



# A Concise History of Japan (Cambridge Concise Histories)

By Brett L. Walker



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To this day, Japan's modern ascendancy challenges many assumptions about world history, particularly theories regarding the rise of the west and why the modern world looks the way it does. In this engaging new history, Brett L. Walker tackles key themes regarding Japan's relationships with its minorities, state and economic development, and the uses of science and medicine. The book begins by tracing the country's early history through archaeological remains, before proceeding to explore life in the imperial court, the rise of the samurai, civil conflict, encounters with Europe, and the advent of modernity and empire. Integrating the pageantry of a unique nation's history with today's environmental concerns, Walker's vibrant and accessible new narrative then follows Japan's ascension from the ashes of World War II into the thriving nation of today. It is a history for our times, posing important questions regarding how we should situate a nation's history in an age of environmental and climatological uncertainties.



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"This is the best short survey of Japanese history available today: timely in its focus on environmental issues but timeless in its sound scholarship, rich in detail but thoroughly readable and eloquent in its interpretation of Japan's complex past."

William M. Tsutsui, Hendrix College, Washington

"This is a textbook for our times from one of the leading scholars in the field. From humanity's deep history in the archipelago to the massive crisis of March 2011, Walker's history recasts the central themes of the Japanese past. Samurai scientists, wartime zealots, and the nation's vibrant post-war popular culture are placed in global context and enlivened through clear prose. Each chapter is concise, accessible and rooted in the latest scholarship. I can think of no finer text that covers the full range of Japan's past."

Ian Jared Miller, Harvard University, Massachusetts

"In crisp, clear prose, Brett Walker's A Concise History of Japan provides a sweeping view of Japan's past distinctively framed by world history and, most crucially, by environmental challenges."

Julia Adeney Thomas, University of Notre Dame, Indiana

"Brett Walker's A Concise History of Japan is a new national survey geared to the global Anthropocene. Alert to the many forces that threaten our planet's future, the author - a leading environmental historian in his own right - takes a critical look at the long sweep of the Japanese past. The result is a fast-paced account of the archipelago's development and its discontents, at once brisk and brooding."

Kären Wigen, Stanford University, California

"A lucid exploration of the way that the peoples of the Japanese archipelago have shaped and been shaped by their environment, from the extinction of big game to the grave disaster and diseases that accompanied industrialization every step of the way."

Morgan Giles, The Times Literary Supplement

"Walker's new history of Japan reflects a deep appreciation of the issues of concern to today's readers. This is a history of Japan unlike anything published so far in the attention given to the impact of disease, famine, deforestation, climate change, environmental pollution, and natural disasters on the story of the Japanese and their relationship with their country. In a clear, readable style, the author expertly narrates the course of Japanese history, reflecting the most recent scholarship available. Along the way, he discusses topics not included in previous histories of Japan, such as the introduction and impact of both disease and medical knowledge in the premodern era, the rise of the Japanese fishing 'pelagic empire' in the twentieth century, and the global impact of Japan's 'soft culture' in recent decades ... Summing up: essential."

M. D. Ericson, Choice

#### About the Author

Brett L. Walker is Regents Professor and Michael P. Malone Professor of History at Montana State University, Bozeman. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2013 for his work on global environmental history. He studies environmental history, the history of human health, and the history of science, particularly as they relate to Japan. He investigates how nature has imposed its way onto the human past, as well as how humans have sliced, burned, extracted and engineered their needs and desires onto Earth and its

living organisms. He is the author of *The Conquest of Ainu Lands: Ecology and Culture in Japanese Expansion, 1590-1800*, *The Lost Wolves of Japan*, and *Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan*. Recently, he co-edited *Japan at Nature's Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power*.

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