

## **The History of Fukue Island: 600s to 1800s**

The Goto Islands' proximity to the Asian continent has made Fukue a hub for cultural exchange, maritime commerce, and domestic defense for more than a millennium. In fact, the Goto Islands were likely an important port well before written records existed. They are mentioned specifically in the eighth-century *Kojiki* (Record of Ancient Matters), Japan's oldest surviving historical text.

### *Envoys to China*

In the eighth century, Tang dynasty China (618–907) was the political and cultural center of East Asia. Between 630 and 894, Japan sent 19 envoy ships to China for diplomacy, research, and trade. Beginning in 702, Fukue Island served as the ships' final staging area before the dangerous crossing to the mainland; it was also the first port that welcomed them back. For centuries, these envoys returned bearing goods and ideas that would profoundly impact Japanese culture.

As a result of the envoys' research, the government adopted Tang-style land reform policies, bureaucratic structures, penal codes, city planning, architecture, standardized measurements, and population registers. The envoys also returned with new schools of Buddhist thought. Buddhism had been introduced to Japan from the Korean Peninsula in the mid-sixth century, but had not been adopted outside the imperial court. However, two envoys who studied Buddhism in China returned to spread what they had learned: Saicho (767–822) and Kukai (774–835), who went on to found two very influential schools of Japanese Buddhism. Saicho founded the Japanese Tendai school, which popularized Buddhism among the masses, while Kukai's Shingon school influenced the thought and aesthetics of the Heian court (794–1185), and thus the trajectory of Japanese art and culture.

### *Trade and Piracy*

The envoy missions ended at the turn of the tenth century, when the Tang dynasty began to decline and trade picked up pace in the East China Sea. It became a particularly active trade zone from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, with Fukue at the center of a network of sea routes connecting what are now China, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. This wealth of trade attracted pirates and led to the rise of marauders called *wako*, who raided settlements on the Korean and Chinese coasts. In the early decades of this period, these pirates were often in the pay of Japanese warlords, who sent the pirates to engage in trade if the residents were willing, and piracy if they refused. Trade treaties later curtailed some of this activity, and the rise of powerful centralized governments in Japan and China in the seventeenth century finally ended it.

During the heavy trade traffic of the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, Fukue was home to a large population of Chinese merchants and pirates, who built a Chinese district in what is now the city of Fukue. A Chinese map from 1561 depicts the island as roughly the same size as Kyushu, its significantly larger neighbor, suggesting its relative importance. Most structures from that time are no longer standing, but traces of the neighborhood can be found in place names like Tojinmachi ("town of Chinese people") and the reconstructed Minjindo Temple, built in a Chinese style.

### *Rule under the Shogunate*

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) defeated his rivals and established the Tokugawa shogunate. The shogunate oversaw a period of relative peace and stability, ruling through a system of semiautonomous domains. The period was characterized by a ruling samurai class and a wariness toward foreign influence and intervention, both of which would shape Fukue's development.

Fukue domain (sometimes also called Goto domain) was led by the Goto family, which had risen to power during the period of trade and piracy. In 1634, Goto Moritoshi required his retainers to settle near his seat of power in Fukue, turning it into a period-typical castle town, though the family's actual castle (Egawa Castle) had burned down in 1614. The neighborhood that housed these retainers is still preserved as the Street of the Samurai Quarter. After centuries of petitioning the shogunate, the family was finally given permission to build another castle in 1849. Fukue Castle (sometimes called Ishida Castle) took 14 years to construct and was surrounded by water on three sides, strategically located for maritime defense at a time when fear of foreign naval invasion was particularly high. The castle

was demolished just nine years later, however, when the shogunate fell and Japan's castles became unwelcome reminders of samurai rule. The remaining exterior walls can still be seen in central Fukue.

In 1614, the Tokugawa shogunate outlawed Christianity, brutally suppressing the faith. Although Fukue was a bustling center of trade and culture, the island's remote inlets and rugged terrain also made it an excellent place to find refuge. Christians expelled from Kyushu settled on the island during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many of these communities of so-called "hidden Christians" survived, and their churches are decorated with distinctive Buddhist-influenced Catholic iconography.