

THE UNITED STATES AND JAPAN, 1853-1915

By the middle of the 19th century, as China was going through the throes of the Opium War and entering into a phase of her history that was characterized by frustration and decay, Japan was rapidly reaching the end of a 200 year period of almost total isolation from the rest of the world. In about 1636 the Japanese, under the rule of the Tokugawa Shogunate, had closed their doors on the outside world. These doors were to remain sealed until the coming of Commodore Perry in 1853.

The West had come early to Japan. Accounts generally accept 1542 as the time of the first arrival of Portuguese sailors. News of this discovery spread rapidly in Europe and in 1549 Francis Xavier, a Jesuit priest, arrived in Japan. His progress was encouraging and he was followed by many more members of his faith. As far as we can determine, the Portuguese were not confronted by any other Europeans in Japan until 1592, when four Franciscan friars from Spain appeared. In 1600 the first Dutch ship reached Japan. The Dutch were unique to the Japanese because instead of religion, they emphasized trade. The Dutch were generally welcomed and the trade between the two soon prospered. English traders too, appeared in Japan in the early 17th century. Both the English and Dutch revealed to the Japanese that religion need not be a part of a successful trading relationship. Because of this revelation and general bickering among the Jesuits and Franciscans over ways to propagate their religion, Iyeyasu, the Shogun in power, proscribed the Christian faith in 1612. Little was done to enforce this policy until 1624 when the Spaniards were ordered out of the country. In 1636, owing to internal problems blamed on the West, new directives prohibited Japanese trade on the high seas. Further curtailments followed and the Spanish and Portuguese were forbidden, on pain of death, to come into Japan. The British had earlier departed because of dwindling profits and thus, by 1638, the only outsiders remaining in contact with Japan were a handful of Dutch at Nagasaki conducting a very limited trade, along with a few Chinese. Thus Japan turned her back on the West and remained that way for over 200 years.¹

In the West, these were dynamic times. New nations, new political ideas, and new weapons appeared, and the industrial revolution sped afresh surge of Western expansionism and colonialism. Meanwhile, the United States became increasingly active in the Pacific. The China trade was small but flourishing by the early 19th century, American whaling boats scoured the Pacific, the age of steam demanded coaling stations and America was becoming a nation with two coasts, rather than only one.

On several occasions in the years of Japanese isolation, American sailors had been shipwrecked on Japan and were poorly treated. The American trade also passed through Japanese waters where supply stations would be ideal. In 1852, because of these, as well as other motives, the United States determined to send a naval squadron, under the command of Commodore Matthew C. Perry, to open trade with Japan.

After delay, adventure, and some misgivings on the part of Americans, Perry entered Edo (Tokyo) Bay with four men-of-war on July 8, 1853. To the heretofore isolated Japanese these ships, belching black smoke, were ominous machines indeed. The officials of the Emperor tried in various ways to thwart Perry's efforts, but he refused to compromise his mission. By using both firmness and tact, the Americans were able to deliver their documents to the Japanese officials, after which they departed amid hints that the squadron would return with many more ships in the spring.

The officials of the Shogun were thrown into a quandary. For 200 years the Tokugawa family had been exercising power in the name of the Emperor. Prior to Perry's visit, however, internal conditions were reaching the point where Tokugawa control was marginal. The new and ominous threat from the Americans forced the Shogun to consult the Emperor and thus further weaken his authority. This began the end of effective Tokugawa control in Japan.

In February 1854, Perry's black ships made their promised return to Edo Bay. The Japanese, realizing that they had no other choice, entered into negotiations with the Americans. Amid gifts, food, wine and general merrymaking, a treaty was signed between Japan and the United States, on March 31, 1854.²

The actual provisions of the pact were not of great significance. The only real gains for America were an agreement for humane treatment of shipwrecked sailors and the opening of two ports to American trade. Of far greater importance was the fact that Japan had been opened to the West and had taken the first steps of the march that would make her, in 50 years, one of the world's military powers.

In order to keep ajar the door that had been opened by Perry, the United States sent as Consul to Japan a truly remarkable man, Townsend Harris. After living in considerable hardship for fourteen months without seeing an American ship or receiving a communication from the State Department, Harris was able to complete a commercial treaty with the Japanese.³ This pact, signed on July 29, 1858, opened more ports to American trade, granted more favorable residence rights, provided for reciprocal diplomatic representation and established basic extra-territoriality for Americans.

One of the provisions of the Harris treaty was that a delegation of Japanese should journey to the United States to exchange ratifications. In early 1860 a Japanese commission numbering over seventy came to America. During the three weeks of their

visit, the wide-eyed Orientals were the toast, and probably the curiosity, of Americans. The results of the visit were mutually advantageous as both Americans and Japanese became friends and gained some degree of understanding and respect for one another.⁴

The United States was not operating alone in Japan, however. Within a few short years after Perry's monumental effort, most of the other Western powers had treaties and trading privileges similar to those enjoyed by the United States. As had been the case in China, extraterritoriality and most-favored-nation were common to the Western relationship with the Japanese.

The rapid influx of Westerners with their ideas, customs and trade, combined with an explosive domestic situation, proved to be too much for the Shogunate to endure. As a result, the government of Japan came actively under the Emperor again with the period in Japanese history that extends from 1862 to 1912 and is commonly called the Meiji Restoration. This era witnessed basic changes in many of the nation's institutions and ideas, most of which came as a result of Western influence.⁵

The Japanese were obsessed with the fear that if they did not respond in a rapid and dynamic manner to the West, they would suffer the fate of China and the other Asian nations that had become virtual colonies of the Western powers. To Japanese leaders, reform meant military power for defense, industrial and technical knowledge, educational, governmental, economic and social advancement. In her world-wide search for the best methods of response to Occidental pressures, the United States exerted more influence than did any other nation on Japan's long-term development.

Several American contributions deserve mention. Christianity made a definite resurgence in Japan after 1859. Its significance has become greater than its numbers since that time, because of the relatively high percentage of upper-class Japanese ascribing, in varying degrees, to that faith. The missionaries also exerted a definite influence on Japanese education and founded several major institutions of higher learning. Education at all levels felt the impact of the United States as the leaders of the Meiji period patterned their basic elementary and secondary systems after American examples. As the visits of Americans to Japan increased, American expressions, sports, customs, and items of dress began to appear in Japanese life. Industry too, reflected the Western impact as advisers from Europe and America could be seen setting up factories and training Japanese to use modern equipment and methods. Law also reflected the Western impact. In an effort to impress the West with their advancement, the Japanese prohibited such customs as abortion, infanticide and mixed bathing in public. Western literature and art also came into vogue. In all these ways Western understanding of and influence on Japan increased. Still, Japan was by no means a little America or a little Europe. Moreover, social and cultural stresses were evident as the old battled with the

new and the Western competed with the Oriental. Both the friendships and the strains could be detected in Japanese-American relations. The entry of Japan into the modern world was also an entry into an imperialistic world where the primary arbitrator seemed to be armed force. The major nations of Europe were busily consolidating their holdings in Asia while the newcomers to the world of power politics, Germany, Italy and the United States, were eagerly seeking colonial areas for themselves. This lesson was hardly lost on the Japanese. Within a few years after the visit of Perry, Japan began her expansion in Asia. Japan's primary efforts were in Korea and China. By 1876 China and Japan were engaged in a fierce rivalry for Korea. The issue was temporarily solved by compromise in 1885 but the agreement was short-lived. In 1894 the Japanese engaged in their first large-scale foreign war and succeeded in handily defeating the Chinese. They were denied a portion of the fruits of victory, however, by pressure from Germany, Russia and France. This was a humiliating lesson in power diplomacy for the Japanese and one they long remembered.

Although American influence had been great on Japan since the days of Commodore Perry, significant diplomatic dealings between the two nations were largely absent until the end of the 19th century. The Sino-Japanese War had displayed to the world the impotence of China and her inability to defend herself or her rights. Thus it was that the United States became quite concerned about the prospects of a partition of China by the various powers, including Japan. The upshot of this situation was the first Open Door note, issued on September 6, 1899 to the major European powers and Japan. It was obvious that only 45 years after Perry had sailed into Tokyo Bay, the United States considered Japan a major Asian power and a threat to the integrity of China.

The Boxer Rebellion of 1900 involved the United States, Japan and the major nations of Europe in a cooperative effort to rescue the Allied delegations in Peking. The second Open Door note, dated July 3, 1900 followed, the result of heightened American fear that China would be further divided. Again, Japan was one of the powers considered a threat to China.

The Japanese-Russian competition for influence in Korea and Manchuria proved to be the stage on which the most significant chapter in American-Japanese relations since 1854 was played. The Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, with a surprise attack by the Japanese on Port Arthur. America's first concern with the conflict lay in the preservation of the Open Door, but soon broadened as President Theodore Roosevelt was asked to become a mediator in the conflict. Although he was not anxious to accept the challenge, Roosevelt felt that the preservation of both Russian and Japanese power in Asia was needed if the Open Door was to be upheld.

Japan had scored significant early triumphs over the Russians but as time went on she began to run short of both men and yen. Knowing this, Roosevelt undertook to modify the initial demands of the Japanese (the island of Sakhalin and a \$600 million indemnity) in order to negotiate a peace. The American finally achieved a compromise by which Japan agreed to take only the southern half of Sakhalin and drop the indemnity altogether. The Treaty of Portsmouth (1905) left the Japanese as the primary Asian power with dominant influence in both Korea and Manchuria. Of greater significance was the aftermath of the negotiations on Japanese-American relations.

Until 1905 the United States had been the most influential Western power in Japanese development and the country to which Japan felt she could best turn for aid. After 1905 this was no longer the case. President Roosevelt had probably done the Japanese a favor by mediating an end to the war with Russia but the Orientals did not appreciate that fact. It appeared to the Japanese that Russia had been soundly defeated and that Japan had been denied the fruits of her victory by Roosevelt's intervention.⁶ In addition new problems in the relations of the two countries loomed.

The response to Chinese labor on the West Coast of the United States had been such that by 1882 the Chinese had been excluded from coming to this country. During the 1880's and 1890's their place was gradually assumed by the Japanese. The surge of immigration soon led to diplomatic problems. Japanese were coming in such numbers, both to the United States and Hawaii, that in 1900 Tokyo restricted the movement of unskilled laborers into America. This was not enough for the citizens of the Golden State of California, however, and in 1906 the issue came to a head in San Francisco.

In October, 1906, the school board of that city passed an order that required all Oriental students to go to a school especially set aside for them. This obvious effort at discrimination hurt the Japanese pride very deeply and the reaction was immediate. The Mainichi Shimbun, a reputable newspaper, expressed itself thusly:

Stand up, Japanese nation! Our countrymen have been
HUMILIATED on the other side of the Pacific. Our poor boys and girls
have been expelled from the public schools by the rascals of the United
States, cruel and merciless like demons. Why do we not insist on sending
(war) ships?⁷

After lengthy bargaining with California, President Roosevelt was able to end the discrimination in return for promising an end to the influx of Japanese. The result was the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907-1908, a series of diplomatic notes by which Japan agreed to end the direct movement of coolies into the United States.

The expansion of the United States into the Pacific, particularly the acquisition of the Philippines, as a result of the Spanish-American War, introduced fresh considerations into the Japanese-American relationship. Japan's strength, revealed by her success against Russia, was thus of considerable concern to President Roosevelt and in 1905 his Administration concluded a remarkable agreement with Prime Minister Katsura of Japan. The so-called Taft-Katsura Memorandum was reached during a visit by Secretary of War William H. Taft in Tokyo. The essence of the accord was that America would approve Japan's special interest in Korea in return for Japanese disavowal of any aggressive designs on the Philippines. It represented basically an admission by the United States that she could not thwart Japan's designs in Korea. As a followup to the Taft-Katsura negotiations, the United States closed its legation in Korea and agreed to deal directly with Japan on Korean affairs.⁸

President Roosevelt was still anxious to impress the Japanese with the power of the United States, and also avoid any conflict with them over territorial or racial issues. One upshot of this concern by the President was his dispatch of the American fleet around the world in 1907. A second result was the Root-Takahira Agreement of 1908. This convention provided that the status quo be maintained in the Pacific, that the Open Door be upheld in China, that each power recognize the other's territorial possessions in the Pacific region, and that the independence and integrity of China be supported. The end result, it seems, was acceptable to all involved and helped considerably to clear the air over Pacific affairs.⁹

As if to thwart any efforts toward a stable and understanding relationship between the United States and Japan, Secretary of State Knox proposed, in 1909, that a group of bankers buy all the railroads in Manchuria, turn them over to China and let her repay the bankers. Few moves could have been a more direct slap at the Japanese. One of the objectives of both Russian and Japanese diplomacy in the Far East had been to gain control of the railroads and thus the territory of potentially rich Manchuria. To both, the Northern Provinces were a gateway to further influence and control in China. Thus, the muddling of Knox in Manchuria did no good in American-Japanese relations. The American policy was, in fact, a significant force in drawing Japan and Russia closer together in a common effort to keep any other power out of Manchuria.

No sooner had the furor over the attempts at dollar diplomacy cooled down than another problem raised its head from the sunny shores of California. The issue of the "yellow-peril," seemingly removed by the Gentlemen's Agreement, again was seen. In 1913 the California legislature passed a law prohibiting aliens who were ineligible for citizenship from owning agricultural land in the state. Although the law did not mention the Japanese by name, they were its obvious target since they, as Orientals, were not

able to become citizens. Again, the thought and threat of war appeared on the horizon because of this new insult to Japan, but judicious action on both sides averted a crisis.

The outbreak of World War I served to intensify the clash of American and Japanese interests, primarily over China. Because of her alliance with Great Britain, concluded in 1902, and due to her own Asian interests, Japan went to war with Germany three days after Great Britain's declaration. The Japanese, in short order, destroyed German power in the Far East and more significantly, took over all of Germany's areas of influence in China. These moves were followed shortly by Japan's "twenty-one demands" on China.

While the rest of the world was preoccupied with events in Europe, Japan presented these demands to China in 1915. They were designed essentially to reduce China to a state of complete domination by and dependence on Japan. The Chinese, in response, turned to their Western friend the United States for aid. Although American policymakers disapproved of Japan's actions, they were concerned lest Japan be provoked in the world's hour of crisis. Thus, the United States struck a bargain with the Japanese. She offered to recognize the special position Japan held vis-à-vis China in return for a Japanese guarantee to uphold the Open Door. The Japanese were quite hesitant on the matter and although Washington wrote stronger notes, it was careful not to antagonize the thin-skinned power of Asia. In the end, the Chinese were left to deal with Japan as best they could, and that was not very effectively. The results of Japanese, Chinese and American policy on this matter were left to trouble the participants at the Versailles Conference ending World War I.

In this brief summary, we have seen Japan come from almost total isolation to the place of a world power in a brief fifty years. In this movement the power that opened Japan, led her through trying times, gave her customs, institutions, industrial models and friendship, was also the nation that thwarted her ambitions in Asia at every turn. If one must identify a single point at which Japanese-American relations changed their amicable path and began the decline which was to lead to World War II, it would be the Russo-Japanese War and its aftermath.