

JAPAN

MEMOIRS OF A SECRET EMPIRE
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Commanding shoguns and samurai warriors, exotic geisha and exquisite artisans—all were part of the Japanese renaissance—a period between the 16th and 19th centuries when Japan went from chaos and violence to a land of ritual refinement and peace. But stability came at a price: for nearly 250 years, Japan was a land closed to the Western world, ruled by the Shogun under his absolute power and control. *Japan: Memoirs of a Secret Empire* brings to life the unknown story of a mysterious empire, its relationship with the West, and the forging of a nation that would emerge as one of the most important countries in the world.

The Way of the Samurai—In the early 16th century, Japan is a warlike society ruled by samurai and their daimyo warlords. When Portuguese merchants arrive in 1543, they are the first Europeans to set foot in Japan. Missionaries quickly set out to convert the nation to Christianity. In the same year, a samurai boy named Tokugawa Ieyasu is born to a low-ranking daimyo family. To prove his family's loyalty to their ruling warlord, Ieyasu is given as a hostage, and he remains so for most of his childhood. When he is finally freed, Ieyasu reclaims his family's domain and allies himself with the most powerful rulers in Japan: Oda Nobunaga, and his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Awarding him a small fishing village named Edo, later to be known as Tokyo, Hideyoshi provides Ieyasu with a vast area to rule. But the two are uneasy allies. At his deathbed, Hideyoshi places Ieyasu in command until his true heir and son Hideyori is able to rule. When daimyo rebels challenge his control, Tokugawa Ieyasu's armies defeat them at the Battle of Sekigahara. The victory brings to Ieyasu the title of Shogun. Hideyori is now Ieyasu's only obstacle to total control of Japan. In 1614, Ieyasu renounces his allegiance to Hideyori and attacks Osaka Castle, slaughtering more than 100,000. It is the beginning of a dynasty that would endure for more than 250 years.

The Will of the Shogun—With Ieyasu in control, peace descends on Japan, and a new society based on the samurai ethics of obedience and loyalty is established. In 1600, William Adams becomes the first Englishman to set foot in Japan. Impressed by European trading vessels, Ieyasu asks Adams to help him build his own fleet. Aware that the English have no interest in converting the Japanese to Christianity, Ieyasu decides to expel the Portuguese and Spanish, who too often combine missionary work with trade. When he dies at 72, Ieyasu's vision of a strictly controlled class system based on the rule of the samurai is a reality. But his grandson, Iemitsu, will rule more harshly. With no wars to fight, Iemitsu tightens control over the power and movement of the daimyo and their restless samurai armies. Though foreign missionaries have been expelled, Iemitsu still fears the influence of Christianity. In 1637, impoverished peasants and persecuted Christians explode in anger in the Shimabara Rebellion, and thousands die. In order to prevent further dissention resulting from foreign influence, Iemitsu closes Japan to the Western world. It will be more than 200 years before the nation will open its doors again.

The Return of the Barbarians—By 1690, Japan is a nation completely isolated from the outside world, except for a small community of Dutch traders. Among them is German Doctor Engelbert Kaempfer, whose writings provide valuable insights on daily life in Japan. Culture and commerce flourish. But ruling daimyo warlords and their samurai armies continue to grow restless. The Shogun Tsunayoshi is a product of both classes. Under his rule, art and education excel, and "Laws of Compassion" are introduced. Samurai, geisha, courtesans, merchants, writers and actors are attracted to Edo, and the classes begin to mix. Japanese interest in Western science increases, making the policy of isolation more difficult. In 1853, Mathew C. Perry sails American ships into Edo Bay, and demands a formal opening of the nation. Realizing that resistance is futile, the Japanese negotiate treaties with the U.S. and other nations in the West. Ten years later, the samurai class is disbanded and the Tokugawa Shogunate ends. After 265 years of isolation, the modern era of Japan has begun.

CREDITS

Produced and Directed by Lyn Goldfarb and Deborah Ann Desnoo

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