help the Tokugawa Shogunate retain the exercise of power and those who wanted to strip the Tokugawa Shogunate of power in favour of Emperor Meiji) saw a period of rapid modernization to keep up with the rest of the Western world and avoid the fate of Western colonization, to which other Asian civilizations became victims.

The Tokugawa Shogunate became abolished in 1868 in the Boshin War and power officially handed over to the Emperor ushering in the Meiji- Period (1868 to 1912). This restoration of power to Emperor Meiji, became known as the **Meiji Restoration**.

The Meiji Period (1868 -1912)

The Emperor became the official ruler of Japan, with the Shogunate power abolished. The imperial family moved to Edo, which was renamed Tokyo. The Emperor however was only 15 years old and therefore power was actually in the hands of former samurai warriors in the government known as the Meiji Oligarchs from Satsuma and Choshu.

Members of this group had a mission to transform Japan into a nation that would be on an equal standing with the rest of the world powers from the West. They include:

Okubo Toshimichi and **Saigo Takamori** from **Satsuma**, and **Kido Takayoshi**, **Ito Hirobumi** and **Yamagata Aritomo** from **Choshu**.

The Meiji Period was a period of extensive adoption of Western civilization and culture in Japan in the fields of education, religion, science, medicine, technology, mining, banking, law, military and; transport and communication. The Western Gregorian Calendar was adopted. Western dressing and hair styles were adopted as well. Japan also experienced transformation in the government structure; the First Prime Minister of Japan **Ito Hirobumi** walked into office and wrote the **Meiji Constitution**, promulgated in 1889.

Rise of Japanese Imperialism and Militarism; and the eventual defeat of Japan in 1945

The Japanese military rapidly modernized and increasingly became independent of the civilian government in Tokyo, pursuing to extend the Japanese Empire into parts of Asia thus went to war with her neighbours. The aim was to put Japan on an equal standing with the Western Colonial powers. The army became a useful tool in quelling rebellions in Japan.

Japan's expansion into foreign territory became the expansionist policy which continued into the 20th Century and lost control over these territories to the United States during the Second World War, and her eventual defeat at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945.

Some of the foreign territories gained were:

- the Ryukyu Islands from China in **the First- Sino-Japanese War** (1895).
- The Korean Peninsula (1905- claimed protectorate, 1910-full annexation) after the Russo-Japanese war (1904-05) against Russia, similarly expanding territory.
- Manchuria region of China in 1931.

In **the Second Sino-Japanese War** of 1937, Japan celebrated victory when they captured the Chinese capital of Nanjing and then committed the infamous Nanjing Massacre, which was the slaughter of unarmed Chinese civilians in the hundreds of thousands. The Chinese led by Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist government, in a temporary alliance with the Chinese Communist Party defended the rest of China in the bloody war until 1945.

The United States in opposition to the invasion of China, imposed strict economic sanctions on Japan, aimed at discouraging other nations around the world from engaging in trade with Japan and to deprive Japan of resources such as oil, which Japan was reliant on to fuel the expansionist wars in Asia. Japan thus joined the Axis forces in Europe (Germany and Italy) in the Second World War, worsening relations with the United States.

Japan extended its empire to French Indochina and as punishment, the West froze all Japanese assets on their territories such as embassies, meaning the Japanese assets were shut down in the sovereign territories of the US and other allies.

In retaliation to all this, Japan responded with a surprising attack on the US Navy fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor Hawaii (December 7th 1941) with her fighter aircraft including the Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter launched from aircraft carriers, forcing the United States to team with the Allies in Europe and to declare war on Japan.



Image: Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941. The Burning ship is USS Arizona hit by bombs dropped by Japanese aircraft.



Ensign-Kiyoshi- Ogawa, Japanese Kamikaze Pilot one the two who died upon smashing USS Bunker.

The United States modified its Pacific fleet replacing much of the damaged battleships with powerful aircraft carriers and began a military campaign westward in the Pacific to retaliate against the Japanese Empire. Japan had upper hand in the war but after the **Battle of Midway**, the tides of war began tiding against them in June 1942. The United States scored more victories in the **Battle of Guadalcanal**, where they manage to gain control of Solomon Islands from Japan.

The Japanese committed war crimes at this time ranging from mistreating prisoners of war, civilian massacre and employment of chemical and biological weapons in war. They were notably notorious for fanaticism, employing *banzai* charges and instead of retreating when overwhelmed, fought to the last man. The frustrated Japanese military leadership resorted to deploying squadrons of Kamikaze pilots to crash their aircraft on allied ships. The **capture of Saipan islands** by the US, allowed the bombing of mainland Japan destroying many of Japan's main cities.

Between April and June 1945, **The Battle of Okinawa** ensued and saw ground and aerial combat between forces of US and Japan, and also naval combat between the two navies of Japan and the US. The battle was a bloody one for Japan, and the United States was discouraged in spilling more blood with the planned invasion of mainland Japan and therefore resorted to the use of the atomic bomb to end the war.

The largest battleship in the global naval history, of the Japanese navy, **the Yamato** was sunk in **Operation Ten-Go**, concurrently with the Battle of Okinawa, as the large ship was heading to Okinawa. The first atomic bomb was dropped on **Hiroshima** on August 6th and the second on 9th August on **Nagasaki**, with the Soviets declaring war on Japan, the day before on 8th August 1945, and invaded Japanese-occupied Manchuria region of China. The Japanese **Emperor, Hirohito** formally made the surrender of Japan to Allied forces official on radio to the Allies on 14th August.

General Douglas MacArthur of the United States, signed a peace treaty with the leaders of the Japanese military aboard the US Navy ship **USS Missouri**, formalizing the end of the war and was the de-facto leader of Japan under occupation and implemented dramatic political and social changes in Japan.



Image – Above, General Douglas MacArthur signs a peace treaty with the Japanese to formalize their surrender aboard US Navy ship-USS Missouri.

Japan was formally brought under United States military occupation from 1945 to 1952 after signing of the **San Francisco Peace Treaty** in 1951 to bring the occupation to an end. The treaty came into effect on 28th April 1952. The US continued administering some islands of the Ryukyu chain of islands, including the Okinawa Island which was the last of the Ryukyu chain of islands, to be returned in 1972. As part of the US-Japan Peace Treaty, the United States continues to operate military bases on Ryukyu Islands to this very day.

Glossary

This section of the book helps you understand some of the terminologies/vocabularies used in the book. The key vocabularies in this book are as follows:

Samurai: traditional warriors in Japan

Ronins: Bandit –Samurai warriors who robbed the wealthy of their money and wealth after the State reduced payments to the Samurai in the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Shogun: a leading Samurai who ruled over Japan on behalf of the emperor. Was typically a military dictator and was appointed by the Emperor.

Shogunate: This is the military government of a Shogun in classical Japan. It may also refer to the area of responsibility and authority (jurisdiction) under a Shogun, in the same way a kingdom belongs to a king and an empire belongs to an emperor.

Daimyos: land owners in charge of provinces in Japan. Power was decentralized to them from the Shogun.

Emperor: ruler of an empire consisting of many kingdoms.

Economic Sanctions: a trade embargo imposed on a state by another state to stop and encourage other states to stop trading with the state that is sanctioned.

Inspiration

I wrote the first edition of this book, having been touched by Japanese History and Culture, notably the Samurai, in my much younger days, from other reading material, NHK World TV, magazines, music video, animations , Television Series and Film. I wrote the first edition of this book, after having for the first time in my life, taken a deeper look at Japanese History and Culture in my time at Kenyatta University studying BSc. Biochemistry.

This second edition was inspired by re-watching the 2013 Keanu Reeves film: **47 Ronin** and watching gameplays of the videogame: **The Ghost of Tsushima** on the YouTube Channel: The RadBrad(<https://www.youtube.com/@theRadBrad>).

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Image: Japanese present-day martial art students practice Kendo. This image was authored by the [Unsplash Artist B Vi](#) and made available on [Unsplash.com](#) under the [Unsplash License](#). Find the image source here: <https://unsplash.com/photos/two-person-playing-japanese-sword-game-KO3ywBQo5IU>

Image: Japanese Art depicting Kabuki Drama: Artist Utagawa Toyoharu Title Perspective Picture of a Kabuki Theater (Uki-e Kabuki shibai no zu) Place Japan (Artist's nationality:) Date 1771–1781 Medium Color woodblock print; oban. Published on April 28, 2024 by the [Art Institute of Chicago on Unsplash.com](#), under the [Unsplash License](#). Find the image here: https://unsplash.com/photos/a-drawing-of-a-large-room-filled-with-people-wbocrn0_F1U

Image: Ensign-Kiyoshi- Ogawa, Japanese Kamikaze Pilot one the two who died upon smashing USS Bunker. The photograph titled "Kiyoshi Ogawa, Japanese Kamikaze Pilot" is sourced from Wikimedia Commons and is in the public domain in both Japan and the United States. You can view the photo here: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ensign_Kiyoshi_Ogawa_hit_Bunker_Hill_\(new\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ensign_Kiyoshi_Ogawa_hit_Bunker_Hill_(new).png)

Image: Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941. The Burning ship is USS Arizona hit by bombs dropped by Japanese aircraft. The photograph titled "The USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941" is sourced from the National Archives and Records Administration (NAID 195617). This image is in the public domain in the United States as it was published between 1929 and 1977 without a copyright notice. You can view the original photo here: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_USS_Arizona_\(BB-39\)_burning_after_the_Japanese_attack_on_Pearl_Harbor_-_NARA_195617_-_Edit.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_USS_Arizona_(BB-39)_burning_after_the_Japanese_attack_on_Pearl_Harbor_-_NARA_195617_-_Edit.jpg)

Image: General Douglas MacArthur signs a peace treaty with the Japanese to formalize their surrender aboard US Navy ship-USS Missouri. The photograph titled "General Douglas MacArthur signing the Japanese surrender aboard the USS Missouri, 2 September 1945" is sourced from Wikimedia Commons. This image is in the public domain as it is a work of the U.S. federal government. View the photo here: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Douglas_MacArthur_signs_formal_surrender.jpg

Relevant Learning Material

This section contains other material that would prove useful in understanding the History of Japan:

The Ghost of Shimura Video Game (2020)

Sucker Punch Productions' open-world action-adventure game "Ghost of Tsushima" makes several noteworthy contributions to the study of Japanese history. The game is set during the Mongol invasion of Japan in 1274, despite being a work of historical fiction. It includes a number of elements that can improve knowledge and appreciation of Japanese history and culture. Here are a few crucial elements:

1. Historical Setting and Context: The game takes place during the **first Mongol invasion of Japan**, giving players background knowledge on this momentous historical occasion. Despite the fact that the game's story takes some artistic license, players can still learn about the Mongol invasions' greater historical impact on Japan.

Feudal Japan: Players can fully immerse themselves in the social, political, and cultural climate of the era thanks to the setting's emphasis on feudalism. This immersion may pique curiosity about the historical realities of the time period.

2. Aspects of Culture

Samurai Culture: The game examines samurai values like honour, loyalty, and the bushido code. The game's protagonist, **Jin Sakai**, is a samurai. Players may be inspired to learn more about the real ethics and way of life of samurai by this portrayal.

Customs: Creating haiku, learning calligraphy, and participating in tea ceremonies are just a few of the in-game activities that offer players an understanding of traditional Japanese customs and arts.

Architecture and Landscape: The game provides a visual and hands-on learning opportunity regarding the aesthetics and design of the era through its meticulous recreation of Japanese architecture, temples, shrines, and landscapes.

3. The plot and the characters

Historical Figures and Fictional Narratives: Although the primary characters are made up, they engage with the Mongol invasions' historical setting. Players may be prompted to discern between historical facts and narrative fiction by this combination of fact and fiction, which can promote critical thinking regarding historical representation.

Cultural Conflicts: Reflecting larger themes in Japanese history about adaptation and change, the story emphasizes the tension between traditional samurai values and the necessity of using unusual tactics to repel the invaders.

4. Narratives Concerning the Environment

Artifacts and Lore: Players can locate artifacts, records, and lore that offer background knowledge on historical occurrences, personalities, and cultural customs throughout the game. These in-game trinkets have the potential to be instructive and educational.

Visual Storytelling: Battle sites, abandoned villages, and historical sites are just a few examples of the visual cues used by the game's intricate environments to tell stories. These cues can help players gain a deeper comprehension of the historical setting.

5. Motivation and Engagement

Interactive Learning: Compared to more conventional approaches, the interactive features of video games can enhance students' interest in learning about history. Gamers may feel a closer bond with the historical events and cultures portrayed if they actively participate in the narrative.

Interest and Curiosity: An engrossing story and a striking visual setting can pique players' curiosity and act as a springboard for additional research into Japanese history.

In conclusion, "Ghost of Tsushima" skilfully employs its setting and characters to introduce players to important facets of Japanese history and culture, even though it is primarily a work of fiction and shouldn't be interpreted as an entirely true historical account. It encourages players to explore and learn more about Japan's rich history by fusing historical context with captivating gameplay, making it a useful teaching tool in an unusual way.

Get yourself a copy of the Ghost of Shimura here:

[https://store.steampowered.com/app/2215430/Ghost of Tsushima DIRECTORS CUT/](https://store.steampowered.com/app/2215430/Ghost_of_Tsushima_DIRECTORS_CUT/)

Watch the Full Game-Play with no commentary on YouTube here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twtys8xT_Uc

Keanu Reeves' 47 Ronin Film (2013)

The movie 47 Ronin, starring Keanu Reeves, can be a useful resource for teaching students about Japanese history because it tells the well-known tale of the Ako incident, also known as the 47 Ronin. The movie serves this educational goal in a number of ways, including the following:

1. Overview of the Historical Occurrence

Based on a well-known historical event that occurred in the early 1700s, the movie tells the story of a group of samurai who become ronin (masterless samurai) when their lord, Asano Naganori, is made to perform seppuku (ritual suicide) because he attacked Kira Yoshinaka, a court official. To honor their lord, the ronin plan and carry out a retaliatory attack against Kira. As a sign of loyalty and honor, they then commit seppuku. This incident, which exemplifies the samurai code of bushido (the way of the warrior), is an important aspect of Japanese history and culture.

2. Concepts and Values of Culture

The movie showcases a number of facets of Japanese culture, such as:

- Bushido: The samurai code of honor, duty, and loyalty.
- Seppuku: The samurai code included a ritual suicide.
- Feudal System: The class-based social structure in which samurai are subordinate to their masters.

These components help viewers comprehend the moral and social structure of feudal Japan.

3. Graphic and Creative Illustration

Japan during the Edo period is visually represented in the film through its sets, costumes, and cinematography. This comprises:

- Architectural styles include Japanese traditional homes, castles, and temples.
- Attire: Conventional samurai armor, kimonos, and other historically inspired apparel.
- Landscapes: Beautiful depictions of the forests, mountains, and villages that characterize Japanese landscapes.

These visual components aid viewers in envisioning and comprehending the historical setting and context of the time.

4. Talk and Analysis

Even though the movie includes fantastical elements (like mythical creatures and supernatural aspects) and takes significant artistic license, these departures can serve as a springboard for conversations about historical accuracy. This promotes considering critically about:

- Disparities between historical accounts and the movie: Examining what was omitted or exaggerated for dramatic effect.
- Historical accuracy: Examining the real events and contrasting them with how they are portrayed in the movie.

5. Involvement and Appeal

A well-known actor like Keanu Reeves and a dramatic, action-packed storyline can draw in viewers who may not have been initially interested in historical subjects. This interaction may spark additional research and study of Japanese history outside of the movie.

6. Myth versus Truth

The film can introduce viewers to Japanese folklore and supernatural beliefs by fusing history and mythology. This feature demonstrates how different interpretations and retellings of history can be made by highlighting the interaction between historical events and cultural storytelling traditions.

In conclusion, 47 Ronin can be used as a starting point for studying Japanese history because it offers a framework for the well-known story of the 47 Ronin, highlights cultural norms and values, and promotes additional study and debate regarding historical accuracy and how historical events are portrayed in the media.

References

Information used in the writing of this e-book, was largely drawn from these two sources:

History of Japan: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Japan

History of Japan, explained in 8 minutes, by the [Epimetheus YouTube Channel](#):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxQcQ5DJqqE>