THOTH STRATEGIC

To what extent did the transition to sakoku edicts stabilize the Japanese state?

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Introduction

The establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate in 17th century Japan not only ended over a century of wars, but it also gave way to a new, innovative political order based on the exclusion of foreign actors, control of domestic elites and establishment of an autonomous economic landscape. This sudden and drastic change in Japan's policies ultimately signified a withdrawal from the international system for over 2 centuries and is known as sakoku or national isolation. In this sense, this paper will explore the question: To what extent did the transition to sakoku edicts stabilize the Japanese state? This research question will explore the transition from the Sengoku or Warring States period to the Edo period under Tokugawa rule in order to determine how stable/unstable the Japanese state became under isolationist policies through a quantitative research design.

The paper is structured in the following manner. Firstly, a literature review will offer a historical and conceptual analysis to set the base from which the question can be approached and contextualise the topic. The theoretical framework, on the other hand, will act both as a continuation of the findings of the literature review and a filling to the gap that has been identified in the existing literature on this period in Japan's history. The analysis section will explore the three pillars that structure the aforementioned quantitative research design:

- **Pillar 1:** Reason for exit (political stability)
- **Pillar 2:** Number of wars and severity (security)
- **Pillar 3:** Urbanisation, population growth rate per year and GDP per capita growth per year (economic stability)

Finally, the last two sections will summarise the findings and limitations of the research in a form of conclusion.

As stated by Laver (2011, p. 3), historians have oftentimes considered sakoku to be a negative phenomenon due to its limited scope. However, in this paper, we aim to refute this argument and show that these edicts stabilised the Japanese state after almost two centuries of constant conflict.

Literature Review

From Sengoku to Tokugawa

The transitional period that is studied in this paper is a complex historical event that needs to be contextualised. There are two main periods that can be identified: the Sengoku period and the Tokugawa period. The former, translated, means Warring States, while the latter is the name of the clan that governed the military dictatorship of the isolationist period.

As explained by Teekah (2025) The Sengoku period lasted approximately 2 centuries, from the late 1400s until the early 17th century, and was dominated by civil war, political upheaval and, thus, the overall discreditation and subsequent fall of the central government authority, the Ashikaga shogunate. One of the main causes of Japan falling into this period of political decay was the #nin War, which began in 1467 and lasted roughly 10 years and was the result of a succession dispute that left Kyoto, the capital at the time, devastated. By the end of the war in 1477, the country had fallen into total political disarray, with regional daimyo rebelling and ceasing to acknowledge the central government as a legitimate institution (Hartley & Connelie 2020). In this sense, the Sengoku period can be described by the old Japanese expression of gekokuj#, meaning 'the low overcoming the high' and used to describe events such as the Mukden Incident of 1931 or the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 1937 (see Wood n.d.; Sather 2022, p. 46).

The following years, as explained by Hartley & Connelie (2020), consisted of battles and sieges, particularly after 1543, when Portuguese traders stepped foot on Japanese soil, becoming the first Europeans to enter the country, and introduced European firearms, thus heightening the tension and its destructiveness in the region. Furthermore, these new weapons facilitated the creation of mass armies of ashigaru (foot soldiers), creating more costly and dangerous warfare (Teekah 2025). These developments set the stage for severe economic and demographic consequences, as wars and battles were generally financed through the taxation system (Jerzemowska 2024, p. 27) and took the lives of many soldiers, thus reducing the birth rate (see Wolfe 1917, p.1). This logic, if extrapolated to the Sengoku case, shows that heightened conflicts will make for a falling birth rate as long as they persist. In this sense, Japan would find itself in a situation of high costs and depleted work force, creating a very unstable environment.

This situation would only continue until 1582, when Toyotomi Hideyoshi prevailed in the battle of Yamazaki positioning himself as heir of the deceased Oda Nobunaga as leader of the Oda Clan that was slowly taking control of the country (Teekah 2025). In this way, Hideyoshi inaugurated what we identify as a transitional period between the Warring States period and the Edo period. In this context, as Hideyoshi defeated his rivals in the country, he would also take advantage of the use of cadastral surveys (kenchi) during the Warring States period in order to make them dependent upon him and the Oda Clan, as they 'made landholding conditional upon investiture

by the daimyo' (Berry 1989, p. 108). What this meant was that he was able to consolidate his power while removing the possibility of backlash. Furthermore, he also froze the social order in the following manner:

> "Item [1]: Should there be any [upper- or lower-ranking military] men [...] who have newly become townsmen or farmers since the campaign in Oshü [northern Japan] of the previous seventh month [1590), the villagers and the townsmen shall conduct an examination and shall absolutely not harbor [them] [...]." "Item [2]: Should any farmer, abandoning his fields, go into trade or wage labor, that person, needless to say, and all in his village (ige-chu) shall be brought to judgment." "Item [3]: You shall absolutely not employ any [military] man whether samurai or komono who has left his master without asking leave. [...] If the (military) man in question has a lord and this is reported, you shall accordingly arrest him and hand him over to his previous master."
> — **Berry 1989, p. 106**

Under these premises, as explained by Teekah (2025), after only 10 years, Hideyoshi had managed to, somewhat, unify Japan and, thus, turned his attention to external objectives, such as the Korean peninsula in 1592 or China in 1597. However, after failing to achieve these feats, Hideyoshi died in 1598, leaving Japan with a centralized military government that would ultimately be taken over by Tokugawa Ieyasu after the Battle of Sekigahara, placing him as the undisputed leader of Japan (Teekah 2025). As a result, Ieyasu would receive the title of shogun in 1603, thus marking the beginning of the Tokugawa period.

Although the Edo period began in 1603, isolationism had not yet been completely put in place. What's more, as explained by Laver (2011, p. 2), Ieyasu made sure to better relations with Japan's Asian neighbours, particularly Korea and China, and even welcomed European traders to enter the country under the condition of maintaining trade relations completely separate from religion and other missionary objectives, even going as far as banning Christianity in 1614 (see Nelson 2002, p. 93). However, this framework ultimately failed, leading Ieyasu's descendants to take steps to protect Japan's domestic affairs until they ultimately enacted the sakoku edicts in 1635, marking a transition from free trade to isolation:

1. The sending of Japanese ships to foreign countries is strictly forbidden.
2. The travel of Japanese people to foreign countries is forbidden. If a person secretly travels abroad, that person will be punished with death, and the ships along with their captains [owners] must be detained while the incident is reported to the authorities.
3. Japanese who return after having crossed over to and lived in foreign countries will be punished by death.
4. You two must send someone to areas in which Christianity is to be found, and a conclusive investigation is to be made.

5. Those informing against priests will be rewarded. A high-ranking captive will receive one hundred silver pieces. For lower ranks, the award will be up to you, commensurate with that person's actions.
6. When a foreign ship resists, the matter must be reported to Edo and the ship must, as before, be guarded by ships from Omura.
7. When Southern Barbarians teach the faith of Christianity or commit other crimes, they must be, as before, locked up in a prison in Omura.
8. As for priests, you must order all ships to be searched.
9. The buying up of commodities of foreign ships for one place is forbidden.
10. It is strictly forbidden for any samurai to buy the merchandise of foreign ships directly from the Chinese. [...] — **Laver (2011, pp. 16-17)**

These edicts marked the next two centuries of Japanese history, which allowed the country to stabilise after almost two centuries of uncertainty and violence.

Defining stability

Although the answer to the research question seems straight forward, it is important to clarify and define the key concepts that govern it. Above all else, stability is a very ambiguous term that many scholars regard 'as having relatively self-evident meaning on which it is unnecessary to devote much time' (Castles 1974b in Dowding & Kimber 1983, p. 229). However, for the purpose of this paper, it is essential to limit its scope. Hansson & Helgesson (2003) identify three types of stability: Constancy, Robustness and Resilience. According to the authors, constancy is obtained 'whenever something remains unchanged or is changed only to a limited degree' (p. 220); resilience is 'the tendency of a system to recover or return to (or close to) its original state after a perturbation' (p. 222); and robustness is 'the tendency of a system to remain unchanged, or nearly unchanged, when exposed to perturbations' (p. 221). However, Dowding & Kimber (1983) in their literature review find a different classification developed by Hurwitz (1973):

> "In reviewing the literature, Hurwitz (1973, 449-63) identified five distinct approaches to stability: (1) stability as the absence of violence; (2) stability as governmental longevity/endurance; (3) stability as the existence of legitimate constitutional order; (4) stability as the absence of structural change; (5) stability as a multifaceted societal attribute." — **Dowding & Kimber (1973, p. 230)**

This taxonomy seems to complement rather than refute Hansson & Helgesson's definition(s) of stability. In this sense, approaches (1) and (4) would be linked to constancy as they describe an unchanged situation; and approaches (2) and (5) would be more closely related to the concept of robustness as they describe an institution that is capable of withstanding pressure. However, for the objectives of this paper, these definitions are too limited in their scope as they only

capture individual aspects of stability. Therefore, going forward, the definition of stability will be determined by Sanders' (1981) definition of instability:

> "The extent to which a political system may be characterized as 'unstable' at any given point in time varies in direct proportion to the extent to which the occurrence or non-occurrence of changes in and challenges to the government, regime or community deviates from the previous system specific 'normal' pattern of regime/government /community changes or challenges; a pattern which will itself vary over time." — **Sanders 1981 in Dowding & Kimber 1973, p. 235**

Taking this into consideration, the limits of political, strategic and economic stability must also be defined. Firstly, political stability is defined by Dowding & Kimber (1973) as 'the state in which a political object exists when it possesses the capacity to prevent contingencies from forcing its non-survival'. Secondly, economic stability will be defined in the context of Jack A. Goldstone's (2017) Demographic Structural Theory (DST) whereby the indicators are used to comprehend long-term societal pressures that cause instability. Therefore, the same indicators can be used to conceptualise economic stability as the result of a growing GDP per capita, population and urbanisation rate. Finally, 'strategic stability in the twenty-first century means the absence of incentives for any use of nuclear weapons, which effectively also requires preventing major military conflict among the nuclear weapon states' (Trenin 2020, p. 10). Nevertheless, as Trenin says himself, the meaning of strategic stability needs to be adapted to the context in which it is being used, thus, for the case of sakoku, an adaptation must be developed to fit the historical narrative. Taking this all into consideration, we define each type of stability here mentioned in the following manner:

1. Political stability is 'the state in which a political object exists when it possesses the capacity to prevent contingencies from forcing its non-survival'.
2. Economic stability is achieved when a country's GDP per capita grows at a rate fast enough to face demographic shifts, particularly population growth and urbanisation.
3. Strategic stability is attained when the central authority manages to remove incentives for conflict while also reducing its mortality.

Isolationism / Sovereigntism vs Internationalism: "Japan First"?

Having defined and conceptualised stability and established the historical context, it is important to explore the academic debate that governs this paper: isolationism vs internationalism. This dichotomy has defined the tension between global integration and national autonomy. In order to clearly conceptualise these doctrines, this section will compare the situation surrounding the enactment of the sakoku edicts and Donald Trump's apparent turn away from the liberal international system.

Internationalism is characterised by Huang (2021) as a policy of multilateral cooperation, collective security (for instance NATO in the contemporary world) and the construction of a 'loosely rules-based [...] international order' (p. 4). These were the values that emerged from World War II, the subsequent international treaties that were signed and the international institutions that were created, constructing a global architecture based on liberal internationalism (Huang 2020). This can be compared to a certain extent to the situation between 1603 and 1635 where Tokugawa Ieyasu attempted to open Japan to the world under specific conditions. However, as can be deduced from the enactment of the sakoku edicts, these policies created more instability than they solved. As explained by Legro (2000), the adoption or abandonment of internationalist policies are linked to ideational consensus and continuity (p. 268). This is understood here as the ability of the liberal internationalist structures to confront systemic crises. In the contemporary world (from World War II until now), this can be identified as the justification for the continued survival of this framework. However, defenders of the hegemonic stability theory (HST) also explain that without a hegemon, in this case the USA, this system would not be able to perdure (Keohane 2019). Taking this into consideration, some scholars have identified certain symptoms of an isolationist turn in American policy, particularly under the Trump administration (see Ettinger 2020; Minacov 2021). This apparent transition can also be extrapolated to the decisions made by Ieyasu's heirs in the years prior to the enactment of the sakoku edicts.

On the other hand, isolationism is understood by Legro (2000) as being a policy of strategically withdrawing from external military and political relations (see Scanlon 2024). However, for Doenecke (2018, p. 2): 'Above all, the isolationist seeks to preserve American autonomy, the freedom to act politically and economically unrestrained by mandatory commitments to other nations.' Although this conceptualisation is USA-specific, some similarities can be found with the sakoku edicts in 1635 as they also aimed to avoid, particularly religious, entanglements that came from trading with the West. Nevertheless, isolationism is too imprecise in this context as it seems to imply a complete detachment from international affairs, which is not a realistic assumption for the historical period that is being studied. As Ronald P. Toby puts it,

> "As was the case in the American experience in both the Federal period and the 1920s, so also in Tokugawa Japan [...], the issue at hand was not simply the choice between some sort of rampant interventionism, on the one hand, and a total, hermetically sealed isolation, on the other. Rather, both were trying, and succeeded in their ways, to resolve their ambivalence about external relations into workable policies that could be existentially acceptable to their peoples, preserve essential values and serve the political, ideological, security, and economic needs of their countries $[\dots]$" — **Toby (1991, p. 21)**

In this context, sovereigntism appears as an alternative for isolationism. Although it is a somewhat recent concept, it perfectly captures the Japanese situation from 1635 onwards. As

conceptualised by Kallis (2018), sovereigntism is the idea that national-level politics should be foregrounded in order to recover the state's power (both institutional and territorial) 'that has slipped away to more distant and diffuse layers of governance' (p. 299). Although this definition was originally used to describe populist backlash against international institutions such as the WTO, if inferred to the Japanese case, sovereigntism played a big role in the ratification of the sakoku edicts as the state wanted to take back control over its domestic affairs, particularly in the domains of religion and trade, in order to avoid it falling into the hands of Western colonialists (see Toby 1991, pp. xxiv-xxv). Therefore, Tokugawa Japan can be seen as an early manifestation of sovereigntism, and certain loose parallels can be drawn with modern-day politics, such as the "Taking Back Control" or "America First" campaigns for Brexit and the Trump administration, respectively.

Finally, with regards to the question of stability, there is no clear mention of internationalism being more or less stable than isolationism, or in this case sovereigntism. However, since the end of World War II, as highlighted by Ikenberry (2018, p. 1), the liberal international order has successfully prevailed and navigated structural crises throughout the 20th and part of the 21st centuries, providing a certain level of stability. Nonetheless, he also speculates that this system is itself in crisis due to the rise of populist, nationalist and xenophobic sentiments that it is unable to confront, giving way to an unstable environment. A similar evolution can be seen in the build up towards sakoku, with religion, and thus external interference, being the main destabilisers of Ieyasu's internationalist policies, leading to a new sovereigntist regime that had the objective of retaining domestic political, economic and strategic control in order to stabilise the country. However, the extent to which this was achieved (or not) is highlighted in the analysis section of this paper.

Research Design and Methodology

For the object and the purpose of this paper, a quantitative historical research design has been developed to compare the stability of Japan during the Warring States period against Early Edo period Japan. This country has been selected as the case study as it presents a unique and abrupt change in foreign policy that seems to have been overlooked from the point of view of stability. In this case, geographic, cultural and civilisational contexts have been held constant while the country's foreign policy has varied, following Stuart Mill's method of difference present in A System of Logic (1843):

> If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs, and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance in common save one, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ, is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon.
> — **Mill (2025, p. 279)**

The periods that are being studied are identified as follows:

1. Sengoku Period: 1467 - 1598
2. Transition Period: 1598 - 1635
3. Tokugawa Period: 1635 - 1867

Nevertheless, to facilitate the data collection and presentation the dates have been slightly adapted into two periods: Sengoku Period (1467 - 1603) and Tokugawa Period (1603 - 1700). The reason for cutting down the latter is due to the main objective of the paper that is to see the immediate effects of the sovereigntist turn rather than the long-term consequences. Furthermore, as explained in the literature review, three pillars of stability have been created to analyze the policy change from different perspectives.

Firstly, for the political stability pillar, data was gathered and compiled, and produced a database with 45 entries each of daimyos that ruled both during the Warring States period and during the Edo period, totalling 90 entries. For the purposes of this paper, the important distinction between the daimyos of these periods is the start date of their tenure. If that start date is in the 16th century then these are seen as Warring States daimyos, and if it is in the 17th Century then they fall under the Edo period daimyos. In some cases the difference in the beginning of their tenure is less than a decade, but the distinction is important to maintain as they ruled in separate eras, no matter how close they are chronologically. The data was gathered mainly from The Samurai Sourcebook which lists many samurais who were simultaneously daimyos (Turnbull, 1998), whilst being crosschecked when possible with The Cambridge History of Japan. With regards to the parameters that have been considered, the tenure length and reason of exit were deemed more significant since they show how long the rule was and the reason it came to an end. The latter was especially important and thus eight primary reasons were identified: (1) Exile, (2) Seppuku, (3) Died in battle, (4) Died from a battle wound, (5) Peaceful exit, (6) Retirement, (7) Defeated, and (8) Assassinated. These categories were then classified into three broad groups:

1. Peaceful (peaceful exit, retirement)
2. Forced (exile, defeated)
3. Violent (died in battle, died from battle wound, assassinated, seppuku)

The second pillar, economic stability, is analyzed through three indicators: (1) GDP per capita growth per year, (2) Population growth per year, and (3) Urbanisation share. Finally, the third pillar, strategic stability, the variable of interest is the number of battles that occurred in each of the aforementioned periods. In this context, a battle is understood as any noteworthy clash between two factions, historically reported and relevant. More specifically, the total number of battles, intensity (e.g. number of casualties), and the type of battles are the main points of interest. The battles were listed in War in Japan 1467-1615 by Stephen Turnbull (2012) and Clodfelter (2017).

Apart from the three pillars, a stability index was created for each type of stability. The process, formulas and results have been outlined in the analysis section of this paper.

Analysis

Political stability pillar

Reason for exit

> **Figure 1:** Reason for Exit: Warring States Period Data (Violent Exit: 51.1%, Forced Exit: 8.9%, Peaceful Exit: 40.0%)

In the data from the Warring States Period more than half of the daimyos finished their tenure due to a violent reason. This is not a surprise, considering that most of the daimyos were warriors and participated in many battles. On the other hand, around 40% of daimyos either retired or died due to natural causes with no foul play involved, which is surprising considering that Farris notes "death rates were higher during the Warring States periods... perhaps higher than at any time since 1280" (2006, p.165). Finally, less than 10% of the local lords were exiled or defeated and forced to concede their lands, signalling that they either died in battle regardless, or the shogun rarely exiled during this time period. In fact, since there often was not a higher ranking authority to enforce exiling, it almost always occurred due to the result of a fight. Furthermore, Sengoku period daimyos did not have a shogun to appoint them or dismiss them, meaning that they had the freedom to do so themselves (Hall, 1961, p.318).

> **Figure 2:** Reason for Exit: Edo "Isolationist" Period Data (Violent Exit: 4.4%, Forced Exit: 6.7%, Peaceful Exit: 88.9%)

Figure 2 shows a single dominant category of reasons for the explanation behind an end of a tenure, namely a peaceful exit. Nearly 90% of all daimyos either died because of natural reasons or retired, which is a major development and a contrast to Figure 1 where it was less than half. Considering that the daimyos analysed in this paper all ruled within 150 years of each other, this change is staggering. The violent exit category accounting for less than 5% of cases and the forced exit category only accounting for roughly 7% of cases, shows that the Edo period experienced a more stable transition of power, less turbulent times, and more rigidness. All this accumulates to the fact that, at least accounting for the political pillar, the Edo period experienced far more stability.

Average Tenure Length

In addition to the conclusive evidence of Reason for exit, the average tenure length increased in between the Sengoku and the Edo period. During the warring states periods daimyos used to rule, on average, about 22.7 years, compared to the 27.7 of the Edo period. This is a 5 year increase for the average tenure period, which coupled with the fact that almost 90% of daimyos retired or died of natural causes, in comparison to Sengoku's 40%, shows that the Edo period experienced longer tenures of daimyos, and smoother transitions of power.

Statistical relevance

A sample t-test was performed to compare tenure lengths between the Sengoku and Edo periods. While the results ($t = -1.65$, $p = 0.095$) do not meet the standard threshold for statistical significance ($p < 0.05$), the shift in mean tenure from 22.7 to 27.7 years provides evidence of a directional trend toward increased bureaucratic stability.

To further validate the exit reason findings, a chi-square test of independence was conducted on the distribution of exit categories across both periods. The assumption of minimum expected frequencies was violated in the forced exit cell (expected $= 3.50$), therefore a Fisher's exact test was also performed on a collapsed 2×2 table combining violent and forced exits into a single non-peaceful category. Both tests confirmed a statistically significant association between period and reason for exit ($\chi^{2} = 26.13$, $df = 2$, $p < 0.001$, Cramér's $V = 0.54$; Fisher's exact $p < 0.001$, $OR = 12.0$), with a large effect size. Daimyos in the Edo period were 12 times more likely to exit power peacefully than their Sengoku counterparts, providing strong statistical confirmation that the shift observed in Figures 1 and 2 was not due to chance.

Political Stability Index

In order to empirically compare the data from the three pillars an index score will be introduced which is meant to measure stability from 1-100 scale. For the political pillar, there are two important variables contributing to the index scores. By taking the average tenure length across the Edo and Sengoku periods, using that as a baseline and then doing the same for the amount of peaceful exits, we can calculate the indexes ($Score = (value / baseline_mean) \times 50$). With the baseline means equalling 64.5% of cases for the peaceful exit and 25.2 years for the average tenure length, the calculations end up looking like this:

- **Peaceful exit score:**
- Sengoku: $(0.40 / 0.645) \times 50 = 31.0$
- Edo: $(0.89 / 0.645) \times 50 = 69.0$
- **Tenure score:**

- Sengoku: $(22.7 / 25.2) \times 50 = 45.0$
- Edo: $(27.7 / 25.2) \times 50 = 55.0$

Finally by adding the two scores together and weighing them equally the Sengoku period received a political pillar stability score of 38 whereas the Edo period got a 62.

Economic stability pillar

Table 1

| Variable | Sengoku Period | Early Edo Period | | --- | --- | --- | | **Urban Share** | 2.6 - 6.4 | 6.4 - 12.6 | | **Population growth rate per year** | 0.35% | 0.51% | | **GDP per capita growth per year** | 0.13% | 0.01% |

For the economic pillar there are three variables that each tell a different story about the economic progress of Japan through the Sengoku period to the end of the early Edo period. The most important figure is the population growth rate per year as it dramatically increased by over 0.15% per year. Although this change may seem insignificant, the population growth between 1450 and 1600 is only around 7 million people, compared to the 14 million between 1600 and 1721 skyrocketing the average population to over 31 million (Bassino et al, 2019, Table 1). Coupled with the population boom in the early Edo period the urbanisation share doubled as well, even by conservative estimates (Bassino et al, 2019, Table 6). Interestingly, the GDP per capita growth stagnated in the early Edo period and was barely above 0, whereas in the Sengoku era it is far healthier, totalling to 0.13 GDP per capita growth per year (Bassino et al, 2019, Table 8). In essence, population growth boomed and the country urbanised, however, the economy stagnated, what happened?

Firstly it is important to understand that Sengoku's economic growth rested on its slower population growth allowing the GDP per capita growth per year to be as 13x higher than that of the early Edo period. This coupled with the fact that Japan traded freely with the world during the warring state period, allowed for the 0.13% growth to appear so productive. Japan's trading partners included but were not limited to Cambodia, Ming China, Portugal and Spain. Furthermore, due to the high frequency of battles and fighting within Japan, the need for war equipment (i.e. steel, swords, etc.) established a desire for such imports, which in contrast were not needed during the Edo period, considering the nearly non-existent violence within the country (Oka, 2018, p.166).

Secondly, the wealth of the Japanese individual during the Sengoku period was higher than that of an individual in the latter period. This trend is underscored not only by annual GDP per capita growth but also by the sharp rise in rice wages during the Warring States period, which subsequently plateaued throughout the early Edo period (Bassino et al., 2019, Figure 1). This

happened due to the Bakuhan system which was introduced by the Tokugawa shogunate, in which samurai were mandated to live in castle towns and, naturally merchants followed. The shift of the merchants was an administrative necessity, replacing the commercially driven urbanisation of the Sengoku era with a politically managed one that circulated less money through individual hands (Iwahashi, 2004, pp.88-89; Oka, 2018, p.167).

Thirdly, the Tokugawa shogunate after taking control, proceeded to introduce the sakoku (isolationist) policies. Due to the fact that the constant warfare of the Sengoku period ceased, the need for war equipment also disappeared, shifting the import demand to more luxury goods. The system that bred economic success, in terms of GDP per capita growth, was broken down by the new shogunate and with it arrived the restrictions (Oka, 2018, p.175). On the other hand, the aggregate economy itself did not stop growing as it grew from 41,635 to 77,603 koku in the early Edo period. This is a growth rate of around 297 koku per year, in comparison to Sengoku's 143,5 koku per year growth, showcasing that the economy grew at a faster and more healthy rate (Basino et al., 2019, p.13) (Table 2).

Table 2

| Variable | 1450 | 1600 | 1721 | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **GDP** | 20,106 | 44,635 | 77,603 |

Finally, to answer the question above, Japan lived in two realities at once: the population, economy and urbanisation rates increased massively during the Edo period, implying a more stable era than the Sengoku one. The second reality is the fact that the individual prosperity of a person worsened between the eras, as more people required more resources to be shared with. Astonishingly, no economic measure decreased between the eras, and as Bassino et al. note "the ability of the early Tokugawa economy to avoid a Malthusian collapse of living standards during pre-modern Japan's peak period of population growth should thus be seen as a success" (2019, p.14). Overall, Japan grew richer as a nation and poorer as individuals, and the Tokugawa peace was the condition that made both true simultaneously, suggesting that at least from the economic perspective the isolationist policies stabilised the evergrowing state.

Economic Stability Index

Similarly the economic stability index is calculated and weighted, to showcase the difference in stability between the two periods numerically. GDP per capita growth and total GDP growth are each assigned a 30% weight, capturing both individual prosperity and aggregate state capacity respectively. The population pressure ratio, calculated as the ratio between total GDP growth rate and population growth rate, is also weighted at 30%, directly operationalising the Malthusian tension central to the economic narrative, whether the economy kept pace with its population. Finally, urban share is assigned only 10%, reflecting the administratively driven Edo

urbanisation, which is a weaker signal of economic stability. Sengoku scores a 62.1 and Early Edo scores a 44.3, suggesting that despite aggregate growth, the Edo period underperformed economically at the individual level.

Strategic stability pillar

Firstly, the type of battle is important as it displays the sheer variety that occurred in these 200 years. Sieges (ca. 47%) and field battles (ca. 40%) are the two most common types of battles. Rebellions, Campaigns and Incidents are far less common, but still occur often enough to be noteworthy. As for the rest, e.g. naval battles, the number of instances is meaningless. The number of battles totals at 201 and the variety within them is intriguing, nevertheless the variety in battle intensity is less impressive.

> **Figure 3:** Count of Battle Type (Field Battle: 39.8%, Siege: 46.8%, Incident: 3.0%, Rebellion: 5.5%, Campaign: 3.0%)

Secondly, the intensity of a battle ranges highly, however, for the purposes of this paper we have classified battles wherein there are less than 5000 casualties as small, between 5000 and 10000 as significant and over 10000 as major, in line with Turnbull's (2012) classification. The results show that a big majority happen to be small (ca. 85%), with only 12% classifiable as significant and less than 3% as major. Most of the "significant" battles occurred between 1570 and 1610 which happens to be the period with the highest frequency of battles. "Major" battles were historically defining moments in Japanese history, exemplified by the Siege of Osaka which is widely recognised as the moment from when Tokugawa Ieyasu took complete control of Japan (Yamamura, 1990).

> **Figure 4 & 5:** Battle Intensity in % (Small: 84.6%, Significant: 12.9%, Major: 2.5%) and Frequency of Armed Conflict per Decade (1500s-1690s)

The most significant finding within the security pillar is the frequency of armed conflict per decade between 1500 and 1700. In the figure above, it is noticeable that the early Sengoku period saw relatively contained regional friction; however, this escalated quickly as battle volume doubled between 1520 and 1530. Conflict continued to intensify until reaching a peak in the 1570s, during which the data records an average of more than three battles per year. Following this peak, there is a sharp decline in 1590 due to the Toyotomi unification campaigns, punctuated by a final, brief spike in 1600 caused by the Sekigahara transition (Yamamura, 1990). However, once the Tokugawa Shogunate consolidated power, the frequency of conflict flattened toward zero. Indeed, only three recorded engagements occurred across the entire span from 1620 to 1700. This dramatic reduction in battle volume suggests that Japan successfully transitioned from a state of constant warfare to a more secure era.

The Security Index

In line with the other indices, the security one aims to showcase and compare numerically the difference between the two eras. It is measured between 1 and 100, the higher the number the more stable. Battle frequency was weighted most heavily within the index, as it represented the clearest indicator of political and military instability during the period analysed. The index was calculated with the following formula: $\text{Security Index} = 100 - (F + I + V)$ where (F) represents the frequency of battles per decade, (I) represents battle intensity based on casualty levels, and (V) represents the variety of conflict types observed. Increases in the number, severity, and diversity of battles therefore reduce the overall security score.

The Sengoku period scored a 50 and the Edo an 88. This puts into perspective how the Tokugawa shogunate managed to pacify the lands and decrease the volume and frequency of battles, thus leading to a more stable and secure Japan. This 38-point difference provides a quantifiable baseline for the Security Pillar that led Japan from a landscape of endemic feudal rivalry into an institutionalised, centralised state.

Limitations

In writing this paper and undertaking this project a number of limitations have emerged that are important to be considered. During the data collection process, the small number (45) of observations for the two analysed periods within the political pillar is noteworthy, considering that there were hundreds of daimyos that the paper could not include. Furthermore, the economic data from Bassino, et al. (2018) carries its own acknowledged grade of uncertainty. Additionally, the battle dataset excludes a number of historically unrecorded skirmishes that are mentioned but not documented (Turnbull, 2012). With regards to the theoretical framework, following Laver's introduction to The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Hegemony (2011), a Eurocentric bias can be seen in the analysis of the academic debate and sakoku, as these concepts are largely based on the admittance (or non-admittance) of Western traders into the Japanese economy. Moreover, the comparison between Sakoku and the "America First" turns is very loose; domestic variables were not taken into full consideration when Legro (2000) explains that these incentives should be taken into consideration when analyzing a change from internationalism to isolationism; and, finally, the substitution of the concept of isolationism for sovereigntism, and the development of new definitions for the three types of stability should be closely checked and peer-reviewed to achieve greater theoretical coherence. These last three limitations are closely linked to the limited word count for this paper.

Conclusion

What emerges from the three pillars is not three separate stories but one: fewer battles allowed the Tokugawa to consolidate political power, consolidated political power enabled isolationist policies, and isolationist policies suppressed the trade networks that had made the Sengoku individual prosperous, showing that each pillar caused the next. The three pillars come together to tell a coherent story that has different angles. From the economic perspective, the overall GDP grew and the GDP per capita, alongside real wages, stagnated due to the rapid growth of the population and the isolationist policies that stood behind this. From the security perspective, there were far fewer wars occurring in the early Edo period in comparison to the Sengoku period, showcasing that the restrictive measures of the Tokugawa shogunate allowed the country to stabilise and move its sights beyond warfare. Finally, from the political perspective, the ones in charge ruled on average for longer, but more importantly their reason for exit ceased to be from violent means. In essence, the economic pillar shows that the country's economy did not collapse under the rapid population growth, which was enabled due to the security pillar outcome: fewer wars, whilst political elites were able to rule for longer and smoother transitions of power happened.

Referencing back to the index scores, Japan during the Edo period experienced a more politically and strategically stable period; however, economically the Sengoku prevails. Taking all the numbers together and basing the criteria on a scale from 1 to 100, the Edo period scores a 66.7 and the Sengoku a 50.1 on the final stability index, showing that although the sovereigntist period scores higher, it is closer than expected. The prosperity that an individual enjoyed during the Sengoku period plateaued quickly under the Tokugawa shogunate, allowing the scores to appear closer. However, it is important to note that the Edo period saw little to no conflict, and the exit reasons for daimyos are far more peaceful, ushering in a more stable transition of power. Altogether, the Edo period is more stable than the Sengoku one, showing that the sakoku edicts, despite their economic cost at the individual level, successfully stabilised the Japanese state across its political and strategic dimensions. Therefore, in answer to the research question, the transition to sakoku did stabilise Japan, though not uniformly traded commercial dynamism and individual prosperity for institutional order and the near-elimination of armed conflict.

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