

**Overview**

Japan in the year 1900 would have been unrecognizable to someone living in the year 1800. The extent of the change in the country over a one hundred year period was unprecedented and profound. The 19<sup>th</sup> century started with Japan enjoying a mature, high-functioning and well-ordered government that was inward looking, semi-feudal in its structure and anachronistic in its rule. The economy remained largely agrarian but was nonetheless well situated to rapidly industrialize. There had been occasional crises in Japan's economic fortunes, for example the Tempō famine, and reform was sorely needed, but life progressed much as it had for the previous two centuries. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century was also distinguished by samurai rule, a time when the warrior ethos (*bushido*) was still highly valued, but when there were few enemies to fight. But that changed in the 1850s when the Tokugawa shōgunate found itself outgunned by several very aggressive, Western imperial powers seeking the normalization of diplomatic and commercial relations. Soon the Japanese government was forced to sign humiliating, unequal treaties, and the foreigners could not be kept at bay. In 1868, the Tokugawa collapsed and the Meiji Restoration was proclaimed. Within a few years, an ambitious plan for national development had been articulated, and the transformation of Japan into a modern, industrialized nation had begun. Within two generations, Japan had largely succeeded and had become the most powerful nation in East Asia. Indeed, it had become an imperial power in its own right.

**Events**

**Seclusion:** During the wars of unification that ended in 1600, Japanese commanders had been more than happy to welcome Europeans bearing technology that could be applied to the battlefield. Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), in particular, was well known for his willingness to embrace new weapons, new tactics and new ideas. As long as the Europeans were useful and didn't cause too much trouble, they were welcome. However, Europeans also brought with them old grudges that reflected national and religious differences, a situation which was intolerable to the new Tokugawa leaders. In 1635, the Japanese moved to completely secure their borders and instituted the policy known as *sakoku*—seclusion. Only Koreans, Chinese and a few Dutchmen per year would be allowed to enter Japan. Though not totally isolated, Japan turned inward for more than two centuries. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *sakoku* became increasingly difficult to enforce as the Europeans (and Americans) began to industrialize. When *sakoku* was instituted, Japanese technology was roughly on par with the rest of the world. And though Japan developed internally under the Tokugawa and the early stages of industrialization were evident, it became clear by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Japan was behind.

**Foreign Threats.** Tokugawa institutions (and leaders) were increasingly unable to cope with the rapidly changing world of the 1840s and 1850s. Both in the domestic and international realm, there were few good options. There seemed to be no end to the number of uprisings, riots and economic crises faced by the government. The treasury seemed always to be empty. Even small, but needed changes had met with resistance from the ruling elites or the peasantry—or both. The Tokugawa were aware that China had recently lost the Opium War to the British and became alarmed because an increasing number of foreign ships had appeared off the coast of Japan. Unlike in centuries past, this time it was clear that new, industrial weapons the foreigners were using might overwhelm coastal defenses. When an American naval squadron of four ships commanded by Commodore Matthew Perry appeared off the coast of Isu Peninsula in 1853 and demanded that the Japanese open their country, they had little choice but to comply. Over the next fifteen years, the Tokugawa were forced to sign multiple, humiliating treaties, and foreigners started living in the country who were not bound by Japanese law and were ignorant of Japanese culture and society. During this time, the government demonstrated that it was unable to defend its borders and to keep the country safe from a potential (or real) barbarian invasion.

**The Boshin War.** The combined domestic and international problems eventually overwhelmed the Tokugawa. Conflict arose between the Tokugawa and some of the old *daimyō* (feudal lords) in southwestern Hōnshū (Chōshū domain) and Kyūshū (Satsuma domain). The leaders of these rebellious domains came to consider themselves the right, true patriotic Japanese, the inheritors of the samurai traditions. They depicted the Tokugawa as having lost their way, of having abandoned all that right and true in Japanese heritage. In a series of relatively small battles

known as the Boshin War, the forces of Chōshū, Satsuma and Tosa defeated the Tokugawa. The new leaders proclaimed a new era—one which would be distinguished by the coronation of a new monarch—the Emperor Meiji.

**Meiji Reforms.** As the new leaders surveyed Japan beginning in 1869, the enormity of the task became evident. In order to secure the nation from foreign and domestic threats, they would have to transform Japan economically, politically, militarily, socially and even culturally. This was an ambitious goal, one which would take two generations to complete. Some reforms were easy. A new government based on Japanese-style democracy was to be implemented (but which would not look much like democracy for two decades) and a new conscript army was created. But most of the decisions on how to build a new country would take several years to determine.

**Iwakura Mission.** Many of the goals set for the Meiji Reforms were informed by the Iwakura Mission, which began in 1871. This was a diplomatic (and fact-finding) mission in which most of the leaders of the new Meiji government traveled to the United States and Europe over a period of two years to study what made these nations strong. They investigated religious, educational, economic, military and government institutions; visited factories and machine shops; looked at penal and legal systems and the like; and considered how they wanted Japan to progress. They also went to try to renegotiate a series of unequal treaties, something they were unsuccessful in doing. Upon their return, they published a 2000 page report, called the Iwakura Report, which outlined their findings. Perhaps the most important discovery was that they believed Japan was only 40 years behind the industrialized countries, a gap which through hard work and sacrifice could eventually be bridged. The Meiji elite then created a blueprint for the development of Japan—in virtually every facet of life. They were largely successful in this endeavor.

**Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895).** The Meiji Reforms had created a nation capable of defending itself by the middle of the 1890s. Still, the ruling oligarchs had grown increasingly concerned about the European powers (Russia in particular) seizing land in Manchuria and threatening to block Japan's own imperial ambitions in Korea. In a peculiar proxy war, the Japanese fomented rebellion in Korea, a nation then allied with China. When the Korean leadership asked the Chinese for assistance putting down a Japanese-backed uprising, the Japanese went to war with China. The outcome was a quick and successful victory by the Japanese. In the negotiations at the Japanese city of Shimonoseki, Japan was given selected Chinese territories and became an imperial power in its own right. It should be noted, however, that in 1895, Russia, France and Germany blocked the transfer of Port Arthur (now known as the Port of Lushun) at the southern tip of the Liaodong Peninsula in what has become known as the Triple Intervention. This enraged the Japanese and set the Japanese on a collision course with Russia a decade later.

## Government

**Structure.** The Meiji elites were in no hurry to transfer power to a legislature or any other democratically elected body. Indeed, the Meiji Constitution finally took effect 22 years after the Restoration! This document, which was authored by Itō Hirobumi (1841-1909) and Inoue Kowashi (1844-1895) was handed down by the Emperor Meiji in 1889. A key (and conscious) omission was the concept of God-given rights. Since the Emperor had given these rights, they were not inalienable and could be rescinded by the same method. In addition, though in theory, the people would have a voice based on their elected representatives in the Diet, real power resided with the oligarchs. For about two decades they decided who among them would form a cabinet and become Prime Minister. This was a position that changed hands quite frequently. It should be noted, however, that though these men didn't always agree with the specific policy decisions of their predecessors or successors, there was a great deal of continuity of vision.

**The Legislature and the Bureaucracy.** The system was designed to be parliamentary in nature (a Diet), with an upper and lower house. The upper house was composed of peers (a designation created during this period). The lower house was to be the people's house. Over the course of time, the lower house discovered that the only real power it possessed was the power of the purse. It got to decide on tax policy and, in this way only, was able to exert influence on the decision making process. It didn't much matter for most of the Meiji period which party had a majority in the Diet because the initiatives of the late Meiji period were decided upon, by and large, by the ruling oligarchs. A national bureaucracy was also created to accompany the new system. It became the highest form of accomplishment to be able to serve the state in this way. Graduates of the new universities competed to enter one of the Ministries. The best and brightest all wanted to help in the creation of the new Japan. Those who could not compete went into the private sector.

**The Feudal System Abolished.** In the early years of the Restoration, the old domains of the Tokugawa period were abolished and in their place governors loyal to the ruling oligarchs were named. A few of the old *daimyō* (feudal lords) remained in place during the transition. But they no longer owned or exercised control over the land in the way they had before. In a very short period of time, the old feudal system was dismantled and a modern system of local, regional and national authorities was created. Tax rates were determined by the oligarchs and revenue collected by representatives of the central government. A new police force was also required in the years immediately following the Restoration. When the samurai lost their jobs, many traded their swords for police clubs and began to enforce the new laws. Given that the samurai as a class had enjoyed great prestige in society, the police in Meiji era Japan came to be highly respected as well.

**The Military.** In the years immediately following the Restoration, the oligarchs disbanded the old samurai system where warriors answered to their lords and not the central government. In this way, the samurai very quickly lost their status in society and their jobs as well. Field Marshall Yamagata Aritomo (1838-1922) then was tapped to create a conscript army, one which was drawn from all across Japan and which used modern training and modern weapons. It was believed that some of the samurai would join the ranks. However, they were largely found to be unsuited and the ranks were filled mostly by young men from the rural areas of Japan. Nonetheless, many of the martial ideals embodied in the samurai were transferred to the new army. This army came to be led by an excellent officer corps and a series of outstanding generals and admirals. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, it proved to be very capable and dealt first with the remnant of the samurai during the Seinan War/Rebellion (1877) and then the Chinese in several small skirmishes and finally the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).

**The Independence of Command.** The Meiji Constitution placed the military outside of civilian control. It is not clear that the authors of the Constitution intended to give it this much autonomy, but by making it accountable to the emperor only, only the Emperor could reign it in. Neither the Diet nor the Prime Minister could get the military to do what the civilian leadership wanted, unless the military wanted to do it. The Constitution also required the military to name a general officer (Admiral or General) to become Minister of War. The general staff soon discovered that if they didn't name a man to the position, it was extremely difficult for a cabinet to be formed. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the military discovered that it had a great deal more power than was intended by the framers. It effectively had the power to veto the formation of a cabinet. It should be noted that they didn't exercise this prerogative for many years until party politicians began to try to form cabinets. In spite of its many weaknesses, the system worked fairly well until the Meiji oligarchs began to retire from public life.

## Culture

**The Literary Arts.** At the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there were four official forms of the written language. They were *kanbun*, *sorobun*, *wabun* and *wakankonkobun*. *Kanbun* was Chinese style writing. *Sorobun* was the form used in everyday correspondence. *Wabun* was one which most closely reflected the spoken Japanese language several centuries before and *wakankonkobun* was a variant Chinese style with markers to indicate how they should be read in Japanese. None was the form of Japanese actually spoken by average Japanese in the Meiji period. In this environment, authors and language specialists took the lead writing Japan's first modern novels and transforming the expression of long form prose. Indeed, many scholars argue that this form of written Japanese acted as a template for the creation of the modern Japanese language.

**Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909)** was a student in the 1880s and had been working on translations of several works from Russian into Japanese, including those written by Ivan Turgenev and Nikolai Gogol. However, he was unable to convey effectively their essence using one of the four classical forms of Japanese. Accordingly, he decided to render them into the colloquial but he could not even decide on basic sentence structure because no grammars existed. After the appearance of *The Essence of the Novel (Shōsetsu shinzui)* by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935), Futabatei initiated a friendship with the literary critic and author that lasted for many decades. Tsubouchi suggested that Futabatei construct a new style based on the performances of San'yūtei Enchō (1839-1900), a famous *yose* performer, (*yose* is best described as the Japanese version of vaudeville) who allowed his stories to be transcribed. Futabatei then wrote *The Floating Cloud (Ukigumo)* in this form. While the mystery of the *genbun'itchi* style (unity of the written and spoken style) was not yet fully solved, Futabatei had made an important first step and had produced what many scholars refer to as Japan's first modern novel.

**Yamada Bimyo (1868-1910).** Around the same time, another author working independently from Tsubouchi and Futabatei began to experiment with the colloquial style, Yamada Bimyo. Bimyo also had been influenced by the introduction of Western novels into Japan and was especially fond of reading the English language works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400). He admired Chaucer for producing quality works of fiction in the vernacular during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Latin was the written language of the educated class. Bimyo never finished school, which perhaps contributed to his willingness to experiment to such an extent with the colloquial form. Nonetheless, Bimyo was a prolific author and vocal advocate of language reform.

**Colloquial Style.** Bimyo published several novels, but was never to attain the literary status of Futabatei. In most of his efforts, he was a shameless promoter of the colloquial style and perhaps had gone too far in the eyes of many of his colleagues. He was even one of the first to use Western-style punctuation such as the comma, period, question mark and exclamation point. While Bimyo seemed to have had a command of the mechanics of the colloquial style, he was not as polished as Futabatei when it came to character development and plot sophistication. Bimyo also wrote in a number of different styles, including *gabuntai*, which has led many scholars to question his loyalty to the *genbun'itchi* style.

**Genbun 'itchi Style ( Modern Style)** Among scholars of the Japanese language, there is still much discussion about who created the *genbun'itchi* form—or even if there was an identifiable form called *genbun'itchi* in the middle Meiji years. Both Futabatei and Bimyo wrote later in their lives that the style of *Ukigumo* and the style of language used after the publication of Bimyo's *A Song from an Organ Melody (Fūkin shirabe no hitofushi, 1887)* was *genbun'itchi*. Bimyo himself credited Futabatei with the creation of the *genbun'itchi* style. Nonetheless, after the publication of Futabatei's and Bimyo's works, over thirty authors were known to be using the *genbun'itchi* style, including, for a time, such literary luminaries as Mori Ōgai (1862-1922).

**The Kokugaku.** In the decade or so after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, intellectuals, government officials, philosophers, journalists and the like began a period of great experimentation. They looked around the world for a philosophical and ideological framework to replace the Chinese Confucian system they believed had been superseded. Men such as Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), Mori Arinori (1847-1889) and Nishi Amane (1829-1897) and many, many others were active in various learned societies, published numerous articles, made speeches and debated before many different groups as public intellectuals. This was known as the "Civilization and Enlightenment" movement and though relatively short lived, was very influential but precipitated a cultural backlash. By the 1880s, many Japanese had had enough of the endless embrace of foreign ideas and believed that the period of experimentation had stripped Japanese culture of its essential nature. During this same period, a group of philosophers and intellectuals began to look backward to Japan's ancient past and to the writings of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801). Motoori studied works such as the *Kojiki* (8<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Man'yōshū* (759CE). Put succinctly, adherents of Motoori and the *kokugaku* came to believe that Japan and Japanese culture was the purest expression of East Asian culture. This is often described as a nativist ideology. For them, China had gotten it wrong and had strayed from the right and true path.

Many of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration had been heavily influenced by *kokugaku* ideology during the 1840s and 1850s and had temporarily strayed from its central tenants in the first decade or so of the Meiji period. However, as Japan moved into the 1880s, this ideology became ascendant. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the ideology which defined virtually all of the second series of reforms. The cult of the emperor, the state support of Shintō, the Imperial Rescript of Education, the development of *kokugo* (national language) and many other initiatives all reflect this perspective. This remained the central ideology of Japan until 1945.

## Society

**Problems with the Structure of Society.** As Japan entered the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, cracks in the social system that had remained hidden from view for several decades began to become more evident. The samurai class was supposed to be the ruling class, followed in rank order by the peasantry, skilled laborers and finally merchants. However, the system increasingly became inverted in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Sankin kōtai* (the system of alternate residence in Edo) and other economic pressures had reduced the fortunes of many *daimyo* and caused them to become increasingly dependent on loans from the merchant class. Some prominent merchants had become very affluent, so wealthy in fact that the shōguns had singled out a few for property confiscation over the years. In other instances, a number of merchant households were ruined when they were forced to make large loans to well-connected *daimyo*, who then refused to make payments. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, careful merchants camouflaged

their wealth and found ways to not make loans to the ruling class. But this had the effect of limiting or removing capital from the economic system. Still, many *daimyō* from the great families all the way down to the lowest samurai retainer struggled with diminished budgets and even bankruptcy. In addition, the competition for a shrinking number of government positions (in relation to a larger samurai population) increased, creating an environment in which corruption could flourish. The samurai, as a class, were struggling and were increasingly seen by the other members of society as contributing little.

### **The Peasants**

In the Edo period, peasants were tied to the land, although they were not serfs. Mobility was limited and permission had to be secured to travel from place to place, to change jobs or to change residences. It was impossible to stop being a peasant, a merchant or a craftsman. (In most instances, one could not stop being a samurai either.) Social mobility was virtually impossible and society became static. Village headmen were responsible to their *daimyō* for the actions of their charges and sometimes for the collection of taxes. When village headmen could not maintain order, the samurai bureaucracy stepped in and meted out severe punishment. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Japan suffered from several major periods of famine, hardship and natural disasters. Conditions deteriorated to the point where infanticide and the selling of children were no longer rare occurrences among the peasants. These periods, for example, the Tempō famine of 1833-1837, were severe and widespread. They disrupted society and demonstrated the weakness of the shōgunate.

### **The Samurai**

Over the course of Edo period, the samurai had been transformed from a fighting force to a bureaucratic work force. Still, the number of samurai in Japan had increased as the population increased, but the treasury (and government stipends) had remained much the same. This caused serious hardship for lower-ranking samurai in particular. When it became clear that the Tokugawa could no longer protect the country from increasing foreign incursions in the 1850s because of pre-existing internal weaknesses, samurai from other parts of Japan overthrew the ruling dynasty and proclaimed the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Ironically, the same samurai who had led the effort to overthrow the previous government moved quickly to minimize the role of samurai in Japan. Within eight years, the samurai were effectively dissolved as a distinct class of society, as were all other class distinctions.

### **Economy**

**Agriculture.** In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 80% of all Japanese were involved in some form of agricultural pursuit as a profession. Either they were peasants or silk producers (sericulture) or in some job that supported the peasantry. Because of this, a very large segment of the population was dependent on the vicissitudes of naturally occurring cycles in agriculture. For most of the late Edo period (with a couple major exceptions), these were predictable. After a typhoon or regionalized flood, hardship and hunger was to be expected. When the rains didn't fall as normal or pests afflicted the crops, people went hungry and the economy suffered. In most instances, the authorities were able to alleviate the worst elements of these by providing some aid. However, there were exceptions. In the Tempō famine (1833-1837), millions of people were affected and hardship appeared to grip most of the country. Thousands died and the government appeared to be unable to respond because of the scale of the disaster. This was followed by several major earthquakes in the 1840s and 1850s which killed thousands. All of these combined to lead most Japanese to believe that the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were the worst of times, a degenerate age. Still, economic historians assert that Japan had experienced some elements of the agricultural revolution during this period, a necessary precursor to industrialization. This is evident in the population, which had risen to 34 million at the end of the Edo era.

**Rapid Industrialization.** After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, and in particular the Iwakura Mission which ended in 1873, the new leadership set Japan on a crash course of rapid industrialization. In the realm of finance, the government provided every known incentive to promote its development. Loans were underwritten by the government that offered virtually 0% interest rates in key industries such as steel production and coal mining. Land was set aside to be procured for new factories. In the transportation sector, the government went on a crash course of building railroads (and later encouraging private companies to do the same). Shipbuilding was also emphasized and a merchant marine became a priority. The Meiji government also passed laws mandating education through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, providing basic literacy to a new workforce that could move into the burgeoning cities and go to work in the factories. Universities and technical schools were opened to meet the increasing need for new teachers, researchers and technicians. Advances in industry also were applied to agriculture, which freed additional workers

for industrial pursuits and allowed for additional increases in population. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Japan was becoming an industrial power. Though still behind most nations in Western Europe in industrial output, it would soon rival Italy and Hungary as Japan moved into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, by 1905, Japanese industry had developed sufficiently so that it was able to support its military in defeating a major European power in the Russo-Japanese War.

### Readings

- 1) James L. McClain, *Japan: A Modern History*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp. 1-275
- 2) Stephen Vlastos, *Peasant Protests and Uprisings in Tokugawa Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
- 3) Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*, (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2006).
- 4) Albert Craig, *Chōshū in the Meiji Restoration*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961).
- 5) Kyu Hyun Kim, *The Age of Visions and Arguments: Parliamentarianism and the National Public Sphere in Early Meiji Japan*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).
- 6) Karen Wigen, *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750-1920*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- 7) Takashi Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

### Questions for Discussion

- 1) Many of the policies put in place by the Tokugawa rulers in the early part of the era—*sakoku*, *sankin kōtai*, the division of society into the four classes, seemed to work well for two centuries. However, as Japan entered the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these very strengths appeared to become weaknesses. Do you agree with this statement? If so, what changed in Japan to bring about this shift? If not, how can historians explain why these very policies were discarded so quickly after the Meiji Restoration? In order to answer these questions, you will need to describe these policies, how they changed and the effect they had on society in the early Edo period and the effect they had on society in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2) The Meiji Restoration occurred in 1868. Did the appearance of Westerners cause the war which led to the end of the Tokugawa shōgunate or did the Westerners take advantage of already existing domestic weaknesses evident in the country? What were the major weaknesses in Japan that doomed the Tokugawa? Conversely, what Tokugawa policies seemed to be effective and forward looking in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? In other words, what were the Tokugawa doing right in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and what were the Tokugawa doing wrong in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Were they overtaken by events outside their control, or did their own incompetence and lack of leadership doom their enterprise?
- 3) The Meiji Restoration has been described by historians as a *coup d'état*, a successful rebellion, a military *junta*, and a number of other positive and negative labels. All of these are correct in one way or another. However, what the Meiji leadership achieved was nothing less than revolutionary. Why do you think that historians are reluctant to call it the “Meiji Revolution?” Is there something about that term that is difficult to apply to Japan in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century? Or is there a better moniker that describes the actions of the Meiji elites after they seized power? In order to answer the question, you will need to understand the word “revolution” in its historical context and know which events in post-Meiji Restoration Japan can be applied to it. You will also need to understand the historical context for the word “restoration” in East Asia and why historians use that term instead.

## Texts

1) "The Charter Oath of 1868," found in *Sources of Japanese Tradition, volume II*, compiled by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene (N.Y.:Columbia University Press, 1958) p. 137.

By this oath we set up as our aim the establishment of the national weal on a broad basis and the framing of a constitution and laws.

1. Deliberative assemblies shall be widely established and all matters decided by public discussion.
  2. All classes, high and low, shall unite in vigorously carrying out the administration of affairs of state.
  3. The common people, no less than the civil and military officials, shall each be allowed to pursue his own calling so that there may be no discontent.
  4. Evil customs of the past shall be broken off and everything based upon the just laws of Nature.
  5. Knowledge shall be sought throughout the world so as to strengthen the foundations of imperial rule.
- The oath was written by the new leaders and given to the newly restored emperor to present to the people.

2) From Millard Fillmore, President of the United States of America, to His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan November 13, 1852. In the public domain.

GREAT and Good Friend: I send you this public letter by Commodore Matthew C. Perry, an officer of the highest rank in the navy of the United States, and commander of the squadron now visiting your imperial majesty's dominions.

I have directed Commodore Perry to assure your imperial majesty that I entertain the kindest feelings towards your majesty's person and government, and that I have no other object in sending him to Japan but to propose to your imperial majesty that the United States and Japan should live in friendship and have commercial intercourse with each other.

The Constitution and laws of the United States forbid all interference with the religious or political concerns of other nations. I have particularly charged Commodore Perry to abstain from every act which could possibly disturb the tranquility of your imperial majesty's dominions.

The United States of America reach from ocean to ocean, and our Territory of Oregon and State of California lie directly opposite to the dominions of your imperial majesty. Our steamships can go from California to Japan in eighteen days.

Our great State of California produces about sixty millions of dollars in gold every year, besides silver, quicksilver, precious stones, and many other valuable articles. Japan is also a rich and fertile country, and produces many very valuable articles. Your imperial majesty's subjects are skilled in many of the arts. I am desirous that our two countries should trade with each other, for the benefit both of Japan and the United States.

We know that the ancient laws of your imperial majesty's government do not allow foreign trade, except with the Chinese and the Dutch; but as the state of the world changes and new governments are formed, it seems to be wise, from time to time, to make new laws. There was a time when the ancient laws of your imperial majesty's government were first made.

About the same time America, which is sometimes called the New World, was first discovered and settled by the Europeans. For a long time there were but a few people, and they were poor. They have now become quite numerous; their commerce is very extensive; and they think that if your imperial majesty were so far to change the ancient laws as to allow a free trade between the two countries it would be extremely beneficial to both.

If your imperial majesty is not satisfied that it would be safe altogether to abrogate the ancient laws which forbid foreign trade, they might be suspended for five or ten years, so as to try the experiment. If it does not prove as beneficial as was hoped, the ancient laws can be restored. The United States often limit their treaties with foreign states to a few years, and then renew them or not, as they please.

I have directed Commodore Perry to mention another thing to your imperial majesty. Many of our ships pass every year from California to China; and great numbers of our people pursue the whale fishery near the shores of Japan. It sometimes happens, in stormy weather, that one of our ships is wrecked on your imperial majesty's shores. In all such cases we ask, and expect, that our unfortunate people should be treated with kindness, and that their property should be protected, till we can send a vessel and bring them away. We are very much in earnest in this.

Commodore Perry is also directed by me to represent to your imperial majesty that we understand there is a great abundance of coal and provisions in the Empire of Japan. Our steamships, in crossing the great ocean, burn a great deal of coal, and it is not convenient to bring it all the way from America. We wish that our steamships and other vessels should be allowed to stop in Japan and supply themselves with coal, provisions, and water. They will pay for them in money, or anything else your imperial majesty's subjects may prefer; and we request your imperial majesty to appoint a convenient port, in the southern part of the empire, where our vessels may stop for this purpose. We are very desirous of this.

These are the only objects for which I have sent Commodore Perry, with a powerful squadron, to pay a visit to your imperial majesty's renowned city of Edo: friendship, commerce, a supply of coal and provisions, and protection for our shipwrecked people.

We have directed Commodore Perry to beg your imperial majesty's acceptance of a few presents. They are of no great value in themselves; but some of them may serve as specimens of the articles manufactured in the United States, and they are intended as tokens of our sincere and respectful friendship.

May the Almighty have your imperial majesty in His great and holy keeping!

In witness whereof, I have caused the great seal of the United States to be hereunto affixed, and have subscribed the same with my name, at the city of Washington, in America, the seat of my government, on the thirteenth day of the month of November, in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-two.

[Seal attached]  
Your good friend,  
Millard Fillmore

By the President:  
Edward Everett, Secretary of State

3) The Imperial Rescript on Education, 1890. Found in *Japanese Education* (London: John Murry, 1909), in the public domain.

Know Ye, Our Subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education. Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation, extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common



interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the law; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you. Our subjects, that we may all attain to the same virtue.

I, the Emperor, think that my ancestors and their religion founded my nation a very long time ago. With its development a profound and steady morality was established. The fact that my subjects show their loyalty to me and show filial love to their parents in their millions of hearts all in unison, thus accumulating virtue generation after generation is indeed the pride of my nation, and is a profound idea and the basis of our education.

You, my subjects form full personalities by showing filial love to your parents, by making good terms with your brothers and sisters, by being intimate with your friends, by making couples who love each other, by trusting your friends, by reflecting upon yourselves, by conveying a spirit of philanthropy to other people and by studying to acquire knowledge and wisdom.

Thus, please obey always the constitution and other laws of my nation in your profession in order to spread the common good in my nation. If an emergency may happen, please do your best for Our nation in order to support the eternal fate and future of my nation. In this way, you are my good and faithful subjects, and you come to appreciate good social customs inherited from your ancestors. The way of doing this is a good lesson inherited from my ancestors and religion which you subjects should observe well together with your offspring.

These ideas hold true for both the present and the past, and may be propagated in this nation as well as in the other countries. I would like to understand all of this with you, Our subjects, and hope sincerely that all the mentioned virtues will be carried out in harmony by all of you subjects.

The 30th day of the 10th month of the 23rd year of Meiji (1890).