

Fortress Kanto

The Kingmaker of Japan

How did the Kanto contribute to the unification of Japan?

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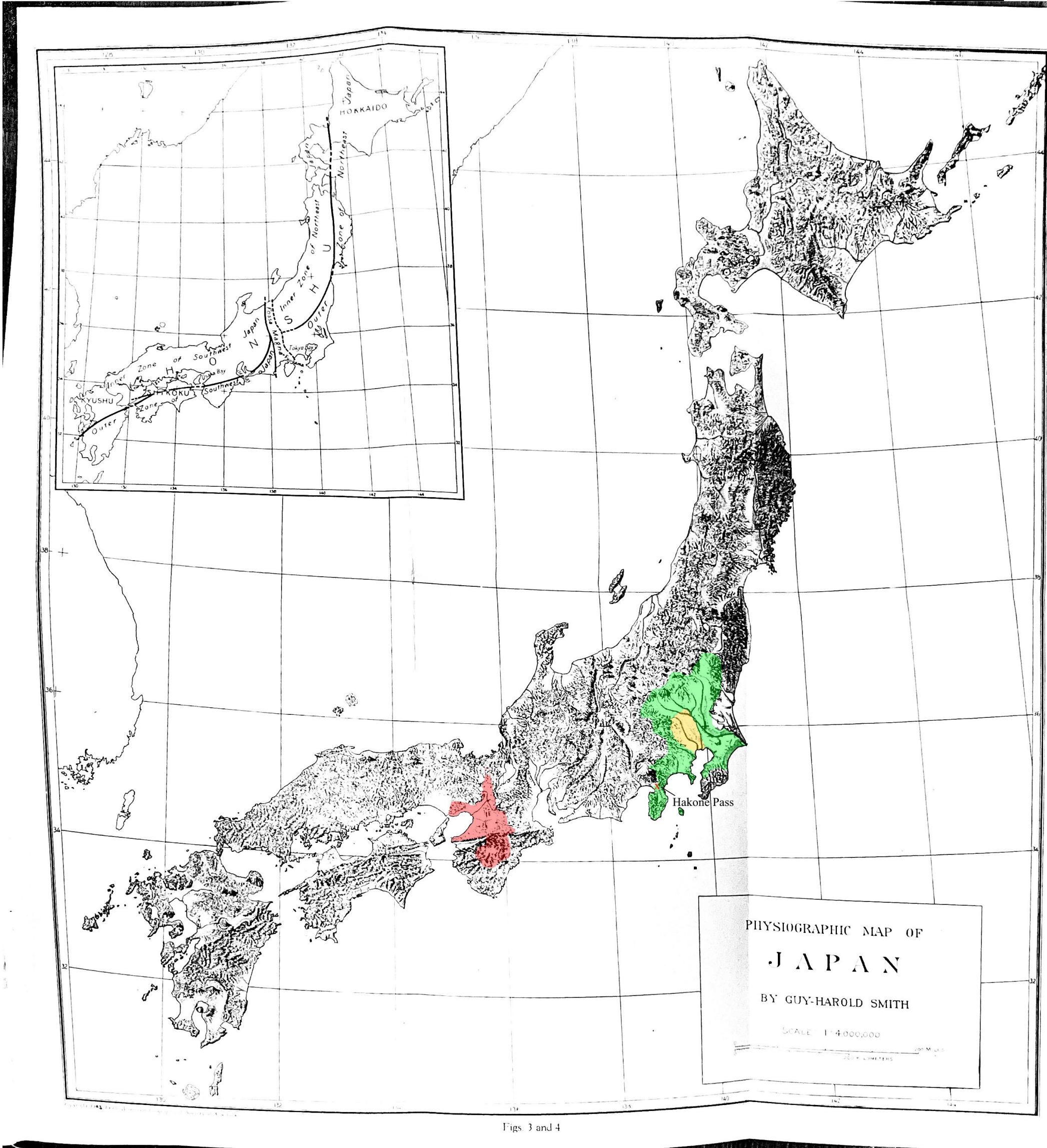
Background

In 1590, Hideyoshi Toyotomi completed the unification of Japan by conquering the Kanto, then ruled by the Hojo clan. For reasons that are still unclear, Hideyoshi “suggested” that Ieyasu Tokugawa trade his wealthy, ancestral domain for these faraway, rebellious provinces. If Hideyoshi’s goal was to weaken Ieyasu, then he failed. Ten years later, Ieyasu raised an army from the Kanto and destroyed his enemies at Sekigahara, becoming the most powerful man in all of Japan.

Geography of the Kanto

The Kanto is Japan’s largest flatland, surrounded by mountains and is accessible to the Kinai (the capital region and centre of power) only through Hakone Pass. It has a warm, wet climate conducive to agriculture and unusually wide, navigable rivers. Ieyasu’s domain was worth 2,4 million *koku* (over one-eighth of Japan’s productive land) and surpassed even Hideyoshi’s personal holdings (2 million *koku*).

The most famous and significant land feature in the Kanto is Musashi moor, upon which Edo lies. It is largely infertile due to sandy soils and flooding-related erosion, but its massive size meant it had great agricultural potential regardless — if the rivers crossing it could be controlled.



The Kinai is in red, the Kanto (only those provinces controlled by Ieyasu) is in green, Musashi moor is in yellow, and Hakone Pass is marked with a small ‘x.’

The vast majority of Japan is hilly or mountainous. Notice how much larger the Kanto is than any other flatland (white).

Based on Guy-Harold Smith, *Physiographic Map of Japan*, in Glenn Thomas Trewartha, *Japan: A Physical, Cultural, and Regional Geography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1945).

Under the Hojos’ Rule

1491	Entrance of the Hojos into politics; seizure of Izu province
1550	Tax reform: villages now responsible for tax collection and transport
1552	Last major rival to Hojo rule defeated; Kanto largely united
1559	Cadastral surveys completed: warrior-vassals no longer responsible for taxation
1568	Nobunaga Oda marches on Kyoto
1582	Hideyoshi begins his cadastral surveys; taxes now paid in rice
1590	Hideyoshi defeats the Hojos, who are forced to commit suicide; Edo's population is ~100

Under Ieyasu’s Rule

1590	Ieyasu moves to the Kanto, losing his silver mines; former Hojo vassals join Ieyasu
1590-1600	Development of Edo: building walls, digging moats, clearing land
1590-1600	Development of the Kanto: draining swamps, digging canals, building bridges
1592	Hideyoshi invades Korea, but Ieyasu is too far away to participate
1598	Hideyoshi dies
1600	Ieyasu defeats his enemies at Sekigahara; Edo's population grows to ~20,000
1603	Ieyasu becomes shogun; Edo effectively becomes the capital

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Conclusion

While other warlords fought for their lives, the lords of the Kanto could keep an eye on Hakone Pass and build their strength. In this isolated, defensible position, the Hojos freely strengthened their administrative and extractive control, which Ieyasu inherited and perfected, aloof from the surrounding warfare. Additionally, the Kanto was agriculturally blessed, and the further development of Edo and the regional economy made Ieyasu the richest warlord in Japan, even without his ancestral silver mines. By the time of Sekigahara, Ieyasu was able to raise 43,000 soldiers, while the next-largest army numbered only 10,000. What originally seemed a disaster became a springboard for unification – **the Kanto was the most powerful single region and powerbase in all of Japan (a “kingmaker”), and it made Ieyasu shogun.**