



PREFACE



My entry into the field of Japanese history was fortuitous. As an undergraduate at Princeton I had decided on a career in Reformation and Renaissance history, but World War II and the military duty I began in 1943 changed that. An army language program, followed by service in Okinawa and Japan, brought experiences and interests that proved compelling. The army program was directed by a pioneer in the study of Japan, Serge Elisséeff, who was himself a chapter in the West's encounter with Japan. Son of a wealthy Russian merchant, he had studied at Tokyo Imperial University in the last years of the Meiji period majoring in Japanese literature, the first non-Japanese to do so, and became a member of the student group that met with the great novelist Natsume Sōseki. Returning to Moscow, he narrowly survived the Bolshevik Revolution and made his way to Paris before coming to head the Harvard-Yenching Institute in 1935. He was a splendid teacher, with a personal anecdote to underscore the usage of almost any word or term.

I was astonished by a language so different from those I knew, and to acquire it was almost like learning to think a second time. There were gradations of status so clearly established that they seemed terraces of courtesy, and all transcribed in a nonalphabetic script. Long before the course was completed I had decided to return for more systematic study once the war was over.

Acquaintance with Japanese society confirmed me in that resolution. On Okinawa I found a gentle, warm, and forgiving people, stripped of everything except their dignity, dazed and surprised to find themselves alive after the carnage of a battle that had reduced their numbers by one-quarter. They seemed courteous, deferential, and quietly skeptical of all authority. In the Japan to which I was soon transferred shadowy figures

moved along darkened streets in the rubble of the cities, far more fearful, and far less open, than the Okinawans had seemed.

There followed an assignment to join a small detachment in the magnificent mountains of Hakone, among villages to which Japanese authorities had sent the “friendly” European community for shelter when the cities were set ablaze by fire raids. The little unit to which I found myself attached had as its mission the investigation of the master spy Richard Sorge, whose story the Intelligence Section of General Headquarters wanted clarified as an object lesson in the dangers of Communist subversion. Sorge, a German of Russian birth, combined brilliance with extraordinary recklessness. As columnist for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* he had secured access to the military men who headed the Nazi embassy in Tokyo, mixed easily with Japanese social scientists, many of them Marxist, who staffed a research institute established by Prince Konoe, three times prime minister, and then transmitted to Moscow reel after reel of secret documents which indicated that Japan would strike south and not north against the Russians. Our office contained the relevant files from the German embassy, and former ambassador general Eugen Ott, who had lost his post when Sorge was unmasked, lived nearby; his successor, Heinrich Stahmer, lived upstairs in the hotel in which we had our office. So too the German embassy’s military attaché, who described for us his astonishment, on walking his dog in Hibiya Park one December morning, at hearing that the Japanese navy had attacked Pearl Harbor and war had broken out with the United States. It would be difficult to imagine a better introduction to contemporary East Asian history.

That same good fortune continued during my years of graduate training in Chinese and Japanese studies at Harvard after the war. Some of our number, most of them with prewar experience of East Asia, were following plans they had had to defer because of military service during the war, but the great majority of us were wartime converts, eager to place what we had learned and experienced in a larger and longer historical context. Edwin Reischauer, newly returned as professor from service in Washington and little more than a decade senior to most of us, was the coach and leader of the team, and his vitality and energy balanced Professor Elisséeff’s quiet astonishment at this sudden influx of enthusiastic students. There was an air of excitement and discovery about our work; the world we were studying seemed newly opened, and its paths were still uncharted.

My first research topic was chosen almost as accidentally as my entrance into Japanese studies. I needed a topic that could be researched in Japanese sources for John Fairbank’s seminar in Chinese history, and out of that came a concern with Sino-Japanese cultural and political contacts that never left

me and is reflected in the chapters that follow. *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen* (Harvard University Press, 1954) traced friendships that developed between Chinese and Japanese in shared distress at the rise of Western imperialism in the last decades of the nineteenth century, and closer study of Japanese participants in those events opened windows on the aspirations of a generation of young Japanese whose identities had been shaken to the core by the tidal wave of foreign culture they encountered. Miyazaki Tōten and Chiba Takusaburō, two young men who figure in this narrative, exemplify that shock and cultural confusion.

For most of that generation a desperate drive to shelter what was central led to concentration on the construction of a modern state. Sun Yat-sen and other Chinese exiles in Japan sometimes styled themselves after the state builders of Meiji Japan, while the young Miyazaki and Chiba looked for ways to broaden the mandate their predecessors had worked out. To better understand this I turned next to the study of the thought and political world of pre-Meiji activists, and tried to locate my subject in the political and intellectual ferment whose echoes still moved Meiji-era Japanese like Miyazaki as well as their Chinese friends. For this a young enthusiast whose political growth was mirrored in letters to the family he had left behind, and whose early death at the hands of assassins, on the very eve of the Tokugawa fall, removed the possibility of distraction by a later career, proved a happy choice. *Sakamoto Ryōma and the Meiji Restoration* (Princeton University Press, 1961) also immersed me in problems of local history in late and post-feudal institutions in Tokugawa Japan, and these in turn traced their origin to the founding of the shogunate in 1600.

That sweep of Japanese history, from 1600 to the present, has been the subject of my teaching and research in the decades that have followed, and it is the field I have taken as my problem in this book. It would have been an easier task fifty years ago, when I began my career at the University of Washington. It is difficult today to imagine a field in which there were almost no books, few articles, and not very many ideas. The study of Japanese history has grown exponentially in this half century, and the flood of publications and variety of topics have forced students to specialize in ways that my generation could not. We were less learned, no doubt, but perhaps also more fortunate, for every topic lay ready to hand and needed to be examined. Concepts like feudalism, militarism, modernization, statism, civil society, and social history have changed the landscape, each leaving awareness of new problems and possibilities in its wake.

My generation of historians of Japan has also benefited immeasurably

from the accessibility and cooperation of scholars in Japan. In my case, a year spent as executive associate at the International House of Japan in Tokyo during 1960–61 led to friendships that have deepened over the years. It has been quite different for our counterparts in Chinese history; however great the contributions of expatriate Chinese scholars and institutions on the edges of China itself, universities in the People's Republic were beyond reach, personally and intellectually, for the greater part of the last half century. In contrast the flow of visiting scholars from Japan, and their receptivity to colleagues, students, and publications on this side of the Pacific, created a universe of shared discovery that has been central to all our work. Visiting scholars became partners in projects by the 1950s; they were taking part in multinational and binational research conferences by the 1960s, joined committees to plan research programs in the 1970s, and took part in editorial boards and manuscript preparation for projects like the *Cambridge History of Japan* in the 1980s and 1990s. They translated and discussed our work and visited major institutions to expound their own ideas. In the last decades the support of the Japan Foundation and, most recently, the International Research Center for Japan Studies have made the study of Japanese society and culture even more of a binational effort.

The other major change has come with the emergence of a generation of specialists who encountered Japanese history and society as standard fare within established college and university curricula, and did not have to wait for international crises or governmental directives to draw them into the study of Japanese. Students educate one another, with the help, or sometimes in spite of, the efforts of their teachers. The greatest pleasure of my pursuit of Japanese history has been the companionship and stimulation of undergraduate and graduate participants in that effort at Princeton since 1959. Not a few will find their work cited in the notes and suggestions for further reading provided here, and it is to them that this book is dedicated.