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The Tempō Crises: The Fracturing of the Tokugawa Shogunate: A reexamination of the fall of the great Japanese Edō Period

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The Tempō Crises: The Fracturing of the Tokugawa Shogunate
A reexamination of the fall of the great Japanese Edo Period

By

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Abstract

The Tokugawa Shogunate of the Edo Period in Japan was one that ruled for over 250 years, but dissolved rather quickly. There has been a significant research about this topic that explains why the Tokugawa Shogunate collapsed. However, after compiling several sources that examine the most instrumental cause of the dissolution of the Shogunate, this thesis finds that the Tempo Crises were a significant factor in the dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate. So why were the Tempō Crises the most instrumental factors to the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate? When trying to understand the failing of the Tokugawa government system, there are several factors that contribute weight in the dissolution. Important causes include: hierarchical shifts within the class system, the failure of isolationism and influence from outside nations, including the Dutch and Americans, and unrest within different feudal domains. These causes are the true collapse of the Shogunate, but a starting point at the Tempō Crises is what lit the fire underneath a need for change, and emphasized the characteristics of the Shogunate that were bound to fail.

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I. Introduction

Japan is a country that has great influence internationally, boasting the creation of cultural innovations like Nintendo and anime, to technological achievements like the Bullet Train and international corporations, such as Toyota. The nation is often regarded as one of the most highly developed and technologically advanced countries in the world, and to add to that, highly democratic. Although Japan has succeeded in creating a fully functioning society and political system, and has promoted progressive reform and change, this was not always the case, with economic disparity, political failure, and food shortages becoming more prevalent in the 1830s. In 1867, one of the most prominent and powerful governing bodies in Japanese history fell, leading to the quick, but far from seamless transition into an industrialized nation, namely the Meiji Restoration. This governing body was the Edō Bakufu, and its dissolution would stamp an end to the 264-year reign of what was also known as the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The eventual dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate is an event that can be studied extensively from many perspectives; however, I choose to look through the lens of a political scientist and historian. The history of why governments and nations fall provides scholars with the ability to characterize modern day government as successful or not, and to sort through the massive amounts of governments before modern day. Studying failed governments and nations results in a conclusion among scholars on the specific causes of the failure, and Edō Period Japan was no different in this sense. There

has been an expansive amount of work done on the failure of the Tokugawa governing bodies, with much of that work being centered around the many events leading up to the Meiji Restoration. Many of these works argue that influences from the push to end isolationism to social hierarchical shifts were the contributing factors to the failure of the Tokugawa Bakufu, but 30 years prior to these factors were the Tempō Crises. I argue that the Tempō Crises were the most instrumental aspect to the eventual dissolution of the Shogunate. However, I do not simply cast aside the arguments from scholars that have been made for decades, but instead argue that commonly argued factors would not in fact be able to develop without the backlash from the Tempō Crises.

Following the Tempō Crises, the Tempō Reforms would devastate the future of the Edō Period. Hoping to reestablish economic and social stability, the choices made during this time period would weaken the state past no return, and give the common people of Japan the reason and opportunity to change the entire course of the nation. Through analyzing materials from this time period, from mortality records from The Great Famine, to modern day analysis of how the Tokugawa Shogunate failed to provide for their citizens, the argument that the Tempō Crises being the most important contributing factor to the government dissolving is made.

Much of what occurred during the Tempō Crises, ranging from famine and drought to mistreatment of the common Japanese people, paint a vivid picture of why nations and states fail, as highlighted by Rotberg (2003). Comparing the Tempō Crises and the reforms that followed to other failed nations provides a strong argument as to

why the Tempō Crises were so important in the dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate. In the following portions of this paper I will provide evidence from several sources to make this argument.

To begin this study, I will provide necessary background to the situation that is being discussed. This will be important to further understanding the state of the Tokugawa government at the time of the Tempō Crises. Next, I will provide the theoretical framework to delve deeper into the research that is being presented, and to further my argument through other primary and secondary sources. Following the intellectual framework of my research, and through a historiographical review of other's work in this field and analyzing scholars George Wilson (1992), Adam Clulow (2014), and Eijiro Hanjo (1934), I will provide evidence as to why the Tempō Crises were so monumental in the downfall of the Tokugawa. Not only will I show the gap in the literature provided, but also make the case as to why this argument is more conducive to a coherent and clear understanding of the failure of the government, and why this argument belongs in this field. Finally, comes the findings and analysis of this research, and the conclusion to the argument being made. The final sections will provide the opportunity to look at Japan after the Tokugawa fall, and the lasting impact that the Tempō Crises had on the nation's progress and its eventual development into its prominence today.

II. Background

Japan had finally been at peace for 250 years since the beginning of the Tokugawa period in 1603, when it came crashing down at its peak in 1868. However, the issues that

would eventually cause the destruction of the infamous “Golden Age” in Japanese history started much earlier than 1868. Tumultuous times reigned over Japan, following civil war after civil war to determine who would rule the divided nation, all the way until 1590.¹ Tokugawa Ieyasu, the heir to the great ruler Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), would take control over the nation, and the Tokugawa Period of Japan would officially take hold. Unfortunately, there is no nation that has a complete golden age, or dark age for that matter, yet the following centuries would widely be considered as the most important to the development of Japanese culture, religion, and nationhood. Lasting from 1638 onwards, until the time period being presented in this essay, there would be no armed conflict of relevance, nor civil war, to disrupt the peace set in place by Hideyoshi.²

Seclusion policies that had been preached by Hideyoshi for so many years prior to the Tempō Crises and would affect just about every aspect of life in Japan during the Tokugawa Period, beginning in 1750.³ Already, the nation was beginning to see the need for imports from outside the secluded islands, and Toshiaki Tamaki covers the topic extensively, with a focus on the silver mines that had been present within the nation for hundreds of years. By the late 1700s, Japan was beginning to experience the lack of trade opportunities that came with seclusion, especially from the Western world.⁴ Silver had

¹ David Howell, “Japan in Tokugawa Period and Modernity,” *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (January 1, 2008): 2, Accessed October 15, 2021.

² Ibid.

³ Toshiaki Tamaki, “Japanese Economic Growth during the Edo Period,” *Modern and Contemporary Mediterranean Center*.

⁴ Ibid.

lost its value, as inflation was continually growing, and could not keep up with the fact that many of the mines had begun to “run dry.” This would turn to the eventual need to change trading systems within the islands, as much of the common people could not use their money to afford daily necessities, nor would it support a business without influence from those outside the system. *Sakoku*, the term coined to describe Japan’s isolationism during the Tokugawa Period, rang loudly as the times continued to bear down on the people of Japan, and as the rest of the world looked from afar, waiting for their opportunity to insert themselves into the curious and mysterious islands of Japan.⁵

Much of the Tempō Crises were victims of the rice culture that had been produced in Japan for centuries prior to the events. Understanding rice culture is important for understanding why the famines, mortality, and government intervention were so key to the eventual dissolution of the Tokugawa government. Rice has often been seen as a deity itself in Japan, existing as far back as the first texts produced from the islands in the 8th century.⁶ These deities were the same that gave life and nourishment to the people of Japan, and had been providing for them since the birth of the islands. In the case of Japan, worshipping these deities resulted in long and healthy lives, however, unlike other religious cultures, these deities could not be necessarily embodied by humans.⁷

Therefore, the humans eat the rice to show their appreciation to their higher powers. This

⁵ Tashiro Kazui, and Susan Downing Videen, “Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 284.

⁶ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, “Japanese Identities Through Time,” *Rice as Self* (1994): 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*

was the first instance of rice culture in Japan, and it would last for millennia following these beginning stages. Evolving gradually, rice culture would later be seen as a cycle that embodies human life, from growth to reseeded.

Rice culture would eventually deviate from a simple connection to deities, to evolve into a more practical influence. Because of Japan's natural environment, and its ability to grow rice at high rates, there were plenty of rice paddies and farmers to provide for the nation. However, rice became a much more important aspect of society in Japan, as it would soon be considered a commodity for payment in monetary forms. Taxation on rice "bales" would increase, and more specifically from the pockets of the Samurai during this time period.⁸ At the time, Samurai were seen as protectorates, the educated, and the influential in the social, economic, and political landscapes of Tokugawa Japan. Their rise to power had begun years before, in 1600, when the position of Samurai would get you just about anywhere in your life. From government appointments, to teachers and warriors, the culture surrounding Samurai gave them a likeness to celebrities in today's world.⁹ Payment towards these Samurai was given in rice bales, and substituted their silver stipend in the years to come. There was a stark increase in payments in the late 1700s that would put many Samurai in debt to farmers and peasants, a fact that many would come to regret in the coming decades.¹⁰

⁸ Kozo Yamamura, "The Increasing Poverty of the Samurai in Tokugawa Japan, 1600-1868," *The Journal of Economic History* 31, no. 2 (1971): 379.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

With the Tokugawa Shogunate continuing to push the *Sokaku* principles, and refusing to change the ways of Japan, there was extreme buildup in the forms of revolts against local governments. There were 1,787¹¹ revolts since 1603, to be exact, with over 400 related to taxation laws and rice–famines, death, and eventually, the Tempō Crises and Reforms. With the state of the Tokugawa Shogunate shaking, and the governing body refusing to acknowledge the growing issues at hand, there was an extreme amount at stake, and the surface tension would eventually break at the tiniest drop being added to the mix. With the knowledge of the state of the Tokugawa Shogunate coming into the 19th century, I will now explore my argument in more detail.

III. Historiography

The Tokugawa Shogunate, in the Edō Period of Japan, ruled the majority of the islands from 1603 to 1868, when the government dissolved because of several different influences. Many authors and scholars attribute this dissolution to the different internal and external struggles, including Dutch and American influence, rearrangement of the class system, and the increase of feudal disagreements. I, however, argue differently. I do not disagree with many of said scholarly sources, such as George M. Wilson and Adam Clulow, but I do argue that the Tempō Crises—a series of events that were disastrous for the long term survival of Tokugawa Japan—were the most influential and instrumental to the eventual dissolution of the Shogunate. The many issues that would occur later, such

¹¹ Abbey Steele, Christopher Paik, and Seiki Tanaka, “Constraining the Samurai: Rebellion and Taxation in Early Modern Japan,” *Harvard University International Studies Quarterly*, 2017.

as the ones mentioned prior to this, would not have been either possible, or nearly as harmful to the governing body if not for the effects of the Tempō Crises.

In this historiographical essay, I critically analyze three sources that I argue are important to understanding Japanese history, and more specifically during the late Edō Period. The sources selected for this historiography are *The Company and the Shogun*, written by Adam Clulow, and *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan*, written by George M. Wilson, plus *The Last Fifteen Years of the Tokugawa Shōgunate*, an article written by Eijiro Hanjo. All of these texts, with the first two being published books, are important to the understanding of the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate, yet they touch on different aspects respectively. Although written in different time periods, ranging from 1934, to 2016, the authors fail to specifically acknowledge the Tempō Crises as a significant aspect of the fall of Tokugawa Shogunate. My goal is to connect these different aspects, and to explain how the differences make for a broader understanding of my thesis, and how each source gives us insight into how the Tempō Crises opened the door to the opportunity for change: the Meiji Restoration.

The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan

Adam Clulow, an author that attended Niigata University in Japan to study history, produced a book that highlights the different encounters of the Dutch East India Company in Japan, dating all the way back to 1609, just 6 years after the start of the Edō Period and Tokugawa rule. The most important argument that Clulow makes throughout this historical piece, is that the Company's influence and persistence to open up Japan to

trade, had a long-lasting impact on the country itself. Because of the isolationist principles that were present in Japan at the time (and for most of Tokugawa rule), the Dutch were very limited in their interactions. The Dutch East India Company had footholds around the world, but their interactions in Japan were very different. Clulow covers much of this in his text and argues that the influence of the Company would lead to the major shift in isolationist principles. Clulow states that foreign influence "... initiated a process of forced socialization in which Japan was compelled to accommodate itself to an existing political order that it possessed little power to change."¹² The influence of the Dutch on trade and the eventual opening of the nation would culminate in the mid 19th century, and Clulow makes a sound argument as to why the Dutch had such a pivotal role in changing the outlook on foreign influence. The Tempō Crises were important in forcing the Tokugawa government to realize the necessities of merchants and peasants in the 1830s, and outside influence helped them do this.

Patriots and Redeemers in Japan: Motives in the Meiji Restoration

Perhaps the most important and influential writer in secondary Japanese history is George Wilson, a professor in History and East Asian Languages and Cultures at Indiana University. Wilson's text is a prime example that highlights the different aspects of the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate, with a focus on three main contributing factors throughout. The factors, specifically for Wilson, are "foreigners, bakufu and *daimyo*,

¹² Adam Clulow, *The Company and the Shogun: The Dutch Encounter with Tokugawa Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 21.

imperial loyalist samurai, and ordinary people”.¹³ The main argument that is being made in this text is that much of Japan would benefit from a change in their long-standing system, and because of this, the government was bound to fall. The motivation to make that change came from both the *daimyo* and the commoners, and with the help of outside influence, such as the same influence Clulow mentions, Tokugawa Japan blurred the lines between time and tradition. Throughout 260 years, there had yet to be a change, but because of the factors that Wilson argues, there is little to show why change occurred so suddenly. I agree with the argument that Wilson makes, and that the Tokugawa Shogunate dissolved because of the overall mistreatment of the common people, stemming from the nationalist need to return all power to the emperor. This, of course, did not work, and would lead to the downfall of the nation. The biggest gap in Wilson’s literature is that he fails to recognize the beginning of the disparities and mistreatment of the common people. Traceable from others sources, such as Kozo Yamamura’s “The Increasing Poverty of the Samurai in Tokugawa Japan, 1600-1868,” the mistreatment of the common people of Tokugawa Japan was an issue that started well before 1868 and the Meiji Restoration, which Wilson focuses on. The Tempō Crises, and reforms post famine and drought, encouraged disparity, and was the beginning of the end for the Tokugawa government. Without the Tempō Crises, there would not be an argument for the mistreatment of common people, like George Wilson argues, and there would be no pinpointed starting point in the fall.

¹³ George M. Wilson, *Patriots and Redeemers in Japan : Motives in the Meiji Restoration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

The Last Fifteen Years of the Tokugawa Shōgunate

Eijiro Hanjo was a Japanese economist who wrote during the early 20th century, and describes, in detail, the issues that the Tokugawa Shogunate faced during the waning years of power. As the two authors stated before, Wilson and Clulow, Hanjo bases much of his argument for the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate towards the end of the 1860s, and states that economic disparity and foreign influence held the most power in affecting the governing bodies. Hanjo stated, in 1934, that “the last fifteen years of the Tokugawa Shogunate represent the period in which the Shogunate experienced the greatest unrest and underwent the most profound changes in its history.”¹⁴ This great unrest and profound change revolved primarily around the instigation by Commodore Matthew Perry and the United States Navy, but also the influence from other competing countries in the trade with Japan. Not only did outside influence play a large role, but the response by the *daimyo* and governing bodies to the instigation would push the public away from supporting their decisions. The influence by Western nations would push the public to believe that integration would result in a successful rebound from the fifteen years prior to the fall, as famine, death, and government mishaps were still prevalent in the country at the time. However, yet again, Honjo fails to acknowledge the fact that Japan’s issues inside their own country had begun many decades before influence from Western nations. Lack of food, trade of materials with outside nations, and depleting natural resources had been a longstanding issue, as the nation continued to grow, but only

¹⁴ Eijiro Honjo, “The Last Fifteen Years of the Tokugawa Shōgunate,” *Kyoto University Economic Review* 9, no. 2 (18) (1934): 1.

relied on itself. Though much of Japan was broken up into different sub-governments, there was still a need for central agreement on trade and resources. Pleading for open trade with those outside the nation would not have been possible without the need for resources down to the most basic necessities, such as food, hence the terrible famines plaguing the rice fields. Hanjo makes the case that the Tokugawa Shogunate would not have collapsed without the impact of Western influence, yet the failure to address why that Western influence was needed is the reason that his work must be reevaluated. As stated before, the Tempō Crises would open the door for following issues to arise on the basis that the nation needed resources, because they had failed to sustain themselves.

IV. Intellectual Framework: Failed Nations

As covered in prior sections, the topic of the dissolving Tokugawa Shogunate is a widely covered, yet minimally contested topic. With much of the literature focused around specific causes during the final years leading up to 1868 and the official dissolution, political scientists and historians have left the door cracked for different approaches to the failure of the government. The factors that surround the collapse of a government can be compared between different failed governments throughout history, and looking at these different factors provides ample evidence as to why certain states collapse. With comparisons to other nations, this section delves deeper into why the argument can be made that the Tokugawa Shogunate was destined for failure long before the common understandings of what transpired.

Robert I. Rotberg is a historian, political scientist, and professor who was a founding member of the Harvard Kennedy School's Program on Intrastate Conflict. He was also president of the World Peace Foundation. His work describes the necessities for a functioning nation and government, and provides several examples as to why nations fail, ranging from Nepal to The Democratic Republic of the Congo. Rotberg focuses on more modern-day government failures. Rotberg argues that "There is no failed state without disharmonies between communities"¹⁵, a quote that can be directly applied to the failure of the Tokugawa government and the Shogunate. This study of failed nations is very important for understanding the dissolution of Edo Japan, and as political scientists and historians, studying trends and significant similarities between failed nations can help provide that understanding. "In most failed states, regimes prey on their own constituents. Driven by ethnic or other inter-communal hostility, or by the governing elite's insecurities, they victimize their own citizens or some subset of the whole that is regarded as hostile."¹⁶ Rotberg uses this quote to help explain the significance of government mistreatment to the wellbeing of the nation, something that can be seen profusely in the end of the Tokugawa Period. During the Tempō Crises, and applying this same thought process as stated above, the significance of government mistreatment towards its commoners would fuel the fight for change, and would provide the roadmap to changing the system that had been in place for centuries. Understanding the similarities between

¹⁵ Robert I. Rotberg, "Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators," (Brookings. The Brookings Institution, July 2003), 5

¹⁶ Ibid.

different failed governments provides the opportunity to demonstrate why the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate began with the failures during the Tempō Crises.

There are several aspects that can be taken from Rotberg's piece, but involving more perspectives from different case studies, better the understanding of what a failed state can be defined as. Jonathan Di John, a scholar and professor at the University of London, has done extensive research on the topic of failed states, with his expertise being centered around Africa and Central America. Di John has done work within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and has sat at the forefront of promoting economic growth in unstable nations. He outlines the aspects that result in failing nations, and uses "Coalitional Analysis," a term coined by Di John to describe faction power:

"Coalitional analysis will enable us to overcome the limitations of purely structural and actor-based explanations of breakdown and collapse. Structural arguments examine the conditions most conducive to state collapse, but do not explain how and why a particular country's state breaks down. Agency-based arguments emphasize the role a leader's policies play in contributing to state-building or collapse but do not explain why such policies endure."¹⁷

The distinction between coalition-based nation failure and structural failure is key to Di John's argument. Structural failure can be tied directly to the governing body of the nation, while much of coalitional power is tied to those being governed. Coalitional movement itself is an idea that groups of like minded individuals form groups to reach a

¹⁷ Jonathan Di John, "The Concept, Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature and Agenda for Research with Specific Reference to Sub-Saharan Africa," *The European Journal of Development Research* 22, no. 1 (May 2009): 36.

certain goal, whether it be for political, social, or cultural movements.¹⁸ The study of Coalitional Analysis benefits the researcher by providing information on whether or not the nation at the time is able to provide a place for more than one coalition to exist at one time, and what coalitions hold power.

There are two outlines that Di John presents that define a state as “failing,” the first being “resource abundance, resource scarcity, state failure and violent political conflict.”¹⁹ Di John describes this aspect of nation failure as one that revolves around the resources that affect the nation both economically, and politically. In the case of many Middle Eastern nations, oil has become the most valuable resource being extracted from the ground. This resource extraction is important to the rise of those economies, as well as the rise of political leaders based on their understanding of the necessity to use it. This resource abundance results in the growth or decay of a nation, and impacts the importance of the nation on a global scale as well. The second aspect that Di John presents is “The Resource Curse,”²⁰ or the availability of the government in determining the impact that the economy has on those that are under the governance of the nation at hand. In many cases, “The Resource Curse” results in improper distribution of wealth and resources, and affects the ability for the government to properly regulate power and the

¹⁸ Jonathan Di John, “The Concept, Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature and Agenda for Research with Specific Reference to Sub-Saharan Africa,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 22, no. 1 (May 2009): 36.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

economy. Di John states that "...a state's dependence on natural resources - measured as the ratio of primary commodity exports to GDP - has a significant influence on the likelihood that a civil war will begin in the next five years."²¹ However, this idea does not simply apply to export data, but internal results as well. In the case of Tokugawa Japan, rice culture and the ability to sustain the country played a large role in the survival of the Bakufu at the time, and when a shortage was inevitable during the Tempō Crises, the political structure began to fail.

I argue that there are many cases that can see both the failure of the governing body, and influence of those being governed, such as the United States of America. During the downturn of British rule in North America, the government failed to provide substantive assistance to the people of her nation, yet those being governed took it upon themselves to make the change they wished to see. I argue that this was a failed nation, even while being considered a colony of another. Taking into account the perspectives of both Rotberg and Di John, I apply both arguments to an analysis of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

V. Data Collection and Methodology

The methodology of studying a subject such as the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate requires researchers to take into account different perspectives. Primary

²¹ Jonathan Di John, "The Concept, Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature and Agenda for Research with Specific Reference to Sub-Saharan Africa," *The European Journal of Development Research* 22, no. 1 (May 2009): 36.

sources and documents from the Tokugawa Period themselves will be used to analyze social norms, political unrest and decision making, as well as qualitative and quantitative data centered around the Tempō Crises. These primary sources ranged from mortality and death records from local government offices that were hit hardest by the Tempō Crises, to journal entries from sailors that traveled back and forth from the United States during the later time period. Analyzing these primary sources, and those specifically from Perry (1854), Heco (1985), Jannetta (1992, translation), and Kinoshita (1998, translation), I will be able to better grasp both the political and social atmosphere of Tokugawa at the time, as well as an understanding of the impact of the Tempō Crises.

When analyzing primary source documents and historically significant articles, Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke (2007) collaborated to help produce an outline that provides a roadmap to better categorize history. This roadmap refers to the “Five Cs”²², and more specifically: Change Over Time, Context, Causality, Contingency, and Complexity. To begin, I argue that not all of these categorizations are directly applicable to this case study of Tokugawa Japan. First, “Change Over Time” is used to better understand how the public’s feelings towards the Shogunate changed, and how the political atmosphere developed prior to, during, and after the Tempō Crises. Next, “Context” plays an important role in the understanding of the Tempō Crises, as using sources that best describe the standing of the nation at the time will result in a more comprehensive argument. Without Context, the argument can be made that the fall of

²² Thomas Andrews, and Flannery Burke, “What Does It Mean to Think Historically?” *The Newsmagazine of the American Historical Association*, American Historical Association, February 1, 2007.

Tokugawa Japan was caused by any factor during its existence. Finally, “Causality” is used by historians to “...base their arguments upon the interpretation of partial primary sources that frequently offer multiple explanations for a single event.”²³ This is the basis of my argument that the Tokugawa Shogunate’s dissolution was created by the impact of the Tempō Crises, and interpreting the primary sources in the following section will insert my argument into a changing environment on the topic. Taking into consideration these three of the five “Cs” will be useful in formulating an argument that fits within the literature of the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Andrews and Burke sum this up perfectly: “The five C's do not encompass the universe of historical thinking, yet they do provide a remarkably useful tool for helping students at practically any level learn how to formulate and support arguments based on primary sources, as well as to understand and challenge historical interpretations related in secondary sources.”²⁴

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²⁷ Ibid.

VI. Findings and Primary Source Analysis

As stated in prior sections of this thesis, there are four primary sources that can be evaluated to determine the soundness of the argument that the Tempō Crises were the most instrumental factor in the dissolution of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Perry (1854), Heco (1985), Jannetta (1992, translation), and Kinoshita (1998, translation) all provide specific and relative perspectives on different times before, during, and after the Crises themselves, and they can all be evaluated in relation to the conditions that lead to failed states developed by Rotberg (2003) and Di John (2008). Using the primary sources identified above, I applied four conditions outlined by Rotberg and DiJohn to determine whether or not the Tempō Crises were truly the leading cause for the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The connection between Di John and Rotberg, while taking into consideration the primary sources from the time period, will provide a stronger base to the argument that the Tempō Crises were catastrophic in the longevity of the Tokugawa Shogunate. However, the table provided cannot highlight all aspects of a failed nation, but to increase validity of the comparison, I have selected differing opinions on the matter of what the definition of basis of “failed or failing state” is argued upon.

In the following chart provided in the next selection—“Findings and Analysis”—I will highlight the differences between the perspectives of Di John and Rotberg, pertaining specifically to Japan during the 1830s and the Tempō Crises. To reiterate what was stated

prior to this section, the conditions are as follows for Robert I. Rotberg. A failed nation contains at least one of these conditions:

1. Internal violence.
2. The inability to control the country's borders, or regulate trade within those borders.
3. Have to have been “contested bitterly by warring factions.”²⁸
4. Have “disharmonies within communities.”²⁹
5. Have “regimes that prey on their constituents.”³⁰
6. Strong and measurable political corruption.

Considering the aforementioned conditions, there are some similarities between Rotberg and Di John, but the latter provides a different perspective on the matter. Di John states that failed nations must contain at least one of the conditions below:

1. Lack of basic government security.
2. The inability to control the country's borders, or regulate trade within those borders.
3. Creation of violent political conflict.

²⁸ Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators,” (Brookings. The Brookings Institution, July 2003), 5.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

4. “Dependent resource scarcity.”³¹
5. “The Resource Curse.”³²

The crossover between conditions emphasizes the importance of those specific points, such as political corruption and the inability to control borders. This will come into play later in this thesis, and the following section will explore the different conditions individually, and the primary sources that show the connection between Tokugawa and other failed nation models.

Robert Rotberg provides several examples as to why nations fail, and his examples can be directly related to Tokugawa Japan. Nations fail because they lack awareness or the ability to provide for their citizens. Simply put: “...the road to nation-state failure is littered with serious mistakes of omission and commission. Even in the modern states with inherited weaknesses, failure is not preordained. Poor, arbitrary, absentminded creations predisposed to failure need not fail.”³³ Japan, during the Tokugawa Shogunate failed to provide for their citizens as well. During the Tempō Crises, the Shogunate refused to provide aid for the common folk of the nation, and

³¹ Jonathan Di John, “The Concept, Causes and Consequences of Failed States: A Critical Review of the Literature and Agenda for Research with Specific Reference to Sub-Saharan Africa,” *The European Journal of Development Research* 22, no. 1 (2009): 11.

³² Ibid.

³³ Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators,” (Brookings. The Brookings Institution, July 2003), 5.

instead demanded that wages be lowered, for both the Samurai and lower classes.³⁴ With the harsh conditions of the Tempō Crises, the instability of the government began to appear. The collapse of the Samurai class is widely considered one of the main causes of the dissolution of the Tokugawa Bakufu, but this cause cannot be considered without the inclusion of Tempō Crises. The unsatisfactory conditions of the government, and the inability to act following famines, rebellions, and death, would not have appeared obviously without the different aspects that occurred during the Tempō time period.

Failed nations have several different aspects in common, as stated before. I argue that the Tokugawa Shogunate would not have been able to collapse at the time it did, nor the way it did, without the prior issues revolving around the Tempō Crises. From the famine and the collapse of local government in 1837, to the decline of the Samurai class towards 1868, the domino effect remains ever present in the downfall of the Tokugawa Shogunate. Without the Tempō Crises, a new nation would not have been able to be rebuilt on the principles that would be discovered in the later years of the Bakufu.

Without the Tempō Crises, the internal factions of the government would not have grown apart, the economic standing of those in power would not have failed, and the outside influence from other nations would not have been accepted. The Tokugawa Shogunate does not fail the way it does without the impact of the Tempō Crises on the longevity of the nation.

³⁴ William Wright Kelly, "Class, Community, and Party in 19th-Century Collective Protest," In *Deference and Defiance in Nineteenth-Century Japan*, 3–25, Princeton University Press, 1985.

Perry in Japan: A Visual History (1854)

Commodore Matthew Perry was the highest-ranking naval officer in the United States military from 1809-1858, and his excursion and constant injection of American offers into the Japanese borders were consistently rejected. However, in this transcription of Perry's journal detailing his journey to the island nation, he includes the communication between United States President Millard Fillmore, and the Emperor of Japan, and the negotiations that took place. In the letter from the President Fillmore, Perry states:

“We know that the ancient laws of Your Imperial Majesty's government do not allow of foreign trade except with the Dutch. But as the state of the world changes, and new governments are formed, it seems to be wise from time to time to make new laws. There was a time when the ancient laws of Your Imperial Majesty's government were first made.”³⁵

At the time of this interaction between the United States and Japan, there was necessity for outside influence in trade, including the need for food and everyday resources. Perry knew this, and knew that the trade at the time would benefit both the United States, and Japan. The interaction between the Emperor and Perry shows that, because of the necessity for trade and resources, the Tokugawa Shogunate would not be successful in controlling their borders and remaining an isolationist country. This inability to navigate the influence from the West would eventually lead to a collapse just a few decades later. David L. Howell, a scholar on diplomacy in early 19th century Japan, argues that “...by

³⁵ Matthew Calbraith Perry, “Perry in Japan: a Visual History,” Edited by Roger Pineau, *Perry in Japan*, Brown University Library Center for Digital Scholarship, n.d. 1852. Accessed November 21, 2021.

the end of the decade [1850], Japan had entered into relations with all major powers and a number of treaty ports had opened to trade.”³⁶ Since 1638, Japan had been successful in limiting their trade to the West, and even Northeast Asia³⁷, yet the influence of the Tempō Crises on the hungry, resource scarce, dying nation would give way for several opportunities for negotiating and forcing one’s hand by Commodore Matthew Perry. Both authors, Rotberg and Di John, provide the conditions of limiting borders, and list the inability to defend and withstand negative outside influence as a condition that results in a failed nation (See Table 1 and Table 2). The influence of the Tempō Crises on trade and border control would eventually lead to the opening of the country, and for the world to see that the Tokugawa Shogunate was failing.

The narrative of a Japanese; what he has seen and the people he has met in the course of the last forty years (1895)

Joseph Heco, born in Japan in 1837, at the height of the Tempō Crises, wrote extensively on his travels and his relations to the United States as a sailor, after he left the country in 1850.³⁸ Much of his journal, which is extensively specific, speaks on his early experiences of the influence on public opinion, and the discourse within the community, that the American fleet had during the need for trade. Not only this, but Heco also goes

³⁶ David L. Howell, “Foreign Encounters and Informal Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 40, no. 2 (2014): 297.

³⁷ Tashiro Kazui, and Susan Downing Videen, “Foreign Relations during the Edo Period: Sakoku Reexamined,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 8, no. 2 (1982): 304.

³⁸ Joseph Heco, “The narrative of a Japanese; what he has seen and the people he has met in the course of the last forty years,” [Tokyo, Maruzen, 1895] Pdf.

into depth about the repercussions that Japan continued to deal with post Tempō Crises, much of which being political discourse and a need for change. In a quote, directed at the governing officials in Heco's hometown, he states: "Inasmuch as you have been dealing largely with foreigners, and thereby brought misery to many of your countrymen and utterly forgotten their true interest, and exhibited your indifference to those who are suffering greatly from the present state of things; We, the Rōnin, intend to punish you as we have already punished others in Yedo and elsewhere."³⁹ There are several instances of these thoughts within Heco's journal, much of which are aimed at public officials and their failure to address the issues arising with the influence of the west, and the poverty, hunger, and death that continuously arises throughout the nation. Considering Rotberg's conditions, Heco provides evidence to the disparity between communities, the neglect of citizen needs, and utter communal dissent (See Table 1). Public opinion of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the state of the nation during and after the Tempō Crises was very clearly at a low, yet there was nothing being done that resulted in a fixing of these problems. Heco moves on to talk about the lack of basic security, and the inability of the Shogunate to put down political violence, and instead chooses to fight the Western traders (See Table 2). On the other side, Heco writes about the disagreements within the communities as well, as the government was beginning to bargain with Westerners post Tempō Crises, as it was much needed, yet there were many in the communities that refused to accept it. When two merchants were killed for dealing goods with Westerners, they had a left a

³⁹ Joseph Heco, "The narrative of a Japanese; what he has seen and the people he has met in the course of the last forty years," [Tokyo, Maruzen, 1895] Pdf.

note on the bodies that read as follows: “These unprincipled persons have been dealing with foreign barbarians for their own gain, and have caused all goods to rise in price, whereby the majority of the people are suffering. Their actions are also contrary to the wishes of the Sovereign of the Empire, and therefore we have punished them as they deserve.”⁴⁰ The obvious and open communal discontent in the economic standings of citizens in Tokugawa Japan, during and post Tempō Crises was growing, and there was nothing being done by the government themselves to curb the disagreements.

Famine Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Japan: The Evidence from a Temple Death Register (1992)

Early 19th century Japan saw a decline in population growth, according to Temple Registers from the *Shūmon Aratame Chō* population records, which began with the efforts to remove Christianity from the nation.⁴¹ In the years between 1801 and 1850, there was, an extremely significant decrease in the number of births, and a loss of over 1.3 million people.⁴² Jannetta, in a translation of the Temple Registers attributes these losses to the significant natural disasters during the Tempō Crises, such as drought, monsoons, and the overall destruction of much of the rice fields in the nation.⁴³ In the text provided by Jannetta, a graph is shown that maps the death numbers of specific villages

⁴⁰ Joseph Heco, “The narrative of a Japanese; what he has seen and the people he has met in the course of the last forty years,” [Tokyo, Maruzen, 1895] Pdf.

⁴¹ Ann Bowman Jannetta, “Famine Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Japan: The Evidence from a Temple Death Register,” *Population Studies* 46, no. 3 (1992): 429.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

in the south of Japan, with one example being Ogen-ji. In the years between 1801 and 1830, the mean number of deaths caused by starvation in this specific village sat at around 100 per year.⁴⁴ In the following years, and the beginning of the Tempō Crises, that number jumped to an average of 400 deaths per year during the height of the famine.⁴⁵ This increase of over four times was attributed specifically to extremely low yields of rice production, and as stated earlier in this thesis, most villages relied very heavily on the production of the crop. Not only did death numbers increase, but there was also a significant increase of female distribution within different temples and villages themselves.⁴⁶ There was a much higher percentage of men starving to death during the Tempō Crises because of a “biological reaction to lack of food.”⁴⁷

The relation of the Temple Death Registers to the conditions of failed states discussed by Rotberg and Di John fit within two different conditions, with the first being “Neglect of Citizen Needs by Government” (See Table 1). The significant increase of death rates, and the decrease of crop production was the result of poor management of resources. In the cases provided, the government itself was at fault for the lack of response to the low rice yields, and Jannetta herself claims that this was a key component of the eventual collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate. She stated that “...the prevention of

⁴⁴ Ann Bowman Jannetta, “Famine Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Japan: The Evidence from a Temple Death Register,” *Population Studies* 46, no. 3 (1992): 429.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 435.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 439.

was only one aspect of Japan's transition to a modern demographic regime."⁴⁸ This "demographic regime" is in reference to the transition into the Meiji Period, and the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the famine of the Tempō Crises sat at the helm of transition. The other condition that this primary source helps to explain is the "Resource Scarcity" (See Table 2). The failed response of the Tokugawa Shogunate to the increased rates of starvation and famine resulted in a failure of the government to protect its citizens.

*Mortality Crises in the Tokugawa Period —A View from 'Shūmon Aratame Chō' in
Northeastern Japan. (1998)*

Kinoshita provides similar evidence on the impact of the Tempō Crises as Jannetta, yet focuses less on famine, and instead focuses on the impact war and epidemics had on Tokugawa Japan. These findings were translated from the same *Shūmon Aratame Chō* as Jannetta's findings. This perspective gives a more comprehensive image of the Tempō Crises outside of the famines and droughts, and Kinoshita's findings show that in much of the nation, the death rates of those older than 10 years increased significantly, but the rates of those younger than 10 years actually decreased.⁴⁹ Kinoshita argues that this can be attributed to several different factors, ranging from "food entitlement"⁵⁰ to the famines themselves, yet these factors play a much heavier role in crisis times. In a period

⁴⁸ Ann Bowman Jannetta, "Famine Mortality in Nineteenth-Century Japan: The Evidence from a Temple Death Register," *Population Studies* 46, no. 3 (1992): 443.

⁴⁹ Futoshi Kinoshita, "Mortality Crises in the Tokugawa Period —A View from 'Shūmon Aratame Chō' in Northeastern Japan," *Japan Review*, no. 10 (1998): 54.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

of time with a lack of food, it is beneficial to most families to feed their children before they feed themselves, as to keep the family line alive. This could very well be the evidence as to why there were significantly higher death rates among the ages between 10 years of age and 50 years of age.⁵¹

In the time of crises, whether it was famine, drought, or other natural disasters, Kinoshita points towards government influence as an important aspect of response. Much of this response can be seen within the differences in socio-economic standings during crisis, and can be better summarized by Kinoshita as: “Analysis of the link between crisis mortality and socio-economic status yields a puzzling result. In the non-crisis period, socio-economic status played a minimal role in determining the survivorship of Yambe villagers. In the crisis period, however, mortality differentials by socio-economic status became more salient.”⁵² This primary source relates to three different conditions outlined by Rotberg and DiJohn. First, the mortality rates during the Tempō Crises point directly towards the “Communal Discontent” (See Table 1) and the fact that there was a severe disparity between socio-economic responses and death rates. The higher the status of an individual, the higher the survival rate, in the majority of cases. Those villages that were hit harder by famine and drought suffered more, as would be expected, but less affected villages saw a stark difference in death rates among the different classes.⁵³ This resulted

⁵¹ Futoshi Kinoshita, “Mortality Crises in the Tokugawa Period —A View from ‘Shūmon Aratame Chō’ in Northeastern Japan,” *Japan Review*, no. 10 (1998): 63.

⁵² *Ibid*, 67.

⁵³ *Ibid*.

in the distrust of the higher classes, most of which ruled these villages and districts, and led to the upheaval of the system as it was during the Meiji Restoration years later. Second, this is yet another example of lack of response to citizen's needs during the crises. The Tokugawa Shogunate mistreated those of lower socio-economic classes, and did not provide them with the goods to sustain their own lives. The mortality rates were somewhat of a direct correlation to "Resource Scarcity" as discussed by DiJohn. Famine plays a large role in the death rates during the Tempō Crises, and this condition is seen again in this primary source.

The findings of this thesis are that Rotberg and Di John's models would categorize Tokugawa Japan during the Tempō Crises as a "failed nation", based on their conditions (See Table 1 and Table 2). With these findings provided, I argue that the Tokugawa Shogunate had failed decades before the onset of the Meiji Restoration because of the conditions set by Rotberg and Di John, such as internal violence, warring factions, lack of basic security, the inability to control borders and territories, and overall communal discontent. With the evidence provided by primary sources from Perry (1854), Heco (1985), Jannetta (1992, translation), and Kinoshita (1998, translation), there is a substantial argument to support this claim.

VII. Conclusion

The Tokugawa Period of Japan was widely regarded as the golden age of the nation, and one that would subsequently last for over two and a half centuries. From the beginning in 1603 and the following wars, and the official start of the great period in

1638, the Tokugawa Shogunate ruled the nation effectively until its eventual collapse in 1868, ushering in the Meiji Restoration and the new era of Japan as a global power. However, the Tokugawa Period began its downfall many decades earlier, and in 1833, the ideas of change and alteration began to appear during the Tempō Crises.

The collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate is a widely discussed topic, and one that is comparable to the writings on the cause for the American Revolution and creation of the United States. Although this is an important and heavily agreed upon topic, I argue that there is room for a different approach, and one that argues that the Tempō Crises were the most instrumental factor in the collapse of this great period. Without them, the world would not see the opening of the country to the West, and the eventual creation of a government that focuses on the needs of the nation, instead of relying on standards set hundreds of years before. In most cases, the failure to recognize the Tempō Crises as a significant aspect of the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate results in a perspective that does not recognize the needs of the common people of a nation. From the impact of outside nations on trade and the economics of Japan, to the famines and mortality numbers within disparaged communities, to distrust of government, the Tokugawa Shogunate failed to respond to the issues of the Tempō Crises. This failure would leave the door open for the push for change, and 30 years later, the collapse of one of the longest lasting dynasties in East Asian history.

Applying the conditions outlined by Robert I. Rotberg and Jonathan Di John in their failed state models this thesis was able to demonstrate that, although these models

did have differences in conditions, there was crossover that presented a somewhat repetitive analysis. Using Andrews and Burke's (2007) guidelines for historical analysis, specifically, "change over time," "causality," and "context" showed that the Tempo Crises had an effect on the fall of Tokugawa Japan. The social, political, and economic atmosphere of Tokugawa Japan shifted tremendously over a relatively short period of time. Looking at the sources shown in the Analysis and Findings section of this thesis, the constant shifting of said atmosphere that was showcased by Heco (1895) was a prime example of the "Change Over Time." The diary of Commodore Perry (1852) provided an example of "causality." Perry described the influence the West had on Japan's border openings. This influence "caused" Japan to open its borders and this opening contributed to the fall of the Tokugawa as Japan became more familiar with new ideas. Finally, "Context" is very important for understanding events. The findings from Jannetta (1992) and Kinoshita (1998), that showed how rampant death and famine were provided evidence as to the overall status of the nation prior to it failing.

To improve upon the findings of this thesis, further research should be examined through a more extensive failed nation model. To add to this, having more comprehensive primary sources from the Tokugawa Period itself may be beneficial to a better understanding of the time period, and the reasons behind the state failure. I recommend that further research be conducted in this area of study, more specifically by those who are able to translate and speak Japanese. This may result in a more important study, and a better comparison to other failed nation models.

Andrews and Burke (2007) and the three of the “Five Cs” that were used to analyze historical methods was very important to understanding the topic of the Tempō Crises as well. The social, political, and economic atmosphere of Tokugawa Japan shifted tremendously over a relatively short period of time. Looking at the sources shown in the Analysis and Findings section of this thesis, the constant shifting of said atmosphere was showcased by Heco (1895) was a prime example of the “Change Over Time” analysis method. Next, the diary of Commodore Perry (1852) provided an example of the issues that arose and resulted in the “Causality” analysis of the Tempō Crises when he described the influence of the West on Japan’s border openings. Finally, the “Context” analysis is grounded in the writings of Jannetta (1992) and Kinoshita (1998), where death and famine were rampant, these authors provided evidence as to the overall status of the nation prior to it failing. These three analysis methods provided by Andrews and Burke, albeit overarching and unspecific, provided a backbone to why I researched the sources that I did.

Table 1: Conditions of a Failed State (Rotberg 2003)

Conditions	Tokugawa Japan: During the Tempō Crises
Internal Violence	✓
Warring Factions	✓
Disparity Between Communities	✓
Inability to Control Borders/Territories	✓
Neglect of Citizen Needs by Government	✓
Political Corruption	
Communal Discontent	✓

Table 2: Conditions of a Failed State (Di John 2008)

Conditions	Tokugawa Japan: During the Tempō Crises
Lack of Basic Security	✓
Inability to Control Borders/Territories	✓
Violent Political Conflict	✓
Resource Scarcity	✓
“The Resource Curse”: Overabundance	

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