



In 1997, prior to being stationed in Japan, I started researching Japanese Philately to get some idea of how Japan views itself (on stamps). In this study, it became readily apparent of the subjects of stamps issued mirrored closely the attitudes the Japanese had for both their internal and foreign relations.



Scott 2 (1871)

Their first stamps were issued in 1871, just four years after the Meiji Restoration (明治維新) or renewal. This event was the end of the Tokugawa (virtuous river) shogunate ((徳川幕府?) that had ruled Japan since 1603 (the year Queen Elizabeth I died). It should be noted that the pivotal event that started the renewal process was Commodore Perry's opening Japan for trade in 1853. (The early shogun period is illustrated very well in James Clavell 's the historical novel "Shogun" – 1976).

Stamps of this period were few and generally for internal use and were very 'vanilla' in design, just text and number.

In the mid 1890's, after about 25 years on the throne, the Emperor (and his government) were secure enough to announce to the world and their subjects what had been happening in Korea and China. The released five stamps depicting the generals that defeated China in the Sino-Japanese War (1895). This militaristic trend continued until 1945.

Also during the period, symbols of the Japanese monarchy were also issued along with stamps that represented government functions (communications, post office and census).

In the mid 1930's, the Nippon Post issued the first series of stamps depicting Japanese historical building, places and events. The 1936 national park series is very beautiful and touch upon the twelve main regions of the country. In the next two years, 16 additional 'scenic' stamps joined this set (these stamps are still moderately priced in mint condition).



Scott 24 (1874)



Scott 166 (1921)



Scott 226 (1936)

After the surrender in 1945, Japan issued a number of stamps depicting Baron Maejima Hisoka, the statesman and business man who argued for Japan to pursue an economic path until pushed out by the militaristic faction in the early 1880's. During his height of influence, he hired a foreign advisor, Samuel M. Bryan, to negotiate a postal treaty with the United States, and to assist in the admission of Japan into the Universal Postal Union in 1877.



Scott 391 (1947)

In 1949, Japan issued its version of "Great Japanese" - each Individual honored opposed the military and in general, fostered economics, cultural expansion and social equity - all virtues espoused by the occupying powers.

After the occupation ended Japanese stamps have been primarily depicted cultural, science, nature, social and engineering themes.



Scott 2858 (2003)

In 2003, 150 years after Commodore Perry's little visit, Japan issued a stamp noting the event.

