

HISTORICAL PERIOD	DATES
PRE-HISTORY Paleolithic ('Mythical Japan')	35,000 – 11,000 BC
JOMON Period Neolithic - indigenous societies, early polities	11,000 - 300 BC
YAYOI Period Invasion! - brings wet rice, bronze & iron	300 BC - 300 AD
KOFUN (YAMATO) Period Rise of cities, cultural consolidation	300 - 538
CLASSICAL PERIOD A nation-state emerges Asuka, Nara, Heian (Kyoto)	538 -1185
FEUDAL PERIOD Age of the Shoguns & Samurai Kamakura, Muromachi, Sengoku, Azuchi-Momoyama, Edo	1185 - 1868
IMPERIAL JAPAN Rise and Fall of Fascist Japan	1868 - 1945
MODERN DEMOCRATIC JAPAN Cultural & economic superpower	1945 -

PRE-HISTORY (Paleolithic)

30-40,000 BC - First migrants from Siberia (ancestors of modern-day Ainu people) enter Hokkaido via the Kurils

40,000BC-15,000BC - Hunter-gatherers spread throughout the Japanese archipelago

11,000 to 300BC JOMON PERIOD (Neolithic)

11,000BC thru 300 BC - **JOMON PERIOD**- early indigenous societies, agriculture, pottery

660BC - Japan's first mythological Emperor Jimmu, a descendant of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, is enthroned

300BC to 300AD YAYOI PERIOD

300BC- **Invasion/migration from Korea** - these are the ancestors of modern-day Japanese. They brought wet rice cultivation ('the foundation of Asian civilization'), metallurgy and a new culture.

210 AD - **Sumiyoshi Taisha in Osaka is founded**, and exists to this day

270AD - Emergence of city-state polities and centralization. Emperor Ojin, Japan's first (quasi-)historical Emperor, enthroned.

300AD to 538AD YAMATO (KOFUN) PERIOD

4th to 6th century - Increasing centralization, emergence of court-based control by dominant nobility clans, contact with China as well as consolidation of an intrinsically Japanese culture with heavy Chinese influences. Iconic Haniwa tomb ornament sculptures.

538-1185 CLASSICAL JAPAN

538-710 ASUKA PERIOD- Buddhism introduced (from Korea), extensive Sinicization and consolidation of courtly control

593- **Shitteno-ji, Japan's oldest Buddhist temple, is founded in Osaka** by Prince Shotoku

602- Prince Shotoku declares Buddhism the state religion

604- The Shotoku Constitution, Japan's first --> establishes Japan as a nation-state, called NIHON ('Source of the Sun')

607- **Horyu-ji is built outside Nara** – it is today the oldest wooden structure in the world

673- **Emperor Tenmu** - Japan's 40th Emperor but the **first to be well-documented historically** - ascends the throne and notably **declares himself TENNO** - a title conferring divinity. He **commissions The Kojiki** to support his legitimacy.

Early 800s- **Shingon and Tendai Buddhism introduced** to Japan, from China

710-794 NARA PERIOD - Capital established at Nara, modeled after Chinese capital at Xian
712 - **THE KOJIKI** is published, codifying Japan's mythology and merging it with the imperial dynasty.
749- *Daibutsu* (Great Buddha) at Todai-ji in Nara
780- Kyomizu (Clearwater) Temple in Kyoto founded

794-1185 HEIAN PERIOD - Capital moved to Kyoto (then called Heian-kyo, 'Tranquility Capital') - flowering of the courtly society under the Fujiwara clan dominance - 'the height of Classical Japan'. Extensive contact with Korea's Silla Kingdom (56BC – 935AD), which had a major civilizing influence on Japan.

1180-85 The **GENPEI WAR** between ruling clans ends in decisive victory for the Minamoto clan over the Taira. This conflict is immortalized in the classic Tale of the Heike. The ascent of the Minamoto clan would end the Classical Period and usher in a new 683-year era: Feudal Japan, with the Shogun military dictator marginalizing the figurehead Emperor.

1185-1868 FEUDAL JAPAN - Age of Shoguns & Samurai

1185-1333- KAMAKURA PERIOD –

The first shogunate, established by MINAMOTO no Yoritomo, the first Shogun (Military Dictator)

1191- Kamakura Daibutsu (Great Buddha); ZEN BUDDHISM INTRODUCED, from China.

1200- Jodo ('Pure Land') Buddhism widely popularized - and remains the most common Buddhist sect in Japan to this day

1232- Samurai legal code and Code of Honor (Bushido)

1274 & 1281 - Failed Mongol invasions of Kyushu by Kublai Khan

1333- Himeji Castle (first built as a fort, converted/expanded to a castle in 1601)

1333-6 - **KENMU RESTORATION** - short-lived attempt by Emperor Go-Daigo to overthrow the Kamakura Shogunate

1336-1570s - **MUROMACHI PERIOD** aka **ASHIKAGA SHOGUNATE PERIOD**. Zen is ascendant and pervasive, but there is also renewed interest in Shinto. Increased contact with Ming China. The arts flourish, but political life becomes increasingly fractured as provincial powers compete. (Muromachi is the district in Kyoto from which the Ashikaga shoguns ruled.)

1346- Komasu shrine, Matsue **1394**-Kinkaku-ji (Golden Pavillion), Kyoto **1473**-Ginkakui-ji (Silver Pavillion), Kyoto

1500- Ryoan-ji Zen rock garden and temple, Kyoto

1467-77 ONIN WAR civil war --> **SENGOKU PERIOD - 1477 thru 1600**- fragmentation, conflict, warring warlords

1542- Portuguese arrive (via shipwreck on Tanegashima Island off Nagasaki). Western firearms are embraced.

1549 - St. Francis Xavier, 'The Apostle of the East', arrives in Japan

1570s-1600 AZUCHI (Shogun NOBUNAGA)-MOMOYAMA (Shogun HIDEYOSHI) PERIOD - REUNIFICATION

Final stage of the chaotic Sengoku Period. Nobunaga begins, and Hideyoshi furthers, **THE REUNIFICATION OF JAPAN**

1592 and 1597 - Hideyoshi launches 2 unsuccessful invasions of Korea (a sign of things to come).

1600- TOKUGAWA IEYASU WINS AT THE MOMENTOUS BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA - THUS BEGINS 268 YEARS OF TOKUGAWA RULE

1601- Himeji Castle built by Tokugawa from prior fort of 1333

1603- Tokugawa officially appointed Shogun,. Capital moved to Edo (Tokyo) - **EDO PERIOD 1603-1868**

Nijo Castle built as Tokugawa's Kyoto residence

1597- Martyrdom of 26 Christians at Nagasaki **1615**- Christians boiled alive in Nagasaki

1620- Shukkei-en Garden in Hiroshima **1622**- 51 Christians slaughtered at Nagasaki; Kenroku-en built at outer Kanazawa Castle

1623- 50 more Christians burned at stake **1635**- Portuguese expelled, Dutch confined on island of Deshima off Nagasaki

1636-Japan is "closed" (SAKOKU) **1637**- Christianity officially banned after the last-gasp, unsuccessful Shimbara Rebellion

1641 - The Dutch (Protestants) are allowed to open trading houses on Dejima Island in Nagasaki.

1650- Ritsurin Garden in Takamatsu

1691- Toko-ji – 500 stone lanterns – Mori clan feudal lord temple/cemetery in Hagi **1701**- The 47 Ronin Affair

1707- Last eruption of Mt. Fuji (Fuji summit today=12,388 ft.)

1709 –Todai-ji rebuilt around the 749AD Daibutsu– it was the largest all-wooden structure in world, and still is

1810- Gyokus-en garden in Kanazawa **1822**- Kenroku-en (Kanazawa) expanded to 25 acres

1853-4 - **COMMODORE PERRY AND HIS BLACK SHIPS VISIT TOKYO BAY**. 1st visit: "I'll be back." 2nd visit: The Treaty of Kanagawa is signed, a coercive trade treaty essentially forcing open Japan's *sakoku* closed door.

1863- Seisonkaku Teahouse built in Kenroku-en garden in Kanazawa

MODERN JAPAN

1868 – THE MEIJI RESTORATION (a euphemism for REVOLUTION) - Modernizers ally with imperial forces to overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate. The new government embarks on a major campaign to Westernize = industrialize and militarize. Shinto is hijacked and used to promote ideas of Japanese superiority and expansionism. This will end very, very badly.

1869 - Births allowed on Itsukushima island for first time (burials are still forbidden to this day)

1872 - Satsuma Rebellion, the last paroxysmal gasp of the samurai, led by Saigo Takamori, 'The Last Samurai'

1888 - The original Imperial Hotel, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, opens in Tokyo

1894-5 - Japan defeats China in **SINO-JAPANESE WAR**. Chinese expelled from Korea. Taiwan annexed 'in perpetuity'.

1904-5 - Japan defeats Russia in the **RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR**. **JAPAN NOW OCCUPIES KOREA** (as a 'protectorate').

1910 - **JAPAN ANNEXES KOREA**

1914 - **Japan enters WWI - ON THE SIDE OF THE ALLIES**

1923 – Sept 1: **Great KANTO QUAKE** >7.9 143K dead (same as Nag A-bomb) –FL Wright's Imperial Hotel opens same day

1931-32 – The Manchurian Incident → Japan invades Manchuria and a 'Manchuoko' puppet state is created

1937 - Japan invades China, including 'The Rape of Nanking'

1940 - Japan signs The Tripartite Alliance with Germany and Italy. After France falls, Japan occupies French Indochina.

1941 – **PEARL HARBOR ATTACK**, followed by rapacious and capacious Japanese conquest of Asia

[NOTE: For my detailed *Timeline of WWII in the Pacific*, see my [Scholar At Sea](#)® website.]

Aug 6 1945 – **HIROSHIMA (LITTLE BOY) A-BOMB DROPPED** **Aug 9 1945** – **NAGASAKI (FAT MAN) A-BOMB DROPPED**

Sept 1945 - **JAPAN SURRENDERS ON BOARD USS MISSOURI IN TOKYO BAY**. US occupation of Japan headed by MacArthur

1946 - Framing of Japan's Pacifist Constitution **1951** – San Francisco Treaty **ends U.S. OCCUPATION** (except Okinawa)

1964 – Tokyo Olympics. The first Shinkansen (bullet train) connects Tokyo and Osaka.

1972 – **OKINAWA IS RETURNED TO JAPAN** by the U.S. administration. Sapporo Winter Olympics.

1974 - The last known Japanese holdouts surrender in the jungles of the Philippines and Morotai island in Indonesia.

1975 - An economically resurgent Japan joins the G7. **1978** – Narita International Airport (NRT) opens

1988 – Japan becomes world's largest creditor. The economy booms ---> into a giant bubble.

1989 - **NIKKEI HITS ALL-TIME HIGH OF 38,916 ON DECEMBER 29TH**.

1990 – **NIKKEI DROPS 48% IN 4 DAYS, INITIATING A LONG PERIOD OF ECONOMIC STAGNATION KNOWN AS 'THE LOST DECADES'**

1995 – **KOBE QUAKE** (Richter 7.5) - 6,000 dead; Shinrikyu cult subway **sarin attack** – 12 dead, 5000 injured

1998 – Nagano Winter Olympics

2001 – Junichiro Koizumi elected in landslide on reformist platform; he is charismatic and immensely popular

2006 - Shinzo Abe elected as Prime Minister. US and Japan sign a deal to move 8000 Marines off Okinawa (to Guam) despite military brass objections that they are needed closer to Taiwan (budgetary issues, construction delays for new barracks in Guam, and foot-dragging by the opposition in both countries will lead to decades-long delays in implementation.)

2007 - Abe surprise resignation → Fukuda becomes P.M.

2008 - Fukuda surprise resignation → Taro Aso (Roman Catholic) becomes P.M.

2009 - Aso resigns. DPJ (Dem. Party of Japan) wins by landslide, ending 54 years of LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) rule. Yukio Hatoyama of the DPJ becomes P.M.

2010 - Hatoyama steps down over Okinawa air base issue; Noda takes over, DPJ still in control.

2011 - **TSUNAMI and FUKUSHIMA DISASTER**. **CHINA OVERTAKES JAPAN AS WORLD'S 2nd LARGEST ECONOMY**. Kan steps down due to perceived poor handling of Fukushima. Yoshihiko Noda takes over, DPJ still in control.

2012 - Nuclear reactor at Ohi re-opens, the first since Fukushima. Japan recalls ambassador to Seoul in protest of visit to Takeshima/Dokdo by South Korea's President Lee Myung-bak. The LDP wins in a landslide comeback - **ABE REDUX**

2013 - The Abe government controversially approves the move of Futenma Air Force Base and its 25K US troops to another part of Okinawa (versus closure, as desired by the overwhelming majority of Okinawans).

2014 - **'ABE THE HAWK' BEGINS DISMANTLING ARTICLE 9 OF THE PACIFIST CONSTITUTION**; Abe embraces US, wary of China.

2015 - Abe surprises his critics on 70th anniversary of end of WWII by apologizing for "comfort women" and other atrocities.

2017 - Trump pulls out of Trans-Pacific Partnership, much to Abe's chagrin. US-Japan ties remain strong in face of muscular China.

2018 - Abe re-elected, thanks to signs of economic improvement. This enables him to continue his push to re-militarize Japan.

2019 - Japan-South Korea friction over wartime sex slaves ('comfort women') and labor conscription continues to fester.

2019 - **EMPEROR AKIHITO STEPS DOWN AT AGE 86** after 30 years on the throne. He is **SUCCEEDED BY HIS SON, PRINCE NARUHITO**

2020 - Abe steps down, for health reasons, after setting a record as Japan's longest-serving Prime Minister. **YOSHIHIDE SUGA, ABE'S CHIEF CABINET MINISTER, TAKES OVER**. He represents continuity.

2021 - Suga proves unpopular due to a surprisingly weak COVID vaccination program and controversy about whether and when to hold the Tokyo Olympics. **THE OLYMPICS COME OFF RELATIVELY WELL, AFTER A YEAR'S DELAY**, in the shadow of COVID.

SUGA RESIGNS AND IS SUCCEEDED BY FUMIO KISHIDA, also of the LDP. Less hawkish than Abe and Suga, Kishida still takes a strong stance against Chinese and North Korean aggression, wants a strong alliance with the USA, and strongly supports Ukraine. **2022- ABE IS BRUTALLY ASSASSINATED** by a disgruntled former member of the Unification Church, with which Abe and the LDP have long had ties.

2023- THE 'SILVER SOCIETY' DEMOGRAPHIC TIME BOMB IS EXPLODING as Japan's population ages and shrinks. Addressing this is PM Kishida's #1 declared priority. The **NIKKEI HAS A GOOD YEAR driven by earnings and Japan's economy is robust**, albeit due in part to the weak Yen as a result of rock-bottom interest rates. The National Diet (the official name of Japan's Parliament) passes a record-breaking defense budget.

2024- The NIKKEI FINALLY RECLAIMS ITS December 1989 ALL-TIME HIGH - officially ending the 'lost decades'. The Bank of Japan raises interest rate (to just above 0%!) for the first time in over 2 decades. Japan continues to strengthen its 'unofficial' relations with Taiwan and build its military with record spending on defense - much to China's displeasure. PM Kishida announces he will not seek a second term in the face of political funding scandals roiling his Cabinet. Demographic data reach a new record for Japan's 'Silver Society' with 29.3% of the population age 65 or greater (world's highest) - with a predictable and worsening labor shortage crisis. To address the labor shortage, plans for increasing immigration are a hot political issue - Japan's immigrant population is approximately 2% - vs. 14% for the USA and 16% for the U.K. Japan's immigrant labor makes up just 1.6% of workers, vs. 19% for the USA. **PM Kishida steps down** voluntarily after a slush fund scandal among his Cabinet members. LDP stalwart and Former Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba edges out Shinzō Koizumi (son of former PM Junichiro Koizumi) to become PM. He is aligned with the LDP's long-standing hawkishness on defense.

2025- Regarding the longstanding Okinawa base controversy: The first 102 Marines finally arrive in Guam in February, more than 18 years after the transfer agreement was inked in 2006.

PM Shigeru Ishiba's approval rating plummets to a record low of 26% after a gift-giving mini-scandal. The ruling LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) loses its majority in the National Diet and Ishiba resigns in July. His likely successor is the ultra-conservative Abe protégé 'Iron Lady' **Sanae Takaichi**, a hawkish former Minister of Economics became Japan's 58th PM and first ever female PM in October. 'Trump Tariffs' are set at 15% rather than the proposed 20-25% on most items, with Japan importantly agreeing to open its markets more to US automobiles. The Nikkei continues to reach new all-time highs as of this writing in early October of 2025.

2026 - Sanae Takaichi's LDP (Liberal Democratic Party - which is actually center-right) won a landslide victory in February elections, cementing her position and opening the door for major policy changes by her solid majority party. She remains extremely popular. Bond yields hit 3% for the first time in 30 years, pressuring the Bank of Japan (BOJ) to raise interest rates. In July the **U.S. and Japan joined forces to buy yen** to support the currency and forestall Japanese selling of U.S. bonds. This by design has put pressure on the BOJ to raise interest rates, which is likely in the fall. Renowned avant-garde artist **Yayoi Kusama** died in Tokyo at the age of 97. She was Japan's most internationally famous contemporary artist, known for her polka-dot motifs, infinity rooms, and pumpkin sculptures. (A 2018 documentary on her life and work, *Kusama: Infinity*, is available on Apple TV and Amazon Prime Video.)