

# JAPAN

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## FROM SHOGUN TO SUPERSTATE

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STUART FEWSTER  
TONY GORTON

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WITH A FOREWORD BY GORDON DANIELS  
General Editor & Academic Adviser

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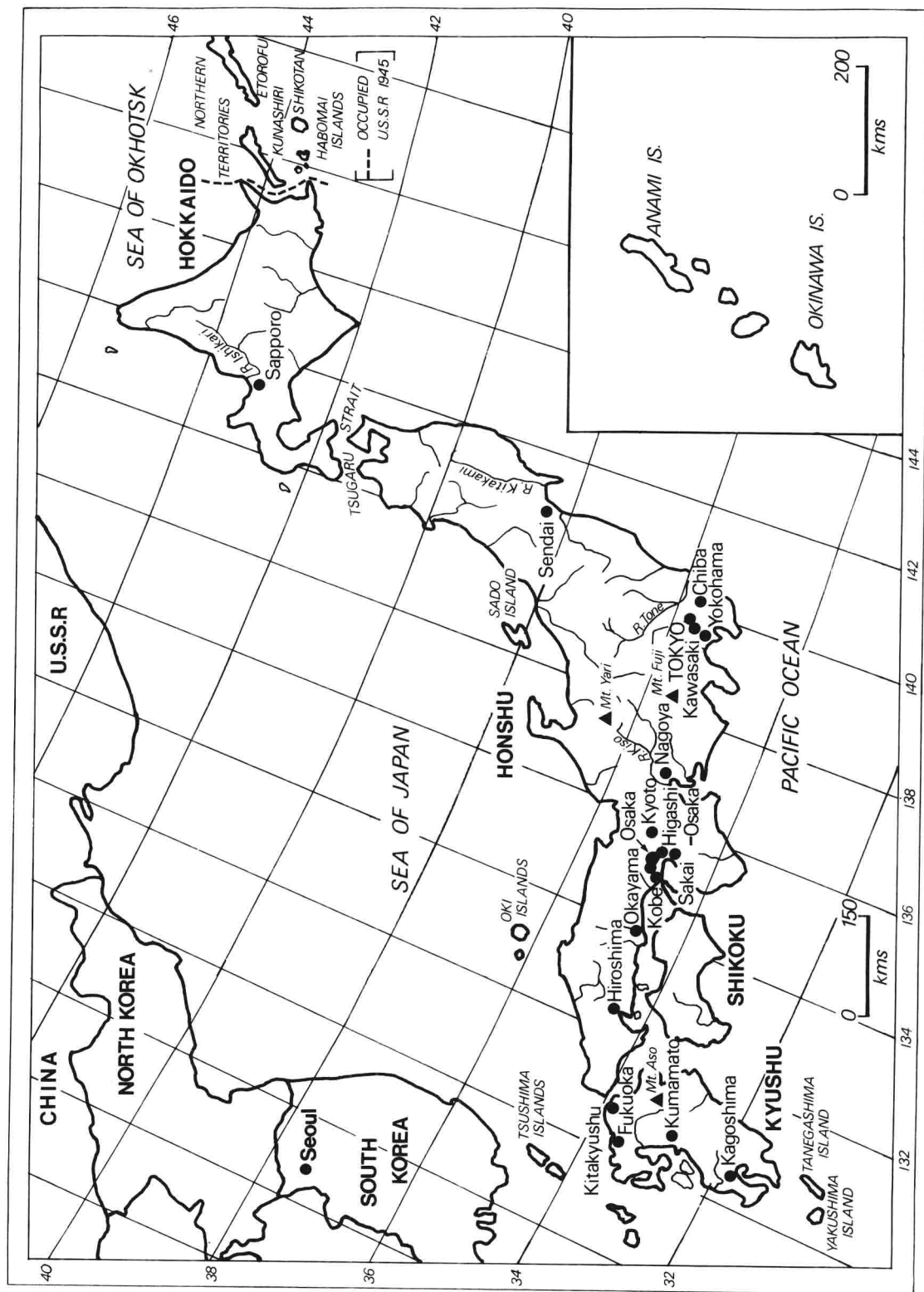
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# JAPAN TODAY





# Foreword

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A hundred years ago Japanese fans and ornaments were fashionable decorations in western houses. Today, Japanese cars, cameras and video-recorders are even more common features of European and American life. Both traditional and modern products show the skill of Japanese designers, but they also reflect the changes which have transformed Japan.

In the nineteenth century, Japan, like other Asian countries, was weaker and poorer than the empires of Europe. In fact, many Japanese feared that their country might fall under foreign control. However, Japan did far more than preserve her independence. She modernised so successfully that her economy is now the second largest in the free world. In many fields, Japanese products dominate international markets, while Japanese banks, shipping companies, and airlines are major influences in world trade and communication. As a result, Japan is the only Asian country to have a permanent seat at the Summits of the advanced industrial nations, and the only Asian state to give large amounts of aid to the developing world. In recent years, Japan's standard of living has surpassed that of many European countries, and today Tokyo can negotiate on equal terms with the European Community.

As rapid as Japan's industrial development, have been the social changes which have transformed Japanese life. In the 1870s and 1880s, Japan looked to Europe and the United States for teachers and advisers; and schools and colleges were built on European lines. Today, Japan herself sends advisers to many overseas countries and her educational standards are higher than those of Western Europe. In medicine, too, Japanese research and treatment have reached the highest standards, and the life of the average Japanese is longer than that of the average American or European. The Japanese may still be renowned for hard work and discipline, but many now have sufficient money to enjoy foreign travel. Until 1854, all Japanese were forbidden to go abroad, but today millions travel to America, Europe and Australasia, as well as to nearby Asian countries. In wealth, health, education and leisure, Japanese standards are often superior to those in much of the industrialised 'Western World.'

In the field of art and entertainment, Japan has experienced yet another peaceful revolution. Traditional arts, such as *kabuki* plays and the *bunraku* puppet theatre continue, but Japanese have also explored almost every art known in Europe, America and the Asian continent. Shakespeare and modern drama, rock music and the classics, experimental architecture and fashion — all are practised and admired somewhere in Japan.

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The impact of these dramatic changes has not been confined to Japan and the Japanese. Many of the finest Japanese musicians are as well-known in New York as in Tokyo; and the 'Suzuki method' of teaching the violin has spread to Europe and the United States. The best Japanese films and directors have won the highest awards at European and American festivals and some American 'Westerns' have been based on stories taken from Japanese films. Japanese television programmes and cartoon films are also widely shown and admired in China, America and European countries. Japanese designers, such as Kenzo, are important in the world of Paris fashion and their products are sold in many American cities. No other non-western country has such an important impact on the world of international art, style and entertainment.

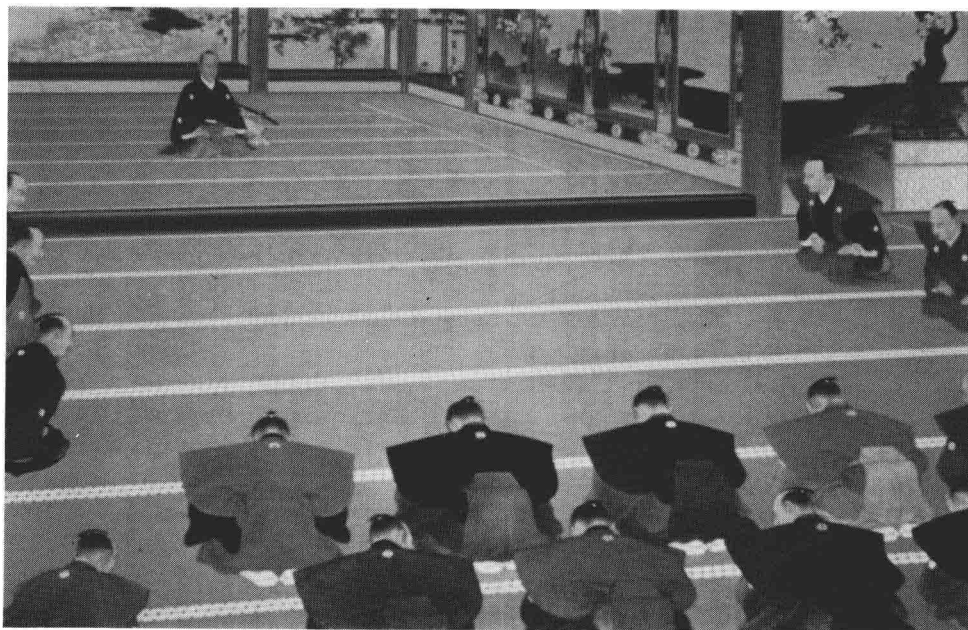
But perhaps the most impressive changes in modern Japan have been in her political system. Japan's first general election was held as early as 1890 and political parties have influenced her government throughout much of the twentieth century. Since 1945, political change has been even more remarkable and today Japan is freer than any other country in East Asia. Now Japanese can write, speak and think as freely as Americans or West Germans, and Japanese people can protest as openly as people in European countries. Most important of all, local and central governments are freely elected by all adult men and women. The creation of a free and democratic political system has been Japan's most remarkable twentieth century achievement.

Despite Japan's world-wide importance, she remains largely unknown. Few owners of Japanese cars or photocopiers know much of the people that made them. Even fewer are aware of the important influence which Japan has on the politics and trade of the entire world. This ignorance is partly due to Japan's distance from Europe and America, and the difficulties of the Japanese language. More important, it is the result of several features of today's Japan. In spite of her political and economic power, Japan lacks the strong armed forces or dramatic leaders which major states usually possess. Her self-defence forces remain relatively small and her leaders are usually members of a political team rather than powerful individuals. Furthermore, Japanese policies often reflect compromise rather than strong opinions. All these factors make Japan a difficult but not impossible country to understand. This book explores the background and historical development of this dynamic but still largely neglected country.

# Introduction

## Japan Under the Shogun

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*The Shogun with officials and advisers*

Japan consists of four main islands and hundreds of smaller ones. Its area is about one-and-a-half times that of Britain, but with less useable land. Much of the country is covered by mountains and most of the population has always been crowded onto the coastal plains where the main crop, rice, is cultivated.

The exact origins of the Japanese people are unclear. They probably originated from somewhere on the mainland of Asia, which is just over a hundred miles away across the sea. Later immigrants and invaders from the mainland mixed with these earlier settlers to produce the Japanese race that we know today.

By 400 AD most of Japan was ruled by a single imperial family which, during the sixth century, became interested in copying aspects of the Chinese civilisation. From China the Japanese imported a style of government and a system of writing. At about the same time Buddhism was introduced from the mainland, and it has run alongside the native Shinto religion ever since. Art, music and literature flourished in permanent capitals, first at Nara, and then in what is now the city of Kyoto.

After several centuries that were generally peaceful the country fell slowly into disorder as private armies fought each other and defied the orders of the imperial court. War-like provincial families were employed to put down revolts, but by the end of the twelfth century they had taken over direct control of the government. From these warrior clans the *samurai* class began to develop and the position of Shogun, or military ruler, was established. The power of the Shogun, like that of the Emperor, slowly declined, and from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century Japan went through a series of civil wars as individual leaders attempted to take control of the country.

During the 1540s the first Europeans arrived in Japan. They were Portuguese, and brought guns that were quickly copied by the Japanese for use in their own wars. The Portuguese, and Spanish missionaries who arrived afterwards, also introduced the Christian religion. At first, they were successful in gaining converts but later there was open hostility towards the missionaries as fears of possible revolt, backed by Spanish troops, began to alarm the government. This led to the outlawing of Christianity and the expulsion of almost all foreigners by 1640. From then on only the Dutch and Chinese were allowed any contact with Japan, and this was strictly limited to the port of Nagasaki.

In 1600 a battle was fought at Sekigahara which decided the future of Japan. The victor was a leader named Tokugawa Ieyasu and it was his family (the Tokugawa) that controlled the country for the next 250 years. Three years after the battle of Sekigahara, Ieyasu was in a strong enough position to become Shogun. Fourteen of his descendants followed him in this post and under their rule Japan became a relatively advanced country.

In comparison with its neighbours in Asia, Japan's population had a higher level of literacy, and agricultural productivity was greater. The development of industry was quite limited but in terms of education, arts, literature and the other ideas by which the level of civilisation of a country is measured, Japan compared well with many western nations.

The Shogun's residence was his castle in Edo, the city now called Tokyo. At the same time the Emperor lived in Kyoto. He may have been treated with respect but was carefully watched by the Shogun's officials, almost totally confined to the Imperial Palace and restricted to ceremonial duties.

The Shogun directly owned about a quarter of all the land in Japan and the rest was divided into feudal domains each with its own ruler, called a *daimyo*. The *daimyo* included one group who had been vassals (*fudai*) of Ieyasu before his victory at the battle of Sekigahara in 1600, and another group who, at the time of the battle, were generally either allies or enemies (*tozama*). The country was carefully controlled and a network of officials watched constantly for any signs of rebellion against Tokugawa rule. In order to occupy their time and money the *daimyo* were compelled to spend every other year in Edo. The journey to and from their province, together with the upkeep of a residence in the Shogun's capital, and that of their own castle, was expensive and might take up half their income. There were guard posts at intervals along the main routes that checked travellers to stop arms being smuggled into the capital. They also searched for any women attempting to leave Edo, as the families of the *daimyo* were kept



hostage there, though they lived in the relative luxury of their private homes.

During the civil wars there was movement between the different groups in society but after the Tokugawa took control of Japan people became strictly divided into four main classes. These were the *samurai* class, which included those from the *daimyo* down to the poorest foot soldier, the peasants, artisans and the merchants. In theory, at least, the peasants were superior to the merchants. The peasants produced rice which was the basis of the economy, while the merchants produced nothing and so were generally looked on with contempt. In practice, the merchants might well be rich, often lending money to the *daimyo*. The Shogun's government, called the *bakufu*, tried hard to keep people in their place. Lists of rules about what each class should eat, how they should dress and behave were published at intervals.

Though the system of government altered little under the Tokugawa, it was still a period of marked change. Small-scale manufacturing industries began to develop and the rigid class system was upset when some peasants managed to become comparatively rich and influential. The *bakufu* itself was forced to introduce some reforms as a result of its own economic problems and the sporadic revolts of peasants and townspeople.

Despite all attempts by the Tokugawa to control society there were those who wanted to overthrow them. By the middle of the nineteenth century the *bakufu*'s hold on the country was weakened by a series of economic problems, and also because of alarm about dealing with western countries which had already humbled China. One great crisis would test the power of the Tokugawa and finally bring an end to their rule.



The village of Hakone in central Japan at the time of the Meiji Restoration

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*Japanese names:* According to Japanese custom all Japanese names in this book appear with the family name printed first.

*Chinese names:* Pin-yin spelling of Chinese names has been used throughout with the traditional Wade-Giles system in brackets.

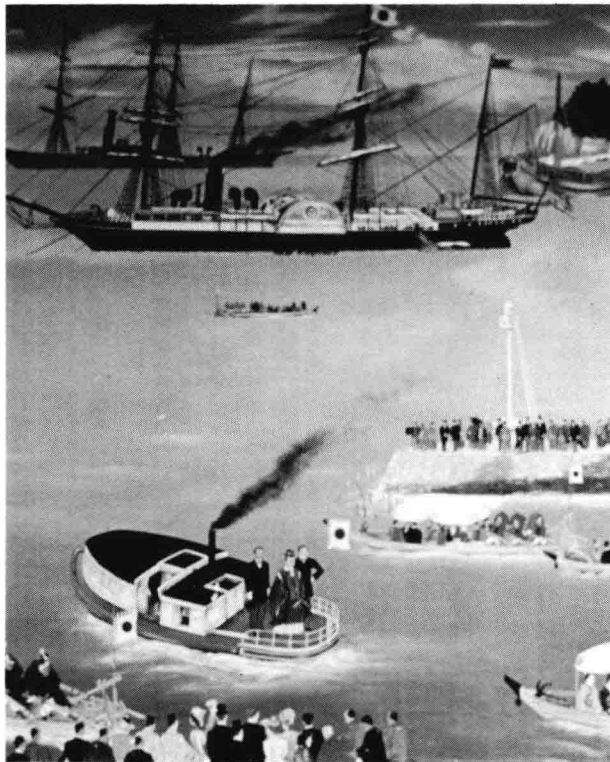
# 1 Shogun and Meiji (1850-1912)



## Western Warships

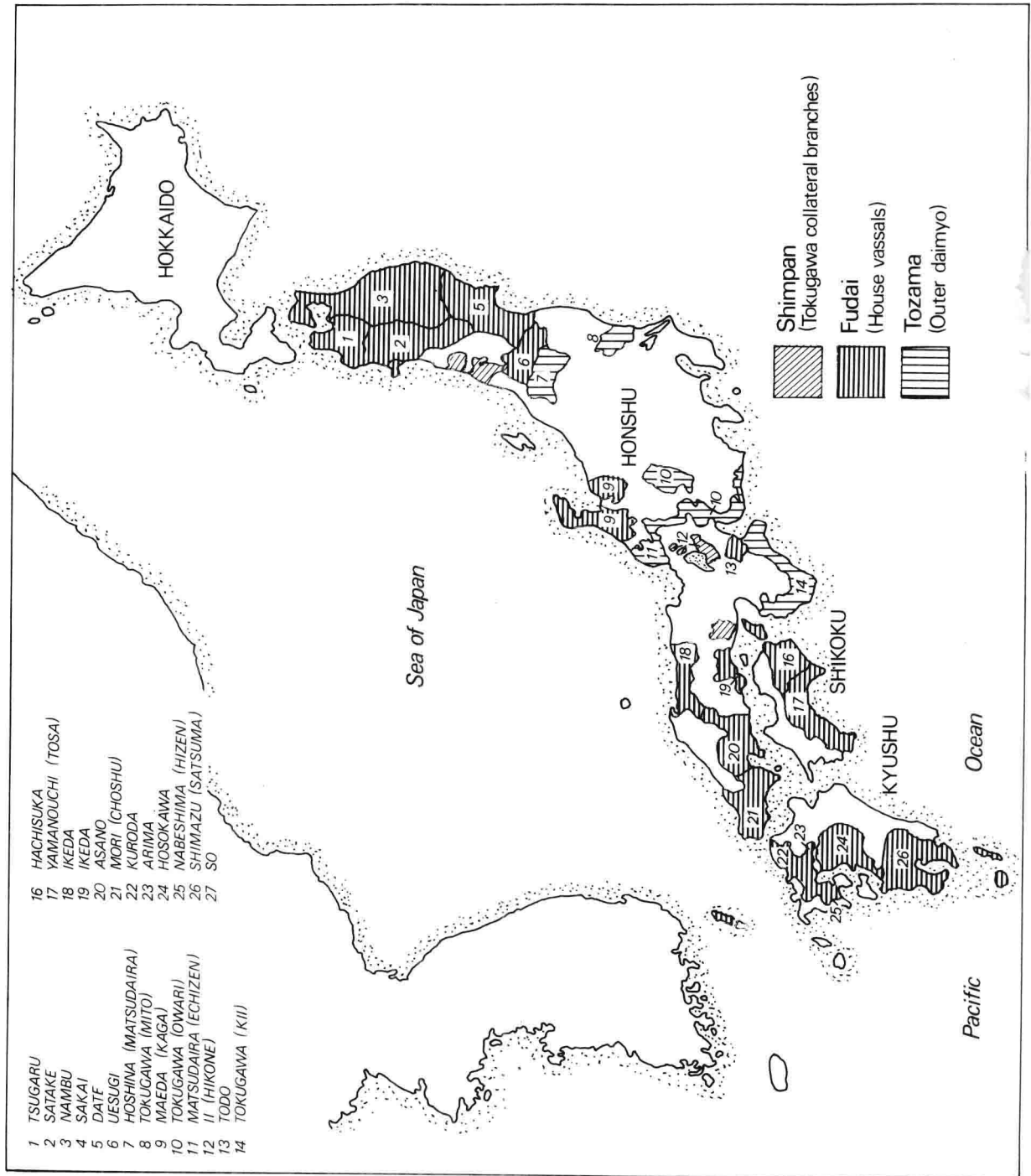
The crisis that eventually led to the fall of the Shogun was caused by foreign pressure on Japan. In the 1850s the Tokugawa government was weaker than in earlier times, but the arrival of western ships demanding fuel, supplies and other concessions led directly to its collapse.

Foreign interest in Japan grew steadily. Russian ships began calling at Japanese fishing villages in the early eighteenth century and by 1842 the *bakufu* had withdrawn its order to kill foreign sailors who came ashore. This Law of Punishment and Warning was replaced by a policy of persuading foreigners to leave. Sometimes they were even given supplies to encourage them to go. A



Ambassador plenipotentiary, Iwakura Tomomi, with other government leaders depart for America and Europe in 1871 to study conditions and discuss the 'unequal treaties'

## PRINCIPAL DAIMYO DOMAINS OF TOKUGAWA JAPAN







Japanese woodblock print showing an English couple. The Japanese artists at the time who painted European merchants in Yokohama showed little interest in distinguishing the facial characteristics of the different nationalities — hence the grotesque features

British warship visiting in 1845 was treated with great respect as it was known that Britain had recently defeated China in the Opium War.

The *bakufu* understood its weakness in the face of foreign warships. Most of Japan's cities were ports and Edo itself received a great many of its supplies by sea. Japan was very vulnerable to blockade as it had no navy and few effective coastal defences. Within Japan there were those who wanted to acquire western knowledge, and the government had some Dutch books translated to gather information. Medicine and warfare were the most important topics for study. The Dutch themselves advised the Japanese to open up the country to foreign trade. They also gave warning of British and American moves to force Japan to allow foreign trade.

American interest in Japan increased during the nineteenth century and it was the forceful approach of the American Commodore Matthew Perry, and his steam warships in 1853 that greatly alarmed the *bakufu*. Perry refused to negotiate with minor officials and insisted that the Japanese accept the letter that he had brought from the American president. This was done. Perry warned that he would return the following year for an answer, and that next time he would bring a larger fleet.

The *bakufu* asked scholars and *daimyo* for advice on how best to deal with the foreigners. This was the first time the Shogun had asked for advice on foreign policy and this showed the weakness of his position. In 1854 Perry returned and after six weeks of negotiations, the *bakufu* gave in and two ports were opened up for very limited trade with the Americans. More treaties quickly followed with Britain and Russia. Each western nation now had access to two Japanese ports. In 1856 the Dutch also signed a treaty. Nagasaki, Shimoda and Hakodate were opened to some foreign trade.

Townsend Harris, an American with the title of Diplomatic Agent and Consul-General, helped to establish further opportunities for trade. With new



treaties came foreign residents, limits on import and export duties and worst of all, from the Japanese point of view, 'extra-territorial rights' for foreigners. This meant that foreigners in Japan were tried by their own officials and Japanese courts could not try foreigners for any crime. In effect, this was saying that the Japanese were not civilised enough to be trusted with judging foreigners. It was this treaty clause that the Japanese were most concerned to change as soon as possible.

## Imperial Restoration

In all the early negotiations westerners had assumed that they were dealing with the ruler of Japan. They were unaware that, in theory at least, the Shogun received his power from the Emperor. In fact, Commodore Perry believed that he was negotiating with the Emperor. As foreign interest in Japan became more persistent, pressure on the *bakufu* from inside Japan became more intense. By the 1860s opposition was centred on western Japan, and particularly in the proud provinces of Satsuma and Choshu. Many young *samurai* in these two provinces agreed with the two slogans that were heard increasingly across the country, 'revere the Emperor' and 'expel the foreigners.' At this time a spirit of nationalism developed in Japan that began to replace loyalties to individual lords and provinces.

Satsuma and Choshu both tried to dominate the Emperor's court at Kyoto. In fact, Kyoto became the focus of all anti-foreign feeling. The Emperor set 25 June 1863 as the day for expelling foreigners from Japan. But the *bakufu* did nothing to enforce this and so Choshu, which had persuaded the Emperor to issue the instruction, fired on foreign ships. In another incident, in September 1862, a British citizen named Richardson was killed by *samurai* from Satsuma. In retaliation western warships attacked Choshu and Satsuma and warriors in both provinces quickly realised the importance of modern armaments and training.

*The Americans arrive to sign the treaty of Kanagawa in 1854*

