COPYRIGHT NOTICE
Batten/Gateway to Japan

is published by University of Hawai‘i Press and copyrighted, © 2006, by University of Hawai‘i Press. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher, except for reading and browsing via the World Wide Web. Users are not permitted to mount this file on any network servers.
NB: Illustrations may have been deleted to decrease file size.
get off the subway at Akasaka Station in Fukuoka and wait on the platform. After a few minutes, as planned, fellow historian Sakaue Yasutoshi steps off a train coming from the opposite direction, and we head out the exit and up the stairs into the bright morning light. It is late March 2003, and the temperature is still chilly, but as we reach street level and look around, I can see the cherry trees already in bloom. We walk up the slope into Maizuru Park, past a moat and some impressive ramparts—the remains of a castle built in 1601–1607 by Kuroda Nagamasa, the first lord of Fukuoka domain.

Fukuoka Castle was home to Kuroda’s heirs and successors for two and a half centuries—until 1868, when Japan’s Meiji Restoration put an end to the old samurai regime. Following the ouster of the Kuroda family, the castle grounds—situated just south of Hakata Bay to the west of Fukuoka’s Tenjin district—temporarily housed Fukuoka’s new prefectural government. When the prefectural offices moved to Tenjin in 1876, the site was taken over by Japan’s new imperial army. Barracks for the 24th Infantry Regiment, which served in several of Japan’s subsequent foreign wars, were built on the ruins of the old castle buildings and remained in use until 1945, when Japan was demilitarized at the end of World War II. In the postwar period, Fukuoka city planners—unable to kept their hands off such a prime piece of real estate, and perhaps also conscious of their duty to repudiate Japan’s military traditions—built an athletic field and a courthouse atop the ruins of the castle and the army barracks (figure 1). Under the name Heiwadai (Peace Hill) Stadium, the athletic field later became the home ground of a professional baseball team, the legendary Nishitetsu (later Seibu) Lions.

As I mentally review this history, Professor Sakaue and I continue to climb, past more cherry trees, past grassy slopes with picnicking families—and ultimately to an ugly steel fence with a clearly marked
Figure 1. Kōrokan site from the air, ca. 2000. The view is from the southeast. The site is visible under the outfield of the old baseball stadium. Note the surrounding castle moat and, in the background, Fukuoka Tower, Fukuoka Dome, and Hakata Bay. *Source:* Fukuoka City Board of Education. Reproduced with permission.
sign: “Archaeological excavation in progress: no trespassing!” Having advance permission, we ignore the sign, pull the (fortunately unlocked) latch on the gate, and walk inside.

In front of us lies a crazy patchwork of pits and trenches. At first glance the angry cuts in the red earth look like nothing so much as a small-scale strip-mining operation. Men and women wearing helmets and work clothes streaked with clay scurry back and forth with wheelbarrows full of rocks and earth. We catch the eye of the nearest excavator and ask for Ōba Kōji, the archaeologist in charge of this site. The worker points him out, and in a moment we are exchanging greetings with Mr. Ōba himself, a dapper man in his fifties with a mustache and a quick, ironic smile.

As Mr. Ōba gives us a brief overview of this year’s operations, I look around and confirm with my own eyes what he is telling us. The old baseball stadium is gone—removed by court mandate to excavate the archaeological treasures underneath—although some of the foundations are still evident. Going back centuries in time with each meter of earth, the excavators have removed not just the stadium but also the remains of the earlier army barracks and castle facilities. All of these structures were built atop the ruins of a much older, and much more important, structure—the Tsukushi Lodge (Tsukushi-nomurotsumi), a hostel for foreign visitors built by Japan’s imperial government in the late seventh century. For a period of centuries, nearly all of Japan’s foreign contacts were routed through this single location. It was, quite literally, the gateway to Japan.

After the Tsukushi Lodge (also known as the Kōrokan, a Chinese-style moniker adopted in the ninth century) was abandoned around 1100 C.E., its very location was forgotten and remained a mystery until modern times. The site was tentatively reidentified in the 1920s by Nakayama Heijirō, an amateur archaeologist and professor of medicine at Kyushu Imperial University. However, final proof did not come until late 1987, when the City of Fukuoka began renovating the outfield bleachers at Heiwadai Stadium. In its haste to improve the facilities of this lucrative sports franchise, the city had begun construction without notifying Japan’s Agency for Cultural Affairs, which has jurisdiction over important historical sites. Alerted to the violation, the agency immediately stepped in to halt construction and order a salvage excavation.¹

Within a few short weeks in late 1987 and early 1988, the site yielded the remains of buildings dating from the late seventh through
ninth centuries, together with vast quantities of Chinese porcelain from the ninth through eleventh—all miraculously preserved under the stadium bleachers. More prosaically, excavators also chanced upon the remains of three eighth-century toilets. An analysis of their contents produced a wealth of seeds, pollen, and parasite eggs, all constituting direct (if unsavory) evidence of the diets of Japanese officials and foreign guests at the Tsukushi Lodge.

As a result of these and further discoveries, the decision was made to tear down the stadium and conduct a full-scale excavation—one that has now been going on for sixteen years. Today I have taken the five-hour train ride from Tokyo to look at the latest discoveries. Aside from the usual postholes and roof tiles, these include two stone walls—one dating from the late seventh century, the other, more impressive one, from the early eighth. Our guide, Mr. Ōba, is currently showing us the latter, displayed in relief in the largest and deepest of the pits. Pointing at the large blocks of stone, Mr. Ōba says, “Who would have guessed that the guesthouse was surrounded by a stone rampart like this? This was built in the early eighth century, when the facility was enlarged. It’s not clear why they rebuilt it at this time. Perhaps it had

Figure 2. Early 8th c. stone rampart at Kōrokan site, March 2003. Photograph by author.
Introduction

something to do with the reopening of diplomatic relations with Tang China” (figure 2).

Admittedly, the remains of the Kôrokan lack the physical grandeur of other, better-known archaeological sites. Even the stone wall I have come to view today—one of the most significant discoveries here in many years—is a far cry from Stonehenge, the pyramids of Egypt, or the Great Wall of China. Although I have devoted much of my academic career to the early history of Fukuoka, I would have a hard time visualizing the original layout of the Kôrokan without the benefit of expert, hands-on commentary from Mr. Ôba.

With his help, this is what I see. Two fenced, gravelled compounds, one to the north, the other to the south, face each other across a narrow ravine spanned by a footbridge. The northern slope of the ravine is buttressed by the stone wall that we are now viewing. Within each compound stands a large one-story building in post-and-lintel style, painted red and white and with a gray tile roof. All in all, the design is fairly typical of Japanese government facilities in the eighth century, though the buildings lack the large foundation stones used at some other sites, such as the palace at Heijō-kyō (Nara) or, closer at hand, the Dazaifu (Kyushu government-general) headquarters.

Turning now to the larger context, we know that the Kôrokan was much closer to the shoreline of Hakata Bay than at present. This is not, of course, to say that the site itself has moved. Rather, the bay has shrunk considerably over the centuries as the result of sedimentation and landfill. During the Nara period (710–784), chances are good that an inlet of the sea came all the way to the guest lodge, probably to a harbor near the outlet of the ravine before us.

Unlike today, there would have been few if any other man-made structures in the vicinity. Now the site is conveniently near downtown Fukuoka, but originally it seems to have been chosen for its proximity to the bay—and isolation from everyplace else. There was no city of Fukuoka, and the nearest town was Dazaifu, situated behind a series of natural and man-made fortifications approximately thirteen kilometers to the southeast. Dazaifu, home to several thousand bureaucrats, soldiers, and their families, was the imperial headquarters for western Japan, and the Kôrokan and associated facilities were placed directly under its supervision.

The physical remains of the Kôrokan belie this site’s importance—if not to world history, then at least to the history of Japan. For, as noted above, the Kôrokan was Japan’s principal gateway to the outside
world during the Nara and Heian (794–1185) periods. Even after the abandonment of the facility, other areas in northern Kyushu continued to play the same role throughout the whole of the premodern period, until the arrival of Commodore Perry’s “black ships” in the mid-nineteenth century forced Japan to open other ports in Honshu and Hokkaido to trade with the West.

To understand the historical significance of northern Kyushu let us take a glance at the map of Japan (map 1). Japan is situated on a volcanic archipelago approximately three thousand kilometers from one end to the other. Of the seven thousand or so islands that make up the archipelago, the four largest, from northeast to southwest, are Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. Of these four, Honshu is quite literally the “main island”—almost three times the size of its nearest rival (Hokkaido), centrally situated, and home to all of Japan’s historical capitals. Today the capital is Tokyo, on Honshu’s eastern Pacific coast, but through much of premodern history political power was concentrated at the eastern terminus of the Inland Sea, which lies between Honshu and Shikoku.

Northern Kyushu lies directly on the shortest, most convenient route between these early capitals and the Asian continent—a route traversing the Inland Sea, rounding the Kyushu coast to Hakata, and then heading across the Genkai Sea to the Korean Peninsula. Hakata itself is two hundred kilometers as the crow (or perhaps seagull) flies from Pusan, South Korea, but this distance is significantly ameliorated by the presence of two natural stepping-stones, the islands of Iki and Tsushima. The latter island (actually an archipelago), historically the furthest outpost of Japanese control, lies just over fifty kilometers short of Korea, which is visible from Tsushima on a clear day. Given these geographic facts, it is no surprise to learn that many of Japan’s early exchanges with the continent were channeled through the Hakata area.

This fact is not lost on the residents of Fukuoka, who are rightly proud of their city’s historical legacy. “Thanks to its geographical proximity to the continent,” boasts the city’s official Web site, “Fukuoka City has enjoyed a long history as a gateway for Asian culture into Japan, and as a base for trade with our Asian neighbors.” The site further describes Fukuoka as “Japan’s oldest internationally oriented city.”

The Kôrokan site has played a major role in the development of this self-image. Soon after its rediscovery, the site was co-opted to serve as centerpiece for the Asia Pacific Exhibition of 1989. The first area to be excavated was enshrined in situ in a prefabricated structure,
complete with explanatory signs—much like Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado and Utah. And many of the early discoveries were put on display in the new Fukuoka City Museum erected within the exhibition grounds two kilometers west of the site. In subsequent years, the Kôrokan has been the focus of numerous city-sponsored symposia and publications. To this day, the Kôrokan remains the prime symbol of Fukuoka’s cosmopolitan past—and present.
The purpose of this book is to shed new light on premodern Japanese foreign relations. In that sense it represents a companion volume to my previous work, To the Ends of Japan. But whereas that book approached the topic from a macro, theoretical perspective, this one takes a micro, down-to-earth approach. Specifically, it is a case study of cross-border contacts in Hakata, or more broadly northern Kyushu, in the period 500–1300. These dates are somewhat arbitrary, as there is considerable spillover to earlier and later centuries. But in any case, the central focus of the book is on the Kôrokan and Dazaifu. Hakata’s later history as a commercial emporium is by no means neglected, but receives secondary billing because after 1300 Hakata was no longer the sole gateway to Japan. (Also, and less justifiably, skimping on Hakata’s later history gives me something to write about next time.)

With that brief justification, here are some of the specific issues I hope to address:

- How and why did Hakata—rather than some other point along the “natural” route from the Asian continent to central Japan—becomes Japan’s gateway? What, in other words, determined the location of Japan’s boundaries—geography, politics, or both?
- Was all contact with the outside world channeled through this single route, or were there other avenues of communication? If so, how important were they? How and why did communication routes change over time?
- What was the actual level of traffic through Hakata or other portals? More broadly, was Japan essentially a closed social system, or was it part of a larger, regional (or global) zone of interactions? How and why did the level of cross-border traffic change over time?
- What types of interaction predominated in different historical periods? Was all interaction peaceful, as Fukuoka’s self-image implies, or were there periods of tension or war?
- Finally, and most fundamentally, why did “foreigners” come to Japan, and how did Japanese people deal with them?

Although this is an academic book, the above issues are not of purely academic concern; indeed, they are highly pertinent to Japan’s role in the world today. Now, as in the period examined by this book, Japan has one principal gateway—New Tokyo International Airport (although it also has a host of other, lesser entrances, corresponding to
other international airports and seaports). Now, as then, Japan’s relationship with the outside world is ambivalent. Japanese people are justifiably proud of their unique cultural heritage, but much of that heritage is in fact borrowed from China (or Korea) and the West. Japan is now part of the “West” but at the same time remains a world apart. Its relationships with other countries are now entirely peaceful but were unabashedly aggressive as recently as 1945. Japanese people today are both astonishingly open-minded and frustratingly exclusive in their dealings with outsiders—tolerant of the most divergent attitudes and practices, but forever erecting mental barriers between “us Japanese” and “those foreigners.” This is true even when the foreigners in question have lived in Japan for decades and speak the language fluently. “Why did you come?” “How shall we deal with you?” These are questions that even the most cosmopolitan Japanese still find themselves asking vis-à-vis foreigners in their midst.

Viewed in this light, the book represents an attempt to explain present-day Japan by reference to its past. To give a brief preview, here are some of my major conclusions: (1) although relatively infrequent by world standards, cross-border interactions were nonetheless of critical importance to the development of the Japanese state and the Japanese people; (2) natural crossroads or foci of interaction, such as Hakata, have always tended to attract the exercise of political power and the drawing of boundaries; and (3) throughout Japanese history there has been a clear and consistent inverse relationship between the power of Japan’s central government (that is, the degree of political centralization) and the volume of cross-border traffic.

The organization of the book is at once thematic and (loosely) chronological, an approach made possible because prevalent forms of interaction changed systematically over time. Chapter 1, “War,” focuses on Chinese expansionism and its consequences for Japan and East Asia as a whole. Chapter 2, “Diplomacy,” examines the treatment of foreign (mainly Korean) envoys in Kyushu, with an eye to revealing the subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) contradictions and obfuscations of the diplomatic process. Chapter 3, “Piracy,” provides a close-up view of random attacks on Kyushu by “foreign pirates,” many of them from Korea. (Japanese pirates, who were every bit as dangerous, also make a brief cameo appearance.) In chapter 4, “Trade,” I examine foreign commerce, which turns out to have been neither fully “foreign” nor truly “commerce” in the modern sense of the word, in and around Hakata. Finally, in chapter 5, I briefly trace the story forward into
medieval and early-modern times, an exercise that sets the stage for re-
staking some of my principal conclusions.

This book thus surveys about eight centuries in the life of a major
Japanese port. With this brief introduction, let us now return to the
Tsukushi Lodge, not as it appears under the excavators’ spades today,
not as it stood in the eighth century, but as it was being constructed in
the late 600s. The builders of the lodge would have been surprised to
learn how their creation was later co-opted by the city of Fukuoka to
serve as a symbol of peace and international understanding! For the
Tsukushi Lodge, like Dazaifu and all other government facilities in
this area, was built under the threat of war.