

Robert Hellyer. *Defining Engagement: Japan and Global Contexts, 1640-1868*

Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010

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Robert Hellyer's *Defining Engagement* delivers a valuable re-appraisal of Japan's foreign relations during the Tokugawa period. As the title indicates, Hellyer is less focused on revisiting the well-trodden paths of the early seventeenth century than deepening our understanding of the complexities of foreign relations in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In so doing, he has produced a multilayered history of foreign relations that also takes into account Tokugawa Japan's place in the wider context of proto-globalization. As such, this book is a must-read for any scholars of early modern or modern Japan.

While *sakoku* has long since passed out of the historiographical mainstream, the notion that Tokugawa Japan adopted a seclusionist stance in the late eighteenth century has remained remarkably persistent. This study aims to dispel "the widely accepted wisdom that by the late eighteenth century, if not before, a single, powerful central government, the Tokugawa *bakufu*, acted reflexively based upon an ideology of seclusion to protect Japanese tradition in the face of Western modernity" (p. 11).

The central argument of *Defining Engagement* has two main parts. First, Hellyer critiques the notion that the Tokugawa shogunate exercised an effective monopoly in the conduct of foreign relations, arguing instead that the management of Japan's foreign ties was decentralized, with domains like Satsuma and Tsushima playing a leading role in Japan's interactions with the outside world. (While Hellyer does occasionally address the role of Matsumae domain, he acknowledges that it is not a central focus of this study.) Second, the study contends that "Japan's foreign relations were not defined by an overriding ideology of seclusion... but rather by particular Tokugawa domestic agendas as well as political interchanges, shared goals and rivalries in trade, and disputes over defense between the *bakufu* and the two domains" (p. 4). By illustrating how shifting domestic exigencies led to significant changes in foreign relations, Hellyer puts to rest the notion that the dynamic arrangements of the early

Tokugawa period lapsed into a traditional defense of national seclusion in the eighteenth century.

In arguing that shogunal and domainal leaders "consistently made pragmatic decisions, especially concerning foreign trade, in accordance with global commercial contexts" (p. 4), Hellyer situates his analysis of Tokugawa foreign relations within a larger body of scholarship on proto-globalization in the early modern world. At the same time, the author is also keenly attentive to the domestic context, as he argues that rising proto-industrial production in the late Tokugawa period had a significant effect on the way Tokugawa Japan interacted with its trading partners.

The book's chapters proceed in chronological fashion, outlining the shifting approaches to foreign relations adopted by the shogunate, Satsuma, and Tsushima between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. The first chapter addresses the history of the relationship between these two domains and the shogunate, with particular attention to how these "interdependent partners" (p. 25) shaped Japan's foreign relations in the first decades of the Tokugawa period. While much of this discussion will be familiar to specialists in early modern Japanese history, it is a valuable, up-to-date overview of early Tokugawa foreign relations.

Chapter Two focuses on the period between 1640 and 1750, when Tokugawa leaders initiated what Hellyer calls a "reaction against globalization" (p. 49) that attempted to maximize the positive externalities of foreign trade while minimizing the detrimental side effects of unlimited interaction. During this process, Satsuma and Tsushima were able to use their status as intermediaries in the trade with other Asian states to shape the shogunate's overall approach to foreign relations. The third chapter deals with the shogunate's attempt to pursue a policy of "guarded engagement" (p. 73) in the late eighteenth century by pursuing an active but more controlled approach to trade while simultaneously reducing the frequency of diplomatic interactions—a set of policies that led to reduced trade and influence for Satsuma and Tsushima. In Chapter Four, Hellyer demonstrates how the rise of proto-industrialization changed the dynamics of both domestic commerce and foreign trade. While Satsuma was able to use these developments to establish itself as a major commercial force, the shogunate began to lose its control of exports, and Tsu-

shima foundered, unable to adapt to the shifting demands of the domestic market. The fifth chapter provides a fascinating exploration of how these three actors responded to the unsolicited overtures of Western nations in the 1840s and 1850s. Chapter Six follows a similar tack, tracing these developments into the final decade of the Tokugawa period, as trade with the West began to assume a greater economic significance. The conclusion, which deals with the years after the Meiji Restoration, chronicles the effective end of domain agency in foreign relations.

In seeking to re-appraise foreign relations over the broad sweep of the Tokugawa period, *Defining Engagement* has great ambitions; and for the most part, it delivers. Hellyer's analysis is detailed, meticulous, and grounded solidly in a wide range of primary sources. While many of the incidents he recounts in detail—such as the abortive attempt of a Russian naval captain to forcibly establish a base on Tsushima in 1861—are fascinating, other sections are perhaps too detail-heavy for those who do not have a particular interest in the trading of specie. One section of the book, however—the concluding chapter's coverage of the relations between Tsushima, Satsuma, and the fledgling Meiji government between 1868 and 1871—is tantalizing, and a fully fleshed-out treatment of this topic would only add to this book's contribution. *Defining Engagement* is strongly recommended for any scholars in the field, and could potentially be used in upper-division undergraduate courses.