The Silk Road of the Sea: A Beginning

In days past, visitors to Kaminoseki arrived by boat, sailing into the town’s gentle bays on the back of prosperous winds and tides. Kaminoseki was then just another port, one of many that punctuated the journey from Shimonoseki to Osaka through the glorious scenery of Japan’s Inland Sea.

My own journeys to Kaminoseki, starting in September 1998, were somewhat more prosaic, involving a train, a bus, and a group of high school students whose early morning inquisitiveness tested my otherwise sunny demeanor. Our route took us twenty kilometers down the mountainous Murotsu peninsula to the southern extreme of Yamaguchi prefecture, where I was to teach English twice a month: a town at the end of a road that felt so remote as to be at the end of the world. Crossing the high bridge that connects the peninsula to Nagashima island, the bus would stop at the high school and then descend to the Kaminoseki seafront. Anxious to record my insights for posterity, I would take out my notebook and scribble down observations both perspicacious and pithy: “traditional Japanese architecture,” “a traditional Japanese port,” “traditional Japanese people.”

On my first visit to Kaminoseki, the principal and an English teacher from the junior high school (111 pupils) drove me up Mt. Kamisakari, a 314-meter peak at the northern end of Nagashima. From a small parking lot, we climbed to the top of an observatory tower that offered a magnificent view—perhaps the only place in Japan where it is possible, simultaneously, to see Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Directly below us on one side of the tower, stretching twelve kilometers away to the southwest, lay the spine of Nagashima, a “long [nagai] island [shima]” of forested slopes dropping steeply down to the sea,
with two or three small hamlets nestled around sheltered bays. Another four kilometers beyond Nagashima, across waters as still as the land itself, was Iwaishima island, at whose junior high school (four students) and elementary school (five students) I would also be teaching English once a month; and beyond Iwaishima, in the very far distance, rose the hazy mountains of northern Kyushu. To the southeast, it was much the same picturesque scene: in the foreground, the mounded island of Yashima, still inhabited but with an elementary school that had closed many years previously, and beyond it the faint outline of western Shikoku etched onto the horizon. And directly below us on the northeast side of the tower lay the Kaminoseki straits, where the Inland Sea narrows to pass between Nagashima and Honshu’s Murotsu peninsula. Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu: as seen from Mt. Kamisakari, Kaminoseki now seemed not remote but rather at the very heart of Japan.

In 1969, economic historian Thomas C. Smith published a seminal essay on this region. Smith showed how farming families on the Murotsu peninsula, which was known as “Kaminoseki county” in the mid-nineteenth century, derived a large proportion of their income from nonagricultural work such as domestic industry, trade, fishing, or transportation. “By-employments,” he wrote, “ready preindustrial people for modern economic roles since they represent an incipient shift from agriculture to other occupations, spread skills useful to industrialization among the most backward and numerous part of the population, and stimulate ambition and geographical mobility.” Thus Smith extrapolated from his case study some reasons why, from the late nineteenth century onward, Japan made such a remarkable transition from a preindustrial economy to an industrial economy and why “a long period of premodern growth, extending back at least to the early seventeenth century and possibly beyond, was followed by modern growth.”

Elsewhere in the Inland Sea region, the industrial economy was in full view. One overseas visitor, traveling west toward Yamaguchi prefecture from Hiroshima in the 1980s, had “gasped” at the landscape fifty kilometers northeast of Kaminoseki. “Admittedly,” she wrote, “it has been decades since the train window here offered an enchanting ink painting of perfectly poised islands, but I hadn’t expected, or remembered to expect, the phantasmagoria of Gary, Indiana, with its spherical and cylindrical tanks accentuated by billowing smoke and shooting flames at any hour of the day or night.” But if such smoke and flames were industrial manifestations of what Smith called “modern growth,” then the quiet islands visible from the Kamisakari Observatory
Tower suggested that his focus on growth was but one theme of modern Japan’s history—one not necessarily applicable to Kaminoseki itself. In 1998, the town had no major industries and only limited public transport links, the schools were hemorrhaging pupils, the rice paddies and vegetable fields were increasingly overgrown, and the “traditional” wooden houses were often empty. Even the observatory tower had been constructed using the 100-million-yen “Furusato Fund” through which the Japanese government attempted to boost the flagging economies of rural hometowns (furusato) in the late 1980s. Here, in short, was a town that in geographical terms was at the center of Japan and whose nineteenth-century by-employments apparently placed it on the cusp of modern prosperity, yet whose appearance, on the eve of the twenty-first century, suggested periphery and decline.

A large sign next to the straits’ bridge wrestled with these contradictions. “Kaminoseki: The Silk Road of the Sea,” it proclaimed, with hand-drawn icons depicting fifteenth-century Ming embassies, sixteenth-century trade ships, the Dutch ships and the Korean embassies of the Edo period, and the Chōshū activists who led the revolution in 1868. Multicolored threads from each icon passed through the Kaminoseki straits, in the center of the map, thus weaving the pre-1868 history of the town into a story of rich engagement between Kaminoseki and the outside world. Yet in the same way that Smith took his analysis of Kaminoseki’s preindustrial by-employments only up to the mid-nineteenth century, the sign remained silent when it came to Kaminoseki’s post-1868 history. Returning to the town in 2003 to start dissertation fieldwork, I was curious to find out what had happened to the “silk road” after 1868 and to the erstwhile farmers, merchants, fishermen, and shippers of Kaminoseki during the period of Japan’s “modern growth.” If Kaminoseki county could offer historians insights into Japan’s early modern history, then I began to wonder whether Kaminoseki’s post-1868 story might help scholars also understand the rougher fabric of Japan’s modern history.

One reason for a book-length study of Kaminoseki is that the town’s location highlights an imbalance in the historiography of modern Japan. Not only did Kaminoseki straddle key trade and diplomatic shipping routes, as indicated by the Silk Road sign, but in the mid-nineteenth century it was also situated in one of the nation’s most important political domains. From the mid-1850s onward, the Chōshū domain was a major agitator in national politics as the Tokugawa
shogunate attempted to deal with the new threat from the West. In 1868, young radicals from both Chōshū and Satsuma, an anti-Tokugawa ally in the southwest of Kyushu, led the revolution that overthrew the shogunate (an event also known as the Meiji Restoration; see Chapter 3). “Modern Japan Started Here” was the title of a lecture I once attended in Hagi, the former castle town of Chōshū; “Welcome to Hagi, the furusato of the Restoration,” read a sign in the city center, playing on late-twentieth-century popular discourses of the “hometown.”

The significance of the domains and individuals that led the Meiji Restoration was not lost on English-language historians in the postwar period. Much scholarship focused on political or economic aspects of the pre-1868 decades (as with Smith’s aforementioned work), or on leading politicians from Chōshū, Satsuma, and the sympathetic domain of Tosa, in southern Shikoku. More recent studies examine Chōshū’s Itō Hirobumi (“the man who made modern Japan”) or the important contributions of Chōshū men to the development of Japan’s Imperial Army; but such analyses ignore the lives of the domain’s ordinary people, especially in the post-1868 decades. Thus, in the historiography of modern Japan, “Chōshū” is all too often thought of as an adjective—Chōshū politicians, Chōshū generals, Chōshū cliques—rather than as a proper noun, a
place worthy of study. Just as the name “Chōshū” was dropped in 1871, when the
domain was renamed Yamaguchi prefecture, so have local residents in many
ways dropped off the radar of modern historiography.

The relative absence of Chōshū/Yamaguchi from analyses of modern Japan
was exacerbated by the ways in which a new generation of historians reacted to
the “positive” agenda of much early postwar English-language scholarship, with
its teleological transition from premodern growth to modern growth and its privi-
leging of institutional and political history. One such reaction, “people’s history,”
will be discussed in Chapter 4, but of interest here is the geographical frame of
such studies. Neil Waters, for example, offered a new approach to the Meiji Resto-
ration by analyzing “local pragmatists” in Kawasaki, just to the west of Tokyo,
while Roger Bowen’s study of anti-Meiji rebellions in the 1880s focused on three
areas to the capital’s north. In the 1990s, studies that challenged the dominance
of the nation-state framework proliferated in both the Japanese- and English-
language historiography. David Howell examined the complex and uneven
transition from protocapitalism to capitalism by focusing on Hokkaido, while
Kären Wigen studied the central Japanese Alps region of Shinano so as to explic-
ate “the making of a Japanese periphery.” Michael Lewis offered a similarly pe-
ripheral view of modern Japanese history by focusing on Toyama prefecture in
the period 1868–1945. In so doing, he built on the work of Japanese scholars such
as Furumaya Tadao, who analyzed discourses of “backwater Japan” (ura Nihon)
from the late nineteenth century onward and who urged his readers toward a criti-
cal “rethinking of modern Japan.” Taken together, these studies and many oth-
ers have offered historians a rich understanding of the social and economic
histories of central and northeast Japan in the modern period. Conversely, despite
(or perhaps because of) their political significance in the late nineteenth century,
the regions at the vanguard of the Meiji revolution have not been exposed to such
analyses. A study of Kaminoseki helps fill that historiographical gap.

A second reason for focusing on Kaminoseki in particular, rather than on
southwestern Japan more generally, was provided by a second painted sign
that caught my eye during fieldwork, just a few meters down from the Silk
Road sign. Atop a grassy hill, a husband, wife, and their young son enjoy a fam-
ily picnic. Behind them, a new road curls smoothly across the forested slopes
of a long island before entering a tunnel in the distance. On the other side of
the tunnel, and completely out of scale to the rest of the image, stand two large
square buildings, each flanked by a steel-framed tower. “Together with nuclear
power,” the sign announces, “a lively town.”
As I started fieldwork, I noticed several other signs on Nagashima, each referring to the idealized discourse of the Japanese “hometown” (see Chapter 9). In the hamlet of Hetsu, for example: “Bright and rich furusato-making through a nuclear power station: [bringing] vitality to young people and comfort to the elderly.” In the hamlet of Shidai: “[Through nuclear power,] a furusato where young people gather and where we have heart-to-heart communication!” The organization that had erected these signs (but not the Silk Road one) was the Kaminoseki Municipal Town-Making Liaison Committee, a coalition of local civil society associations. The existence of this committee, and its uncompromising support for atomic energy, followed an extraordinary development in the early 1980s, when the Kaminoseki municipal council actively requested the construction of a nuclear power station in the town (Chapter 10).

Such a request flew in the face of the protest movement known as Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY), which has been synonymous with campaigns against the nuclear power industry in postwar Japan. Instead, the council’s embrace of a so-called public bad—a nuclear power plant—was an example of Definitely In My Back Yard. As this book argues, pronuclear lobbyists in Kaminoseki viewed nuclear investment as a means of community survival, through which brightness, young people, and vitality might be restored to a hometown.
that had lost all these by the early 1980s. The story of how silk roads led to nuclear survival in Kaminoseki is therefore a story of hard times and rural decline in modern Japan—one that is counterintuitive and of interest because it occurred in the backyard of the leaders who “made” modern Japan.

But despite the depiction of large nuclear plants on the “lively town” sign, the reality as seen from the Mt. Kamisakari observatory tower was quite different. Even in 2003, almost two decades after the original request, there were no buildings or towers at the western tip of Nagashima. From taking the ferry to Iwaishima past the proposed site, it was clear that even the ground and beaches remained untouched. A sign near the fishing cooperative at Iwaishima indicated why no progress had been made: “Preserve our rich fishing and important furusato: absolute opposition to the Kaminoseki nuclear power station!” Centering not only on the pros and cons of nuclear power but also on the discourse of “hometown,” a dispute appeared to have divided the town and delayed the start of construction—a dispute so bitter that close friends warned me it was a “no touch” topic.

As Natalie Zemon Davis has observed, however, “a remarkable dispute can sometimes uncover motivations and values that are lost in the welter of the everyday.”14 My friends’ warnings notwithstanding, the nuclear dispute was clearly an important episode in Kaminoseki’s modern history (Chapter 11): not to write about it would, as Robert J. Smith argued to justify examining a similar controversy, “result in a serious distortion of the record, a kind of falsification by omission.”15 But as I conducted oral history interviews in the town and tried to work out a strategy for broaching a “no touch” topic,16 I found that the welter of the everyday was in fact key to uncovering townspeople’s motivations in either supporting or opposing nuclear power. Moreover, the stories of everyday life that were emerging in interviews—of a sword maker who retrained as a blacksmith, of a sake-brewing emigrant to southern Sakhalin, of a coal shipper in the Inland Sea—seemed to offer new ways of understanding the broader motivations and values of so-called ordinary people as they experienced the extraordinary transformations that Japan underwent since the mid-nineteenth century. As the following chapters argue, far from being just a rhetorical tool in a late-twentieth-century dispute, the everyday hometown was a stage on which ordinary people practiced political, economic, social, and cultural interactions as they both shaped and responded to the exigencies of modern life. To study the hometown community is to understand the motivations and values of ordinary people in modern Japan.
A third reason to focus on Kaminoseki is because of the extraordinary range of sources that the town offers to historians of everyday life—sources not always available to scholars writing about Japan’s ordinary people.\textsuperscript{17} In addition to material culture evidence—houses, schools, commemorative headstones—and oral history interviews, this book draws on two important sets of documents. The first is the \textit{Bōchō ōdo chūshin’an}, a survey of individual counties and villages initiated by the Chōshū domain in the early 1840s and published in twenty-one volumes in the 1960s. Widely considered to be one of the best sources of social and economic data for mid-nineteenth-century Japan, the survey provides particularly detailed results for Kaminoseki county—hence Thomas C. Smith’s essay on preindustrial by-employments. Using the \textit{Bōchō ōdo chūshin’an} to reconstruct a detailed picture of everyday life in Kaminoseki on the eve of Japan’s re-engagement with the West allows us to contextualize the extent and impact of social and economic change thereafter (Chapter 2).

The second set of documents, this time unpublished, surfaced with great good fortune in a dilapidated warehouse close to the Kaminoseki seafront. Stored in around eighty cardboard boxes, this was a collection of 2,300 official documents, ranging from the 1870s to the 1960s, which had first been catalogued by the Kaminoseki Town History Editorial Board in 1972. Unfortunately, the board members had written catalogue numbers for each document on a piece of paper that they taped to the original. By the time I opened up the boxes in 2007, the tape had melted, rendering the number all but unreadable in many cases. Moreover, more than a thousand documents, mainly from the 1950s and 1960s, were missing—the victim both of municipal mismanagement and of the collection being hastily moved to the present warehouse from another building severely damaged by a typhoon twenty years previously. Nevertheless, I was still left with more than a thousand unpublished and otherwise abandoned documents, several two or three hundred pages long, that were mostly compiled by the Murotsu village office between the late 1880s and the merger with Kaminoseki village in 1958.

At the most basic level, the Murotsu collection allowed me to check the reliability of the \textit{Kaminoseki Town History} (1988), on which I had hitherto been overly dependent.\textsuperscript{18} Written by an all-male committee of esteemed local personages, the 880-page \textit{Town History}, which did not employ footnotes, had very few factual errors (at least in the three hundred or so pages that referenced the documents in question). However, with the warehouse documents, I could now identify absences in the official account—the places where, for example, the authors
might have probed the social consequences of the rather dry institutional documents that they had transcribed in large numbers. In particular, the collection revealed a much deeper history of overseas migration in the prewar period than the brief, twelve-page section of the Town History might suggest (Chapter 6). Equally important, the rediscovered collection enabled me to follow up on my oral histories bearing a new set of questions. I could thus reconstruct not only individual stories of daily life in modern Japan, in the mold of Simon Partner’s Toshié or The Mayor of Aihara, but also do so across several generations, as in Gail Lee Bernstein’s Isami’s House. If the roadside signs voiced the hopes and fears of ordinary people with regard to late-twentieth-century Japan, oral interviews and the warehouse collection now revealed the complex stories of villagers who, no less than leading Chōshū politicians, helped “make” the new Japan in the mid-nineteenth century.

But local Japan has always spoken in multiple voices, and in Kaminoseki, despite the rich variety of sources, some voices continue to speak louder than others. As far as I could see, the warehouse documents were entirely recorded by men—the bureaucrats of the municipality. Moreover, the types of documents on which I particularly relied in order to tease out the details of individual histories—tax returns or land registers, for example—were recorded in the name of the household head, who was almost always a man. This limitation in the written evidence was exacerbated by my experiences during interviews. Being a male researcher and having originally told people in Kaminoseki that I was studying Japanese history (Nihonshi), I was first directed to those “knowledgeable” elders who were considered best equipped to answer academic questions: men. Even after I softened my language—I was now interested in talking to people about “the past” (kako no koto) and about “everyday life”—the majority of my interviews were still with men. Consequently, the voices of individual women are not as prominent in the pages that follow as I would wish, or as some other scholars have achieved in their work. For better or for worse, this is a history mainly of Kaminoseki’s men—of their achievements, difficulties, and human foibles.

During my first period of fieldwork in Kaminoseki, I read an interview with the American novelist Philip Roth. “People prepare for life in a certain way and have certain expectations of the difficulties that come with those lives,” he said, “[and] then they get blindsided by the present moment; . . . ‘History is a
very sudden thing,’ is how I put it. I’m talking about the historical fire at the center and how the smoke from that fire reaches into your house.” For many months, and no doubt influenced by Roth’s novels, I wondered about the ways in which the smoke from the center had drifted into the households of the Kaminoseki periphery. How had the Meiji Restoration come to the town? How did townspeople react to Japan’s new engagement with the outside world? In short, how were townspeople objects of change in modern Japan?

But all these questions assumed that historical change occurs only in the exceptional realm of the “noneveryday,” in the historical fire at the center. By contrast, scholars of German *Alltagsgeschichte* (everyday life history) rejected such an assumption. Ordinary people, Alf Lüdtke argued, were not just the objects of history, but also its subjects: their everyday motivations and values were thus worthy of study. Lüdtke and his colleagues attempted to do this for modern German history, partly as an attempt to understand “fascism’s everyday face” and thus to acknowledge (once again using the metaphor of blindness) that “the historical actors were (and are) more than mere blind puppets or helpless victims.”

That the realm of everyday space can be a site for historical change has concomitant implications for the framing of historical time. As Ulrich Herbert suggested of modern Germany, what historians generally consider to have been “good times” and “bad times” do not always match the lived realities or the memories of interviewees as they recount their life histories. Indeed, a characteristic of histories focused on the “human tradition” is that individual life stories do not necessarily match the temporal and thematic structures of macrohistorical accounts. As a consequence, the chapters in this book, although roughly chronological in order (at least within each part), do not necessarily follow themes that a reader of modern Japanese history might expect. For example, I have not devoted a chapter exclusively to the Second World War—“hard times” if ever there were. Meanwhile, the 1930s—the “time of crisis” analyzed by Kerry Smith in his village study of Sekishiba (again in the northeast of Japan)—are discussed more in terms of the hometown’s dependence on overseas communities than in terms of rural distress (Chapter 7). This is partly because a number of excellent studies have recently been published on rural suffering in the 1930s and on the role of ordinary people in the war years, and I wanted to focus on other stories that arose from the archives and from oral history interviews. Another reason was that the single most traumatic event for the communities of Kaminoseki occurred on the last full day of conflict—14 August 1945—and therefore the
community memories of “war” spill into memories of hard times in the immediate postwar years (Chapter 8).

Instead of seamless transitions from one transformative event to another, this book patches together alternative narratives and timelines from “the hodgepodge character of personal experience.” Thanks to the work of previous scholars, we already know about the views of ordinary people vis-à-vis the Meiji Restoration, their role in the establishment of the new Meiji state, their experience of mid-twentieth-century dislocations and wartime defeat, and their struggles during the years of postwar growth. My focus on Kaminoseki allows us to go one stage further, to see how the same community—the same households across several generations—experienced historical change. In this way, it becomes possible to connect otherwise disparate themes in the history of modern Japan: we can begin to understand the relationship between Edo period economic growth and the subsequent Japanese empire, or between political practices in the late nineteenth and late twentieth centuries, and more besides.

The “guiding threads” that hold this patchworked history together are the names of households and of individuals that appear and reappear across generations of Kaminoseki daily life. Yet this fact alone raised a difficult dilemma. To name individuals whom I knew were involved in less salubrious aspects of the nuclear dispute risked going against the ethics of fieldwork, which privileges anonymity. Equally, to change their names would entail changing also the names of their ancestors, thus distorting the historical record. As several chapters argue, family and household names convey a range of specific historical meanings in Kaminoseki (as elsewhere in Japan). To alter the names in the documents meant losing these meanings as well as undermining one of the greatest contributions of history from below—the naming of the otherwise nameless. As a result, I decided to use almost no pseudonyms in this book: I interviewed townspeople on the understanding that I would use their real names and thus be able to draw connections across three or four generations of hometown history, and I have anonymized interviewees only when explicitly requested to do so or when the political or socioeconomic context seemed, in my opinion, to demand it.

The questions raised by Alltagsgeschichte have thus been one major influence on the structure and themes of this book. A second, related influence has been the practice of microhistory. Like their colleagues in the social history and “history from below” movements, the first Italian practitioners of microhistory in the 1970s sought to move beyond teleological analyses of the rise of
the nation state and modern economic development—analyses not dissimilar to those of Thomas C. Smith in his work on Kaminoseki. To this end, they criticized quantitative history and abstract typologies that reduced ordinary people to mere exemplars and case studies of macrohistorical trends: such studies, they argued, relegated the “lived experience” of ordinary people to history’s margins. Instead, they proposed a microhistorical analysis on a reduced scale, which would permit “a reconstitution of ‘real life’ unthinkable in other kinds of historiography.” By altering the scale of observation in this way, “phenomena previously considered to be sufficiently described and understood assume completely new meanings. . . . It is then possible to use these results to draw far wider generalizations although the initial observations were made within relatively narrow dimensions and as experiments rather than examples.” In other words, reducing the scale of analysis to a hometown community or even to a single unknown individual would not, they emphasized, lead to less historiographically ambitious research. Rather, the reduced scale of microscopic analysis would conversely force a reconsideration of the macrohistoriographical picture.

Because of the extraordinary empirical detail of microhistorical studies—the result, more often than not, of the chance survival of a document or a collection—the question then arises of their “typicality.” But, as Carlo Ginzburg asks of Menocchio, a sixteenth-century miller who could read and write, “typical of what?” That is, to start with a question of typicality implies a “big picture” framework that is already fixed, in which the individual or community story will serve merely as historical detail. This is one reason that microhistorians tend to reject the designation of their work as case studies: “a case study,” according to one definition, “pursues more narrowly-defined objectives, such as the testing of particular generalizations. . . . Case studies rarely seek to pose wholly new questions or to assert original interpretations.” Thus, this book does not offer the story of Kaminoseki as “typical” of any particular trend in modern Japanese history or as a “case study”: the town’s privileged location in the Chōshū domain, its high incidence of prewar overseas migration, its escape from physical wartime damage, its high poverty rate in the 1950s, its role as location for a famous television drama in the 1970s, and not least its candidacy for a nuclear power plant make it an extremely unusual community in many ways—unusual as well in its combination of all these trends. As a result, a microhistory of Kaminoseki does not segue seamlessly into macrohistorical narratives of modern Japan.
But that, arguably, is the significance of my account. In three different ways, I propose, the history of Kaminoseki forces us to rethink dominant narratives in the history of modern Japan. First, economic decline is a major theme that runs throughout this book. On the eve of Japan’s reengagement with the West, in the mid-nineteenth century, Kaminoseki was one of the most prosperous towns in one of the most prosperous domains in the whole country. Thereafter, the town’s economy collapsed; the silk road of the sea, to the extent that it survived, now bypassed Kaminoseki, mainly owing to the transformed political order in Japan—a transformation that townspeople helped bring about in the 1860s—and to the introduction of new technologies from the West. Understanding how ordinary people lived with decline in their everyday lives, especially in the traditionally “advanced” regions of the southwest, will contribute to a rethinking of post-1868 Japanese history that is still to a large extent interested in questions of modern growth.

To focus on the theme of decline is not simply to highlight the costs of modernization. The individuals portrayed in this book did not just wait for change to be imposed from on high but devised ways to make their everyday lives better. In so doing, they helped shape the modern state, in particular the country’s engagement with the outside world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and its recovery from defeat after 1945. By reconstructing these everyday life stories, I secondly offer new evidence that the ordinary people of modern Japan exercised individual agency in their lives. Henceforth, these individual “micro” decisions and motivations need to be better integrated into the “macro” analyses that historians undertake of modern Japan.

A third theme concerns space and borders. Although the scale of my microhistory is reduced to the current municipality of Kaminoseki, a town of just thirty-five square kilometers, it ties the histories of townspeople to ambassadors from Ryūkyū and Korea, dentists in Hawai‘i, hoteliers in San Francisco, sake brewers in Sakhalin, merchants on the Japan Sea coast, coal miners in northern Kyushu, energy bureaucrats in Tokyo, and a multinational utility company based in Hiroshima. To this extent, *Hard Times in the Hometown* is not just a local history, narrowly framed by administrative boundaries; the hometown, I argue, was also a site of global history, in which the lived experiences of the townspeople regularly traversed the borders of municipality, region, or nation.

A town that to my untrained eyes first appeared “traditional” and yet whose nineteenth-century employment practices were considered harbingers
of “modern growth,” a town momentarily in the political heart of Japan and yet marginalized by economic and political change, a town in which individual stories of growth and success were framed by long-term economic decline: Kaminoseki mediates between the paradigms of tradition-modernity, center-periphery, and growth-decline that have often been used to frame Japan’s extraordinary transformations between the mid-nineteenth and late twentieth centuries. By focusing on individual experiences, I hope if not entirely to reject such polarities, at least to show in significant new detail what Japan’s modern transformations meant for the everyday lived realities of all but unknown people in an all but unknown hometown.