1. Port Development in Relation to Economic Growth

Japan is a long, narrow island country. The remarkably high proportion of coastline, which spans 34,600km, to total land area (380,000 sq km) has generated an extremely large number of ports. Approximately 42% of the entire population of Japan lives near a harbor. Ports are the mainstay for 99% of Japan's foreign trade and 42% of its domestic distribution.

Trade with China stimulated cultural development in Japan, and the limited amount of space prompted a national policy establishing foreign trade early on. The development of ports and harbors has therefore been particularly important to the economy, and the Japanese government plays a leading role in maintaining the country's ports, as well as its shipping.

1.1. Pre-19th Century (Ancient times to the Edo Period)

Japan, A Shipping Nation

Exchanges between Japan and the continent (China) began to flourish from the 6th century. At this time, the Inland Sea of Japan, which formed a large, natural shipping canal, was a particularly important waterway. In the 11th century, an artificial island (Kyoga Island) was constructed at the site of what is now Hyogo Prefecture where trade ships from the continent could anchor. Sakai Port in Osaka began to flourish in the 16th century when it served as the main port of call for the Chinese and Europeans (the Spanish and Portuguese). Japan entered the Edo Period in the 17th century, an approximately 250-year period of official national isolation. Ports that had previously been opened to foreign countries now focused on domestic distribution, and the bulk of Japan's current port structure foundation was established during this period. The country's commodity distribution bases were in Osaka and Tokyo, with the "Eastern Roundabout" and the "Western Roundabout" as the two main shipping routes. The Eastern Roundabout ran along the Pacific Ocean, connecting Northeastern Japan with Tokyo, while the Western Roundabout ran along the Sea of Japan and the Inland Sea, tying Northeastern Japan with Osaka. In the mid-19th century, international trading ports were opened in Yokohama, Nagasaki and Hakodate, followed by Kobe and Osaka at the end of the Edo Period and the beginning of the Meiji Period.

1.2. 1870 to 1945 (Meiji Period to World War II)

Industrial Promotion Policy

Japan's ports and harbors matured under the Meiji government's policy of industrial promotion, national wealth and military strength. Ports, harbors, railroads, roads and other types of social infrastructure were established at this time. The Meiji government's policy of modernization under a centralized government was designed to help Japan catch up with advanced Western nations.

Yokohama and Kobe were established as major foreign trading ports during the Meiji Period. These ports were also key to promoting the concentration of industry around metropolitan areas, as the coastal region was developing into a heavy chemical industrial belt under the government's