

## The US “Opens” Japan to Trade, Part 2

### Background: The Final Decades of the Shogunate

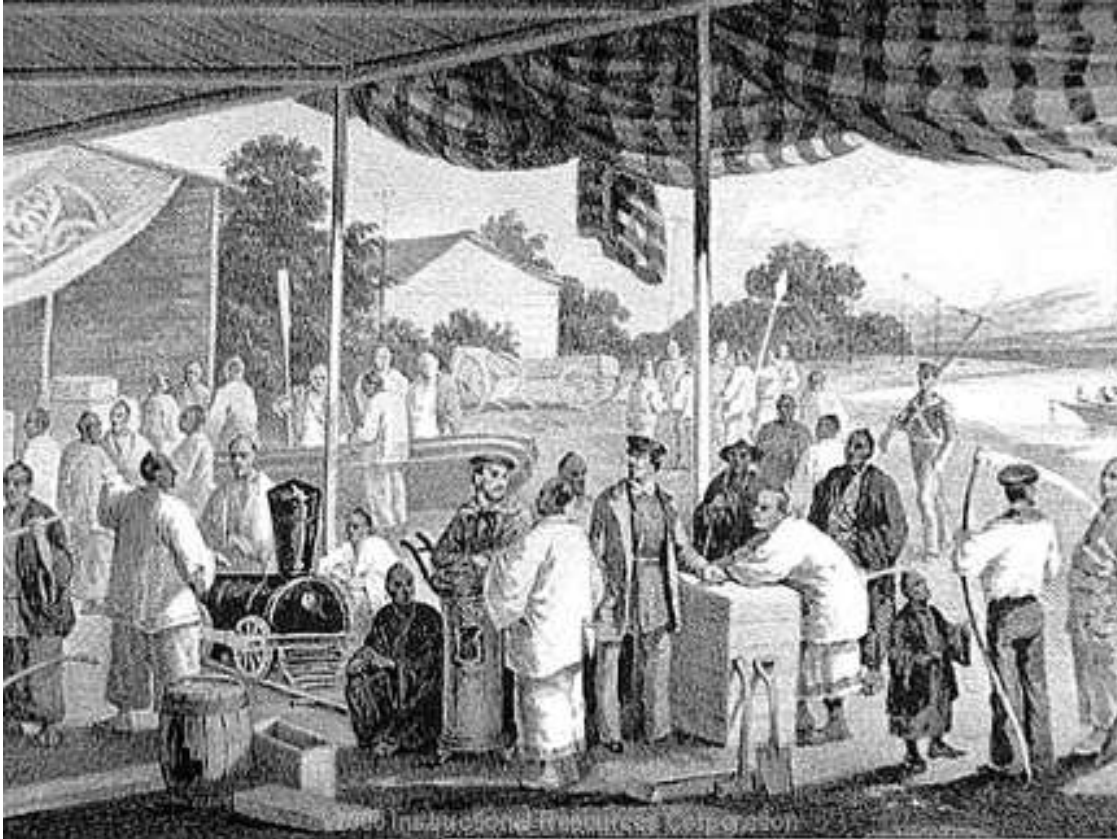
In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Tokugawa Shogunate (*Japan's government made up of powerful samurai lords and a weak emperor*) continued to have many problems. Government funding was based on taxes placed on agricultural goods, but the Japanese lords who ran the government made sure these taxes were low so they could keep control of their wealth. This meant the government never had enough money. What little money they could raise was often spent in payments to the lords to keep them loyal to the government. When famines and natural disasters struck in the 1830's, the government was not able to respond and the landless peasants became angry. They demanded reforms, but these only weakened the government further. In addition to this, Japan had a very rigid social structure with samurai lords on top, then merchants, artists and peasants on the bottom. There was almost no social mobility between the social classes, so there was little motivation to try new things.

Japan did have a culture that celebrated education. Literacy rates were higher in Japan than in Western Europe. Japanese schools stressed Japanese culture and literature. But Japan had closed their doors to trade for 200 years and they had missed the industrial revolutions that other countries had gone through. They did not have the guns, cannons and warships that the Western nations had. They did not have steam power or industrial factories. Most of their goods, while of exceptional (*very good*) quality, were produced by hand and were made of wood, silk or clay because they did not have large metal deposits or open mines. Japanese weapons consisted of bows and arrows, swords and leather armor.

In 1853, the American admiral Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into the port city of Edo (*Japan's capital*) in his industrialized, iron armored, steam-powered warships, bristling with cannons and guns. He wanted Japan to abandon (*give up*) their isolationist policy and trade freely with the U.S. In the end, Japan agreed to do this, though they were not happy about it.

### Why were the Americans successful in opening Japan?

**Document E: "Commodore Perry Presents Gifts to the Japanese" 1835, Lithograph by Sarony & Co., USA, 1855**



**Document F: Shiryo Hensanjo, University of Tokyo - Perry's gifts, as depicted here by Japanese artists, included a telegraph apparatus, tools, casks of liquor, firearms, headgear, umbrellas, a stove, and a camera.**

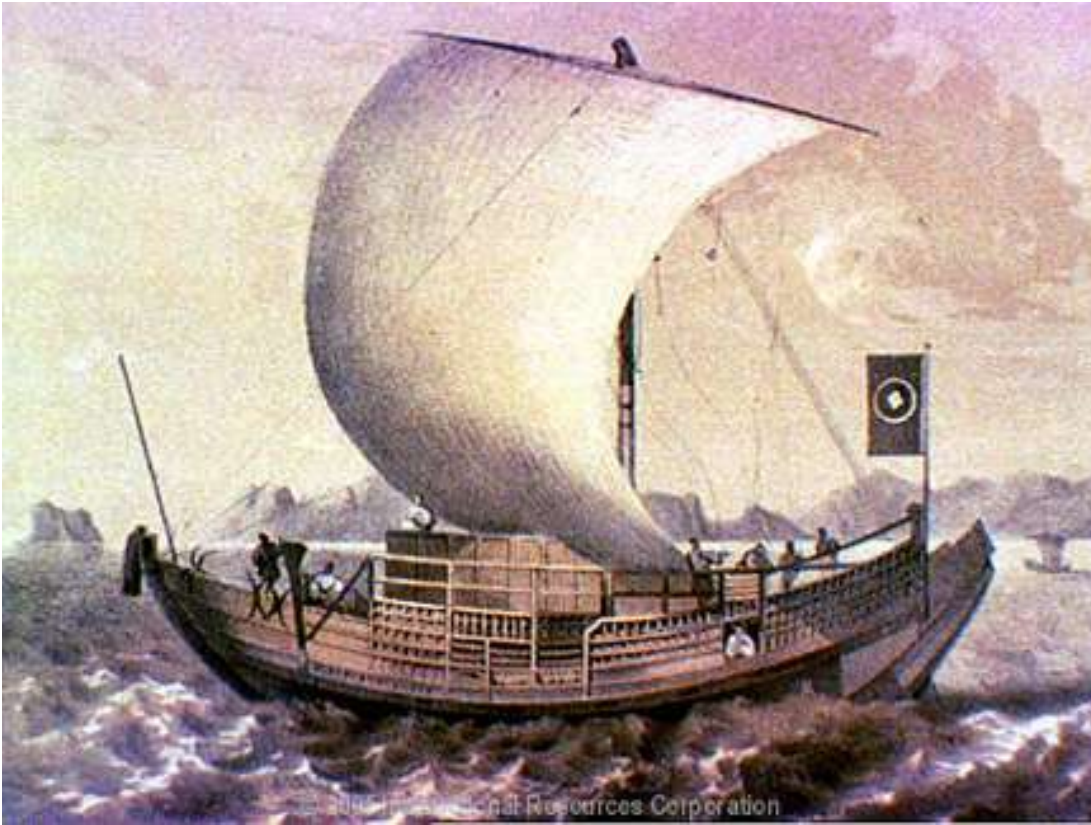


6. What kinds of manufactured goods did the Americans give the Japanese?

7. How might these goods make the Japanese feel about their own products?



**Document G: "Japanese Junk," Sarony & Co, USA, 1855 (a Junk is a kind of Japanese fishing boat)**



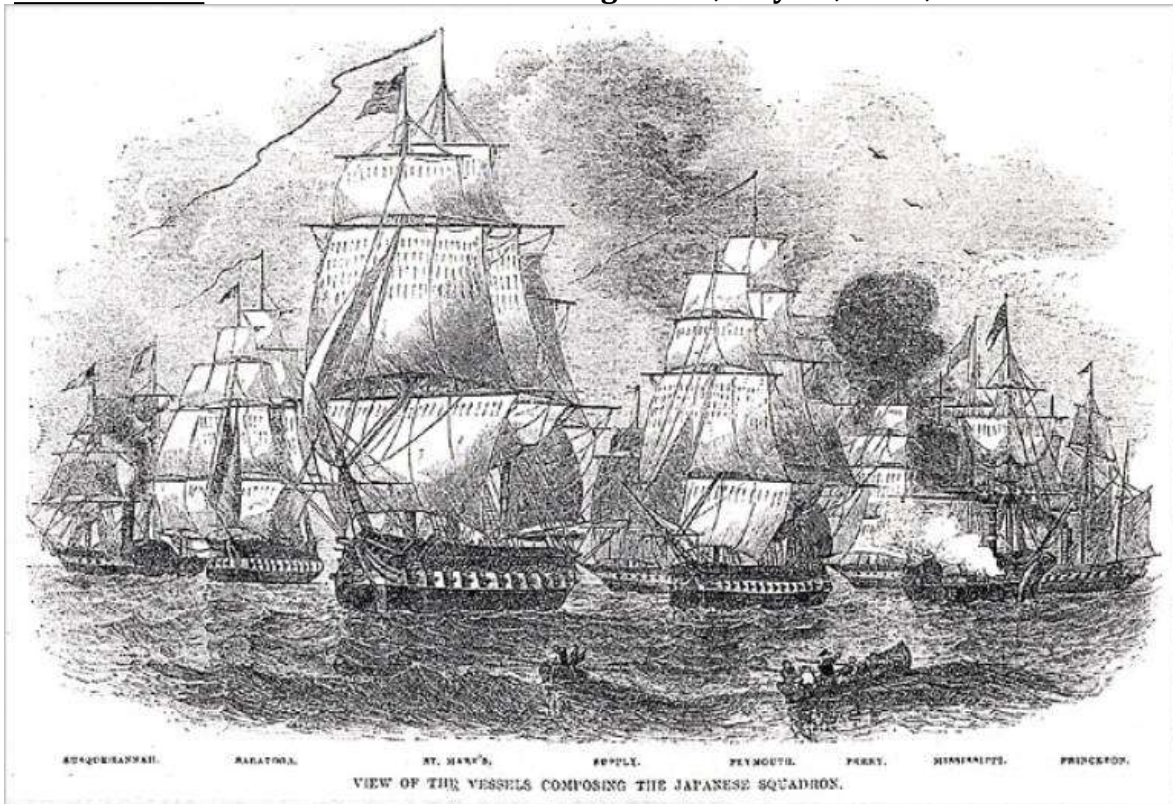
*Japan's adoption of the "closed country" policy in the early-17th century involved not merely keeping foreigners out, but also keeping Japanese in. Thus, severe restrictions were placed on shipbuilding, and maritime activity was restricted to sailing small vessels in coastal waters.*

8. What is this ship made out of?
9. How big is it? (You can count the number of

sails to give you an idea of size. The more sails the bigger the ship.)

10. What kinds of weapons might it have?

**Document H: Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room, May 15, 1852, USA "Commodore Perry's "United States Japanese Squadron"**



**United States Japanese Squadron"**

11. What are these ships made out of?
12. How big are they?
13. What kinds of weapons might they have?



**Document I: Japanese kyōka (poem) Unknown author, 1860**

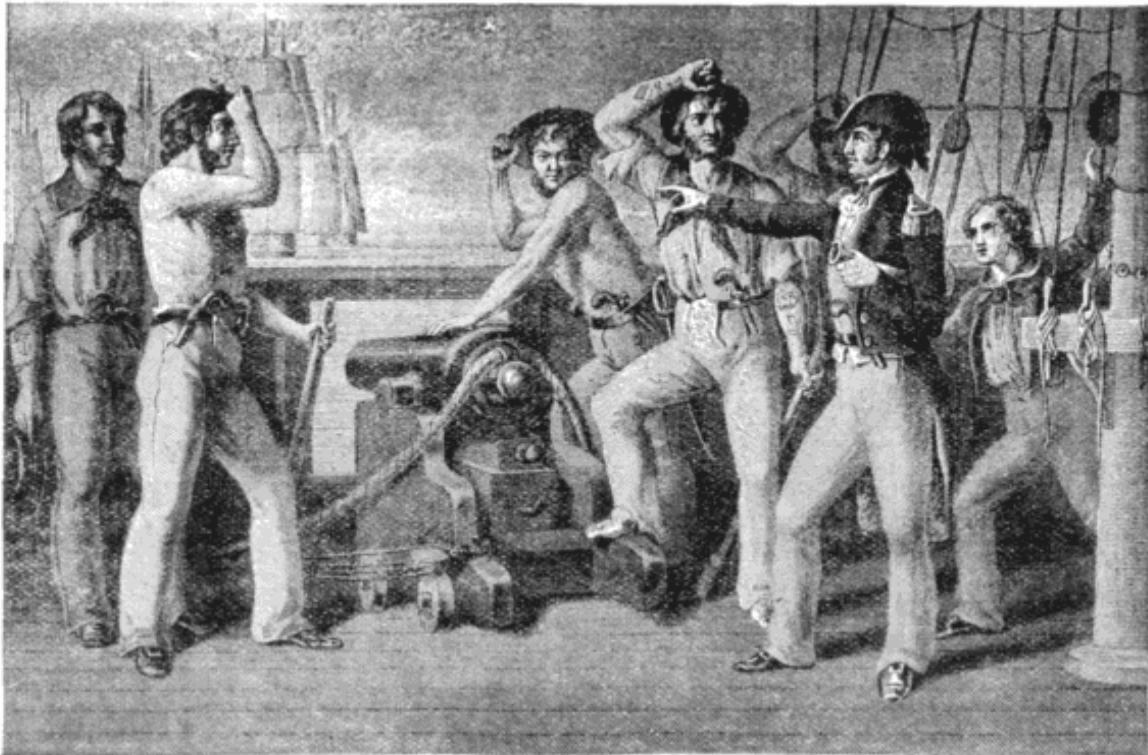
The steam-powered ships  
break the halcyon slumber  
of the Pacific;  
a mere four boats are enough  
to make us lose sleep at night.

*Halcyon- Calm and peaceful; tranquil.*

14. What emotion is this Japanese poem capturing?

**Document J: Traditional Samurai armor made of boiled leather, silk wood and iron, Tokugawa Period, 1600's**

15. How well would this armor protect a Samurai warrior from a modern rifle? From a cannon ball?



**Document K:**

**“Commodore Perry prepares his men to fire on Edo Bay” Dewey and Other Naval Commanders, Edward S. Ellis, A.M., New York, 1899**

16. The Japanese agree to trade before Commodore Perry actually fires his cannons. However, what would have happened to the capital city Edo, if Perry had attacked?

