

Commodore Perry's Arrival

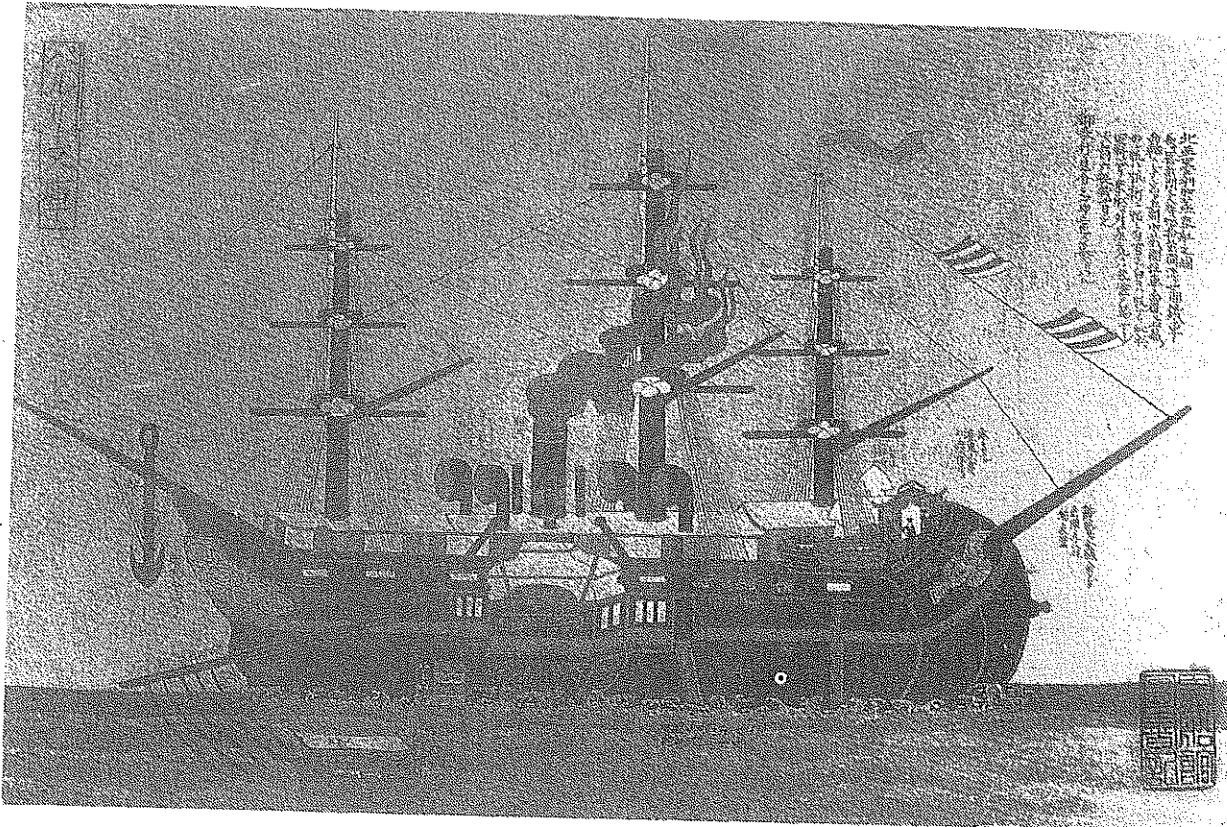
On 8 July 1853 an American squadron of four ships under the command of Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry anchored in Tokyo Bay. The shogunate, forewarned by the Dutch, knew that they were coming. But no one had told the local fisherfolk, who fled for the shore 'like wild birds at a sudden intruder'. That night a flaming comet passed through the sky. Perry righteously construed this as an omen 'that our present attempt to bring a singular and isolated people into the family of civilised nations may succeed without resort to bloodshed'. Implicit in this piety was the clear intention to shed blood if necessary; but first the commodore would try swagger. When he finally deigned to go ashore to meet the shogun's representatives Perry was escorted by two huge black sailors ('the best-looking fellows of their colour that the squadron could furnish') plus an escort of marines and a very noisy band. As the official chronicle confessed, '... all this parade was but for effect.' Having presented their demands, the Americans sailed away, pledging to return the following year for an answer.

The Americans returned, as promised, bearing gifts – and with twice as many ships. The gifts for the shogun, clearly intended to impress, included an entire miniature railway, complete with 350 feet of 18-inch track, a telegraph with three miles of wire, two boats, an iron stove, a telescope, numerous weighty tomes of history, law, Congressional debates etc., a virtual cellarful of drink and a small armoury of weapons. Every Japanese official was presented with what were evidently regarded as the most representative products of a higher civilisation: a clock, a sword, a rifle, a revolver and five gallons of whisky. The Japanese reciprocated with a selection of bronzes, lacquer, ceramics and textiles which the Americans thought 'a poor display, not worth over a thousand dollars'. To underline their superiority the Americans then put on displays of close-order drill and fire-fighting, staged a mock attack on a ship and fired off a broadside of their heaviest guns. These proceedings were followed by a lavish disbursement of naval hospitality ('... when clean work had been made of champagne, Madeira, cherry cordial, punch and whisky I resorted to ... a mixture

of catsup and vinegar which they seemed to relish with equal gusto') – and rounded off with a 'nigger-minstrel' entertainment.

What the Japanese made of this final proof of the advanced state of American culture is not recorded, but Perry got a treaty and within a few years so had the rest of the Western powers. The initial treaties of friendship, in effect promising hospitality to travellers, were soon enlarged, under Western pressure, into trade agreements granting far greater rights.

In the course of this diplomacy the shogunate revealed its fundamental feebleness, first by its unprecedented decision to consult both the *daimyo* and the emperor before acceding to the treaties, and secondly by the implicit admission that it could not hope to combat the superior military technology represented by Perry's 'Black Ships'. The basis of Tokugawa authority, the right to rule in the name of the emperor as 'great barbarian-subduing generalissimo', had been exposed as a sham.



A Japanese artist's impression of one of Perry's black ships

Documents Three and Four: Eyewitness accounts of Perry's arrival in Japan

Because the hulls of the American ships which visited Japan in 1853 were painted black, the Japanese referred to them as the 'Black Ships'.

In 1903, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the 'Black Ships', accounts of the event were collected from people who had been witness to it. Parts of two such accounts are reproduced below. Document Three is the recollection of a man who lived at the small fishing village of Shimoda, south of Yedo. The man describes the sight of Perry's ships on the horizon and the reaction of the people in the village to what they saw as the ships approached the coast. Document Four is the recollection of an historian who worked at the shogun's castle in Yedo. He describes the reactions of both the officials and the people of Yedo to the news of the intrusion by foreign warships. Both of these accounts are taken from the book *The Black Ships Scroll* which was written by Oliver Statler and published in Tokyo in 1963. You will notice that in both of these documents the capital Yedo is referred to as Edo.

Read the documents and answer the questions that follow.

Document Three

Some things I still remember. One morning there was a great hubbub. When I asked what it was all about, I was told that in the offing there were ships on fire. I ran to the top of the mountain to get a good look. There was a crowd of people there, all stirred up and

making guesses about the burning ships on the horizon. Then those ships came nearer and nearer, until the shape of them showed us they were not Japanese ships but foreign ones, and we found that what we had taken for a conflagration on the sea was really the black smoke rising out of their smoke-stacks. When we came down, there was excitement

all over town, and what with a report being dispatched to the government office at Nirayama and special messengers being sent hurriedly up to Edo, there was a great uproar. Later I learned that even the people in Edo were fussing and excited, so you couldn't laugh at the people of Shimoda for being confused . . .

Document Four

Fresh messages arrived one after the other, and the . . . Shogun on receiving them was exceedingly troubled, and summoned all the officials to a council . . . At first the affair seemed so sudden, so formidable, and so important that they were too alarmed to open their mouths, but in the end orders were issued to the great clans to keep strict watch and ward on the seashore . . . as it was possible that these barbarian vessels, who had made a sudden irruption into our inner waters, might proceed to acts of violence. The clans all declared their readiness, and proceeded at once to despatch troops to the posts assigned, to provide arms, and to hoist flags emblazoned with the crest of

each noble house. It was a beautiful sight to see this firm attitude of defense . . .

The military class had during a long peace neglected the military arts; they had given themselves up to pleasure and luxury, and there were very few who had put on armour for many years. So that they were greatly alarmed at the prospect that war might break out at a moment's notice, and began to run hither and thither in search of arms. The city of Edo and the surrounding villages were in a great tumult; in anticipation of the war which seemed imminent, the people carried their valuables and furniture in all directions to conceal them in the house of some friend living farther off . . .

Look at Document Three.

- 1 What did the people on the shore think when they saw smoke coming from Perry's ships?
- 2 To which centres of government did the villagers of Shimoda report the sighting of Perry's ships?

Look at Document Four.

- 3 What action did the shogun take when he received the reports of Perry's approach to Yedo (Edo)?
- 4 Why were the clans ordered to keep a strict watch on the seashore?
- 5 What action did the people of Yedo (Edo) and the surrounding villages take in anticipation of war?

Briefly

What was the Bakufu? How did the Bakufu rule Japan during the Tokugawa shogunate?

The Artist's View: Perry and his second-in-command, Adams

This woodcut print of Commodore Perry (left) and the painting of his second-in-command, Adams, were the work of Japanese artists. Both of these works were done in 1854 at the time of Perry's second visit to Japan and were included in a scroll which depicted the Americans who had come to Japan to force the country to open its doors. The scroll claimed to give a 'true image' of the foreigners.

Study these images and answer the questions that follow.



- 1 How accurately do you think these woodcuts depict Perry and Adams?
- 2 Why have the artists drawn these men like this?
- 3 Why would the scroll claim these to be 'true images' of the Americans? What attitude about foreigners do these images reflect?

Briefly

Explain why the Americans sought to establish relations with Japan in the 1850s?

Document Five: The unthinkable . . . eating sheep and wearing woollen clothing

Many of Japan's leaders were violently opposed to any accommodation with the

Western powers as they encroached upon Japan's isolation during the mid-19th century. One such opponent was Aizawa Seichisai, who was a disciple of the Shinto Mythology which deified the emperor and stressed the unique qualities of the Japanese people. The document below is taken from Aizawa's writings and was published in volume II of the book *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, which was edited by W.T. de Bary and published in New York in 1958.

Read the document and answer the questions that follow.

In the past those who have attracted popular attention and confused the thinking of the populace with their improper teaching have only been people of our own realm. But now we must cope with the foreigners of the West, where every country upholds the law of Jesus and attempts therewith to subdue other countries. Everywhere they go they set fire to shrines and temples, deceive and delude the people, and then invade and seize the country. Their purpose is not realized until the ruler of the land is made a subject and the people of the land subservient . . .

Recently, there has appeared what is known as Dutch Studies, which had its inception among our official interpreters (at Nagasaki). It has been concerned primarily with the reading and writing of Dutch, and there is nothing harmful about it. However, these students, who make a living by passing on whatever they hear, have been taken in by the vaunted theories of the Western foreigners. They enthusiastically extol these theories, some going so far as to publish books about them in the hope of transforming our civilized way of life into that of the barbarians. And the weakness of some for novel gadgets and rare medicines, which delight the eye and enthrall the heart, have led many to admire foreign ways. If someday the treacherous foreigner should take advantage of this situation and lure ignorant people to his ways, our people will adopt such practices as eating dogs and sheep and wearing woollen clothing. And no one will be able to stop it. We must not permit the frost to turn to hard ice. We must become fully aware of its harmful and weakening effects and make an effort to check it. Now the Western foreigners, spurred by the desire to

wreak havoc upon us, are daily prying into our territorial waters. And within our own domain evil teachings flourish in a hundred subtle ways. It is like nurturing barbarians within our own country. If confusion reigns in the country, and depravity and obsequiousness among the people, could this land of ours still be called the Central Kingdom? Would it not be more like China, India, or the Occident? After all, what is the "basis" of our nation?

The Western barbarians have independent and mutually contending states, but they all follow the same God. When there is something to be gained by it, they get together in order to achieve their aims and share the benefits. But when trouble is brewing, each stays within his own boundaries for self-protection. So when there is trouble in the West, the East generally enjoys peace. But when the trouble has quieted down, they go out to ravage other lands in all directions and then the East becomes a sufferer.

As to the Western barbarians who have dominated the seas for nearly three centuries — do they surpass others in intelligence and bravery? Does their benevolence and mercy overflow their own borders? Or do they have supernatural powers enabling them to accomplish what other men cannot? Not so at all. All they have is Christianity to fall back upon in the prosecution of their schemes . . . When those barbarians plan to subdue a country not their own, they start by opening commerce and watch for a sign of weakness. If an opportunity is presented, they will preach their alien religion to captivate the people's hearts. Once the people's allegiance has been shifted, they can be manipulated and nothing can be done to stop it.

- 1 What did Aizawa claim 'the foreigners of the West' did 'everywhere they go'?
- 2 Which group of Japanese did Aizawa claim hoped to transform 'our civilised way of life into that of the barbarians'?
- 3 What practices did Aizawa fear the people would adopt if the foreigners increased their influence in Japan?
- 4 In Aizawa's opinion when did the East generally enjoy peace?
- 5 What belief did Aizawa claim the Western barbarians had 'to fall back upon in the prosecution of their schemes'?

Briefly

Why did the Tokugawa shogun give in to the demands of Commodore Perry? What concessions did Perry win from the shogun under the terms of the Treaty of Kanagawa in 1854?

Document Six: 'All Japan was . . . swept by the anti-Western feeling'

In contrast to Aizawa Seichisai who strongly opposed foreigners and whose opinions were laid out in the preceding document, Fukuzawa Yukichi was a man whose mind was open to the West. Fukuzawa was a scholar who embraced the liberal values of the West. In 1860 and again in 1867 he visited America and Europe on missions for the shogun. On his return home Fukuzawa founded a chain of newspapers and wrote many popular books promoting modernism.

What follows is an extract from *The Autobiography of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Tokyo, 1947). In this extract Fukuzawa describes the anti-foreign feelings which swept Japan during the early 1860s. The ronin to whom Fukuzawa refers were ex-samurai bandits.

Read the document and answer the questions that follow.

All Japan was now hopelessly swept by the anti-Western feeling, and nothing could stop its force from rushing to the ultimate consequence.

Until now this anti-foreign movement had only been an existence in society, separate from my personal life . . . But now since our return from Europe, the situation had changed. The *ronin* were appearing in the most unexpected places; even some of the merchants engaged in foreign trade sud-

denly closed up their shops for fear of these lawless warriors . . .

The reason the *ronin* included us in their attack was that they thought we scholars who read foreign books and taught foreign culture were liars trying to mislead the people and make way for the Westerners to exploit Japan. So we also became their prey.

If I had given up all study of foreign books and come out advocating an anti-foreign movement, I would surely have

earned their praise as a patriot. But I did not want to be a patriot in their sense . . .

Still the anti-foreign wave did not subside. The shogunate was now harassed on both sides: — there was, on one side, the agitating clans which clamored at the point of arms for the closing of the country, and on the other side was the united power of Western nations demanding the “open door” . . .

The shogunate, as the governing force, had lost all its prestige. There were almost daily assassinations. The country had become a fearful place to live in . . .

Militarism ran wild in this period before and after 1863. People in general were concerned with nothing so much as showing off the old warrior spirit. That, however, was not to be wondered at, for the shogunate itself was encouraging it. Although, for its outward policy, the government of the Shogun had professed the policy of peaceful relations with the West, that was simply because it was in the responsible position of government and diplomacy. If one were to

examine the individual official, one would have found each one an ardent hater of anything new and Western. All those who had any influence or commanded respect were wearing long swords. Many of the fencing masters of the city had been honored with commissions by the government, and they suddenly became the idols of the people. It was no time for the students of foreign culture to hold up their heads above others.

This vogue of militarism spread everywhere. It infested even the priests of the Shogun's court who were known generally as *Chado-bozu*, the “tea-ceremony priests,” since they were usually employed in serving tea and performing social offices to the *daimyo* and higher feudal nobles around the Shogun. These priests usually wore short swords and crepe overgarments, gifts from the lords, and they would walk along with a mincing gait. Their effeminate manners were taken for granted. But now, with the new militaristic trend, some among them actually adopted long swords and were seen tossing their tonsured heads like fierce warriors.

- 1 According to Fukuzawa what was all Japan swept by during this period?
- 2 Why did the *ronin* attack scholars like Fukuzawa?
- 3 In Fukuzawa's opinion how was the shogunate harassed on both sides?
- 4 What did Fukuzawa claim had happened to the shogunate as a governing force during this period?
- 5 What attitude to the West did Fukuzawa claim the individual officials of the shogunate possessed?

Briefly

Who opposed the shogun's decision to open Japan to the West? What attempts did these groups make to expel the foreigners?