

# A Short History of Japan Before the Showa Era

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# 古代史 Ancient Periods

- 神話 Mythology
- 縄文 Jomon (10000BC-300BC)
- 弥生 Yayoi (300BC-300AD)
- 古墳 Kofun (300-592)
- 飛鳥 Asuka (592-710)
- 奈良 Nara (710-794)
- 平安 Heian (794-1185)

# 武士の時代 Samurai Periods

- 中世 Medieval Periods
  - 鎌倉 Kamakura (1185-1333)
  - 室町 Muromachi (1333-1568)
  - 安土桃山 Azuchi-Momoyama (1568-1600)
- Early Modern Period
  - 江戸 Edo (1600-1868)

# 現代 Modern Periods

- 明治 Meiji (1868-1912)
- 大正 Taisho (1912-1926)
- 昭和 Showa (1926-1989)
- 平成 Heisei (1989-2019)
- 令和 Reiwa (2019-present)

# Ancient Time 1

- AD57: An emperor of Later Han of China presented a gold seal (aka Golden Seal of Shikanoshima) to a ruler of the northern Kyushu.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> century: The Yamatai-koku was described in a Chinese chronicle 魏志倭人伝.
- 5<sup>th</sup> century: Giant tomb mounds were raised in the western Japan.
- 600: Prince Shotoku sent an embassy to 隋Sui dynasty and started official diplomacy with China.

# Ancient Time 2

- 645: Taika Reform – The Soga clan was destroyed by Prince Naka-no-Oe and Nakatomi-no-Kamatari.
- 872: Jinshin War – Prince Oama destroyed Prince Otomo the son of his elder brother Emperor Tenji, and was crowned as Emperor Tenmu.
- Emperor Tenmu confirmed institutional rule by the imperial family, and created the *Ritsuryo* 律令 state, following the Chinese model (Tang dynasty).

# Ancient Time 3

- 710: The capital city 平城京 was built in Nara.
- 752: Emperor Shomu built a gigantic Buddha Statue at Todaiji Temple.
- 794: The capital city moved to Kyoto 平安京.
- 858-1086: The *Sekkan* rule 摂関政治 by the Fujiwara clan.
- 1086-1185: The *Cloistered* rule 院政 by the retired emperors.

# 聖徳太子 Prince Shotoku Taishi

- From 594 to 622, Japan was led by a Buddhist, Prince Shotoku, who was appointed to the regent to support Emperor Suiko, a his elder sister.
- He sent an embassy to China to open an “equal diplomacy” with an impolite letter, starting “The ruler of the land of the rising sun addresses the ruler of the land of the setting sun”.



Shotoku Taishi was printed on the 10,000 yen bill in the Showa era.



# Construction of the Giant Buddha 奈良の大仏

- In 710, the government constructed a new capital at Nara, following China's capital Chang'an.
- During Nara period, Japan suffered many natural disasters, including a smallpox (天然痘) epidemic.
- In 752, Emperor Shomu built the Giant Buddha statue at the Todaiji temple, in order to put down natural disasters with the help of Buddhism.



# 平安時代 Heian Period 1- *Sekkan* politics

- In 794, the capital moved to Kyoto, which remained the capital until 1868.
- The Fujiwara clan, offsprings of Nakatomi-no Kamatari, dominated the Heian politics.
- They maintained their power by allowing their daughter to marry into the emperor's family and their grandson to ascend the throne as emperor for generations.
- The Fujiwara leaders supported the emperor as a regent, either as 摂政 *sessho* (an assistant to the emperor in his infancy) or as 関白 *kampaku* (a guarantor to the emperor in his adulthood).

# 莊園 *shoen* (manor)

- In the 律令 Rite System, land was owned by the government.
- In order to increase agricultural productivity, the imperial court encouraged cultivation and allowed conditional private ownership of new settlements.
- Manors were nominally the private property of powerful members of the imperial court, and by the 11th century, more than half of the country's land was manors.
- The owners of manors hired armed samurai to protect their private properties. This is the origin of the samurai.

# 平安時代 Heian Period 2 – Cloistered rule

- In 1086, Emperor Shirakawa ceded the throne to his son but continued to exercise political power.
- Since then the real authority was held by a retired emperor behind the scenes.
- Newly created landowners maintained their position as administrators of the manors by donating them to the Fujiwara clan and the imperial family.

# 源氏と平氏 the Minamoto and Taira clans

- Among the emerging warriors, the Minamoto and Taira clans, whose ancestors were the imperial family, rose to prominence.
- They gradually grew in power by being hired by the imperial family and nobility as armed devices to resolve the political struggles of the imperial court.
- In 1160, 平清盛 Taira no Kiyomori defeated his political rival 源義朝 Minamoto no Yoshitomo and became the first samurai to take control of the imperial court.

# Mediaeval Time 1

- 1185: Minamoto-no-Yoritomo, a Samurai leader, defeated the Taira clan, and consolidated his rule based on military power at Kamakura.
- Since then, Japan had dual governments: one in Kyoto and the other in Kyoto, Kamakura, or Edo.
- The samurai rule was based on feudalistic virtue – grace and service: the shogun authorized the property rights of his vassals, who provided military service to protect the shogunate.

# 鎌倉幕府 Kamakura bakufu

- The Taira clan was challenged by Minamoto no Yoritomo, a son of Minamoto no Yoshitomo.
- As a result of fierce battles, the Minamoto clan destroyed the Taira clan.
- In 1192, Yoritomo received the title of 征夷大將軍 *Seii tai shogun* from the Imperial Court and established a government in Kamakura independent of the Imperial Court for the purpose of controlling the warriors.
- This was the establishment of the Kamakura Shogunate.



# The Hojo clan

- The Minamoto clan died out in three generations, and the real power of the Kamakura shogunate passed to the Hojo clan, which inherited the regency.
- The rule by the Hojo clan confronted the two full-scale invasions by Kublai Khan of the Mongol Empire in 1274 and 1281.
- After the Mongolian invasion, the weakened rule of the Hojo clan was challenged by the descendants of the Minamoto clan
- In 1333, the Kamakura shogunate fell, and the rule by the imperial court was temporarily restored.



# Mediaeval Time 2

- 1274 and 1281: The samurai armies were mobilized in to confront two full-scale invasions launched by Kubilai Khan of the Mongol Empire.
- Northern Kyushu was the major battle field.
- 1333: Discontent among the samurai resulted in the end of the Kamakura shogunate.

# 南北朝対立 The North-South Dynasty Conflict

- Emperor Go-Daigo temporarily restored the imperial rule, which was soon replaced by another shogunate led by the Ashikaga clan.
- Ashikaga Takauji, a descendant of the Minamoto clan, revolted, drove Emperor Go-Daigo out of Kyoto and set up a new shogunate with a replacement emperor.
- The chased Emperor Go-Daigo opened another imperial court in Yoshino in Nara and called for support from samurai all over the country.

# 室町幕府 Muromachi Bakufu

- The North-South conflict was won by the Northern Dynasty, and the three symbols of imperial succession returned to Kyoto.
- The Muromachi Shogunate was at its peak during the reign of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third shogun, who was economically successful in trading with the Ming Dynasty in China.
- In 1397, Yoshimitsu built the sumptuous Kinkakuji Temple on Kitayama in Kyoto.



# Mediaeval Time 3

- The samurai rule by the Ashijaga clan was fragile: The state soon entered a civil war (the Ohnin War 1467).
- Established samurai leaders were replaced by their elaborate vassals, who consolidated local rules and grew to the Sengoku warlords.
- The scattered political rule was gradually united by the three heroes: 織田信長、豊臣秀吉、徳川家康.
- In 1603, Tokugawa Ieyasu founded a new shogunate at Edo (Tokyo today).
- The Tokugawa bakufu continued for more than 260 years.

# Pre-modern Time

- The rule by the Tokugawa shogunate was based on the feudalistic lord-vassal relationship and its Confucius authorization.
- At the end of the Edo period, as the Western powers approached Japan, trust in the Tokugawa shogunate gradually wavered.
- In 1867, the last shogun Tokugawa Yoshinobu returned the ultimate power to rule to the emperor (Meiji Restoration).

# Modern Time 1

- 1868: 明治維新 Meiji Restoration - the state capital moved to Toyko from Kyoto.
- The shogunate was abolished and replaced by a modern monarchy, following the British and Prussian models.
- 1889: The first representatives were elected by wealthy people's votes.
- The first constitution was given by the emperor to the diet and the state government.
- Bureaucrats are responsible not to the elected representatives but to the emperor.

# Modern Time 2

- Legal institutions were modernized to the western model.
- Industry was revamped with the introduction of modern machinery.
- Japan waged wars against China (1894) and Russia (1904).
- Japan's bitter victory not only gave confidence to the people, but also enhanced Japan's status in the international community.

# Modern Time 3

- In 1914, Japan joined World War I under the pretext of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and attacked the German territory of Tsingtao.
- Japan also attended the Versailles Peace Conference and became a member of the Council of the League of Nations.
- In 1920s, parliamentary politics evolved and the "Taisho Democracy" took root, with the two major conservative parties taking charge of the government in turn.



# The Normal Way of Constitutional Government

- When the cabinet collapsed due to scandal, the emperor appointed the leader of the opposition party as the successor leader based on the advice of the senior statesmen.
- In the general elections held after the dissolution of the Diet, the party of the new Prime Minister always became the first party.
- The people approved ex post facto the choices of the emperor and the senior statesmen.
- The so called "normal way of constitutional government," differed from Western democracy, in which the people directly decide the party in power.