



## Inventing Japan: 1853-1964 (Modern Library Chronicles)

By Ian Buruma

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**Inventing Japan: 1853-1964 (Modern Library Chronicles)** By Ian Buruma

In a single short book as elegant as it is wise, Ian Buruma makes sense of the most fateful span of Japan's history, the period that saw as dramatic a transformation as any country has ever known. In the course of little more than a hundred years from the day Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in his black ships, this insular, preindustrial realm mutated into an expansive military dictatorship that essentially supplanted the British, French, Dutch, and American empires in Asia before plunging to utter ruin, eventually emerging under American tutelage as a pseudo-Western-style democracy and economic dynamo.

What explains the seismic changes that thrust this small island nation so violently onto the world stage? In part, Ian Buruma argues, the story is one of a newly united nation that felt it must play catch-up to the established Western powers, just as Germany and Italy did, a process that involved, in addition to outward colonial expansion, internal cultural consolidation and the manufacturing of a shared heritage. But Japan has always been both particularly open to the importation of good ideas and particularly prickly about keeping their influence quarantined, a bipolar disorder that would have dramatic consequences and that continues to this day. If one book is to be read in order to understand why the Japanese seem so impossibly strange to many Americans, *Inventing Japan* is surely it.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

A respected journalist adds this overview to the "Modern Library Chronicles" series.

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Compressing a century of complex history into one short but taut narrative, Buruma traces the remarkable metamorphosis that transformed an isolated island shogunate into an expansive military empire and then into a pacified and prosperous democracy. Predictably enough, Buruma begins with the oft-told story of Commodore Perry's 1853 naval mission to open Japan to American traders. But he invests this event with a new and darker meaning as he relates how this pivotal visit helped catalyze a firestorm of civil war, toppling the shogunate and ushering in the Meiji Restoration. The architects of that restoration Buruma depicts as tragically myopic, their nationalistic and religious authoritarianism dooming democracy to stillbirth and converting commercial wealth into imperial armaments. Just as impressive as Buruma's probing account of this cultural tragedy is his lucid analysis of Douglas MacArthur's remarkable--but finally flawed--achievement in guiding Japan toward the exemplary democracy that showcased its astonishing development in the 1964 Olympics, which Buruma takes as his end point. An excellent introductory study, complete with a helpful bibliography for those seeking more rigorous analyses. *Bryce Christensen*

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#### Review

“Stylish and illuminating, **Inventing Japan** has the added virtue of being admirably concise. Students and general readers alike will find this grand overview of modern Japan’s many identities engaging and provocative.” —**John W. Dower**, author of **Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II**, winner of the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize

“In his characteristically penetrating manner, Ian Buruma delves into why modern Japan—for all its intellectual and artistic vitality—has not developed a more open, democratic, and cosmopolitan political order.” —**Sheldon Garon**, professor of history and East Asian studies, Princeton University

“Those familiar with Ian Buruma’s impressive body of work on Japan will not be disappointed by **Inventing Japan**. This compelling narrative captures the excitement, triumph, and failure of the century in which Japan abandoned its traditional ways and entered into the modern world. Iconoclastic as always, Buruma offers fascinating insights into the nature of Japan’s uneasy experiment with constitutional government, the impact of bureaucratic planning on economic growth, and the ties that closely bind the present with the past. Equally intriguing are his comparisons of Japan’s development with those of China, Japan’s ancient cultural mentor, and with Germany, its modern cultural mentor and another late-developing nation.” —**James L. McClain**, professor of history, Brown University; author of **Japan: A Modern History**

“A witty and illuminating romp through a hundred years of Japanese history, written with Mr. Buruma’s usual style and insight. I cannot think of a wiser or clearer introduction to the subject for the general reader, and even the well informed will find something of interest.” —**Ronald Spector**, professor of history and international relations, George Washington University; author of **At War at Sea** and **Eagle Against the Sun**

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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